

CHAPTER 8

RECOVERING SUPERNATURAL MINISTRY

John Wimber, with his spiritual gifts and faith, founded a Vineyard Church, but something beyond him turned his church into a movement. He writes:

It was Mother's Day, 1979, and I had invited a young man to speak at the evening service of the church at which I had only recently become pastor... That evening he gave his testimony... He finished his talk and said, "Well, that's my testimony. Now the church has been offending the Holy Spirit a long time and it is quenched. So we are going to invite it to come and minister." We all waited. The air became thick with anticipation—and anxiety. Then he said, "Holy Spirit, come." And it did... People fell to the floor. Others, who did not believe in tongues, loudly spoke in tongues. The speaker roamed among the crowd, praying for people, who then immediately fell over with the Holy Spirit resting on them. I was aghast... Over the next few months, supernatural phenomena continued to occur... All who were touched by and yielded to the Holy Spirit... accepted the experience and thought it was wonderfully, drawing them closer to God... A revival began that May, and by September we had baptized over seven hundred new converts. There may have been as many as seventeen hundred new converts during a three-and-a-half-month period.¹

The phenomena Wimber unexpectedly witnessed that Mother's Day evening, his lack of understanding it and his loss of control as leader, as well as alarmed staff and angry members, drove him to anguished prayer that night and to his Bible. By 4:30 a.m. he was even more upset; but then he remembered something he had read from *The Journal of John Wesley*. To his garage he went, where he read accounts of unexpected phenomena and power from Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Finney and Jonathon Edwards. Even these testimonies did not fully settle his heart and stomach. A timely, reassuring phone call from a trusted pastor friend helped.² In the end, only the fruit could commend the experience.

¹ Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, 24-26.

² *Ibid.*, 25-27.

Wimber was not a Pentecostal or a Charismatic. He did not adhere to a doctrine of a second experience for believers or to tongues as evidence of it. In his thirst to make disciples, however, he hungered for any power available to fulfill that mandate.

Wimber's hunger served him well. He was looking for an empowering relationship. An empowering relationship would have to manifest itself in personal experiences. A relationship, at root, is a series of choices and experiences that are self-revealing, mutually meaningful and shared by at least two individuals. A relationship with God is founded on a self-revealing act of God that is personally meaningful. A relationship with the Holy Spirit is founded on such an experience and developed through a series of choices and mutually meaningful experiences. In other words, there is some form of interaction. William James argued that the foundation of religious life is religious experience. He argued that our explanations and beliefs, our doctrine and dogma are secondary.³ Donald Miller, commenting on James' observation, believes that the growth and decline of any religious group hinge on their ability to help people experience profound, life changing divine encounters.⁴

In an earlier chapter, we discussed how our cultural perception of reality has interfered with our openness and ability to observe, process and welcome these experiences of God. Moreover, it has blinded us to those non-material or supernatural factors that both help and hinder us as believers in our relationship and ministry with Christ Jesus. In this discussion, we will outline strategic steps that will both help us overcome this hindrance personally and tackle it constructively in the congregations we lead.

The Impartation of Power

Nearly all Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is important, that He is the starting point and key to Christian ministry. Nearly all believe they need His continual presence and power. We just fight over teachings about Him. We argue about the meaning of being "baptized with the Spirit" and quarrel over the nature of spiritual gifts. Wimber's experience and teaching about the Spirit largely bypassed the debate. He did not ignore it; he rather put it in perspective. He noted that the noun form, "baptism of the Holy Spirit," does not appear in Scripture and that the argument over the nature of Spirit baptism is really a question of labels. He wrote, "Good medicine may be incorrectly labeled." He suggested, "The Pentecostal's

³ Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

experience of God is better than their explanation of it.”⁵ Realizing that probably is true for us all, that our religious experiences are better than our explanations, and because Wimber focused on the power and work of the Holy Spirit as it relates to the advance of the kingdom of God rather than one’s authenticity as a Christian, huge numbers in the body of Christ were now free to more fully explore their relationship with the Holy Spirit without abandoning their church’s teaching and tradition. Indeed, the debate about a second experience slowly evaporated in much of the Western church because the focus shifted from judging our doctrines and beliefs to encouraging our relationship, experience and ministry. The vision from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was giving way to that focused on the tree of life.

This is so important because “exponential growth” is being experienced worldwide in the Christian movement through congregations that encourage their people in lifestyles that cooperate with the power of the Holy Spirit. These gatherings of believers enjoy rather than fear the Holy Spirit and have come to recognize manifestations of His presence among them. They carry the conviction and experience that both the gifts and fruit of the Spirit are vital necessities in advancing the gospel.⁶

A critical truth about congregations is that their experience of the Holy Spirit, their passion for others, and their freedom from the confining aspects of Western skepticism depend upon their lead pastors. Research revealed, in the Assemblies of God congregations, that the prominence of “corporate charisma” depended upon the pastor’s personal experience.⁷ In other words, the expressions of the Holy Spirit’s presence among the people, such as physical healing, inner healing, acceptance of forgiveness and relief from guilt, deliverance from spiritual bondage or addictions (demons), uncanny insight, tongues, visions, dreams, personally encouraging and soul-baring messages (prophecy), phenomenal experiences of peace and joy, poignant and relevant Scriptural exposition by lay people and countless other phenomena that fuel passion and commitment to Jesus Christ and mobilize people in His mission depend on the pastors’ experience of these things in most cases, and at the least, with their familiarity or comfort level with them.

⁵ Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, 145.

