

# Your Ultimate Help in Discerning Counterfeit Spirit Guides

It is so funny to me how believers pick and choose what things they think are “New Age” and what things are “Christian.” For example, are trances “New Age” or Christian? Well, the Apostle Peter fell into a trance. Here is the reference: “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision: A vessel like a great sheet was descending, let down from heaven by four corners, and it came to me” (Acts 11:5).

The Apostle Paul also experienced a trance. Here is his reference; “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance” (Act 22:17).

Are angel visitations “New Age” or Christian? Are you aware that angels are mentioned 185 times in the New Testament alone? There were at least 20 angelic visitations in the book of Acts alone. In contrast, the Holy Spirit is mentioned 223 times in the New Testament.

When some people read the words of Jesus like these, “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonder to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24), they are convinced that Jesus said, “In the last days all the prophets will be false.” Nobody would be fooled if there were no real prophets. Most of the heresy-hunters don’t believe there are prophets in the last days, so they deem all signs and wonders as false.

Of course there are false prophets, false signs and wonders, demonic trances and demonic tongues, but the devil only counterfeits things that are valuable. Nobody ever counterfeited a penny or a dollar bill; it’s too much work for very little impact. But in their zeal to not be deceived, some

Christians take anything that is counterfeited and assign it to the New Age movement; consequently, what's left is a powerless church. Paul warned Timothy about these people when he said, "Know this: In the last days perilous times will come ... [People ] having a form of godliness, but denying its power. Turn away from such people" (2 Tim. 3:1, 5).

### **The Gospel Is Powerful**

The truth is that you can't separate the gospel from the power of God. Paul put it like this: "By the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." ().

If someone teaches that there are no longer gifts of the Spirit—prophecy, healing, deliverance are not for today—all spiritual experiences and/or supernatural encounters have passed, are not these people false teachers? Is it just not just as dangerous to remove the power of God from the people of God as it is to be deceived? In fact, isn't this deception?

Peter said, " ... just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies ..." (2 Pet. 2:1).

"For if you were to have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers. In Christ Jesus I have become a father to you through the gospel. But I will come to you shortly if the Lord wills. And I will know not only what those who are arrogant are saying, but also their power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power". (1 Cor. 4:15, 19-20).

Many of the heresy teachers have become the very thing that they are warning everybody about. As Job said, the thing they feared came upon them (see Job 3:25).

The devil has a great strategy to disarm the church: Convince

her that the weapons of warfare are of the devil.

## **My Spirit Guide**

I have a Spirit Guide; His name is Holy, and he guides me into all truth. "But when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

*How has this blog impacted you? Let me know in the comments below. {eoa}*

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# **Do the Stars Confirm God's Victorious Isaiah 14 Promise?**

This week, we will have one of the best opportunities of the year to view the planet Mercury.

Mercury is one of the "seven planets" that were visible to the ancients. The fourth day of the week, Wednesday, is named in

English after the Norse god corresponding to Roman Mercury and Greek Hermes. The planet Mercury is symbolic of Satan in the Star Bible and is mentioned in a passage in the Bible about Satan (Is. 14:12), where he is described as the "morning star laid low." The Greek name Hermes, meaning "The Burnt One," also adds to the picture of Mercury as representing Satan.

The planet Mercury is very close to the sun and can only be seen as a morning or evening star. Most of the time it is too "laid low" near the sun to be seen at all. However, in the next few days it is at its furthest distance from the sun and will be visible an hour and half after sunset.

Satan's fate can be seen in the constellations nearby. Standing above Mercury just to the south is the constellation Taurus (the bull), which tells of Christ's return in power. A little further to the southwest is Orion (coming forth as light), which pictures Christ standing over a serpent preparing to crush its head as prophesied in Genesis 3:15. Then, just to the northwest of Mercury is the constellation Perseus (the breaker) showing the victorious Christ carrying the severed head of evil. The constellation Leo (the lion), picturing the victory of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah over the serpent, is at its highest point just to the south of the zenith. In fact, the entire night sky this week tells the story of Satan's doom.

Adding to the picture is the moon, representing the church (Ps. 89:37), standing just above Leo. It is worth remembering that, while the moon often appears partly dark to us, from the vantage point of Mercury, the moon is always bright and white reflecting the light of the sun, as the church reflects the light of Jesus, the light of the world.

So if you go out this evening, take some time to enjoy the picture of Satan laid low, his defeat by Christ as told in the stars and the moon's reminder of the church reflecting the light of Jesus. {eoa}

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## **When Tolerance Becomes Intolerable: The Dilemma of the Secular Mindset**

Recently, Pepsi released an advertisement that resulted in a frenzy of outrage. In case you missed it, I'll fill you in.

In just under three minutes, we (the viewers) are plunged into a gag-inducing short story that centers around Kendall Jenner (of Kardashian reality TV fame), who abandons her conveniently located photo shoot to join a diverse group of handsome and strangely happy protesters who don't seem to be protesting much of anything at all.

