

# God, Are You Really There?

✘ When times are tough, it's easy to feel that God has abandoned us. We must learn that His presence is a promise.

More than once during your spiritual journey, particularly when you were facing difficult circumstances, you have undoubtedly asked yourself, "How can I know God's presence in my life?" This is the type of question that often draws a cliché and leaves the inquirer feeling somewhat guilty for having asked it. Among those clichés may be the quoting of various Scriptures such as Matthew 18:20: "'For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them'" (NKJV) or Psalm 22:3: "But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel."

The inference is that one need only gather with others to pray or sing praises to the Lord to be assured of His presence. Add Psalm 100 to these verses and you will be given the key to entering His presence: Begin with thanksgiving, progress to praise and ultimately be swept through the veil, standing before Him with singing.

So many times I have given this "formula" in sermons. I since have learned that formulas do not work with God. But because I had personally discovered that I could walk into God-consciousness by applying this strategy in faith, I believed others would do the same. Most of those attending the meetings I led did so as we corporately took each step.

However, I soon learned that few sustained the awareness of God's presence when the meetings ended and they returned to "business as usual" at home, in the workplace, and tragically even in church services. This realization left me wondering why and sent me to God for answers.

Here are the answers the Lord gave me to my query about why

some believers do not walk in God-consciousness on a regular basis.

**They are afraid they cannot meet the requirements for His presence.** In Psalm 15:1 David asks: "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?" Then he gives the answer: "He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord; he who swears to his own hurt and does not change; he who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved" (vv. 2-5).

The promise of never being moved, or dismissed from His presence, should be enough stimulus for us all to claim it. Yet often we don't because of our fear that the requirements are impossible to meet.

Harboring such a fear proves that we do not intimately know our God. He repeatedly tells us in His Word that He has provided for all our needs by Christ Jesus. God never asks us for anything He has not already made provision for.

Our confusion comes from yielding to fleshly desires and lusts rather than relying on the Spirit within, whom Jesus sent to be our teacher-enabler. The apostle Paul explains this conflict in his letter to the Galatians: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (5:17).

Look again at Psalm 15 and note that we need the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22-23 to meet each of the requirements. To the one who has love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness

and temperance (self-control) active in his life, the requirements for a constant awareness of the presence of the Lord are easily met.

Galatians 5:25 says, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." This verse infers that we who have the Spirit should progress in the life He enables us to live.

**They are not obedient.** Too many sort through God's Word for the Scriptures they choose to live by. Promises of wealth, health, favor and blessing are especially popular. The cry to be shown His glory and the plea for an open heaven and latter rain are being sung in many circles.

What is wrong with claiming these promises? Absolutely nothing, unless we are choosing to bypass the conditions for such blessings. In fact, we are encouraged to believe the Scriptures, to rehearse them from morning through night, to hide them in our hearts, and to testify of and with them. But the power of the tongue is limited by the believing in the heart that these things are true. It is not the rote that moves God but the obedience to His Word and faith in Himself that assures us of His abiding presence.

Our society is one that is driven by a rapid pace, quick results and immediate solutions. It is little wonder that Christians have fallen into the trap of believing they can manipulate God by demanding something, even the sense of His presence, in their time frame by simply quoting Scripture. "In Jesus' name" has become a slogan of demand rather than an awareness of divine authority given to believers by an omnipotent God through Jesus Christ.

I am amazed at how few Christians spend quality time reading and meditating on God's Word. Their lack of faith is directly related to that neglect. A Sunday sermon, even if complemented by a mid-week message, is not sufficient to bring us into an intimate relationship with our Beloved, and to an increasing

knowledge of Him, His love, His care, His compassion and His desires. The Bible makes it clear that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

Is it any wonder that prayer, thanksgiving and praise seem so difficult for us to exercise continually? If, due to a lack of study of the Word, we are not convinced (that is, do not have faith) that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think (see Eph. 3:20), or that His plans for us are plans to prosper and not to harm us, to bring us to a good end and give us a hope and a future, as Jeremiah 29:11 promises, then we have little motivation to sing His praise. Not only that, but we have forgotten His care of us through the years so that we are not thankful either. Therefore we have no confidence—we have cast it away—and are an open target for the enemy to shoot the bullets of discouragement, disappointment, despair and defeat right to our spirits. Instead of a celebration of Jesus, we have a pity party for self.

### **Enjoying God’s Presence**

In contrast, *the recognition of God’s presence* comes to the one who expects and looks for God in all situations and places:

- In the sanctuary (see Ps. 150)
- In godly leaders (see Heb. 13:7)
- In other believers (see Matt. 18:20)
- In the family of God (the body of Christ)
- In nature (see ; 1 )
- In himself. “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).
- In troubled situations. We have these promises from Hebrews 13:5: “He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” and Psalm 138:3,7: “In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with

strength in my soul. ... Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me.”