⁶ Haggard, *The Life-giving Church*, 84.

⁷ Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*, 86.

Empowered and impassioned people lead empowered and impassioned churches. Moreover, the key to empowerment is not experience, but relationship. Relationship rather than experience, itself, is the purpose of God's activity, and seeking relationship with God is far more important than seeking experiences. A couple can have experiences with one another, but a relationship, a friendship, is far more fulfilling. On the other hand, any notion that the couple has a relationship without a series of self-revealing experiences is fantasy. The first strategic step then, in overcoming Western skepticism's hold on our lives and unleashing our congregations in ministry is cultivating that empowering relationship with Christ. That always begins with our calling upon God.

Our voice, our call is important to God. In Genesis, chapter four, verse 26, we are told that in the time when Adam's grandchildren lived, people began calling out to or "accosting" Yahweh, their God. The simple Hebrew term "qara" is used 733 times in the Old Testament to describe God and people's efforts at communication. The prophet Isaiah exhorted, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near" (Isa. 55:6). "Call to me," God bid through the prophet Jeremiah, "and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know" (Jer. 33:3). Similarly, Paul wrote with a Greek term:

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." (Rom. 10:12-15)

Our efforts in bringing God's liberation to people culminate in their personal call to God. In the relationship begun with that act, the Spirit of God responds and works because of the love and faithfulness of God. In experiencing power to lead, we begin there too. We call to God. We accost God. We pray. We, ourselves, invite conversation.

George Barna noted an amazing thing about churches that had completed turnarounds from dire circumstances.

A turnaround church is resuscitated partly due to the *widespread and heartfelt prayer* that is lifted to God on the church's behalf. The pastor emerged as a true prayer giant, taking hours and hours every week to beseech God for all that was needed in the turnaround experience. The congregation was led to a place where it, too, embraced prayer as a special, hidden weapon in the battle

to turn back the forces of darkness that were pushing the church toward the edge of extinction... In almost every turnaround church, the incoming pastor recognized that forming the congregation into a team of praying partners would be a difficult but necessary challenge. It may be that the ability of the church to embrace prayer as one of its defining characteristics would differentiate it from those declining churches that never recover... Often, a distinctive of the successful turnarounds was that people around the world were praying for the comeback of the church.⁸

There are several noteworthy statements in Barna's observation about pastors who led a turnaround. One is they prayed. Two is they were known for praying. Prayer got in the way of other things on their agenda. In other words, it was a priority, and people felt its presence commanding the attention of the pastor over theirs on occasion. Three, it was focused on the congregation's battle. The pastor was not known for contemplative retreats so much as battling in prayer for his or her congregation. Four, the leader led the congregation to see their struggle as a significant spiritual, supernatural struggle, as opposed to exclusively sociological. Five, the leader was able to mobilize members of the congregation as partners in this battle through teamwork in prayer. Sixth, leaders and members enlisted people everywhere to support them in their battle through prayer.

In short, these pastors called upon God, enlisted partners to call upon God with them and mobilized people to call upon God on behalf of them; they led the way in emphasizing the importance of prayer.

There are several amazing vignettes in Scripture that give us real clues to how important this is. Jesus was praying when the Holy Spirit came upon him (Luke 3:21-22). He then spent 40 days in the wilderness fasting (declaring His dependence upon His Father). That preceded all ministry he attempted. Sometime afterwards, Jesus spent an entire night in prayer. People then discovered that he was anointed with power; for just touching his clothes healed them (Luke 6:12-19). Jesus was transfigured as he was praying on a mountainside (Luke 9:28-36). He then walked on water after he spent time on another mountainside praying (Mark 6:46-52). Prayer was associated in Jesus' life with a release of power and significant acts. That was also true for others. Rabbi Saul was visited by Ananais and healed from blindness after praying (Acts 9:11). Cornelius was visited and instructed by an angel while praying (Acts 10:31). Peter was used in the greatest breakthrough of the church, the evangelization of non-

⁸ Barna, *Turnaround Churches*, 52-53.

Jewish people because he was praying (Acts 11:5-17), and Paul escaped harm and was directed to go to the Gentiles while praying in Jerusalem (Acts 22:17-21).

Power and direction for ministry relies upon prayer. The calling and accosting is essential. It is fostered more as people partner in prayer with us. Peter was supernaturally released from prison as people prayed for him (Acts 12:5-14). Paul and Silas were miraculously sprung from their chains after they had been praying and singing together (Acts 16:22-34). The Holy Spirit baptized the church with power on Pentecost as the community was in “one accord” (Acts 2:1). One accord practically never happens unless people are praying.⁹ We are united in few things but our dependence on God.

We become ready for renewal as we pray and as we mobilize people to pray with us. The partnership with others is especially helpful. Many have found themselves motivated to pray when they hear how prayer has changed so many things for others. The testimonies of others provide motivation. Testimonies in classes, small groups, worship and informal settings are crucial in stirring faith to pray. Too frequently our insecurities rather than our faith make us busy activists. The first order in our activism can be prayer. The examples of others provide encouragement to prayer. The fellowship of others provides discipline to pray.

