

Chuck Parry: I Decided to Stay in the Mountains Until I Met the Creator

We had about half an hour set aside for an interview with American pastor Chuck Parry, but despite his busy schedule, it went on longer. We sat in the empty dining room of a hotel in Prague, talking not only about Bethel church in Redding, California, but also touching on more personal questions. He tried to answer each one honestly and with a smile.

You represent Bethel Church in California, which has become one of the most influential churches in the world. It has a huge impact through books, preaching, and its Bible school. What are the main areas in which Bethel has brought something new to contemporary Christianity?

I would say it's a return to the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave gifts to the church; He gave us the Holy Spirit and His Word. We pursue the gifts of the Spirit—prophecy, healing, miracles. Whenever Jesus preached the gospel, He said: "The Kingdom of Heaven is here." Then He healed the sick and cast out demons. He told His disciples to proclaim that the Kingdom was here, and to heal and cast out demons. I think it's a simple return to this basic calling and to the manifestations of the coming Kingdom—with power and gifts that transform lives, destroy the works of the enemy, and bring God's light.

How exactly do you pursue these gifts?

First, we read His Word and what it says on the subject. If I want to know more about healing, for example, I'll read the stories in the gospels about how Jesus healed everyone who came to Him. Then I'll read the promises I've received as a believer. I talk to God about these things and take them as my own: "Oh, You gave us this? I want it. God, how can I work with You?" Sometimes we want God to do what we

want, but that's not how it works. It's better to say: "I want to do what You are doing."

Let's continue with the example of healing. Do you pray for everyone who comes and wants to be healed, or do you wait until you feel the Holy Spirit prompting you?

Sometimes you feel it, sometimes you don't, but God always heals.

Does that mean people are healed every time you pray for them?

It doesn't happen every time, but it's still our standard, because Jesus healed everyone who came to Him. In Acts 10:38 it says: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him." It speaks of Him as Jesus of Nazareth. I believe this points to His humanity—that God anointed a man who healed everyone because God was with Him. And Jesus says we will do much more than what He did.

We believe the standard is that everyone should be healed. If we don't meet that standard, there's sometimes the intellectual approach: "We have to find some excuse or reason why it didn't happen." We don't agree with that. We believe the standard is always Jesus, and we never lower it just to explain why something didn't happen. We keep pressing toward His standard.

We've noticed more people are healed than before. Sometimes we see healing for everyone, sometimes not, but we always want people to encounter God's love and peace, and to be freed from the stress and fear that sickness brings. I believe every time we pray, we release something from God, and things start to change.

I only had a bag of oatmeal and firewood

You are the director of the Healing Rooms at Bethel. When and how did you get into this job?

When I came to Bethel seventeen years ago, the Healing Rooms were already up and running. I liked what was going on there, so I started serving there and later I started leading it.

I didn't grow up in a Christian family. I met Jesus in the mountains of Colorado when I was twenty-two. I read the Bible and just believed everything it said. I didn't pursue a healing ministry, but I pursued Jesus. His heart beats for every person. I saw in the Scriptures that He healed the sick.

What led you to start reading the Bible, even though you didn't come from a Christian family?

First I met Jesus (laughter).

Were you walking in the mountains and suddenly there he was? (laughter)

Not really (laughter). It's a bit of a longer story. I went to university to study architecture, which is, among other things, about construction and design. I had to study physics, which was a bit boring, but I had to write a term paper. I was looking for a topic and I came across the golden ratio. Everything in nature corresponds to it. I was carried away by it and said to myself: "Wait, if there is such a repeating pattern in everything, there must be a designer, a designer of the entire universe and creation." I began to have a desire to meet Him. I started to think and search. It was the late sixties and early seventies, and I did not see much happening in the church in the United States and I didn't know many people who thought about spiritual things. Eastern mysticism was coming in and people were studying these things. I had visited a few traditional churches, but nothing touched my heart; it seemed boring.

After graduating from university, I devised a plan. I used to ski and hike in the mountains of Colorado and felt maybe I could experience the Designer there. I decided to get a cabin in the mountains and stay until I met the designer of the universe there.

That sounds good...