- In his past, present and future. Hebrews 13:8 tells us: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” And before the Israelites took possession of the promised land, Moses exhorted them to always remember all the way the Lord had led them through the wilderness, protected them from their enemies and other dangers, fed them, given them the power to get wealth and supplied their every need (see Deut. 8). He has been there for all of us in similar ways.

*The response to God’s presence* is often singing and dancing, clapping one’s hands and raising one’s arms. There are times for victory shouts and playing of instruments. But there are also times of silence when it would seem a violation of reverence even to stir. Bowing, kneeling and prostrating oneself are appropriate expressions of adoration at such times. Giving an offering is an expression of worship, too.

The methods are less important than the motives. We are instructed to seek the kingdom (the rule) of God *first*—and to love the Lord our God with *all* our heart, mind, soul and strength and also our neighbor as ourselves. Considering these commandments, it becomes obvious that worship must be an acknowledgement of His presence, and His presence is brought about by worship when it is offered in spirit and truth. Whatever form of expression we use can be acceptable to Him only when given by one who is walking humbly with his God.

How can we be sure His presence is real and that He is in our lives? His Word assures us of it, and God honors His Word, as Psalm 138:2 declares: “You have magnified Your word above all Your name.” Other proofs include:

- God’s Spirit: confirming, convicting, convincing,

conceiving and conquering

- Prophecy: God's Word to us personally
- Revelation: the understanding of the Word. The apostle Paul wrote: "How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (Eph.3:3-5).
- Inspiration: insight from the Holy Spirit. "And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6); "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52).
- Intercession: God Himself enters into our praying (Rom. 8: 28).
- Believing: "The genuineness of your faith ... may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:7-9).

Are you discouraged by unfulfilled prophecies or answers to prayers that have been delayed or denied? Do you lack the joy you are promised or once had and lost? Has doubt crept into your thoughts because of the pressures of life and the hurts of situations? Are you in pain or facing the threat of death despite the many prayers of others and yourself? Have you lost faith in people due to betrayal and abuse? Does it seem that love has no place in your life and that possessions have been stolen?

If your answer to any of these questions is yes, know that

there are many people today who can identify with you—but there is One who will not leave you there. Lift up your head and focus on your unfailing God. Every prophecy remains a promise, and every delay has a purpose.

God's joy is in you: Call it forth and demand its expression. He will restore both your soul and your losses, and He will arise with healing in His wings. God's love sent Jesus to the cross, Christ's love became your salvation and your eternal victory. "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24) because He dwells in His temple, which temple we are (see 1 Cor. 3:16-17).

The Bible tells us that God is *always* with us. You can experience and enjoy the reality of His presence by coming to know Him intimately through prayer, worship and the study of His Word, by being obedient to His commands, by walking in the Spirit and by exercising your faith to believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (see Heb. 11:6). 3

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## **Good News in Tough Times**

With the stock market plunging, unemployment topping 8 percent and Congress spending nearly a trillion dollars to stimulate the economy, many people in the U.S. have lost hope. The gloom crystallized in March 2009, when the World Bank warned we were sinking into the first global recession since World War II.

Nearly lost in this negative chorus is a gathering cloud of witnesses: Christian business executives and entrepreneurs whose businesses are prospering despite the downturn.

“The Lord isn’t broke, and He’s not in the recession,” says Paul LaRue, whose Nashville-based Just Me Music expects 300 percent growth in 2009, thanks to stocking products in entertainment giant Disney’s stores and other retail outlets.

LaRue sees current conditions as a time of testing, believing God will prosper those who are committed to doing His work.

“Jesus is in a good mood,” the charismatic businessman says. “The world would say, ‘You’re a nut.’ But the Lord is looking and saying, ‘Who can I trust?’”

Some other examples:

- Power Station, which operates a series of automated kiosks in airports and hospitals where customers can rent a laptop or download movies and games, expected to see 500 percent growth in 2009. That would be more than double its first-quarter gain.

“We’re figuring out how you do business God’s way,” says Chief Operating Officer Michael Cozakas. “We’re realizing some significant fruit. It’s the appearance of Jesus Christ in the marketplace.”

- The slowdown in Florida’s economy had construction magnate Brian Carroll so strapped for cash late last year that he faced restructuring to survive. While at the bank to take that step, he received a call. His company had won contracts enabling him to double his business in 2009 and open offices in two other states.

“When God moves, He moves,” Carroll says.

- Entrepreneur Don Lisle, whose small shop handles insurance and financial services, saw his business

skyrocket in 2008 after several major clients implemented large projects.