John Maxwell found that prayer partners made a significant difference in his effectiveness. His partners pray each day for him; but one day each month they spend intensive time praying for him throughout the day. When Maxwell was lead pastor at Skyline Wesleyan Church of San Diego, his partners would arrive before worship and pray throughout the auditorium. Additionally, they would pray with him before each worship service. Then a team would continue in prayer the entire time he led and spoke in the various worship services.¹⁰

The author discovered that an astounding difference in receptivity and spiritual ministry occurred within six months of organizing prayer partners. Many imposing obstacles were surmounted and difficult conflicts constructively resolved after several weeks of intercession by a prayer team. Many more problems may have been avoided because of the heart to heart communication that occurs with prayer. The author’s own faith and awareness of the Spirit’s work was profoundly affected. Team prayer offers perspective. It does so in

⁹ Lyle Schaller in *Discontinuity and Hope*, 35, notes that unlike music, preaching, missions, biblical interpretation, and worship, prayer is the one thing in which Christians engage in a cross-cultural setting that is unifying.

¹⁰ See Maxwell’s book, *Partners in Prayer*.

two ways. First, the sphere of people and things covered in prayer is wider so the possibilities to see immediate answers are greater. Second, additional eyes can often identify progress or the hand of God in some way. Soon, the team as whole not only prays but sees a great deal of God's handiwork as God's answers unfold.

The Community Church of Joy in Phoenix, Arizona not only organizes partners to pray for the pastor; but all 6,000 members of the congregation have their own personal prayer partners. The church organizes prayer teams, prayer chains, prayer walks and even an occasional "prayer cruise."¹¹

There is no substitute for the partnership of another believer in prayer. Vision, discipline, encouragement and wisdom all come with such networking. It is significant that in nearly every New Testament mission we read about, the leader was not alone in the battle. Frequently, they brought someone with them into the battle. Barnabas took Paul. Paul took Silas, Luke and Timothy. Peter's language is clear. He was not alone when he went to minister to Cornelius (Acts 10:23). We need not be, either.

To some degree this camaraderie in prayer is like placing hot coals together. The heat grows and other nearby coals ignite. It is significant that there is also a pattern of spiritual power being transmitted through relationships in Scripture. For example, Moses to Joshua, Elijah to Elisha, Eli to Samuel, Samuel to David, Barnabas to Paul, Paul to Timothy, Paul to Titus, Paul to Luke, and so on go these mentoring relationships. Although there was no significant spiritual mentor for Jesus, the rest of the Christian community were privileged with helpful friendships. Indeed, Christ spent His time investing in others, expanding their vision and helping them relate to the Holy Spirit.

An excellent strategy for many leaders is to network within the body of Christ but outside one's tradition to explore charisma or the work of the Spirit that may be unfamiliar and can empower, and then network within the tradition to better understand and explain it. Wimber's observation that the experience is better than the explanation holds true so frequently.

Unleashing the church begins with leaders that are progressively being empowered and unleashed themselves. As the adage goes: "Changed people change people." That is critical in recovering the supernatural.

¹¹ Hunter, *Church for the Unchurched*, 30.

The Role of Healing Ministry

For most Western congregations, there is a fear of the supernatural. People feel vulnerable. Will the exploration of the supernatural, specifically their relationship with the person and work of the Holy Spirit, plunge them into a world of superstition, irrationality and anti-intellectualism? Will they be surrendering their grasp of reason and truth for an orgy of emotionalism?

This may be the most powerful fear among Christian leaders, not so much that they are surrendering their grasp, but that they are surrendering their credibility, their reputation of having a grasp of reason and truth. They fear they will be as patently dismissed as they may have dismissed others. They believe that they then can no longer lead. At most they will be a voice. In my studies of New Testament History and Criticism with Joseph Wong of Asbury Theological Seminary, I learned the “three C’s” of inductive reasoning. The truthfulness of an idea is related to how “coherently” (meaningfully, reasonably, without gaps in logic), “consistently” (without self-contradiction) and “comprehensively” (excluding none of the evidence) it explains the data. From the perspective of reasoning, a prophetic voice generally exposes meaninglessness, gaps in the logic, self-contradictions and ignored data. Such voices are critical to every community. For the spiritual community, prophetic voices sounded these very things. Solomon pointed out the meaninglessness of a life focusing on the accumulation of wealth or fame (Eccl. 1:1-14), and Haggai noted some ignored data saying, “Haven’t you noticed how hard you work and how little the return is, that seemingly you have holes in your purses” (Hag. 1:4-6)? Prophetic voices may occasionally be lonely, but they are God’s compassion for His wandering children. They may solicit ridicule, but they sow blessing. Like with John the Baptist and Jesus, prophetic teachings may result in personal loss, but they give life where faith is present. Our call as believers and leaders is primarily to a trust-relationship with God. When we attend to that first, our words in time become prophetic; and true life-giving leadership will result in proper time.

Instead of fearing the loss of their credibility, some wonder as they go beyond the historically recent rationalistic traditions of the church whether they are making themselves vulnerable to satanic deception and bondage? Others simply fear the social disapproval of people they love and respect. Charles Kraft notes that the way out from the crippling aspects of our Western worldview is not easy. It to a great extent rests on our will. Are we open to

reevaluation and change? Will we choose to pursue relationships and experiences that can assist us in this? Will we persevere in this pursuit when we encounter resistance, hostility or disappointment?¹²

Although programs like ALPHA are helping congregational leaders guide their people into a rapport with the Holy Spirit in the context of the basic tenets and practices of the Christian faith, many leaders have taken the same route that Jesus used with his disciples. Before their experience at Pentecost, the disciples were commissioned and sent to heal. As they succeeded and failed, and then were taught and supervised by Jesus, they were alerted to the activity of the Spirit; and in time, they became to some extent adept at identifying the Spirit's activity. Similarly, there are many leaders today who are helping their people become more conversant with the Spirit through the ministry of divine healing.

