

FORTIFY FAITH: Follow the Cloud!

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While ministering at a conference in Las Vegas, I joined a group of friends for an off-road adventure in the Nevada desert. Riding utility terrain vehicles, we set out across the vast, sun-scorched landscape with a sense of excitement and freedom. Each group had its own guide, and as we sped along, the sound of engines and the smell of desert air created a thrilling atmosphere.

At first, I stayed comfortably with my group, enjoying the ride and the camaraderie. But it wasn't long before I noticed I had drifted toward the back. I didn't think much of it at first—after all, I knew the general direction and assumed I could catch up. But the gap grew quickly, and the harder I tried to close it, the more the group ahead disappeared into a cloud of dust.

The trails became harder to navigate. Dust hung thick in the air like a curtain, obscuring my view and making it impossible to see which path to take. Panic set in as I realized I was lost in the desert. To make matters worse, several trails split off ahead of me. Each one looked plausible, but I had no clue which one would lead me back to my group. I felt isolated, vulnerable, and unsure what to do next.

Then, in the distance, I saw it—a large, billowing cloud of dust rising against the bright desert sky. Though I couldn't see the riders themselves, I instantly knew what it was. It was my group. That dust cloud was evidence of their presence,

their movement.

Without hesitation, I turned my vehicle and followed the dust trail. Minutes later, I was reunited with the group, overwhelmed with relief.

But the lesson wasn't over. It happened again later in the ride—I lost sight of my group and once more found myself alone in the desert. Yet, just as before, I saw a rising cloud of dust, turned toward it, and followed until I rejoined my friends.

It was in that moment I sensed the Holy Spirit speak clearly to my heart: "Follow the cloud."



To order Matt Cruz's new book, Stormproof, visit .

A Cloud in the Wilderness

That experience in the Nevada desert made me think of another journey—the Israelites' passage through the wilderness. After God led them out of Egypt, He didn't send them off with nothing more than instructions and good wishes. Instead, His presence went with them in a visible form: a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exod. 13:21).

The cloud was far more than a sign. It was God Himself guiding, protecting, and reassuring His people. When the cloud moved, they moved. When it stopped, they stopped. They didn't have to guess, strategize, or figure out their own route—the cloud was their compass.

In the same way that we need oxygen to survive, we have no spiritual life or direction without God's presence. The cloud didn't merely point out the path; it was the path. It went ahead of them, ensuring they stayed on the road to the Promised Land.

Follow the Cloud, Not the Crowd

Psalm 119:105 declares, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Jesus promised in John 16:13 that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth. That same divine presence now dwells in us, guiding us through the challenges and decisions of life.

But here’s the tension: we’re constantly pulled between following the cloud and following the crowd.

The crowd is the easy road—the broad way Jesus described in Matthew 7:13. It’s filled with voices urging us to conform to cultural trends, peer pressure, and worldly ideologies. The crowd promises acceptance and instant gratification but can never give us true peace or eternal life.

Today’s crowd shows up in many forms: in social media algorithms that reward outrage, in entertainment that glorifies sin, and even in educational systems that challenge God’s truth. Wherever the image of God is under attack, you can be sure the crowd isn’t far behind.

Proverbs 14:12 warns, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” In contrast, Psalm 1 tells us of the blessing on those who reject ungodly counsel and delight in God’s law. Such people are like trees planted by streams of water—they flourish in every season.

Even now, Jesus calls His followers to step away from the crowd and walk with Him. You weren’t created to blend in. You were created for His presence and purpose.

Following Jesus on His Terms

John 6 tells the story of a large crowd following Jesus after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. They were drawn to the excitement, the miracles, and perhaps the hope of another free meal. But when Jesus declared, “Unless you eat

the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53), the atmosphere changed.

His words were hard to understand and even harder to accept. Many turned away, unwilling to embrace the deeper commitment He required.

We often do the same. It's easy to follow Jesus when He blesses us, but what about when His words convict us? What about when obedience costs us friends, opportunities, or comfort?

Peter's response cuts to the heart: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). True followers recognize that Jesus Himself is the reward—not just what He can do for us.

Ask yourself: Are you following Jesus for the blessings or for who He is?