“This is the season,” says Lisle, a top agent for a major insurance company’s California operations. “God would say He will supply our needs according to His great riches, not the [stock market].”

- Financial adviser Alan Johnston, who also serves as stewardship pastor at Abba’s House, a charismatic Southern Baptist church in suburban Chattanooga, Tenn., sees God’s hand behind this trend.

“God is faithful,” says Johnston, whose franchise outperformed its national chain’s peer group by 42 percent the first quarter of 2009. “When people do business by the Book, God honors that. My own business is [proof]. We pray every day, ‘God, bring us the people You want us to help.’”

Johnston also cautions believers to avoid getting swept away in the hysteria that has driven the stock market down.

He points to the Standard & Poor’s 500, a noted group of companies listed on the New York Stock Exchange. In early March he said the S&P had lost \$114 billion over the last 15 months, with 10 of the 500 losing \$131 billion. That means 490 in the index had decent years and some were profitable, Johnston notes.

That says to him that the problems aren’t nearly as pervasive as has been commonly portrayed. “When money flows a little more freely, business needs leverage, and we’ll see this thing rise again,” Johnston says.

Cozakas believes too many Christians are enmeshed in the fear that greeted the collapse of such corporate titans as Lehman Brothers and General Motors.

A member of C. Peter Wagner’s network of apostles, he says

instead of looking at the 70 percent of companies who are still OK, they focus on the 30 percent that have flopped.

“If you work in faith and not in fear, there are opportunities looking left and right,” Cozakas says. “How do we harvest this instead of worrying about it? The body of Christ isn’t seeing the truth of that yet. But God will bless the faithful. This is our time.”

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### **John Ritenour**

God has been teaching John Ritenour about maintaining a positive outlook in the current environment, and the chairman of Insurance Office of America (IOA) has numbers to back up his optimism. Even though he expects 2009 sales to remain flat, the company’s stock value is rising.

The stock’s value is foundational to the 650 people working at the employee-owned company, which primarily writes business insurance. With premiums based on payrolls that have shrunk lately, IOA’s achievement represents a miracle to its chairman.

“We feel pretty good about that,” says Ritenour, who stepped aside as CEO last year in favor of his son, Heath. “Our earnings were flat, but we did some things right to make the bottom line better.”

If he chose to look on the down side, 2009 will mark the first

time in a decade the company won't register double-digit sales growth—although Ritenour views keeping pace with last year as equivalent to a 15 percent increase.

And though the economy has many executives wringing their hands, the elder at Grace Church in Longwood, Florida, maintains the opposite outlook. He keeps employees' eyes off their tight finances by assigning two staff members to act as liaisons with charitable organizations.

"Our employees are involved in feeding the homeless and going to Ronald McDonald House and doing things they normally wouldn't get a chance to do without the corporation ... funding it," Ritenour says. "As bad as it may be for them, it's not as bad as being homeless or having medical issues."

## **Wende Jones**

Business for 5-year-old Agile Northwest in suburban Portland, Oregon, rose approximately 40 percent the first quarter, with President Wende Jones looking for a 100 percent increase for all of 2009. That could mean adding three employees, a 50 percent increase in full-time staff.

Jones expects profits from this growth to allow her to fund a planned charitable foundation, which she envisions will help the homeless and causes such as the International Christian Chamber of Commerce.

"It's all God," says Agile's president, who attends a nondenominational, charismatic church. "We don't have to operate in the world's economy; we can work under God's economy if we work in faith."

The business owner sees personal prayer time as one of the keys to the company's growth. Since attending a conference of Christian businesspersons last fall, she has been getting to

the office early for two hours of prayer.

One thing the Holy Spirit has been revealing in these sessions is her need to relinquish control of her business, something the entrepreneur says is hard to do.

Still, God is answering as she asks questions such as, “What are You starting today? What do You want to put before me?”

“If you don’t get that grounding in the morning with the Lord, it’s tough,” Jones says. “When those phones start ringing, I’m ready. It’s critical to me to have that time.”

## **Paul LaRue**

Paul LaRue, president and CEO of the suburban Nashville company Just Me Music, believes God not only gave him the inspiration for the company but also is spurring the company’s amazing growth. Through licensing agreements, Just Me produces personalized CDs and books that include a child’s name in stories featuring popular characters from VeggieTales, Barney, Mickey Mouse and others.

“Personalization is so huge. Now we have piles of buyers who want to bring in CDs to their stores.” Those stores include Disney-owned outlets, which recently started stocking CDs burned with the top 100 selling names that account for 50 percent of Just Me’s sales.

“Something happens when the Lord starts something—it activates things in the spirit realm,” LaRue says. “I believe He is preparing for people to carry significant wealth, but He’s preparing us to carry the weight.”