There are several reasons for this. For one, God does not command believers in the Scripture to "experience this or that" with the Holy Spirit, but He does place all Christians under the mandate to heal.¹³ This very mandate reveals a profound truth. If Christ healed people because he was uniquely divine, then the command for us to heal would be absurd and harmful. At best, we could only ask God for healing. At most, we could only pray for healing; and when healing failed to materialize, we would feel responsible because we are commanded. Christ, who came to remove our guilt, would be saddling us with guilt over something that was never truly in our hands. Yet, the command of Christ was not to pray for healing. It was to heal (Matt. 10:7-8, Luke 10:9) and Jesus even became angry with his disciples when they failed to heal a demonized boy in Matthew 17. If Jesus healed not because of His divine nature but because of His anointing with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38), then the command makes sense; and our ministry is no longer completed after we offer a prayer for health. Healing then becomes a journey we take with the Holy Spirit. In that journey, we engage in a veritable battle for the health of others; and not just for their bodies, we battle for the wholeness of their hearts and minds as well. In doing that, we become attentive to various signals of the Spirit's presence and direction because we cannot manufacture a healing on our own. We learn dependence and attentiveness to the Spirit and spiritual gifts. That is the second reason why divine healing is gaining more prominence in the church. Healing is not only commanded; it offers a journey where believers are empowered and develop rapport with the Holy Spirit. A

¹² Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 92, 96-100.

¹³ See the discussion in Chapter 2.

third reason for healing ministry is that it is the fruit of faith and compassion. The ministry of divine healing focuses on God's compassion for others and how we can respond and be instruments of that. It is unlike a personal pursuit of spiritual gifts and anointing that occasionally can be tainted with questionable motives (Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8 again is suggested). There is nothing inherently wrong with seeking an anointing or filling of the Spirit, or "eagerly desiring" spiritual gifts. The Bible encourages that; and in doing so, one actually seeks intimacy with God. However, God sometimes chooses to take people, perhaps because they are crippled themselves and need healing from deeply rooted insecurities and selfishness, down a different road of surrender and empowerment. Whatever the case, the ministry of divine healing has become the path of empowerment for many. It places us among people as ministers and servants, which is the normal environment for people responding to God's love. A fourth reason many leaders emphasize healing is that there is cultural approval for caring about and ministering to the sick and hurting. There is less inhibition in North America to exploring a relationship with the Holy Spirit in this context. A fifth reason is that divine healing is so central to the task and mission of the church in evangelization. It fits well as a priority for attention and activity within a spiritual body of believers.

A second strategy then for overcoming the hindrance of our rationalism and naturalism and unleashing our congregations in the community is to embrace a ministry of divine healing. In order to accomplish this, it is helpful for parish leaders to network with people who are both fruitful in healing ministry and sensitive to their settings. Some healing practitioners have wonderful results, but that is the extent of their gifts. Their explanations are not all that helpful. For example, in studying the effectiveness of healing ministry among Assemblies of God congregations, Margaret Poloma found no positive correlation with positive confession. Incidents of healing were no more frequent where such a tool was taught as where it was not.¹⁴ Claiming a healing and the theology behind such an explanation appears to be a needless detour.¹⁵ Poloma did find a higher incidence of healing testimonials or reports

¹⁴ Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*, 62.

¹⁵ Poloma's findings suggest that the experience is better than the explanation in the positive confession movement led by Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland and others. Her work, however, is limited to the application of this movement's principles in Assemblies of God churches.

among people who seemed more conversant with the Spirit through prayer, tongues, Bible reading and so on.¹⁶

It is difficult to launch a healing ministry on the basis of reading someone's book although it has been tried. Books are helpful, but healthy relationships are vital. Networking with people experienced in healing ministry is beneficial for two reasons. First, in networking, we are paying attention to the charisma God has given to build the body. Second, relationships are divinely given to bless and empower us in ways that books or courses cannot. We enjoy in relationships the encouragement and love of God as well as interactive learning that is tailored directly to what we encounter on our battlefield. When one hits a difficult situation, it is difficult to communicate with a book or course and obtain specific and applicable insight.

There are so many things to learn in embracing our call to heal. There are so many questions to ask, let alone answer. No one author has the subject down. No one leader knows it all. This ministry actually holds more potential to unite than to divide the body of Christ because it fosters a dependence on God. However, those with an "umpire" vision will continue to hurt and divide people with their judgments, no matter what grace we celebrate.

The Power of Intercession

Alluded to in the discussion of empowerment, individual and team intercession is critical to overcoming spiritual myopia. Mobilizing intercession is essential for the internal dynamics of spiritual bodies, for their outreach in their territories and also for their impact on the world.

After observing the church life of congregations that successfully made a comeback from extinction, George Barna declared:

Until the church owns prayer as a world-class weapon in the battle against evil and cherishes prayer as a means of intimate and constant communication with God, the turnaround efforts of a body are severely limited, if not altogether doomed, to failure.¹⁷

Specifically, he noted that healthy churches are praying churches, and that a church's faith can be determined by the condition of their prayer life as reflected in the number of people

¹⁶ Ibid., 63.

¹⁷ Barna, *Turnaround Churches*, 97.

praying, the frequency with which they pray, the intensity with which they pray and the joy they experience from their prayers.