At the climax of the commercial, Jenner—having “fist bumped” her way through the crowd—struts up to the tense-looking riot police and hands one of them a Pepsi can. After a brief nervous pause, the policeman gives an, “Ah, I guess they're all right” look to the officer to his right, and a party erupts.

What I found surprising about this commercial was not the

staggering amount of stereotypes Pepsi managed to cram into three minutes, or the homage to “king tolerance,” but rather the intense negative reaction the ad received.

Within 48 hours, the video got nearly 1.6 million views on YouTube (with five times as many down votes as up votes). Celebrities and social activists alike came out, guns blazing, and denounced the ad as “tone deaf” and “trash.” The ad was so strongly criticized that it was pulled by Pepsi the same day it released. Later, the company said in a candid statement, “Clearly we missed the mark.”

As I watched this drama unfold, I couldn’t help but wonder: Did tolerance just become intolerable?

In case you haven’t noticed, tolerance is kind of a big deal in secular culture. It sounds noble on the surface: Every idea, all beliefs and all views are equal and should be respected by all people everywhere. It doesn’t take a professional philosopher to see the self-refuting nature of this very definition. Tolerance is the logical extension of relativism, and shares in its incoherence. After all, demanding the tolerance of all views isn’t very tolerant.

In secular culture, the idea of tolerance is often synonymous with being “open-minded”—a modern concept, equally riddled with philosophical contradiction, and a major enemy of truth. As D.A. Carson puts it, “Tolerance no longer means that you may or may not have strong views yet remain committed to listening honestly to countervailing arguments. Rather, it means you are dogmatically committed to the view that all convictions that any view whatsoever is wrong are improper and narrow-minded.”

In my opinion, Pepsi’s ad simply reflected a culture whose commitment to open-mindedness naturally produces exactly what the ad shows—a worldview incapable of judging anything, left with only platitudes and trivial solutions. This ad exposes

the hollow philosophies that undergird secular pop culture today—and though the members of this culture have no one to blame for this but themselves, they aren't happy about it one bit!

After all, when an aggressive commitment to open-mindedness erodes the moral foundation necessary to validate something like a protest, all you are left with are smiles, fist bumps and soda. But people live in the real world, with real problems, and their outrage with this ad proves the inadequacies of the secular mindset.

People are hurting and fed up with trivial answers. This is a critical time for followers of Jesus to be bold. The reaction against the Pepsi ad is evidence that people are hungry for something real. My hope is that this ad might expose the modern idea of tolerance for what it is: trite, vacuous and in total misalignment with reality.

As young people today grow increasingly fed up with the incoherence and naivety of tolerance and relativism, they will come searching for real answers. In fact, they already have! As Christians, we have the truth, and now more than ever, we need to share the Gospel. We need to do so with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15) but with a confidence that while Pepsi's solution to evil is soda, we serve the Creator of the universe, and those who drink of His water will never thirst again (John 4:14). {eoa}

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*would never set foot into a church.*

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## **10 Dangerous Signs of Prophetic Abuse**

I have been in the body of Christ now since the late 1970s. I came into the prophetic movement in the early 80s and started moving out prophetically, even participating in prophetic presbytery while doing itinerant prophetic ministry. Furthermore, our local church has nurtured many outstanding prophetic leaders and voices as well as hosting numerous prophetic trainings and schools. My primary motivational gift and mode of ministry is prophetic, even when it seems like I am teaching. (I rarely use notes and teach and preach as prompted by the Holy Spirit when I am ministering.)

Furthermore, I have found the prophetic gift, including inspirational preaching, teaching and prophetic words to be the most edifying of all the gifts, as St. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14. However, with every true gift of God comes either a counterfeit and or an abuse. You can say that about all of the cluster gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. The prophetic gift can especially be very dangerous if left unchecked, since people think the words spoken are directly from God and will often obey them without question or the use of discernment. Based on all my years of operating in the prophetic, as well as mentoring, nurturing, overseeing and hosting many prophetic ministers, the following are 10 signs of prophetic abuse and manipulation.

I write this not to discourage prophetic function but as a guide to increase the level of discernment and true

edification in the body of Christ. All sincere prophetic people should welcome these warning signs. If they are truly endeavoring to serve the Lord, they will welcome correction and or desire more discernment in the Church.

### **1. Prophecies are intentionally given to people of wealth.**

I have noticed through the years that some prophetic leaders will discern who has the most money and influence in a church or conference and will target them for a prophetic word. The reasons are obvious: First and foremost, they know that business people desire to have a direct connection with God so they can make the right decisions in their high-risk field. Actually, all influential people feel this way because of all their responsibility. The motive of this prophetic manipulator is that they want the personal cell phone number of the wealthy person so they can develop a relationship with them outside of the church and perhaps receive personal donations. In my opinion, the motive is wrong, and the prophetic person is using their gift to manipulate unsuspecting potential donors. Not that it is wrong to give wealthy people a word, it is wrong when the hidden agenda is to befriend a potential high-end donor.

