

The Miracle Man

Apostle Demontae Edmonds doesn't remember much about his childhood before turning 5 years old. One thing that remains vivid in his mind, however, is the way his aunt introduced him to the gospel, using him as an audience to help her gain confidence to teach her Bible school classes.

Looking back, Edmonds says his aunt's actions were a huge part of helping to mold who he is now—an apostolic ambassador, author, leadership coach, prophet, podcaster and international speaker. It has led him to 25 countries to share the Good News of Jesus and help build future leaders for the kingdom through his worldwide ministry, Freedom 4 the Nations, based in Atlanta, Georgia.

Through Freedom 4 the Nations, Edmonds has laid hands on people and witnessed God's power through miracles such as the blind seeing, the lame walking and the deaf hearing. He is known for his concise teaching of the Word, his prophetic accuracy and the ability to empower individuals to walk in their full God-given potential.

While God gave him those precious spiritual gifts that have benefited many inside and outside the kingdom, Edmonds also credits his aunt for helping stir up his enthusiasm for a ministry that demonstrates God's unlimited power when she practiced her Bible class teaching before him. At the tender age of 4, he discovered just how powerful the Bible is, which gave him a hunger for more.

"She would use me as the practice person for her presentation," Edmonds recalls. "She had these little boards where you could take cutouts of the Roman soldiers, of Jesus and of the cross where you could ... change the pictures out with Velcro and stick them on the boards.

"So she presented the gospel to me that way," he says. "And

one day, after a few times of practicing on me, she asked me if I would like to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. Even to this day, I can see that very moment in my mind.

“He was already very real to me, and I had already felt His love at that point,” Edmonds says. “So when she asked me that very important question, the Lord was already welcomed into my heart. At 4 years old, that is pretty unusual. But with the gospel, Jesus says that the words I speak are spirit and life. At 2, 3, 4 years old, a child may not be able to fully comprehend the gospel message, but our spirit man can connect with the spirit of the gospel and the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”

Without a doubt, that Spirit took hold quickly in Edmonds' life, and the fruits of his ministry are living proof.

Rising Miracles

During the early days of obedience to his calling, Edmonds says, God spoke to him about the restoration of miracles to the kingdom. While many in the body of Christ today have chosen to deny the possibility of the supernatural and miraculous, he teaches that these experiences are not limited to the Bible.

“Oftentimes we hear about miracles that took place in the Bible or even in our immediate past with people like Kathryn Kuhlman or John G. Lake. And with some ministries, it may happen, but it's more likely that it does in third-world pockets overseas,” Edmonds says. “But I'm telling you, we've been seeing some very powerful miracles, even during the COVID pandemic.”

Edmonds says many people have affectionately referred to him as “The Miracle Man” due to the supernatural displays of God's power and his prophetic accuracy within his ministry and meetings. That moniker is not something he boasts about or even cares to embrace, but the impact of his ministry within the supernatural realm is undeniable.

"We've had people write to us virtually over the internet—as we're preaching or ministering or praying—that they have experienced tremendous miracles. I'm going to give you an example. There was a woman named Sarah Marie Ashbridge, and she had fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis. She was confined to a wheelchair for three years, and [had] a tremendous amount of pain throughout her entire body. Right when we were preaching over the internet, the power of God came upon her. She got up out of the wheelchair, and she was able to walk. She was perfectly healed, and she has given that testimony publicly.

"We had a virtual miracle service online, and someone shared it with a relative who was bedridden in the hospital," Edmonds says. "This woman had a very serious condition and illness where she couldn't get up and walk around; she couldn't do much. She was bedridden. All of a sudden, while the gospel is going forth, she felt this wind come into the room and lift her off the bed. She then gets up and walks as the pain left her body. We have a written medical record of that miracle happening as well.

"We've seen limbs grow. When we were in India, in one meeting, there were over a dozen people totally, or partially blind that were touched by the power of God and instantly became able to see," Edmonds says. "There was one testimony where the gentleman who was not only able to see, [but] he looked up to the back of the building and said that he could read. The miracle of that is, he had never been able to see. So that means he was never able to read or was never taught to read. So now, not only was he able to see, somehow supernaturally God gave him the ability to read. So I believe there's going to be an increase of those creative miracles until it gets to the proportion of biblical type miracles, and we've been seeing them consistently throughout our ministry."

Coming Awakening

These miracles are only a small snapshot of the way Edmonds and his team are using technology and the media to show people the irrefutable power of God and to help reap a mass harvest in this next generation, he says.

He believes there are three keys to accomplishing another great awakening, which he believes is coming soon: miracles, media and marketplace.

“In talking about those three things, I’d like to start with marketplace. There are seven mountains of cultural influence. Traditionally, preachers focused on just one: religion. Churches were built; megachurches were built. But when you get into the educational mountain, the big government mountain, the business mountain, many times Christians and God didn’t have much influence, and the culture turned into an ungodly culture, even though ministries were prospering and growing. So, 40 years ago, you didn’t really have churches with 10,000; 15,000; 20,000 people. But 40 years ago, you couldn’t turn on the television and see naked people or hear profanity.

“So we have advanced a lot in that church space and church arena,” Edmonds says. “But now the Lord says for the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdom of our God, we need more people who can invade and integrate into these seven mountains of cultural influence. The cultural has to shift so the devil doesn’t have a foothold in these areas. That’s going to be very vital for the gospel.