Such statements make perfect sense when we realize that the point of our mission journey is to partner with Christ and our Heavenly Father in reaching and reconciling His estranged children. Indeed, the point of our lives is to be restored in intimacy with our Father and bless His creation through that partnership. Intercessory prayer, which brings the needs of others before God, and that follows the path of Christ, the chief intercessor (Heb. 7:17-28), is a natural act for one led by Christ's Spirit. Even as Christ lives to intercede (Heb. 7:25), so His Spirit would carry that same desire and passion to the hearts of people in whom He lives.

God's Spirit of intercession is embraced in churches making a difference. Ted Haggard's New Life Church has teams praying through phone books, over maps and for other churches. They pray for government leaders, schools and neighborhoods. He believes that the most effective way he helps his congregation touch the lost in Colorado Springs is through prayer-walks in the city. Every street in the entire city is "prayerwalked" at least once a year because New Life coordinates their efforts with other churches.¹⁸

It is one thing to pray for people; it is quite another to pray with them. In many cases, believers are contacting neighbors and asking for prayer concerns or are offering prayer when a need becomes apparent during a normal conversation. Some call this Prayer Evangelism. Ed Silvano notes that intercessory prayer on behalf of the *felt needs* of Pre-Christian people is the best way to open their eyes to the gospel.¹⁹ When they see those things that they feel they need met in unusual ways, they begin to realize that faith is not necessarily blind. Even more, Christians are discovering that the priority Christ embraced for his life, ministry to the lost, is evident in answers to prayer. Answers to prayer come surprisingly quick when believers intercede for the needs of the lost. Silvano states, "Prayer for the needs of that (lost) one-hundredth sheep is the spiritual equivalent of dialing 911."²⁰

If expanding prayer beyond the needs of the parish is important, so is directing prayer beyond the reach of the community. Haggard's congregation targets nations. They also attempt to find ways of evaluating their prayer. People need to know that whatever they are doing makes a difference. Prayer not evaluated soon is evaporated. Accordingly, they evaluate

¹⁸ Haggard, *The Life-giving Church*, 148.

¹⁹ Silvano, *That None Should Perish*, 57.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

the effects of their prayer. In one nation New Life Church targeted, the church grew by 600 percent in the first twelve months that followed and by 300 percent in the next 12 months. In another nation they targeted for prayer, the underground church made astonishing headway. They became networked, mobilized and trained to pray through the homes, recreation sites and worship sites of its Islamic masters. In one of their most recent “target” nations, the church is doubling every year. Moreover, New Life Church has teams take prayer journeys through those targeted countries and partner with evangelistic ministries in those territories. So far, they have witnessed tangible results “every time!”²¹ That is not just prayer. That is something more. That is what Jesus called his disciples to do: “Watch and pray” (Matt. 26:41, Mark 14:38, Luke 21:36). Discern what is happening spiritually as well as pray.

That last statement is crucial. When Jesus called his followers to watch with him and pray, he was saying more than stay awake. He was concerned that they would fall into temptation, not because they were snoring, but because they did not recognize the battle and God’s purposes. They needed to see the events not merely as a material transaction, but as a spiritual engagement (Matt. 26:31, Mark 14:32-42). Christ’s teaching about the spiritual battle preceding His return reinforces this notion. He does not want His followers spiritually “submerged” or “torpedoed” as they focus on the surface troubles. Therefore, He calls them to be careful, to always be on the watch, and pray (Luke 21:10-36).

Silvoso says:

In order to take the gospel to every creature, the Church is called to engage the forces of evil. The battleground is the heavenly places. This is where the battle for our cities is won or lost.²²

Intercession is more than a one-on-one conversation with God. There are more players in the ballgame of life than God and believers. Intercession is communication with God in the context of a nasty spiritual fight; and all kinds of prayers and petitions can be involved. The Hebrew writer wrote of Jesus:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. (Heb. 5:7-8)

²¹ Haggard, *The Life-giving Church*, 152.

²² Silvoso, *That None Should Perish*, 97.

It is important to understand that this text generalizes about Jesus' prayer life as a whole. The time period for the actions described is captured in the phrase, "during the days of Jesus' life on earth." A word for word translation of the original Greek is "in the days of his flesh." Those who would limit this description of Christ's prayer life to the end of His life, because of the allusion to His death, must understand that Christ's awareness of his approaching death is indicated quite early, well before he began speaking to his disciples about it in the region of Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13-21). Thus, long before His death, Christ's prayer life was punctuated with tears and loud cries. It was dynamic, emotional, relevant and contemporary. Christ noted that prayer had been important to expelling some demons (Mark 9:25-29). Christ found himself weeping over the destiny of a city (Luke 19:41-44). In fact, Jesus did not unswervingly follow the pattern that we call the Lord's Prayer. The pattern is helpful and an aid, but prayer is communication not formula.

Silvoso, as a Latin American Christian, sees a marked variation between the formulaic prayers of Western Christians and the hints of what was practiced in the early church from Scripture. He believes that it is as vast as the difference between swimming in one's bathtub as opposed to the open ocean.²³ He writes, "Our prayers seem to be written by lawyers who qualify every sentence to provide God with a way out in case no answer comes."²⁴

Mobilizing people in militant, proactive prayer depends on the context and relationships through which prayer is shared, taught and modeled. If prayer is seen primarily as a private thing, an isolated conversation with God, done in a spiritual vacuum, performed with a royal protocol, testimonials may not even offer much motivation; but if it is presented and modeled as an essential link in an ongoing palpable battle, people will gravitate to it even as they move to a table at the call of a dinner bell. It will become their lifeline.