### **2. Prophecies commissioning people to high-level leadership.**

Prophetic leaders sometimes give prophecies to actual or potential leaders, telling them that they are called to be an apostle, prophet or great leader. When prophetic leaders give prophecies commissioning people they don't know, in the context of a local church or conference, it is dangerous since they may be puffing up the head of an immature recipient. These are the kind of words that should not be given unless first clearing it with the person's overseer. It can also cause churches to split since the recipient can now claim to be an apostle and doesn't have to submit to their pastor's oversight anymore. What makes this prophetic abuse is the harm it creates in both the individual receiving the word and

the local church where they serve. Furthermore, I suspect some prophetic people also commission people into the apostolic or prophetic because it gives them a strong link and even possibly authority over the persons to whom they give the word. By celebrating, affirming and commissioning others as apostles and prophets, many prophetic leaders and their networks have gained them as adherents. Much of the time, these kinds of relationships are short lived because it is built upon a faulty foundation.

### **3. Prophecies are based upon on prior knowledge.**

In the 1980s, I had a visiting minister come to our local church. Before he ministered, he asked me questions about several of our members. I was shocked when he got up to minister because he started prophesying to every single person I spoke to him about. His prophecies were general exhortations that orbited around the information I gave him prior to the service. Not only that, the few people he prophesied over without having prior knowledge, we did not speak about them, he was mistaken and inaccurate. Of course, the people who received a word from him based on his conversations with me thought he was a great prophet. However, after the service, I confronted him, and he apologized and said he would never do that again.

### **4. Prophecies are given for monetary gain.**

There are several well-known, so-called, prophets who charge money for giving prophetic words. You can even call them up on the phone and receive a word, for a price, of course. I was told that one person charges \$5000 for a "life-transforming word." Although there are some biblical instances in which people gave gifts to a prophet (1 Sam. 9:7-9; 2 Kings 4:42), it was more of an act of honor than otherwise. The prophet did not demand it or charge a specific fee for his prophetic gift. Prophets who charge money to give words are guilty of the sin of "Simony," which is when a person uses the gifts of the Holy

Spirit for monetary gain. This is something the Apostle Peter strongly corrected (Read Acts 8:20-22). Truly, whenever we think the gifts of God and or godliness is a means for financial gain, we are greatly in error (1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11)!

## **5. Prophecies go beyond the Scriptures to teach doctrine.**

I remember several years ago a famous healing evangelist was saying that he was in heaven and Abraham told him who wrote the book of Hebrews and other such things that can influence one's view of Scripture and biblical doctrines. I don't mind if someone says they visited heaven and heard amazing things; however, when we try to make the foundation of a biblical teaching an extra-biblical source, it is very dangerous. (For example, when Bishop Carlton Pearson erroneously said the Holy Spirit told him that all people would eventually be saved, which led him to preach a doctrine of "inclusion" and/or universalism). Consequently, if we allow this unbiblical mystical practice, we open a door for the enemy to put subjective revelation on the same level as Scripture, which can lead people to apostasy.

The greatest level of the prophetic will always be the Scriptures, once and for all given to the saints, and any tradition or prophetic word that claims to be equal to the Bible is in great error (Read 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Some charismatics are so extreme they put their spiritual experiences above the plain teaching of Scripture and/or are led by prophecies when making big decisions, even without a witness in their own spirit and or without checking biblical principles before making said decision.

## **6. Prophecies are used to manipulate relationships.**

Some people will even use prophetic words to try to manipulate people into remaining close to them, serving them or even remaining their friend. I am not referring to accurate

prophetic words given to a friend, employee or church member for their edification or for the sake of the kingdom, but words given for the purpose of emotionally manipulating a person into remaining in some kind of relationship. This is an abuse of the prophetic and very manipulative

### **7. Prophecies are used to get people to serve the prophet.**

Some prophetic leaders will use the example of Elisha serving Elijah as a way of getting younger leaders to serve them (1 Kings 19). Although there is truth in this principle, it can also be used to manipulate naïve young prophetic people into waiting on older, more seasoned prophetic leaders. No matter who gives you a word, it should not be obeyed if it compromises the relationships and commitments you presently have, including to your spouse, family and local church, and if God doesn't clearly confirm it. Of course, in general, God will never tell you to leave your spouse and family.

### **8. The prophetic leader is not accountable when mistakes are made.**

There have been many prophetic leaders who have declared words involving national catastrophes, events and even predictions about the last days. After it was clear they were in error, rarely does anyone have the guts to call them out in private or in public. Any prophetic leader who lacks a working, relational, accountability structure in their life, should shut their mouth until they get apostolically aligned for personal oversight.