Thanks to the positive response to their products, the founder says he has gained an entrée with those who normally wouldn’t listen to the gospel.

## **Kenn Renner**

The number of real estate agents in the Austin, Texas, area has shrunk 30 percent since last year, reflecting a decrease in average monthly home sales in 2008 of more than 50 percent, according to Realtor Kenn Renner. However, after seeing his sales double the first two months over the same period last year, the head of Renner Realty is aiming for a 50 to 65 percent increase in 2009—he hopes to reach \$20 million.

Symbolizing his optimism is the early March listing of an \$800,000 home that sold in four days.

“We surrender the whole business to [God],” says Renner, a member of Glory House Christian Center. “With the power of prayer and our model of doing things—people are looking for that. They want encouragement.”

Though an independent agent for 25 years, Renner says last fall God directed him to become an affiliate of Keller Williams Realty. The Austin-based franchiser is now the nation’s third-largest residential real estate firm.

Renner liked the priorities of co-founder/chairman Gary Keller: God first, followed by family and then business.

“As a stereotype, [business owners] put business first,” Renner says. “It’s proven that God first is more biblical.”

For every home sale, Renner Realty donates \$360 to Fullness in Christ Ministries, a Texas ministry founded by charismatic pastor Ras Robinson. “It’s one of the ways I’m letting people know this is a Christian business,” Renner says.

## **David Green**

After opening 19 stores in 2008, Hobby Lobby is aiming for 25 to 30 new outlets this year. It expects a 7 percent sales increase and a same-store sales (a standard retail industry measure) hike of 2 percent, reflecting gains the first two months of 2009.

Founder David Green attributes these numbers to divine blessings. During a mid-1980s oil patch bust that brought the Oklahoma City-based business to the brink of bankruptcy, he learned that the point of his endeavors is God.

"We're blessed," says Green, whose family made national headlines when it donated \$70 million last year to Oral Roberts University. "We feel like we're trying to do the right thing and leave the rest up to the Lord, regardless of what it looks like on a spreadsheet."

With some 18,000 employees and nearly 440 outlets, Hobby Lobby's 2009 sales are expected to surpass \$2 billion. Its five affiliated companies include the Christian bookstore chain, Mardel.

Saying that God taught him He hates debt, Green claims for the last several years the company has operated virtually debt-free, using only short-term financing of Christmas inventory. He says this ethic emerged from the 1980s, when it became clear debt in an economic slump can be fatal. The Lord also taught him lessons about pride during that time.

"He wants us to die to ourselves in our daily lives and our operations," Green says. "I think those are the greatest things He's trying to teach us."

Another scriptural principle is remaining closed on Sunday. Adhering to this principle cost the company \$100 million, or 12 percent of its overall business, when it made the change in the early 1990s.

Obviously, that decision hasn't hampered Hobby Lobby. Green thinks its success, in spite of the bleak economy, shows God's purpose—for Green to glorify Him in his life, family and business.

Though some might credit the chain's performance to hard work, he says even that is a reflection of the Almighty.

"In the past I tried to make a lot of things happen and wished I hadn't," Green says. "We want to be more sensitive than we have in the past to His direction in our lives."

### **Michael Cozakas**

Not only does the company Michael Cozakas serves as chief operating officer expect a 500 percent increase in 2009, but during a one-year period ending in February, Power Station saw a 480 percent increase in its per-share value.

After starting this year with 35 employees, the private company has been adding staff and expects to reach almost 90 by late summer. Though not all are believers, everyone who sees Christian principles acknowledges they work, Cozakas says.

"We have worked hard to apply the gospel to the marketplace," says Cozakas, who sold a high-tech innovation to IBM in 2002 and intended to retire—until God told him to give away his wealth. "Wealth is not about how much you keep; it's how much you give away. The purpose of wealth is to distribute it."

Still, investors want a return on their money. After watching corporate giants fizzle, he says many are looking for smaller companies where they can stay on top of their investments. The result for Power Station was that during the first quarter, the company raised \$2 million and didn't have to chase a multitude of investors for it, Cozakas says.

He acknowledges that many Christian-owned businesses have endured tough times recently, yet insists such times of testing may be God's method of redirecting them.

“I think the first thing people have to do is look at what they're doing [and ask], 'Is it really honoring God?' ” he says.

Honoring God isn't simple, he admits. Cozakas points to a costly decision his company made this year to pick up insurance coverage for employees and their dependents after their payroll provider made a mistake.

“On the surface this appears to be unprofitable,” he says. “But the Lord has blessed [us], and we are experiencing tremendous growth. This economy hasn't frightened us, and we see this as a great opportunity to become market leaders.”

