

## My Experience With Toronto

Until I got sick in 1996, I used to frequent cutting edge charismatic churches whenever one could be found. I have been around for a long time. I have seen a lot of glory, and carry my share of it, so I am not easily impressed.

I remember hearing about "The Vineyard" of California in the mid-eighties from up here in Canada. They re-discovered healing. Ho-hum. So when did we lose it?

The answer to that is in two parts:

1. We were in the midst of the most terrible spiritual drought. In all the big city of Edmonton (Alberta) at that time I could find only two other men who really cared to talk about seeking God's best. The three of us had a "book reading club". We would get together occasionally and compare notes on the best Christian book we had read on the topic. (never on sanctification but regardless, I entered His Rest during this time) Out of this earnest seeking sprang a large prayer group of seekers that met in our spacious city home.

2. The Vineyard appealed to newly Spirit-filled evangelicals that were seeking God's best -just as John Wimber was. So in the Vineyard, we have all these people who are completely green as far as the ways of the Spirit gathered together. And the Vineyard leaders were just learners themselves. And there were far too few of them!!! What a dangerous mixture!! There is no way around the fact that it takes time to develop discernment and wisdom. No amount of training will change that fact of life, although ignorance will substantially hinder the process.

At that time they just had the one church in Canada -in Vancouver. They had a policy to not start any more churches in Canada, because they just did not have enough people that were spiritually ready to lead. Their intention was to just network through the existing churches with charismatics in them.

Vineyard sponsored a large conference in Edmonton (approx. one million in pop.) at which John Wimber introduced Paul Cain to the public for the first time. I liked Wimber's winning personality and presentation. His casual and humble message was basic and well-suited for beginners.

And then the Vineyard changed their policy, and started planting a church in Edmonton regardless. Expectations quickly became giant since there was such a dearth of anointed churches.

They sent various teams from the church in Vancouver to help the local church plant. Well. I was so amazed at what I saw. The head leader for Vineyard for all of Canada came. His preaching was scattered and worthless. He was going a thousand miles and hour and trying to do all the organizing himself. Was he spiritual? It was hard to tell. He passed in a blur of motion and speed-talk. He had no time to talk with me about the resources I had ready at my ministry. The teams they sent were not edifying, to say the least. They were enthusiastic but had no depth of anointing or grace.

They appointed a Baptist pastor who had recently been filled with the Spirit to head it up. Well, if denim was anointing this new church would have been greatly favoured of God. As it was, it was mostly not, although they certainly tried hard.

Shortly after this, my wife and I then moved back to London, Ontario, hoping to find a proper church for our family with two young daughters. Then as now, I need revival. I feel that with anything less, church is a droll shadow that is an insult to the bright and wonderful faith I now share with you. I insist on maintaining a constant revival in my personal life regardless of the season outside. This was now 1991-2.

After I was in London a while, Vineyard put on a big conference near Hamilton, Ontario. Their intention was to stay outside of Metro Toronto because Vineyard was just not ready to handle the spiritual challenges of another big city. This conference featured John Wimber, Mike Bickle, Paul Cain, and Bob Jones. The expectations of most were absolutely stratospheric in the face of the prolonged spiritual drought.

Well, I drove down to the conference for the weekend and took my youngest daughter with me since she was so eager to spend time with me in an adult venue. I think this daughter was born adult. She was ten or so at that time and had known the Lord since she was three. It was a remarkable conference as you may well imagine, but the most remarkable event of all was not even scheduled.

Somebody shouted out a prophecy that was half to three quarters of an hour long. And then some others nearby

added to it. The loudly shouted theme was that the Lord would not leave Toronto out. O no. The Lord had big and very special plans for Toronto. Basically, it was Torontonians shouting, "ME TOO".

Much later, after hearing much rumour about how glorious the move in Toronto (approx 4 million) was, I went to see for myself. They had just moved into this huge building that used to house an international trade centre near the international airport, which is the primary node of air travel to and from Canada.

What did I find in my visits there? The level of hype and self-importance was very high. The esteem in which their mediocre leaders were held was something to behold. They basically felt that they were the greatest thing since sliced bread, and the world had nothing to equal them outside of California. But even this qualification would not last long after the demise of John Wimber.....

Apparently thousands of people were flying in from all around the world to see what was happening in Toronto. I had a good talk with one happy couple like this from Iowa. They were evangelicals who had only recently been filled with the Spirit. They felt very privileged to be able to come to this charismatic Mecca since it's enthusiasm was such a contrast with the jaded skepticism that greeted their new experience at home. No doubt these immensely positive opinions when voiced to the Toronto locals in the thousands, were a large factor in puffing up the whole movement. The high opinions were caused by the starvation of the visitors, not necessarily the state of the local assembly.

I had a mature ministry friend who lived in Toronto. He attended there sometimes to try to help out, but most of the time attended a more stable pentecostal fellowship.

As for me, I kept waiting for the reality of their vast expectation to show up. I am still waiting now, almost fifteen years later.

Yours in Him;

Tom Plumb (your "Earnest Seeker")

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