### **9. Dramatic prophecies are given to build an audience.**

Some leaders feel compelled to give a dramatic word every time they minister or are on T.V. This is because they depend on the dramatic to maintain their audience which also brings in their donations. I am of the opinion, we should never feel pressure to perform or to give a prophetic word unless the Lord is clearly leading us to do so. Case in point: One time,

after I finished preaching and prophetically ministering in a church, the pastor announced that I was going to prophesy over every person in the service. I promptly took the microphone, corrected him and told him I was done ministering since I had no more of a leading to continue. I was never invited back to that church because I did not perform up to his standards and expectations; that is fine with me since I always endeavor to minister to an audience of one.

## **10. The prophecies draw attention to the prophet.**

Some prophetic words begin and end with self-affirming accolades describing themselves as “the man of God sent to them” or “the prophet sent to them” or even as “the voice of God” that they need to hear. While this may be true in a very limited sense, there is only one completely accurate voice and expression of the Father: Hebrews 1:1, 2. I am usually suspicious when a person points to himself or herself when giving a word. A true word both edifies the church and exalts the Lord Jesus Christ, not the speaker (1 Cor. 12:3, 14:1-4). Whenever any minister or believer points to himself or herself instead of to Jesus, we should be very leery of that person.

Paul said follow me as I follow Christ (1 Cor. 4:16). Since Jesus was not self-promoting, his so-called ministers involved in chronic self-elevation are not serving in the pattern of Christ.

In closing, I hope this article can serve as a guide for prophetic ministry in the church and beyond. {eoa}

*This article originally appeared at .*

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# **Bombings at Egyptian Coptic Churches Kill at Least 36, Injure More Than 100**

At least 36 people were killed and more than 100 injured in bomb attacks on two Coptic churches on Palm Sunday, in the latest assault on a religious minority increasingly targeted by Islamist militants.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attacks, which come a week before Coptic Easter and in the same month that Pope Francis is scheduled to visit Egypt.

The first bombing, in Tanta, a Nile Delta city less than 100 kilometers outside Cairo, killed at least 25 and injured at least 78, Egypt's Ministry of Health said.

The second, carried out just a few hours later by a suicide bomber in Alexandria, hit the historic seat of the Coptic Pope, killing 11, including three police officers, and injuring 35, the ministry added.

Pope Tawadros, who had attended mass at Saint Mark's Cathedral, was still in the building at the time of the explosion but was not harmed, the Ministry of Interior said.

The bombings come as Islamic State's branch in Egypt appears to be stepping up attacks and threats against Christians.

In February, Christian families and students fled Egypt's North Sinai province after a spate of targeted killings.

Those attacks came after one of the deadliest on Egypt's Christian minority, when a suicide bomber hit its largest Coptic cathedral, killing at least 25. Islamic State later claimed responsibility for the attack.

Thousands gathered outside the church in Tanta shortly after the blast, some wearing black, crying, and describing a scene of carnage.

“There was blood all over the floor and body parts scattered,” said a Christian woman who was inside the church.

“There was a huge explosion in the hall. Fire and smoke filled the room and the injuries were extremely severe,” another Christian woman, Vivian Fareeg, said.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Prime Minister Sherif Ismail are set to visit the Tanta site on Sunday and Sisi has ordered an emergency national defense council meeting, state news reported.

#### ‘WE FEEL TARGETED’

A shift in Islamic State’s tactics, which has waged a low-level conflict for years in the Sinai peninsula against soldiers and police, to targeting Christian civilians and broadening its reach into Egypt’s mainland is a potential turning point in a country trying to prevent a provincial insurgency from spiraling into wider sectarian bloodshed.

Egypt’s Christian community has felt increasingly insecure since Islamic State spread through Iraq and Syria in 2014, ruthlessly targeting religious minorities. In 2015, 21 Egyptian Christians working in Libya were killed by Islamic State.

“Of course, we feel targeted, there was a bomb here about a week ago but it was dismantled. There’s no security,” said another Christian woman in Tanta referring to an attack earlier this month near a police training center that killed one policeman and injured 15.

Copts face regular attacks by Muslim neighbors, who burn their homes and churches in poor rural areas, usually in anger over

an inter-faith romance or the construction of a church. {eoa}

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# When Religious Spirits Masquerade as Prophets

If you could look at my e-mail inbox, some of what you read would make you cry out in travail for the trauma good people in the body of Christ are suffering. Other messages would make you shout for joy as testimonies of breakthrough roll in. Still others would make you scratch your head and ask, "How can anyone who calls themselves a Christian behave this way?"

I got an email last week that ranks in the top 10 ridiculous category. I've left off this person's last name so he doesn't get flooded with rebukes. Take a read and judge the spirit thereof and let's learn some lessons about prophecy along the way.