I found the cabin and moved in in the fall of 1972. The Designer didn't show up for a long time (laughs). It started snowing, I got stuck in the mountains, my car broke down, and I ran out of food. I only had a bag of oatmeal and a lot of firewood. At Christmas there was a huge blizzard and the snow stopped around New Year's. I went outside in the night and saw millions of stars in the sky. It felt presumptuous and arrogant to think I could meet the Designer of all this, as I felt like only a tiny spec in the universe.

I went to bed, woke up in the morning, and snow was sparkling everywhere in the sunlight. I got up and said, "How can I know you?" Suddenly, a light brighter than the sun outside flooded the entire cabin, and I knew it was Jesus. I fell to my knees and surrendered to Him. I felt Him speaking to me in my heart, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." I had never read the Bible, so I didn't know it was in it. I replied, "Please show me the Father."

That's how I began my journey with God. I felt His presence in nature, and that's why I wanted to continue living in it. It was so real that I didn't even think about going to some church.

I bought an Indian teepee and lived in it for three years. One day, a beautiful blonde woman came and set up her teepee across the creek from me. That's how I met my wife (laughter). We've been together for forty-eight years. But we still hadn't met any Christians.

Was your wife a Christian?

No, she went to church as a child and knew the Bible better than I did. But she lived with her grandmother, who didn't want to go to church, so she stopped when she was about twelve.

Five years later, in 1977, someone told us about a group of believers who met in a village of about four hundred people high in the mountains. They prayed for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, prophesied, spoke in tongues, prayed for healing, and saw miracles. We went to the village and to their prayer meeting. There were about twenty of them; they sat in a circle and they invited us in: "Come, we're going to worship God." I had never done anything like that before. A lady played the

guitar and they started singing, and gradually they sang in different languages. I experienced God's presence strongly, and we decided to keep going to the prayer meeting. They taught me how to read the Bible. I had started with Genesis and got almost to Exodus (laughs). They suggested I start reading the Gospel of John and explained to us what salvation is.

Healing is the heart of the gospel

Let's go back to Bethel. What is its history?

Bethel was founded about sixty years ago. It was originally a Pentecostal church and its members believed in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But there were not many healings and miracles. That changed with the arrival of Bill Johnson.

How did it look like?

Bill Johnson was the pastor of a church in a small town in the mountains, in Weaverville. It was at a time when revivals were taking place in Toronto and Florida. Many of us went to those places because we had heard that the Holy Spirit was working powerfully there. When we returned home, we were still "charged" and sensitive to the manifestations of the Spirit. There were about one hundred and fifty people in the church in Weaverville. Miracles began to happen and people began to be healed.

Bill's father had been the pastor at Bethel before, but by that time he had passed away. The church invited Bill to be their pastor because they didn't have one. He accepted the offer, but he wanted the church to pursue what they were experiencing in Weaverville, the presence of the Holy Spirit and His gifts. There were many manifestations that were unusual, but Bill didn't want to hinder them. He wanted everything God has for His people and they agreed.

I think we should blow up our boxes and let God be God.

Some of the manifestations can be controversial...

Sometimes revivals seem chaotic, people fall to the ground laughing or crying, God touches people. Some are afraid of it and don't like it. But Bill wouldn't back down, and eventually the church split and some left. We saw the growth of God's presence and manifestations in those who stayed. However, both churches are doing well, there is no hatred or animosity between us. There is no one right way to lead a church.

My wife and I had started two similar churches in Colorado. Then when we came to Bethel, we saw that this is what we wanted too.

Bethel's emphasis is on planting more churches and healing. Do you see these as connected vessels or two lines of your ministry?

I used to plant churches when I was younger, I don't do that anymore. People everywhere wanted to see more healing. Do you know someone who is sick and needs healing?

Yes...

Everyone knows someone like that (laughter). The Bible promises healing. That's why they invite me to different countries, "We want to see more healing in our church." The problem is that you can't just add healing to the church. It's not on the peripheral to the gospel, it's at the center of it, because Jesus told his disciples to preach the gospel and heal. We believe that healing and other manifestations of the Spirit are a natural manifestation of preaching the gospel. In many places where they invited us, they didn't have that way of thinking. That's why I like to go where they want to see the culture that Jesus brought, and teach them how to host or develop the "culture of heaven."

I read that you've seen people raised from the dead. Can you tell me more about that?