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## Charisma's Spectacular Summer Reading Guide



### Prayers That Bring Change

*By Kimberly Daniels, Charisma House, softcover, 176 pages, \$.*

Prayer brings change. God has given us authority to break out of bondage and to release healing and blessing. Kimberly Daniels doesn't offer merely a book about how to pray; she offers actual prayers to help believers walk in the authority they have in Christ.

## **Faith Set Free**

*By Will Davis Jr., Revell, softcover, 192 pages, \$.*

Do you pray for *you*? Will Davis Jr. says you should. Davis, senior pastor of Austin Christian Fellowship, says that praying for ourselves isn't being selfish; it's a necessity, not a luxury. He explains why we should pray for ourselves and shows how it will transform our lives. He offers 100 pinpoint prayers to get started, and the questions with each chapter will enhance more in-depth study.

## **Conquering the Antichrist Spirit**

*By Sandie Freed, Chosen, softcover, 224 pages, \$.*

Sandie Freed, co-founder of Zion Ministries, offers an in-depth study of the Antichrist. She doesn't address the identity of the end-times Antichrist but exposes the demonic spirit. Only when believers are able to identify and overcome this stronghold that has infiltrated society will they begin to experience the healing and freedom needed to live as God intends.

## **Princess Unaware**

*By Brenda Garrison, Standard Publishing, softcover, 288 pages, \$.*

Laundry. Dishes. Bills. Guilt. Fear. Such is the life of a princess? Brenda Garrison assures women that they are already royalty; they simply need to claim the fabulous life the King has for them. Readers will learn how to erase fear and guilt, resist the pressures of the

world's expectations and claim their true identity in Christ. Each chapter includes a four-day Bible study appropriate for individual or group study.

### **Engaging Your Teen's World**

By Brian Housman, Brazos Press, softcover, 208 pages, \$.

Sometimes confusion and tension build between teens and parents. Parents blame society for family problems, and though they try to protect their children from the world, they sometimes make decisions out of fear. But there is a peaceful way to guide your teen into adulthood. Brian Housman explains that parenting can't be approached with an "us vs. them" mentality. Parents and teens together can work to redeem culture with love and selfless service.

### **Redefining Beautiful**

*By Jenna and Max Lucado, Thomas Nelson, softcover, 240 pages, \$.*

Jenna Lucado, a speaker at Revolve conferences, and her dad, Max Lucado, help girls gain a life of peace, joy and Lucado stresses the importance of a father's love but assures all young women, whether they have a loving earthly father or not, that as they look to God as their Father, He will change their lives. Jenna's conversational writing, with insights from her dad, will help girls change the way they God, themselves and others. (This title releases in September.)

### **The Power of Praying for Your Adult Children**

*By Stormie Omartian, Harvest House Publishers, softcover, 224 pages, \$.*

Stormie Omartian uses personal stories from other parents and her own experiences to help parents of adult children pray with power for careers, marriages, parenting skills and more. Omartian assures parents that they can still support their grown children by releasing them to God through powerful prayer.

### **The Psalms of a Warrior's Heart**

*By Emmanuel Young, DoveHouse, softcover, 95 pages, \$.*

Emmanuel Young shares what he calls a "story essay collection." His poems, essays and reflections are based on his relationship with God and offer practical guidance about everyday life. He addresses such topics as compassion, anger and patience. He writes to Christians and non-Christians with a tone that is not condemning, yet he poses thought-provoking questions to help readers consider their decisions. This collection would be an encouragement to young and old, and is a personal expression of what it means to be a Christian.

## **FICTION**

### **June Bug**

*By Chris Fabry, Tyndale House, softcover, 400 pages, \$.*

For years June Bug and her father have lived in an old RV, with many a

night spent sleeping in Wal-Mart parking lots. June has always believed what her father has told her—until the day she sees her own photograph printed on a missing children’s poster. June becomes desperate to know the truth about herself, and her dad and her mom. Her father can’t escape his past for long, and the pair is forced to return home to Dogwood, West Virginia, where their lives soon are changed forever.

## **Breathe**

*By Lisa Bergren, David C. Cook, softcover, 416 pages, \$.*

Odessa St. Clair has consumption, and by the time her brother and sister get her to Colorado Springs, Colo., for a cure she is barely alive. Soon after they arrive, Odessa believes she witnesses the murder of miner Sam O’Toole. Sam had left her a poem with clues on how to find his silver mine. But she must first get well, and dare to embrace God’s plan.

## **Gold of Kings**

*By Davis Bunn, Howard Books, hardcover, 352 pages, \$24.*

After Sean Syrrell is murdered, his granddaughter Storm discovers that he was not only an antique broker but also a go-between for those in the highest ranks of business and government worldwide. To learn more, Storm travels abroad to meet an associate of Sean’s. He tells Storm that her grandfather’s dying wish was for them to continue his quest for secret historical writings. When they become a target, they learn they can trust only each other.