## **A Long False Prophecy That Carries a Curse**

*My name is Robert and I am a Prophet here in McKinney, Texas. I moved here about 7 months ago with my wife and children from Miramar, there in South Florida. Holy Spirit led me to one of your YouTube videos and told me to contact you and give you this word.*

*For the past 9 months the Lord Jesus has been using me to give words to many of the saints about moving. Many of these saints are Apostles, Prophets, and Pastors with large ministries. As you may or may not know, judgement is here for America. Catastrophic events are going to start happening*

*soon so God is moving his saints into specific safe areas and assignments.*

*The word that I have been told to give you is that Jesus is calling you to move your family and ministry to the Dallas, Texas area as soon as possible. 1 Peter 4:17 says judgement must begin at the house of God. Every believers [sic] obedience is being tested right now. Jesus says to whom much is given, much is required.*

Let me pause on the prophecy right there. This is your textbook doom-and-gloom judgment prophet. Most doom-and-gloom judgement prophets have a religious spirit. There are true words of warning and God is a God of judgment, but this is not one of them. The Lord is not speaking to me to move.

I have had prophetic words from well-known, credible prophets about laboring for a great revival in my region. This religious doomsayer was sent by the devil in a feeble attempt to get me off the wall, just as false prophets were sent to Nehemiah to get him off the wall (Neh. 6:12-14).

### **Prophetic Presumption Exemplified**

The false prophecy continues: "God is up to something big here in the Dallas area and I believe part of it has to do with TV because a lot of the saints that he told me to contact are or have been on television. I have also received a few prophetic words myself last year about being on TV which is not something I ever even thought about or wanted."

Here's a great example of prophetic presumption. We don't need to have opinions about prophetic words. We need to have God's mind on what God is saying. Presumption can be deadly, as I've said many times before. Notice also the emphasis on self here. If he's supposed to be delivering a life-saving word to me, why does he talk about how God wants to put him on TV?

## When the Religious Spirit Manifests

The false prophecy continues:

*Also The Lord is bringing true biblical holiness back to the church. Jesus says he wants you to stop cutting your hair short. 1 Corinthians 11:15, "But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.*

*Jesus is also saying to all his women no more fake hair, painted or fake nails, and no more makeup which as we read in the Bible was used by wicked women. Also no more earrings or jewelry, which were associated with idolatry in the Bible. A watch and wedding ring are all Jesus wants his women and men to wear. We have to be the example of what holiness looks and acts like. 1 Timothy 2:9, "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array."*

*Also read 1 Peter 3:1-5. Jesus says he is coming for a church without spot or wrinkle and he made women perfect without these foolish things ... Will be praying for you sister and God bless!*

I don't have room in this column to teach about the religious spirit. I believe in holiness, but holiness is a matter of the heart, not the hairstyle. Esther was a godly woman, and she wore jewelry, makeup and expensive clothing. I agree with the modesty message and have championed it. But I don't agree with this prophetic word came from the Lord because neither the message nor the messenger is lining up with the character of God. {eoa}

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# **This Subtle Danger Disguises Itself as Spiritual Maturity**

I'm not sure when I became spiritually mature, but it happened without me noticing. I simply loved the Bible because it gave me glimpses of the Living God. As my love for God grew, so did an insatiable appetite for all 66 books of His Spirit-breathed Word.

Then, somewhere along the way, others began to solicit my opinion on every topic under the sun, because I was suddenly "full of spiritual wisdom." I began to be the one who taught the Bible studies rather than attending them. I was more often the mentor than the mentee.

This is all as it should be. It isn't surprising that those who love God's Word are often sought out for advice. Psalm 1 tells us that the one who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night will be like a tree planted by streams of water yielding fruit in its season. Proverbs 1 reminds us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. But a new temptation arose in the subtle shift from learner to teacher, one I didn't foresee.

## **The Temptation to Use God**

I didn't begin this journey to know God because it would make me a wise person or make me impressive in the eyes of others. I wanted to know God because He is amazing—and who wouldn't want to know Him? But as I looked around and noticed that others were impressed or came to me for advice, something began to change. I enjoyed the new attention and affirmation I got from others for my knowledge of God and His Word. Pride

began to creep in through an unexpected door: delighting in my own expertise of God, rather than God Himself.

This slow fade into pride is the pursuit of a cheap, second-rate joy—a joy in our own abilities to know God. In our pursuit, we cease to learn about God because He is enjoyable, beautiful and glorious, and instead seek Him because it impresses others. Just like the childhood friends of rising stars often betray intimate knowledge to the magazines just to make a buck, we may find ourselves using our knowledge of God to better our own standing with others.

I'm exposing this dangerous pride primarily because it poses such a threat to my own love for God. I wonder if you also see the temptation within yourself.

### **The Pharisees and the Promise of Exposure**

In the Gospels, Jesus regularly pulls back the cloak of pious activity to reveal the Pharisees' proud hearts. We see in them that this temptation to use God had drawn them in and taken root. They loved their interpretations of Scripture more than the one of whom the Scriptures spoke. They studied the law, not for love of the lawgiver, but because of the benefits it gave them. They taught the Word to others, not because they longed for others to know their great God, but to exercise authority and power over them.