Raising the dead is Jesus' command, that's why we do it. I wasn't prepared for that. The first person I saw resurrected was my wife's grandmother. She had had a stroke and lived with us. She wasn't doing well, we prayed for her, and she gave her life to Jesus. We baptized her on the farm when she was eighty-two.

She had a very weak heart. I was working in the barn and I went into the house to make her lunch, and we were talking, and suddenly she collapsed on the couch. I ran over to her, sat down, held her in my arms, and she died. She stopped breathing, she started to lose color, she started to get cold and stiff, she just passed away. It was a holy moment because all my children were born at home and now our grandmother died at home, it was rare/precious. I held her, praising God because I knew she was with him. A lot of time had passed.

Then I thought, "What do you do when someone dies at home? Should I call the police?" I asked God, "What should I do?" Then I thought of my wife. Her grandmother raised her after her mother abandoned her as a child. My wife had just gone to the village with the children and would be sad if she couldn't say goodbye to her grandmother. So I spoke to the Lord, "I wish Linda were here to say goodbye." Suddenly I heard the Holy Spirit say, "Rebuke death." I did so, and suddenly a gray cloud lifted from her and flew away. I stopped. She still looked dead. So I began to speak the words of life. It was gradual and slow, but she started to get warm, her color was coming back, after a while I felt her breathing weakly and finally she opened her eyes. I shouted, "Grandma!" (laughter) It was funny, she looked around and said, "Oh no." She hoped she was in heaven, and yet she was back in her old body. She was so disappointed! (laughter)

We started talking, joking, and then a friend of mine who worked with me came over. I had been away for quite a while, so he asked what had happened. I said to him, "Can you go to the village and bring Linda back, as fast as you can?" She came with the children, to whom I said, "Hug Grandma and tell her you love her." We had a beautiful time together and after about a few hours she rolled back onto the couch and died. We praised God and didn't want to bring her back. We knew she was doing well. I understood that God's love for my wife is greater than death. It was amazing.

Bethel and New Age?

Bethel is targeted by many critics. We can read a lot of negative things about it on the Internet, in English and Czech. Would you be willing to comment on some of the points of this criticism?

People google information, but I would ask why they don't go to our website and listen to some sermons to hear what we teach, instead of just reading criticism.

But not everyone can speak English...

Oh, I see.

Bethel is often accused of using New Age methods, such as using tuning forks (Bill Johnson's now deceased wife Beni wrote about using a 528 Hz tuning fork as a prophetic act or a means of healing - ed.) or lying on the graves of Christian figures to receive the anointing...

God created sound and vibrations, so a tuning fork is not a New Age thing. The orchestra also has to tune to one note. It amazes me that people are afraid of sound and things that God created, thinking that it is new age.

And what about lying on the graves of Christians?

I have never heard of anyone actually doing that. People go to important places. Today I went to see the Bethlehem Chapel because I respect Jan Hus. He did wonderful things, he was our forerunner. I will not do any new age practices there, but I can express my respect and pray to God: "God, I want to have the courage that he had." I want to be inspired by the lives of such Christians.

Do you lead unbelievers to repentance?

Of course. But they do not have to repent and believe in order to be healed, because healing is for everyone. No one whom Jesus healed was a Christian when the healing happened. That is why we pray for healing or prophesy to everyone to show them God's goodness. Then we lead them to repentance so they can be saved and receive Jesus. We preach the gospel every week at the Healing Rooms and at the services, and people receive Christ. It is part of how we live.

Do you hold to the doctrine of prosperity? Do you think that wealth is promised to all who are saved and obey God?

This is a sensitive issue because God is not poor. Jesus said, “The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy; I have come to give you life, and that you may have it more abundantly.” God is a God of abundance who withholds nothing from us. Our goal is not to be rich, and we do not use the gospel to make ourselves rich. But we believe that we can pray for people to get jobs and be able to provide for their families. That is why we want to teach them all kinds of things. We want to be useful citizens who contribute to society. That is prosperity to me.

We have the doctrine of the prosperous soul. The prosperous soul knows the goodness of God and has no depression, hunger or lack. We believe that God’s goodness reaches into every area of our lives, but the goal is not how I can build my own kingdom or how much I can have. It is never selfish: “I want to be rich, God, give me...” We belong to the kingdom of God, and therefore we have access to all that is in God, to all of God’s blessings in Jesus. What does that look like and what does that mean? If I have a vision from God to go to Africa and start a mission, I can trust God to provide everything I need to do that.