## **Love's First Light**

*By Jamie Carie, B&H Publishing Group, softcover, 320 pages, \$.*

Christophé, the Count of St. Laurent, lost his family in the French Revolution. He escapes to a castle in Carcassonne, France, to not only hide but to also heal. There, he meets the gorgeous widow Scarlett but discovers that she is related to the man who murdered his family. His growing affection for her turns cold, and he chooses revenge. What will it take for Christophé to love again?

## **Outlaw's Bride**

*By Lori Copeland, Harvest House Publishers, softcover, 256 pages, \$.*

Johnny McAllister was falsely convicted of bank robbery. Sent to a rehabilitation program in Judge McMann's home, Johnny determines to behave himself only so he can earn early release and accomplish his main goal in life: kill the man who wiped out his family. Everything is going according to plan until he meets the townspeople and Ragan, the judge's beautiful and kind housekeeper. Johnny has to choose between a life of anger and bitterness or one filled with love and mercy.

## **A Bride in the Bargain**

*By Deeanne Gist, Bethany House, softcover, 368 pages, \$.*

In 1860s Seattle, married men could claim free land. Joe Denton's wife died before she could make it to Seattle, and now his claim to 640 acres is in jeopardy. In desperation, he buys Anna from Asa Mercer, an

entrepreneur who brings widows from the east. When Anna learns she is to be Joe's bride, she refuses. Joe will lose everything if he cannot convince stubborn Anna to become his lawfully wedded wife.

## **Take Two**

*By Karen Kingsbury, Zondervan, softcover, 320 pages, .*

Chase Ryan and Keith Ellison are beginning to make their mark on Hollywood. Their first film has created a lot of buzz, and it seems as if everything is lining up perfectly. But Chase's marriage is on rocky ground, and Keith's daughter is making compromises as she pursues her own dream of stardom. The two producers are on their way to being able to influence society through film, but they have to decide if it is worth the cost.

## **The Deliverer**

*By Linda Rios-Brooks, Realms, softcover, 304 pages, \$.*

Ancient language expert Samantha Yale is translating new scrolls written by the same fallen angel from *Lucifer's Flood*. Included in these writings is an eyewitness account of biblical events that occurred from the time the Hebrews left Egypt until Joshua became their leader. This is a tale of rebellion, consequences and how demons strategize to wreak havoc on God's people. But ultimately, this story is about God's overwhelming love, grace and mercy, and His insatiable desire to restore His wayward children.

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# Feedback

## MY TURN

Thanks for informing many readers of the “marketplace ministry” discussion (“Doing God’s Business”; April). Dualistic thinking has kept believers from bringing God into work for years.

Some believers have been outspoken evangelists, but unfortunately most haven’t won many people to Jesus. Their personal motives, style, credibility and perceived zealous antics probably have done more damage than winning people to Christ. In fact, many believers have remained quiet to avoid association with these types of fellow Christians.

St. Francis of Assisi said, “Wherever you go, preach the gospel, and when necessary use words.” We communicate a strong message at work based upon how we serve our employer, communicate, react to problems and so on.

Our work ethic is a strong testimony of Christ to people on the job. The Holy Spirit can communicate a lot more through our actions; and when appropriate our words have greater impact for people who are searching, whose hearts have been prepared by God.

I believe the next great move of God is going to happen with empowered believers in their working life. The walls are coming down, great corporations have prayer groups, HR departments are more open-minded to God, and many executives want to bring God into strategy. Let’s make sure we don’t exclude the blue-collar worker by focusing on only

leaders and entrepreneurs.

In addition, stay-at-home moms are also right in the center of the working life discussion. Moms have great influence in schools, in the neighborhood and other spheres. Besides, we all know that moms work harder than executives!

*Steve Shelby  
Cumming, Georgia*

### **REMEMBERING ISRAEL**

God bless you for your love and support of the state of Israel. The Bible says in Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." I stand for Israel and will continue to pray for them.

*Arlette Vanarthos  
Norfolk, Virginia*

### **GAY MARRIAGE IN THE HEARTLAND**

Your headline says, "Christian Leaders Outraged by Iowa's Gay Marriage Ruling" (*Charisma News Online*, April 3) I'm sorry—they are not outraged enough, or we all could stop this thing.

*Nann Lee  
Monongah, West Virginia*

This decision was handed down by a state Supreme Court. Judges of that court are elected officials. The good citizens of Iowa can vote these justices out of office and replace them with more conservative judges who rule consistent with the U.S. and state constitutions. This decision can be reversed.