Just like the Pharisees, when we enjoy our own cleverness in knowing God more than God Himself, we have guaranteed our eventual hypocrisy. And just like them, I have often been a hypocrite, in ways that others likely couldn't see. I was able to continue doing ministry, saying and doing the right things, while my heart was puffed up with pride.

But hallelujah! God does not leave us as we are. If we are truly born again, He has given us His Spirit, and in His kindness, He will expose us (a promise I cling to tighter every day).

God's exposure in my life feels like the splashing of water on my face, waking up my lethargic soul from the hypnotic lure toward spiritual arrogance. One such incident was the encouragement of a sister in Christ who is some years younger than I am. I have been her small group leader, mentor and friend. It matters little what was said, only that my heart revolted from being exhorted by this sister in Christ whom I have deemed younger than me in every way.

As I felt indignation rise to conscious awareness, I knew I had been lured away again from the purity and simplicity of devotion to Christ. That somewhat painful moment provided my way of escape from the pride. His exposure was an offer to return to Him in repentance and to rest in Christ's finished work.

## **Fighting for Humility**

While God will expose us, are there things we can do to resist this temptation? How can we protect ourselves from this ever-present danger? How can we discern when our spiritual disciplines begin to be motivated by a desire to be the most spiritual person in the room? Let me share a few ways I am fighting for a posture of humility and a pure devotion to Christ.

### **1. Repent**

Repentance is not a bad thing to be avoided. It is a call to return to God, and as sinners it ought to be the daily posture of our hearts. See repentance not as a proof of failure but an invitation to return home. When temptation creeps in, cry out to God and run to Him.

### **2. Meditate**

Spiritual arrogance quickly turns the study of God's Word into a search for something tweetable. Like missing a sunset because we ran off to tell others about it, we may easily miss

opportunities to enjoy God in His Word because we're too obsessed with telling others. Choosing to meditate and mull over what I read gives my heart time to soak in the reality of who God is and what I am learning about Him. It gives me time to respond to God and reminds me to not just be content to learn about Him but to talk to Him!

### **3. Study for Fun**

I do love teaching others about God and hope you do, too. But the more opportunities I get to teach, the easier it is to turn my Bible reading and prayer into the means, not the end goal. Of course, I need to get into the Word and seek God to prepare for the next article, Bible study or speaking event. But if that's the only time I go to Him, knowing God becomes a job, not a joy. Now I make it a priority to always be studying books of the Bible that I'm not preparing to teach about. Study for fun. Search out God's character in His Word simply because He's amazing and has invited you to know Him.

### **4. Remain a Humble Learner**

I was a young, junior high student when God opened my eyes to His Word. I found in the Bible a God beyond my imagination and ached to know more. I cared little about how much I knew or didn't know but was simply thrilled that there was more to know and that I could know it. What joy! Now, by His grace, I pray to remain as lowly as I began: a humble learner. I do not have the market on the Word of God. His Spirit can just as easily illuminate the Scriptures to whomever He wishes; no seniority rules apply. I pray I will always be excited to learn from others around me who love God, no matter how young in age or how new to the faith.

We will never be satisfied with anything other than God Himself. Being an expert on God and His Word is a poor substitute and still just a broken cistern that cannot hold water (Jer. 2:13). As we grow in maturity, teach others, offer

wisdom and find ourselves the mentor more than the mentee, may we fight diligently for joy in God alone. {eoa}

Â© 2001-2017 *Revive Our Hearts Reprinted from Revive Our Hearts. Kelly Needham hopes to persuade as many people as possible that nothing compares to simply knowing Jesus. She is married to Christian singer/songwriter, Jimmy Needham, whose ministry of sharing the gospel through song takes him all over the world. After spending many years traveling with her husband as his road manager and violinist, Kelly came off the road to be a full-time mom to their two young daughters.*

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## **Watch for These Clues—God Might Be Speaking to You**

Yesterday I pulled out a manila file labeled “colors.” That’s the theme of the week in my Spanish class, so I have plans to bring colors to my students through various mediums.

Skittles are on the docket, because if a student tastes the rainbow, he might be more motivated to remember its colors. I also have a color by number, a color wheel and a stack of paint swatches. For my upper-level students, I have a devotional blog post about colors to translate.

We do a variety of activities, because one pass over information isn’t enough for anyone to learn well, and the same is true in the way we learn from God.

**God often speaks to us in multiple layers.**

For example, over a week ago I signed my very first book contract, and that is a strange new world for me. Matt keeps

imagining my grand book tours on the East coast, bless his heart.

But the whole book thing sent me into a fierce heart battle over motive. I set a stopwatch, and I clocked myself lasting about four minutes with godly motives. Then off my wretched heart would go—longing for fame.

I would halt those thoughts and go through a Scripture list I've made up, to define my purpose in writing: To glorify the name of the Lord, to help others know him, to shine light into a dark world and to teach people to live by God's commands.

Then pretty soon I was imagining myself famous again.

*Oh Lord, help me.*

Friday night I told Matt about my struggle as we crawled under the covers.