The Possibility of Spiritual Mapping

Church growth leaders consider the effectiveness of any congregation in evangelizing its territory are influenced primarily by two things: institutional factors—things within the institution and its control, and contextual factors—things outside the institution and beyond its control. Institutional factors for a congregation are the leader, the campus, the programs and so on. Contextual factors are shifting demographics, cultural heritage, cultural attitudes toward Christianity and so on. An excellent ministry team located in the right context can reap

²³ Ibid., 193.

²⁴ Ibid., 185.

great fruit; but if they relocate to a resistant area, their fruit will be meager. This usually proves true; however, a profound change of perspective has taken root beginning in the 1980s.

In 1985, Bill Jackson wrote in *World Christian* magazine of a retired missionary couple from Thailand. Laboring long and faithfully, like many other missionaries in that nation, they made little headway. At one point, however, believing that evil spirits may be responsible for people's resistance to the gospel, they set aside one day a week for spiritual warfare prayer. They went out to bind the demons and loose God's Spirit. Not long after they began this practice they saw tangible results that eventually multiplied into waves of conversions.²⁵

Another story stirred rethinking of assumptions. On the Uruguay-Brazil border is a small town where the international border runs along its main street. A missionary began distributing tracts on the Uruguayan side of the street in the morning, but encountered resistance. Discouraged, he crossed over to the Brazilian side and much to his surprise the people gratefully accepted the literature and some even stopped to read it right on the spot. Then he noticed a woman, who had refused a tract on the Uruguayan side, cross over to the Brazilian side and begin window-shopping. An idea hit him. An experiment. The missionary waited for her; and when she approached, he offered her the tract once again. She smiled, took it and thanked him profusely. He tested several others and many followed the same pattern. Later as he was praying about the incident, the words of Jesus came to his mind: "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder the house" (Mark 3:27).²⁶ Could the Spirit be telling him that spirits not only inhabit people but also territories? Was there a "strong man" haunting and hindering God's work on the Uruguayan side that had no influence on the Brazilian side? There seemed to be no model in Scripture. Jesus frequently expelled demons from people, but when did he ever expel them from a community or nation? Yet, Jesus spoke of an angel over the church of a territory in the Book of Revelation. Could there be fallen angels over such territories?

Omar Cabrera caught the attention of Church Growth analyst Peter Wagner. His Vision of the Future Church grew from 30,000 in 1979 to 145,000 in 1988. Cabrera's church is a prototype for the fast growing congregations in the world. It is a multicongregational church that grows by planting new congregations and multiplying campuses. Over a decade

²⁵ Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, 60.

²⁶ Ibid.

ago they had 40 permanent campuses in Argentina. Cabrera's personal evangelistic gift is key in the church's growth. His church capitalizes on that charisma; however, Cabrera did something unique that puzzled Wagner for a number of years. Before he opened up a new location for his church, he would lock himself in a hotel room in that community and then pray and fast for days. No one was to bother him during this time. Even his wife, who co-pastors with him, only visited him when he called for her. He did not spend a routine number of days in seclusion, either. It might be two, four, who knows? Only when he felt that he had arrested through prayer the spiritual principalities hindering the faith and life of that community would he emerge. Then the Argentine minister would plant the new congregation through evangelistic meetings. His evangelistic service would open with a public prayer renouncing all the demons in the auditorium and casting them out in Jesus' name. In many cases, before a Scripture was read or another prayer uttered, people would be healed or fall under tremendous conviction and seek forgiveness. In some cases, the evangelist simply announced healings, and no ministry team needed to pray. When Wagner traveled with Cabrera, he witnessed amazing healing and hunger for the gospel of Christ.²⁷

In each of the previous cases, there appeared to be a spiritual dynamic that was territorial bound. In the New Testament, receptivity to Jesus' ministry varied from community to community (see Luke 4:16-30; Matt. 8:34; Luke 9:51-56). Jesus even denounced some communities where he performed miracles (Matt. 11:20-24) and prepared his disciples for rejection by others (Matt. 10:11-15). An examination of Paul's ministry also reveals unequal receptivity. Paul experienced varying receptivity at cities like Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Berea, Thessalonica and Ephesus. Usually, some group would threaten his life; but in Corinth he was able to stay a year and a half despite virulent opposition. God told him in a vision:

Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city. (Acts 18:9-11)

Paul's safety in Corinth was assured because God had many people in the city. What did God mean? Was Paul's safety because of sociology? Were the opposition voices intimidated because of the numbers of sympathizers? Could not one zealot knife through and harm Paul? Was his safety physical? Were the believers a physical ring of protection for him? Could not

²⁷ Ibid., 97-100.

Paul still be injured in some way? Early Christians saw their struggle as a war with spiritual beings that manipulated and incited human beings to harm. They held neither the materialistic nor the naturalistic assumptions about life in which westerners were raised. Most likely, Paul understood that the Christian presence in Corinth was restraining and crippling the control of evil territorial spirits. His description of the Christian's struggle, that we wrestle not with "flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12-13), suggests a fight with territorial powers of varying rank; and it explains why he eagerly sought to have believers join his struggle in prayer (Rom. 15:30-32). Prayer was not so much a means of incurring God's favor. That is freely given to us. Instead, it was an offensive weapon for people made in God's likeness and given dominion over the earth. It was a weapon that in partnership with Christ resubmitted the soil of the planet to the reign of God.²⁸

In the book of Daniel, it is obvious that a territorial spirit, "the prince of Persia," interfered with Daniel's interpretation of a dream. Three weeks of fasting and an angelic fight was necessary for his prayers to be answered (Dan. 10:1-14). Daniel may not offer us a model for expelling territorial powers, but his experience certainly demonstrates their effect on God's people and offers us an example of one man overcoming some of their influence.