Following God When It's Inconvenient

Obedience isn't always convenient. Years ago, while helping a pastor friend move, I stopped at a gas station. As I pulled in, I felt a prompting: "Go to the station on the right. Look for a man in a yellow jacket. Give him \$50 and tell him I love him."

It seemed absurd. It was nearly 100 degrees outside. No one would be wearing a jacket. And I only had \$37 in my wallet.

But as I filled up, a motorcycle pulled in. The rider was wearing a jacket with yellow stripes. Heart pounding, I approached. "This might sound strange, but I felt God wanted me to tell you He loves you."

The man's eyes filled with tears. He explained he was a pastor riding cross-country to raise awareness for men's mental health and addiction. Discouraged and wondering if his efforts mattered, he said my words were exactly what he needed.

I went inside, withdrew cash from the ATM, and handed it to him. "God is proud of you," I said.

He broke down in tears.

That moment reminded me: following God often means stepping out in faith—even when it's uncomfortable, awkward or costly.

Divine Appointments

God is always orchestrating opportunities for us to bless, encourage, and pray for others. But how often do we miss them because they feel inconvenient?

Faith in action isn't convenient—it's transformative. True obedience is following God's leading into places that stretch us.

How to Move With the Cloud

Much like my experience in the desert, some seasons in life can leave us feeling lost. We move forward, full of excitement and purpose, only to find ourselves falling behind, confused, or unsure which path to take. We may see others moving ahead and wonder if we've missed something or strayed off course.

In those moments we must remember the lesson I learned in the desert: Follow the Cloud.

Just as God's presence, in the form of a visible cloud, guided the Israelites through the wilderness to the Promised Land, He will guide us too. We are called to follow God's presence. But how does this look in our daily lives? Here's how we can follow the Cloud practically:

Look for the Cloud of God's presence. In the desert, I had to look up and spot the cloud of dust in the distance to find my group. In the same way, we must train our spiritual eyes to seek God's guidance.

While we may not see a literal cloud or pillar of fire, God speaks to us through His Word, prayer, the Holy Spirit, and other believers. When you feel lost or unsure, look up—seek signs of His presence and follow them.

Trust the Cloud when you're lost. In the desert, when I felt lost and uncertain, seeing the cloud gave me a sense of direction and reassurance. In life, when we feel like we're losing our way—whether in relationships, work, ministry, or our spiritual walk—we need to look for God's guidance.

God's presence will never leave us. As I followed that dust cloud, I didn't question whether it would lead me to my group. I trusted that it would guide me where I needed to go. The same is true spiritually. When we follow God's presence, we can trust that He will guide us to where we need to be.

Be willing to follow even when you can't see the whole picture. One of the hardest parts of following the cloud in the desert was that I couldn't see where it was leading me. I had to follow without knowing the full path.

The same is true when God leads us. He doesn't always show us the entire plan or provide every detail. Instead, He calls us to trust and follow Him step by step. The Israelites didn't know the exact route through the wilderness, but they trusted the cloud was leading them to the Promised Land.

Follow the Cloud until you're back with the group. When I felt lost in the desert, following the cloud always brought me back to my group. Similarly, when we follow God's presence, He brings us back to where we need to be—whether that's in fellowship with Him or with others.

We are never truly alone. The Holy Spirit is always with us, leading us into all truth. The next time you feel lost, as I did in the desert, remember to follow the Cloud. Trust that God's presence is always with you, guiding you and leading you back to the right path.

I was never truly lost as long as I had the cloud to follow. And you are never truly lost when you have God's presence to guide you.

The Question

Are you following God's presence—or just following the crowd?

Will you trust Him when His leading takes you out of your comfort zone? When it costs you something? When it makes you stand alone?

The crowd's path is loud and wide but leads to destruction. God isn't in the crowd. He's in the cloud.

Look up. Seek Him. Trust His guidance. Follow the cloud, and you'll never be truly lost.

*Raised in a multicultural church on Chicago's Southside, **Matt Cruz** had a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit at age 19 that transformed his life. He started evangelizing on the streets of Chicago, where he witnessed incredible miracles and later began posting evangelistic videos on social media which have received more than 200 million views. His newest book, Stormproof, is available now on .*