"I can't seem to maintain a humble, godly motive for even two seconds!" I told him.

"You should be encouraged that you recognize your wrong motives," he said. "That's a sign the Holy Spirit is working in you. You know, it's funny because our sermon tomorrow night is about motive."

Sure enough, the sermon passage:

*"For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you" (1 Thess. 2:2, NIV).*

By the end of the singing and sermon that night, I was fully reminded that I am a sinful woman, and my motives are naturally impure. During the closing prayer, I sat in my chair and held my head in my hands.

*Dear God, redeem my motives from the dark side.*

The next day I was reading a book by Paul David Tripp called *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*. He writes:

*Sin makes us glory thieves. There is probably not a day when we do not plot to steal glory that rightfully belongs to the one who craves glory that does not belong to us.*

Yes, I am a thief.

Then I sat down to write my next newsletter to those of you who have subscribed to my website (if you haven't subscribed, wanna join us?) I want to send you guys something valuable each month, and it's going to be a homemade micro-lesson in how to study the Bible. As I was preparing this Bible study for the newsletter, I did the scientific thing and opened to the Psalms, closed my eyes, and let my finger fall on a verse for us to study. Don't you know my finger landed on a verse about glory and motive? (Coming to you this Sunday.)

But God wasn't done talking to me about motive yet.

Yesterday I watched a news video about a pastor in Germany who is facing fierce opposition because he is preaching that Jesus is the only way to God. But he said he also started getting thousands of encouraging emails from followers of Christ, and he started to think he was really something.

"I am really a great pastor!" he said to himself.

Then he shook his head in disgust and said he had to remind himself, "No, I am nothing. I am only a sinner. I am only a tool for Jesus Christ."

Yes, brother. Me too.

So my point is that good teachers layer information, so that it sinks in and makes a lasting impression in the learner's thinking and lifestyle. Like God keeps impressing on me that I need to be rescued from bad motives.

God is an excellent teacher, and when He wants us to know something, He very often will bring the same information to us from multiple directions.

On our part, we have to be excellent listeners who are attentive 24/7. Bibles open. Hearts prayerful. Reading and listening to things that are bringing us godly messages and not just entertainment. We also have to be hungry to grab the new information and believe and obey it.

What message has God been sending to you from every direction lately?

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## **A Powerful Prayer When You're Under Torrential Attack**

When I was in my junior high years, we lived in the small town of Sherrill, New York, on a street with nine guys within a year of each other in age. We had a lot of fun and got into some innocent trouble together. A great time in life!

I recall one night hanging out in the Swan boys' backyard, trying to think of something fun to do. They had a two-tiered yard with a small hedge between the two levels of ground. We got the idea of running at the hedges, jumping over them, and landing on the ground beyond—a drop of about 3 feet. From the

point of leaping over the hedge to the bottom of the drop off was about 5 feet. We had fun doing this a number of times. But then the inevitable happened.

One time when I ran toward the hedge (probably getting a little tired and sloppy), I did not jump quite high enough. My foot caught the hedge. Rather than falling feetfirst, I landed with a thud directly on my chest and stomach. The wind got knocked out of me and I could not breathe. I still remember that awful feeling of lying there trying to gasp for air—any air. I thought I was going to die.

Of course, I eventually caught my breath. All was well until another day of shenanigans.

## **Catch a Breath and Pray**

I have recently found myself praying with the wind knocked out of me. You know those times. It's when things are not going well and you're attacked on every side. Every little thing goes wrong, and you feel like you can't catch a break (or a breath).

How do you pray and walk in faith during those seasons? How can you pray in a way that allows you to catch your breath, get up, and move forward?

Some people would advocate praying the Psalms during this time. Nothing wrong with that remedy. But for me, in this situation I go to a passage from one of Paul's letters:

*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let everyone come to know your gentleness. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will protect your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just,*

*whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, think on these things (Phil. 4:4-8).*

Just as I had to force myself to try to breathe when I got the wind knocked out of me, I force myself in these challenging times to rejoice. I think of the good things I have, the things that are going well—and I begin to praise Jesus for those things. It is amazing how this simple practice can fill your spiritual lungs with air again. Try it. You'll breathe again! {eoa}

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## **Receiving Intervention Intercession**

## **Angelic Through**

When God hears prayers from His people, He responds. What happens is that He dispatches His angels before, during and after our prayers. It's a dynamic, living sequence, repeated over and over:

- 1. Angels usher in God's presence and declare His intentions to people.**
- 2. As a result, Spirit-inspired intercession rises from believers.**
- 3. In response to the prayers, God releases His angels to deliver, protect, heal and strengthen people, to execute**

**His judgments, to reap and to gather and to do whatever else He wants them to do.**

Do you think about this when you pray? That prayer you prayed this morning may be the one that God used to mobilize an army of angels. This means your intercessory prayers are important! It also means that it may have been *angels* who helped you know what to pray before the word was on your lips. Angels can come to prepare the way for your prayers, to convey your prayers to heaven, and to execute the answers to those prayers.