When the Apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians about what hinders unbelievers from faith, he pointed to a spiritual being that he called "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4). Most modern readers may see that as an allusion to the devil and think no further. The language, however, suggests a spiritual usurper, controlling the contemporary atmosphere where nonbelievers live. Paul was not offering his Corinthian readers an exposition of the devil's names and powers. Instead, he was simply sharing about the tremendous opposition he and his team experienced as they brought the gospel to Asia. He was not concerned that he or his team had somehow unwisely provoked the pain and resistance they met; rather he wrote that they were engaging the ruling principality.

Both Christian experience and the writing of Scriptures suggest that we are affected by ruling principalities wherever we minister. When we seek to bring liberation to a community,

²⁸ It is important to stress that Paul had no struggle incurring God's favor. Neither do we. God's favor is not achieved. It is given. It is grace, unmerited, unearned favor and goodwill toward us. In prayer, we appropriate grace. We act in view of it and out of dependence upon it. However, in prayer we also struggle. We struggle with those powers that in some way block its expression and fulfillment in our lives and world. To join Paul's struggle was not to wrestle with God for a blessing, but through the guidance of the Holy Spirit to shackle and dethrone evil powers opposed to Paul. See Matthew 16:18-19.

there are spiritual dynamics beyond the sociological, beyond the anthropological, beyond demographic studies that should interest us. We are affected as Daniel, Paul and Jesus were; the god of this age, the prince of our community affects our work. Since our goal is liberation, neutralizing the control of that prince is vital. This contextual factor that once was considered beyond the influence of believers is now becoming a focus of ministry for many believers.

Perhaps, no one has provided more help in this regard than George Otis and the Sentinel Group. Otis believes, “We must learn to see our communities as they *really* are, not merely as they *appear* to be.”²⁹ He suggests that large-scale conversions are unlikely to occur unless we discern the nature and origin of any obstacles to revival and receive God’s prescribed strategies for their removal.³⁰ The question, “What are the roots of a territory’s resistance to the gospel?” has given rise to a new, rapidly growing discipline within the global Christian community called “spiritual mapping.”

This form of cartography relies heavily on the insights of cultural geography and anthropology. However, it parts company with those scientific disciplines in two ways. First, it is postmodern. It has jettisoned the notion of a purely materialistic and naturalistic world. It intends to identify and discern the influence of spiritual beings. Second, it recognizes prayer as a legitimate methodology for data collection. Otis writes, “If spiritual forces are an active part of our campaign to liberate lost men and women, it should not surprise us that God—the most potent force of all—would occasionally reveal useful secrets and strategies.”³¹ Critics of that last statement may suggest that Otis is discounting God’s hand in scientific discovery. I do not believe so. Instead, Otis is suggesting that liberation is a divine-human partnership. It makes sense that some insights will come through avenues that explicitly reinforce that partnership, avenues like prayer.

Spiritual mapping is propelling believers to investigate the socioeconomic, political and spiritual histories of their communities. It is training believers’ prayers on their community and it is sensitizing them to the presence of blighted areas and residual pain from historical injustices. It is enlarging their vision from promoting sectarian and congregational self-interest to contributing to the spiritual and social transformation of their communities. Moreover, it is leading them to prophetic acts that are creating breakthroughs.

²⁹ Otis, *Informed Intercession*, 81.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

The Potential of Prophetic Action

In 1978 thousands of fans flocked to the city of Cordoba, Argentina for the finals of the world soccer playoffs. An international team of two hundred workers from Youth With a Mission had been on the streets all day with no results to speak of. The following day, the workers left the streets, fasted and prayed in a rented monastery. During that time they began to see that their timidity and weakness in proclaiming the gospel was due in part to the work of satanic forces manifesting themselves in the culture of the city. They were ministering in a proud and beautiful city to a proud and beautiful people. Much of the population was of German and Italian descent and valued position, possessions and appearance. The team, of simply dressed believers from over twenty nations, who struggled with their Spanish as they handed out gospel literature, seemed out of place in that fashion-conscious community.

As the workers prayed in small groups, they realized that they were not unseemly to God, but that they were to a people hindered by the influence of a prideful spirit. A simple strategy for breaking that territorial spirit's power occurred to many while they were praying. John Dawson wrote: "We were discerning a principality attempting to rule the city in the pride of life, so we had to confront it in an opposite spirit with a strategy of personal humility."³² All two hundred workers went to the seat of pride, the fashionable malls and streets of downtown Cordoba, divided into groups of thirty and spread out as led. They then in their groups knelt publicly and prayed for a revelation of Jesus Christ to visit the city. Breakthrough was immediate, both in the workers and the city. Large and curious crowds gathered around each prayer group. Boldness and compassion filled the hearts of the workers so that all throughout downtown Cordoba, workers preached with effectiveness. Lines formed to receive "autographed" gospel tracts as people wished to honor the workers. People dropped to their knees in public repentance. Large street meetings went on for several weeks until the team's departure, and hundreds signaled their desire to turn to Christ.³³

In a very rudimentary way, this missionary team had engaged in spiritual mapping. They had discerned the nature of the resistance to the gospel they proclaimed. They had identified the principality hindering their work. They followed their findings with a prophetic

³² John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities For God: How to Break Spiritual Strongholds* (Lake Mary: Creation House, 1989), 19.

