

## THE TORONTO BLESSING

Something special happened in January 1994 at the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church. Pastors John and Carol Arnott had thirsted for a move of God after they had seen it in South Africa and in Argentina. They invited Randy Clark, a former Baptist pastor to hold four nights of meetings in Toronto. Randy had encountered the Holy Spirit power in 1984 himself through the Vineyard Ministry led by John Wimber. Randy had been miraculously healed from a car accident that occurred while he was a teen. He was also impacted by the ministry of Rodney-Howard Browne who came to the USA as a missionary from S. Africa in the 1980s with a vision to see another Great Awakening in America. His ministry has been marked with lots of laughter from the Holy Spirit. (I went to some of the meetings in Lakeland, Florida in the early 1990s.)

When God decides to move upon his people, it is much like what took place at Pentecost and in other revivals since then. **God comes SUDDENLY.** That is what happened on January 20, 1994 while Randy Clark was ministering to the 120 gathered there in Toronto, Canada. God suddenly descended upon the meeting and almost everyone ended up on the floor being touched with the joy of the Lord! The meetings that were to last for four days continued for 6 days a week for the next 12 1/2 years with over 4 1/2 million visitors coming from all over the world. It became known as the laughing revival with people experiencing the Father's love and all kinds of healing. When a human body comes in contact with high currents of electricity, their bodies react with shaking, falling down, and various types of emotional reactions. It has been the same throughout history during times of revival, when God's power comes on people as He brings healing to their mind, soul or body.

It happened to me in January 1981 at a farmhouse in NY state as one anointed man of God in a small group prayed over me as I stood with my eyes closed. He had 'words of knowledge about fear in my life'. The next thing I remember is waking up on the floor and rolling with laughter coming from my innermost being. I felt like I was floating on a cloud with supernatural peace around me. I later remembered the words of Jesus...that out of your inner most being will flow rivers of living water.

The following Sunday was my last one at our little country church in upstate NY before I went to Florida. The teacher decided to skip the Sunday School lesson and asked me if I had anything to share. I sure did! I shared about my Holy Spirit encounter at the home. Most everybody seemed quite interested except the Pastor's wife. She remarked, 'Are you sure that wasn't of the devil?' Instantly the Lord had me share the incident of the Roman soldiers who fell to the ground at the tomb when they encountered Christ's resurrection power.) God often does dramatic things during key transition times in our life, just to encourage and empower us for what is ahead. God knew I needed some encouragement just before I headed to Florida for ministry training and then on to the mission field in Europe.

One of my greatest regrets is that I did not get to Toronto after I came off the full time mission field in July of 1994. I could have used some joy and inner healing in my life. I came home discouraged and broken in many ways after some very hurtful experiences on the mission field. In early 1994, my pastor in London had sent me off to receive prayer from someone outside of London. After some wise counsel the man prayed for me and had a vision of me dressed as a wounded soldier from World War I. It was accurate as to how I felt at the time.....very wounded.

When I returned to the States in July, I had to start working two days after I got home to the USA in order to support myself. My main supporting church had been generous to me during my missionary years, but my support was dropped immediately after I returned home. Also, the London Bible School I had taught at in the spring semester of '94, could not send me any money

until later that year. Through a strange twist of fate, I never saw the check until 5 years later. My nephew was staying with me in upstate NY and never told me the check came and just stuffed it in a drawer. The house was sold and 5 years later, the lady who had bought the house had new kitchen cabinets put in and found the envelope from the Bible school down behind the old cabinets and brought it to me at Christmas time. Unfortunately, I could not cash the check so I wrote to England and they told me the school had moved to Australia. I still have the uncashed check and have considered framing it in memory of the whole episode.

People don't realize that coming home from the mission field is similar to soldiers coming home from the battlefield. One can feel like an orphan...not knowing where one belongs anymore. I can relate to how Heidi Baker felt when she came to Toronto from the mission field in Africa.

News of the Toronto blessing soon reached England in early 1994 where I was teaching at the time. Plane loads of British flew to Toronto to see what God was doing. In 1994, the revival at the airport church was the leading tourist attraction in the city of Toronto. By 1995 Charisma magazine reported that an estimated 4000 churches in England and 7000 churches in N. America had been impacted by this movement. In London, the blessing came to the Anglican church of Holy Trinity Brompton where curate Nicky Gumbel had already started the now world famous Alpha course. By the year 2000 one British journalist reported that 250,000 agnostics in the U.K. had come to faith in Christ through the Alpha course. Nicky Gumbel credits the Toronto Blessing as the 'kick start that the Alpha course needed.

Since the 1994 outpouring in Toronto, the small airport church has gone from a storefront to a 3200 seat auditorium with 8 satellite campuses, 23 church plants and a global Catch the Fire church network. (stats from article: The Enduring Revival, in Christianity Today by Lorna Dueck 3/7/2014)

Whenever revivals have taken place in history, there have always been critics who speak against things they do not understand. They focus on unusual outward expressions while ignoring the deep work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives. A sociologist went to Toronto from Ohio on her own volition and examined the Toronto outpouring and concluded that the fruit was good. About 90% of the people said that they loved Jesus more and almost 90% of couples said their marriages were filled with more love. Good fruit for sure!

In a time prior to the '94 outpouring, John Arnott had experienced some revival at their church but he had quenched it after a few weeks as he tried to 'over control it'. He promised the Lord that if they had another visitation, he would let the Holy Spirit have his way. One of my favorite books on church history is: **Quenching the Spirit: Examining Centuries of Opposition to the Holy Spirit** by William DeArteaga - 1993 Creation House. He exposes the spirit of the Pharisee and Sadducee which has resisted moves of God's Spirit in the past because it conflicts with their theology even though there is evidence of good fruit from God.

Bill Johnson was impacted by the Toronto blessing and pastor of a small church in Weaverville, Calif. In 1996 he was asked to pastor Bethel church in Redding, Calif. He accepted the call on one condition, the message would always be about revival and the subject of revival would never change. The church sits on a hill overlooking beautiful Redding with mountains on three sides in the distance. 9000 gather to worship each weekend on this campus which has now become a light to the world through its global revival impact. The church has also blessed its local community as the largest employer in this city of 100,000 and brought much healing to its residents. One time they even gave the local police department a gift of \$500,000. The church also has a school of supernatural ministry with about 2500 students from around the world. Just as the Olympic torch flame is passed to various places, the fire of God's Spirit has been passed on from generation to generation through people and groups who

recognize his presence at work and are willing to catch the fire and pass it on. John and Carol Arnott still travel the world to spread the fire that God brought on that frigid day of January 20, 1994 in Toronto, Canada. Their ministry has been appropriately renamed.....**Catch the Fire.** The title of Arnott's book about the revival in Toronto conveys what it is all about..... **The Father's Blessing.**

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