Personally, I believe that I have access to everything I need to work for the kingdom of God, but I don’t have a million dollars in the bank. Miracles have happened: money came, a car, I didn’t have to fill up the tank for months, and I still had gas in the tank... That happens. That is prosperity to me – I lack nothing, I don’t live in lack. But that doesn’t mean I have to have the best house, the best car, or anything else.

I don’t look for things to give me identity. Wealth to me means other things – the people in my life, my grandchildren. I believe that we don’t have to be poor, but in the book of Proverbs we read that if we are lazy, we can be poor. I think that as believers we should not “work ourselves out”, but we should be productive, energetic and do our job well.

The Bible as a Tuning Fork

Is the canon of Scripture complete? What role do contemporary prophecy play alongside the prophecy of Scripture?

That is a good question. The whole Bible is true, but the whole truth about the world is not only in the Bible. I believe that the truth that God reveals will never contradict God’s Word, but in many ways it will

expand it. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, guiding us into all truth. The Bible is not big enough to write about every aspect that may arise in your life in 2025. There are principles in it, but the prophetic word designated specifically for you can unlock some revelation that will not contradict the Word of God. We can use the analogy of the tuning fork (laughter): If the Bible is a tuning fork, everything will resonate with it.

If you hear prophecy, do you go to the Bible and see if it is in harmony with it?

I could do that, or I can feed on the Word of God every day, think about what I have read, and thus write the Word down in my heart. Then I know if something resonates with it or not.

Sometimes I may get a prophetic word telling me to be careful, like I'm going to meet someone today and it's going to be an important meeting. Things like that happen in the Bible. In that case, I'll say, "Okay. I'm going to be careful and watch out for the people I meet today." I don't want to miss the meeting that God has prepared. It's a word that's not written in the Scripture, but it's a manifestation of God's heart for me. Prophecy reveals God's heart and mind. Paul tells the Christians in Corinth, "Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy." He doesn't say, "You can only say the words that I write here in my letters."

I don't see the Bible as something restrictive, I see it as full of promises that we haven't seen fulfilled yet. How God does some things in your life or mine will be different from how He does them in someone else's life because He is personal and each of us is different. Sometimes the church wants to have everything neatly arranged in a little box, black and white, but He is much bigger.

Jesus said, "If two of you on earth agree about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." He doesn't tell us how to do it. When there's a need, I will say to you, "Do you want it to happen? Shall we agree?" I'm not talking about Ferraris or good grades, but about devastating earthquakes, forest fires, or sexual slavery. That's how intercession starts to stir up, leading to, for example, the exposure of the slave trade.

Why does it sometimes take so long? There are many people praying for peace in Ukraine, they agree, there are more than two of them.

When we pray and it concerns people, we have all the human choices. William Wilberforce fought in parliament against slavery in the British Empire for twenty years before he won a majority on his side. The majority was against him at first, they made good money on slavery. Someone has to give the impulse and then it is necessary to touch many hearts and change them. I think it is easier to avert a hurricane or a forest fire than to stop people. Therefore it is important to set things in motion, which then sets people's hearts in motion. Life is not as simple as we would like it to be.

Yes, but sometimes one can have the impression that it is simple. You said that you have a high standard, miracles happen, people are healed, and then things do not happen...

Yes, but when it happens, it is simple. When we complicate it, it does not happen. Even if I see that someone is not healed, I want to be sure that they have experienced God's love that God has for them. If people experience it, everything in their world starts to change.

What to do about it when we read only positive examples in books, and when we don't see it in our own lives, we think, what are we doing wrong?

Most people don't experience it. That's why I think it's good to write about it happening, so that they can see that it's possible. I want them to know that miracles happen today. I believe that the testimonies are encouraging.

Is there anything you would like to say to Czech readers?

We want to expand our perception of God. It's too easy to put Him in religious boxes. I think we should blow up the boxes and let God be God. He will amaze us with what He does. The boxes may seem safe, but they are not really safe because they prevent us from experiencing the unbridled nature of God.