³³ *Ibid.*, 18-21.

action. It was prophetic because it was conditioned and prompted by faith birthed from their prayer. It was action because their faith propelled them to act and engage their mission field in a spiritual as well as sociological way. The results offered empirical and objective confirmation of their hypothesis for what may have appeared to many as subjective superstition.

These prophetic acts may or may not bring such dramatic results; however, they offer potential that is not found elsewhere. Bob Beckett tells the story of one particular prophetic act and its impact on the Indian and white community in Hemet, California.

At one time the arid and dry desert valley, in which it lies, had been lush with vegetation. Hemet is an Indian word meaning “hemmed in by trees.” The valley had been so fertile that great orchards grew 1200 feet up the hillsides and were watered by natural springs. A rancher would go out into the field with a pipe three or four inches in diameter and jam it into the ground. Soon water would start bubbling up through the pipe so the cattle could be watered. During the 1930s, however, a water company decided to export water from the valley out to the surrounding communities. In drilling a route for the water pipe through the mountains, engineers miscalculated and mistakenly tapped the underground water table, which did not legally belong to the company. Day after day, month after month water gushed out of the mountain while company officials promised to stop the flow. Accusations surfaced that the water company was actually diverting the water to Riverside and Orange counties for enormous profit. Billions of gallons were drained off for a period greater than a year. Orchards died. Ranchers suffered. But more than that, the Soboba Indians lost their livelihood as the ground on their reservation dried up and died beneath them. The Sobobas called upon tribal shamans to curse the company and its workers. Inexplicably, through odd circumstances and bizarre accidents company workers actually began to die. Fifty years later, the relationship between these Indians and whites in the valley were still punctuated with bitterness.

In the fall of 1991, a solemn assembly was organized where two believers from the tribe and a current employee of the water company came together to formally confess and seek forgiveness for the sins of their ancestral leaders in the situation. Serendipitously, a missionary from Argentina, furloughed for two weeks, was in attendance that had worked on that water line fifty years earlier when the water table was tapped. He also stood as a representative. As tears flowed, representatives of both parties offered confession and extended forgiveness.

The results in time may prove even more dramatic than what Dawson observed in Cordoba. A spiritual awakening has begun on the Indian reservation that has brought about dramatic public conversions and spread to other reservations. The water table in the valley has risen; and a major reservoir, larger than all the rest in Southern California put together, is being constructed in the valley and will raise the table substantially.³⁴

Hadaway and Roozen, in their study of church growth and concern for historic denominational churches, observe that growing churches are located in growing communities or receptive populations.³⁵ However, as congregations and coalitions of congregations recover an emphasis on the supernatural, there is more to be said. Demographics and the receptivity of people are changing as “coincidences,” from the modernist perspective, are multiplied where believers engage in aggressive intercession, spiritual mapping and prophetic action.

There is a lot more to recovering supernatural ministry than saying we believe. It involves the choice to open ourselves to new data, new relationships, new perspectives and new practices. For many of us it is a choice to pursue truth even when it violates the conventions of those whose respect and approval we cherish. For certain, it involves a humbling commitment to reexamine one’s self, one’s biases and the genuineness of one’s dependence upon Christ.

What do we do when we read and hear statements like that of Ed Silvano? “All over the Third World, where the Church is on fire, we find an ever expanding number of testimonies of dramatic angelic intervention on behalf of the Church,” he writes.³⁶ Do we dismiss the testimonials Silvano reports too quickly? Salman Rushdie, the author of *Satanic Verses*, once told an All-India Radio audience, “Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems—but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems incredible.”³⁷ Many believers can affirm the raising of dead by Elisha, Jesus, Peter and Paul, but any reports of that today disturb them. This is the fight Christians have in recovering the supernatural. Credible people become incredible or unbelievable, not because of their logic, method or character, but because their witness is incredible. This inherent danger of being marginalized for affirming or reporting

³⁴ Beckett, *Commitment to Conquer*, 140-143.

³⁵ Hadaway and Roozen, *Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream*, 65-66.

³⁶ Silvano, *That None Should Perish*, 181.

³⁷ Otis, *Informed Intercession*, 79.

contemporary supernatural activity is further multiplied because of Western Christianity's recent dance with the Enlightenment.

To shift gears and change perspectives in this milieu is exceedingly difficult. Kraft writes:

Every shift of perspective requires, at the very least, that a person knows a shift is possible and has enough understanding about what lies on the other side to have an inkling of what to expect. One of the biggest hindrances to change is the lack of knowledge that there is an alternative. There are, however, at least three kinds of knowledge: intellectual, observational, and experiential.³⁸

For those of us educated in an Enlightenment perspective (virtually all westerners), Kraft's observation is actually a challenge. If we are truly open and genuine seekers of truth, then we will pursue knowledge of the supernatural intellectually, observationally and experientially. Intellectual knowledge requires exposure to new thinking and thinkers. It follows a new course of reading and dialogue. Observational knowledge demands networking with different people. It pursues a very different set of contacts, friendships and ministry settings. Experiential knowledge means embracing new practices. It places believers on a path of ministry and learning where they totter for a season like children with their hands held out to Jesus. Constructive change usually leads us into unfamiliar and uncomfortable territory.

The decision to recover the supernatural is not only personally demanding; it is far reaching. It is the one strategic decision, if followed persistently, which not only portends the greatest change in the potential of our congregations but also in our individual relationships with God.

³⁸ Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 94.