*Margaret Wood*

*San Marcos, Texas*

## **TAKING WOMEN OUT OF THE BOX**

When I saw the article "Taking Women Out of the Box" (April) I turned to it immediately. No one who comes to Christ or receives ministry from a woman has a problem recognizing that her gifts and calling are heaven-sent. Can we reach the world for Christ without the gifts of women? We haven't done it yet!

*Elizabeth Turner  
Pleasanton, California*

Thank you so much for including Mimi Haddad's article. So many women need to hear that God's call to them is real, despite what misled people tell them. God loves men and women equally and gifts us each as He chooses. I would not want to be in anyone's shoes who tells people they can't do something God has called them to do.

*Betty Jo Benz  
Ashland, Illinois*

Yes, women can be primary leaders, but that does not mean this is God's ideal. Maybe what the writer refers to as a "box" is actually a God-given role. Let's be careful that we do not take women out of one box and put them into another one where they fit even less. I have performed numerous marriages for more than 40 years. I note that marriages where spouses are determined to be "equal" become a never-ending competition and often end in divorce.

*Albert Zehr  
Surrey, British Columbia*

I beg to differ from Mimi Haddad about women's role. The writer's theology would make us believe that unless a woman is in the fivefold ministry, she cannot serve God acceptably. God rewards obedience and not office.

*Ofobuike Okani, M.D.  
McGregor, Texas*

### **RAISE YOUR VOICE!**

I was informed about President Obama's "online town hall" meeting by a *Charisma* news e-mail. I submitted a video link along with my question at . The next day while I was watching the meeting, I suddenly saw my face and heard my voice saying "I am Harriet in Georgia" before I asked my question. I want to encourage everyone that we have a voice, but we must use it. The Lord simply opened a door where I could use mine. Our political representatives will never know what your voice is saying unless you use it!

*Rev. Harriet Bradley  
Norcross, Georgia*

### **RICK WARREN'S HOT POTATO**

Lee Grady, you hit it perfectly ("Rick Warren and the Hot Potato of the Decade," *Fire in My Bones* online, April 15). Charismatics should take note: Rick is leading people to Jesus in *droves*, gives 90 percent of his income away and feeds the poor by the tens of thousands.

*Tyler Wright  
Vancouver, British Columbia*

I appreciate Rick Warren's approach to the issue of same-sex marriage. He is trying his best to hold to biblical standards while also loving sinners. We will never be able to bring the love of God into our opponents' lives if they think we hate them. Jesus was able to convey His deep personal love for every individual despite their sin.

*Rev. Jim Johnson  
Berlin, Germany*

### **TODD BENTLEY**

Much has been said about the healing of Todd Bentley, and his second wife and their future in ministry (News, May). What is being done relative to healing the hurts of the first wife or the psychological and spiritual wounds of the children, who for the first time may experience a sense of loss, rejection or even embarrassment? The process appears a little one-sided.

*Dr. Sheila L. Johnson  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

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## **Former Local Church Critics Change Stance**



Several former critics of the late Witness Lee, a disciple of Chinese evangelist Watchman Nee, are now calling his followers orthodox Christians—a decision that has sparked controversy among evangelicals.

Nee, who had a major following in the charismatic community, died in a Chinese prison in 1972. After his death, Lee became the most prominent teacher of the movement Nee founded. Lee died in 1997.

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## **Cry Out for Israel**

I was privileged beside him on a flight home from Israel last

year—that is, with the obligatory empty seat separating us. Jewish tradition holds that a rabbi is forbidden to sit next to a woman. I asked him his name. He smiled and answered, “Gavriel.”

What a passionate young rabbi he was! We freely discussed the Scriptures from our different perspectives as well as the promised redemption of Israel and the coming of Messiah.

Three months later, Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg, 29, and his young, pregnant wife, Rivka, 28, were dead, savagely tortured in the Chabad House in Mumbai, India, by Islamic extremists.

I cannot adequately express my initial disbelief on hearing the news and my subsequent grief and outrage. Those few hours together on the plane with Gavriel had marked me.

This was not an isolated incident. Every day across Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere in the world, Jewish schools and synagogues are firebombed and cemeteries desecrated. Jewish people, regardless of age or sex, are beaten by neo-Nazi and Islamic extremists.

Now a virulent anti-Semitism is fomenting in the United States. Last December, a coalition of far-left Muslim and Arab groups organized demonstrations in 30 U.S. cities to denounce the Gaza War. More rallies were held in January. The participating groups touted the events as a response to Israel’s “massacre of Palestinians.” Speeches and placards were rife with slogans such as “Death to the Jews and the State of Israel.”

Given the upsurge of Islam in the U.S., a biased, liberal media, and a president who courts Israel’s enemies and surrounds himself with anti-Israel cabinet members and advisers, it is only a matter of time until Israel’s friend, the United States, joins the infamous ranks of *all nations* that Zechariah prophesied would stand against the Jewish nation (see Zech. 12:3; 14:2).