### **How Are Angels' Assignments Related to our Intercession?**

We don't hear as much about the relationship of angels to our intercession as we do about the intercession itself. I want to take the three points above and relate them to some specific types of angelic assignments:

- 1. Angels usher in God's presence and declare His intentions to people.**

By definition, angels are assigned to minister the presence of the Lord. They usher in His glory. They connect heaven and earth. Sometimes we feel God's glory and usually we don't, but they never stop ushering it in.

*And in the same area there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And then an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were very afraid. But the angel said to them, "Listen! Do not fear. For I bring you good news of great joy, which will be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:8-11).*

Angels may simply pronounce God's will in the silence of your prayer time, dropping into your mind and heart the

very thing that God wants to do—and that your inspired prayers can subsequently bring about. Angels sometimes release wisdom and understanding in dreams or visions. In a variety of ways, angels help to give guidance and direction to human beings, who are their fellow servants, earthbound and in need of heavenly assistance.

2. **As a result of having been ushered into God's presence and learning His will, intercession now rises from believers.**

Angels are involved in our responses to God's guidance. They are involved in our praise and worship. They come from the throne room, after all, where worship ascends perpetually. Angels worship with us, and they enhance our praises. Without their help to cultivate grateful, expectant, worshipful hearts, we cannot carry out our function as intercessors. Paul wrote, "Be anxious for *nothing*, but in *everything*, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God" (Phil. 4:6, emphasis added).

Angels are divine watchers. They look into the historical affairs of humans. They mentor us in alert and prayerful watching. They tip us off when they see something. (See Dan. 4:13-17, Acts 12:20-23, 1 Tim. 5:21.) They also tip each other off, and they go to battle whenever the need arises. Angels are definitely involved in our spiritual warfare. We can't stand against the devil without them.

3. **Response to our prayers, God releases His angels.**

Angels bring the answers to our prayers. They carry God's provision from His storeroom. The angels bring deliverance and they bind demonic powers. They provide protection and strength to people. God uses them as His healing instruments. They execute His judgments. They are His reapers and gatherers. They

stand ready to do whatever He wants them to do.

## **Five Foundational Premises**

Another way of talking about it is to identify five foundational premises that underlie the truth that angels are intimately involved with our intercession. They are as follows: 1. Believers are co-workers with Christ; 2. God hears and answers prayers; 3. An innumerable company of angels is available; 4. Angels are involved in both the spiritual and practical affairs of humankind; and 5. Angels deliver God's answers to people's prayers.

### **1. Believers are co-workers with Christ.**

Here is a phrase for you to remember: God's resources are released by man's invitation of intercession. We do not have a passive role to play. We are actively inviting God to get involved in human affairs, both small and sweeping. "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much" (James 5:16b).

### **2. God hears and answers prayers.**

This is very basic; we absolutely must operate on this premise. God does not turn a deaf ear to our prayers. In fact, our prayerful intercession influences Him to advance direction and destinies of individuals and entire nations.

### **3. An innumerable company of angels is available.**

Heaven's army of the angelic host is waiting for its next assignment. Each angel is ready to be dispatched. Angels, in a manner of speaking, are unemployed—at least between assignments. They are waiting for our invitation in order to be released to most of their assignments.

Nobody can count them, there are so many: "... the host of heaven cannot be numbered nor the sand of the sea measured" (Jer. 33:22a).

**4. Angels are involved in both the spiritual and practical affairs of humankind.**

Sometimes we think angels are only involved in the hyper-spiritual stuff such as at Bethlehem, or at least protection from imminent danger. We are under the impression that angelic assistance happens only once in a while. I don't think so. I know angels have preserved me from traffic accidents time and time again. (Somebody once told me, "James, you must have more squashed angels than anybody.")

Angels are servants, and they do practical tasks. Remember the story of Peter and the angel who came into his jail cell to let him go free? The angel woke him up and said, "'Put on your clothes and sandals.' And Peter did so. 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him" (Acts 12:8). That's a practical assignment.

**5. Angels deliver God's answers to people's prayers.**

I don't think we can differentiate between God's direct answers to our prayers and His "indirect" answers, conveyed by angels. The angels are often His best option, and they are direct. They're obedient; they're fast; they're powerfully efficient. They carry God's love and His character. What more could you want?

The important thing is that God answers prayers. The "extra credit" part is recognizing that angels have an important role in delivering His answers. {eoa}

*Lord God, may the veil that separates the eternal from the temporal, the supernatural and the natural, keep on getting thinner and thinner. We welcome heaven's army into our earthly sphere, into the regions over which we have been given jurisdiction. We call forth the angels who watch, who report, who heal, who deliver. We invite angels to join us in our*

*praise and worship. We expect to see the outcome of the work of angels of breakthrough and protection. We enter into deep intercession, with worship. Awaken our senses. Today, send forth your angels to intervene in our lives, families, cities and nations. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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