

## **Recognizing a True Movement of God**

By Carol Madison

When we pray for and speak of revival and transformation, what are the benchmarks we are using to identify a true move of God? Because those terms mean different things in different venues, we need to identify characteristics of a move of God that are supernaturally leading toward true revival and transformation. We should desire nothing less of God!

After traveling to Almolonga, Guatemala, to walk the streets of a completely transformed community, I experienced firsthand a new level of understanding of true transformation. This community was once known for idolatry, crime, drunkenness, and poverty some 20 years ago. Through the power of prayer, God's presence is so manifest in this mountain village of 19,000 people that more than 85 percent now identify themselves as followers of Jesus Christ. Most of the 30-plus bars have been replaced by more than 30 churches. The four jails have closed, and crime is so nonexistent that the police no longer carry guns. And most amazing, God has literally healed the land in such a way that Almolonga is now known as the "Valley of Miracles." The people raise vegetables of biblical proportions. There is no denying that God has miraculously transformed this community!

When we speak of a transformed community, we need to uphold Almolonga and other similar places around the world as the benchmark of a true movement of God. The danger is to define transformation according to our own perceptions or experiences, and in the United States that will most often sell transformation very short!

### **What Does a True Movement of God Look Like?**

What is meant by a true movement of God? Very simply, *if it is God, then it defies natural, simple explanations*. It is God interrupting the flow of history for the sake of His glory.

Nancy Leigh DeMoss, a recognized speaker on brokenness, repentance, and revival, states: "It is a divine moment when there is a supernatural outpouring of God's Spirit on His people that cannot be explained in human terms" (*Is This Revival?* Pamphlet published by Revive Our Hearts).

Duncan Campbell, who helped give pastoral leadership to the revival in the Hebrides Islands in the late 1940s, described the outstanding characteristic of a movement of God: "**First, the presence of God.**"

John H. Armstrong expands on that definition: "God is always present and reveals Himself in many ways. But a true movement of God is when His presence overwhelms masses of people with an awed sense of Him. It is the manifest presence of God—coming to His people beyond normal experiences—to advance His Kingdom" (*When God Moves*, Harvest House Publishers, 1998).

### **Criteria for Determining Reality of a Movement of God**

A movement of God can be personal, as in a transformation of a single person. But when we speak of transformation of an entire community, we need to be more discerning of His movement. Here are some criteria that I believe can help in this discernment process.

#### **1. Who should get the credit: God or man?**

Not everything that we claim is a move of God truly is. Often things are done more in the flesh than in the Spirit. Guard against declarations of God's hand that are really the result of our own energies and efforts.

A movement of God is not necessarily measured by numbers of books sold or churches participating in a program. We can very adequately run programs and market products, but only God can bring true transformation of the heart. It's about heart transformation!

I've heard many claims that revival is here, but as revival expert Richard Owen Roberts says, "If you live in the Western World and were born after WWII, you have not witnessed a genuine move of God in revival." You may or may not agree with statement, but it sets a high standard for definitions of true revival.

A caution on overstatement: I once heard someone state, "We shared the gospel with 10,000 people on Saturday." That is a powerful claim, but truth is that they sponsored a float in a parade and passed out tracts. Don't overstate a movement. If it is of God, one doesn't need to make any greater claims than what God is truly doing.

To truly be a movement of God, it needs to have changed or transformed something. God is about transformation, not numbers.

## **2. Revival movements are characterized by a deep conviction of sin and repentance.**

God has established an "If...then" pattern in Scripture that gives a general principle.

**2 Chronicles 7:14:** "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sins, and heal their land."

**Malachi 3:7:** "Return to me and I will return to you."

**James 4:8-10:** "Come near to God and He will come near to you."

A move of God should include a sober recognition of the **holiness of God**. Isaiah pretty much sums this up when he says in **Isaiah 6:5**: *"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."*

If repentance, brokenness, and humility are not a part of it, then I find it suspect. Scripture indicates that God moves in response to obedience. If there is flamboyancy or prideful declarations, perhaps it is not from God.

A true movement of God should also result in a deep hunger for the Word of God that penetrates the heart, brings conviction, and leads to transformation of the heart. It transcends the person preaching or the program.

## **3. Can you discern a clear "before and after"?**

Is there a significant difference, even in the physical realm? I've seen people change in physical appearance when they have found freedom and transformation in Christ. Whether physical or spiritual, some change must be evident.

Are there redeemed places you can identify? Pastor Moriano (Almolonga, Guatemala) placed his hands on side of bar in Almolonga and prayed that God would redeem for His Kingdom

purposes—and now thousands worship on that very spot in a church that has been established there.

#### **4. Do you see evidences of abundance and restoration?**

Psalm 65:5-13 speaks of God-given abundance:

*You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.*

*Those living far away fear your wonders; where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy. You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it.*

*You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops. You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing.*

This passage declares the abundance and restoration that God delights in bringing. This describes God doing His best work—a true movement!

I saw the contrast between Quetzaltenango and Almolonga, Guatemala—towns just minutes apart from each other. In Quetzaltenango, it was common to see guards with automatic rifles in front of stores and banks—and even McDonalds! Crime was high and it was not safe to walk the streets at night. In contrast, police in Almolonga (just a mile or so away) did not need to carry guns because of God’s protection over the community. Even the marketplaces of the two communities were dramatically different, with an overabundance of produce filling the streets of Almolonga. The vegetables were scrawny and sparse in Quetzaltenango.

#### **5. What are the specific indications that something has changed in the spiritual realm?**

People often say, “We prayed, and God gave us a breakthrough.” That may very well be, but what are the evidences? If God broke something, that means something has changed. If God did it in the spiritual, then you should be able to see some manifestation in the natural. Those are the indicators that truly God has moved in a profound way.

#### **6. Is God getting ALL the glory?**

So often you see advertisements that state: “Come and see Prophet so and so, and experience miracles?” Notice who is getting the bigger headline—the main speaker, or the manifest presence and holiness of God. Is the focus on sensationalizing something or on some unusual manifestation, or is it on a life-giving encounter with Jesus Christ?

#### **7. Can you verify through a variety of sources?**

If it is truly a movement of God, it will touch scores of people. Is there some acknowledgment by others that a change has taken place? Can non-Christians see an objective change?

People might not agree with how or why the change has occurred, but they should be able to see a difference. Almolonga is now called the valley of miracles—you cannot deny that

*something* has happened. I picked up a secular travel book that identified Almolonga as *a place with lucrative vegetable export business, a village that has abandoned religious traditions in favor of “evangelism.” More than 25 “evangelist” churches; residents attend at least once a day...The new religion is credited for lowering the rate of alcoholism, as well as for area’s beautiful crop (Hunter Travel Guide to Guatemala, page 171).*

**8. Do you see some level of community transformation?**

Transformation does not mean perfection. But a true move of God cannot help but have an impact on society. It’s not something that happens just within the walls of the church.

If people are continually being drawn to a church because unusual things are happening or they are experiencing emotional encounters, but nothing changes in society—then it is good to question of much of that can be attributed to a movement of God. It may or may not be—but you need to be discerning.

Habakkuk 2:14 holds up a high standard for community transformation: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

The bottom line for a true movement of God is that Jesus’ name is famous and God is glorified in the community. Let’s believe and pray for nothing less!