As Isaiah the prophet foresaw, Jewish immigrants are flooding home to Israel in record numbers. Soon we will hear his words pronounced in our day: "This place is too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell"(Is. 49:20, NKJV).

I am grieved by those in the body of Christ who think they understand the times and seasons and yet do not actively stand with Israel and the Jewish people. They tend to ignore what the Spirit is saying to the church regarding Israel: "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" (Is. 40:1).

Now is not the time for the church to become apathetic. Old Testament prophets clearly foretold this end-time regathering of the Jews and the church's responsibility to them. Isaiah prophesied that we are to cry out to God day and night until Jerusalem becomes a praise in the earth; that we are to remove the stones and prepare a highway for God's people to return to Him; to declare to them the words of hope, "Surely your Salvation is coming!" (see Is. 62:1,10-11).

The end-time church is to be engaged in extending our Lord's heart and hands to His Jewish brethren: proclaiming good news, healing the brokenhearted, setting captives free, comforting those who mourn, declaring the coming of Messiah to a weary and despised people (see Is. 61:1-3).

Today I plead with pastors: Adopt a ministry in Israel. Partner with a ministry run by those who live among the Jewish people and know individual families' needs.

I beseech Christians: Give to anointed ministries in Israel that are the Lord's hands extended to His people. No longer give offerings indiscriminately to every cause that has "Israel" or "Jewish" attached to it. Connect directly with the land today!

**Melva Lea Beacham** is the president of *Melva Lea Ministries* and the director of international development for *Christian Friends of Israel in Jerusalem* (). You can contact her

at melva@.

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## Good News for Charismatics

A widely publicized study released in late April about why Americans have given up their faith or changed religions is actually good news for charismatic churches. The survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, described as the largest study of its type about why people change their religious affiliation, interviewed 2,800 people. It found that respondents had not become more secular or rejected their religious affiliation because of anger over doctrinal or leadership issues but because they had “just gradually drifted away from their faith.”

Why is that good news? Because it’s an indication that people want something that will meet their needs.

Thirty-five years ago my late mentor, Jamie Buckingham, newly baptized in the Holy Spirit, put this provocative comment on his church’s marquee: “For More than a Sunday Morning Religion.” He knew that people aren’t interested in just hearing a dull sermon and singing the same songs that have been sung for decades. They want a vibrant faith—the living Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is why Pentecostal and charismatic churches around the world are growing.

Like many of the churches noted in the survey, charismatic churches have the problem of people coming in the front door and going out the back door. But I believe the survey results are good news for those of us in the charismatic movement. Here’s why:

*People want an exciting worship experience. They don't want "boring religion." One thing people say about charismatic churches is that the services are anything but boring.*

*They want a genuine encounter with God. Often that comes through praise and worship—the subject of this month's cover story. In fact, the charismatic church has led the way in this area through musicians such as Israel Houghton, Darlene Zschech and others we include in the article.*

*People want answers to their personal problems. Charismatics pioneered the concept of inner healing, pray for deliverance from life-altering addictions and lay hands on the sick, trusting they will recover, for "by His stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5, NKJV). We believe God has answers for our personal problems, and that resonates with people who are searching.*

*If people want community, they can find it at Spirit-filled churches, which are more ethnically and generationally diverse than other segments of the body of Christ. Are they perfect? Of course not. But when you find a mixed-race church, it's usually charismatic.*

*Our churches tend to be independent, if not organizationally, at least in attitude. Independence can sometimes create a lone-ranger mentality. But it also frees up leaders who have a passion and a vision to get outside the box and share the gospel with those who are hurting.*

*It has also spawned new churches and ministries, including Christian TV, which reaches millions who don't go to church. Many who watch Christian programming later get active in a church, but even those who don't are hearing the gospel and being touched.*

*Sharing the gospel and reaching out to poor and hurting people are values almost universally shared by Pentecostal and charismatic churches. There's a need for us to do more. But charismatics have grown around the world because they*

emphasize outreach, both here and overseas.

As a movement we certainly aren't perfect. Sadly, many of our churches are just as dead and boring as the ones spoken about in the Pew report. Timothy warns against "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Tim. 3:5). And there is nothing "deader" than a dead Pentecostal or charismatic church.

However, we don't approve of deadness, and charismatics won't put up with it for long. They vote with their feet by going where the presence of God brings life.

I've been covering the charismatic church for three decades, and I believe we're continuing to grow at a time when many other churches aren't. But the Pew report should remind us that people want answers and we have them—all from the Word of God.

To me, that's good news.

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**Steve Strang** *is founder and publisher of Charisma. Read his weekly Strang Report via email or his Twitter updates here.*