“The second thing is the miracles,” he adds. “Throughout the Bible, we see that God is the God of miracles, from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It’s one of the major ways that he’s given proof to His Word; one of the major ways that He’s given proof to truth and one of the major ways that He’s given proof to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are so many competing religions, ideologies and doctrines. But when miracles take place—when the blind see, when the lame walk, the deaf hear, when limbs grow, when supernatural activity

takes place—the debate goes out the window.”

Edmonds points to another time when he traveled to India and, while he was preaching at SRM University in Chennai, a group of Hindu and Muslim students, whom Edmonds calls “curiosity seekers,” witnessed a dynamic miracle. During his sermon, a loud rainstorm occurred, and the Muslim student group next door to his class was drowning out the sound of Edmonds’ sermon.

“At that time, all of a sudden in Jesus’ name, there was an indignation that came over me, and I commanded the noise and the rain to stop,” Edmonds says. “As I preached, many of the students ran to the altar. People got filled with the Holy Ghost, and Muslims and Hindus got saved.

“It wasn’t until the next day that the host of the ministry that invited me said to me, ‘Did you notice that when you told the rain to stop, it stopped instantly?’” Edmonds recalls. “I was just so focused on getting the message out that I didn’t even look for the results. But God did a miracle. I mean, Hindus and Muslims got saved because they saw proof of a power that was greater than the powers they were serving. So I believe miracles are going to grab the attention of people so Jesus can captivate their hearts.”

The third key to the coming harvest of gigantic proportions, Edmonds says, is the media. In recent years, the secular media has become a huge influence in America, and many have spread an anti-Christian, anti-Jesus message that has attempted to poison the minds of the public.

Edmonds says that if the enemy, Satan, can control what people consume through the media, then he can control their hearts and minds. Edmonds finds that unacceptable—and provides a godly alternative. He’s written several books, including *Grab Hold of Your Miracle: 10 Keys to Experiencing Supernatural Miracles* and *The Supernatural Gift of Faith: Unlocking a New*

Realm of Prophetic Power.

As the host of Highways, which can be seen via Comcast Dish Network, on Atlanta's channel 57 via XFINITY and viewed globally via the internet through streaming services like ROKU and WATC, Edmonds uses the airwaves as a prophetic voice to deliver, equip and empower pastors and to deliver accurate prophetic words for nations and top church and secular leaders.

He is also the host of the show This is Freedom with Demontae Edmonds on the Charisma Podcast Network.

Transforming Truth

All of these efforts show just how important the media is in our culture.

"It says in the Bible that Satan is the prince of the power the air," Edmonds says. "So, in our day and time, the airwaves, the air frequencies, whether by radio, whether by Wi-Fi, whether by internet or whether by television, he wants those mediums; he wants those media streams so he can influence people negatively, so he can cause them not to have faith in God, so he can distract them from prayer and he can distract them from relationship with God.

"We need to be just as intentional and strategic about moving into the space of all media streams and having a voice having an influence and presenting an image of Christ that people can connect with," Edmonds says. "That can bring transformation to their lives, and they won't be influenced by the doctrines of the devil. They won't be influenced by false religions, and they won't be distracted from having a relationship with God and give in to all of this imagery that has been presented to them that's ungodly. I believe one of the greatest spiritual battles in this generation is going to be in the realm of media."

Through the marketplace, miracles and the media, Edmonds says he believes God will send “strategic vessels into uncanny places” to bring His Word to the masses.

Through the vessel of his aunt many years ago, God raised up Edmonds as a strategic vessel, calling him to take the gospel into many uncanny places on this earth, including, of all places, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

“I was praying, and the Lord told me to go into the Pentagon and prophesy,” Edmonds says. “And I said, ‘Go where to do what? Lord, they kill people professionally and can get away with it.’ He told me, ‘I’m going to open the door for you.’”

“The door didn’t open at first, but the Lord made the way, and I ended up prophesying to a group of generals and high officials,” Edmonds says. “They were weeping and crying, and they received the word of the Lord. Things were accurate down to names. So that goes back into that marketplace where we have to be open as believers to step out of the box and bring God into some untraditional, uncanny places.

“But your heart has to open to these things as mine was when I was a kid,” he adds. “As I said before, when your spirit man connects with the spirit of the gospel and the Spirit of Jesus Christ; that’s when transformation takes place. It’s the only way we’re going to change this culture and give it back to God.”

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The Power of a Praying Grandmother

Dr. Angela Powers' grandmother, Mamie, passed away more than 20 years ago. But the spirit-filled prayers of protection, perseverance and strength she poured out over her granddaughter's life remain a blessing not only over Powers and her ministry but over the men, women and children she impacts for the kingdom today.

As an ordained prophet of the New Era Apostleship Restitution Collaborative headed by Dr. Paula A. Price and the founder of the World Impact Institute, Powers mentors and develops prophets and intercessors, hosts gatherings for training and elevation in prayer and intercession as well as regional and municipal times of intensified extended corporate prayer.

She is the host of the FORCE Broadcast which airs weekly on Facebook, teaching and training praying people everywhere. She is also working to network a force of intercessors globally and to strategically deploy them municipally, regionally and nationally. Through the Power Prayer Zone Academy, she dispenses prayer education and prayer coaching. She also ministers itinerantly through the vehicle of AMP Ministries and is sought after to impact regions through her teaching, preaching and prayer.

Powers is the host of the *Power Prayer Zone* podcast on the Charisma Podcast Network and leads the 40-Day Master Shift Course, a 40-Day prayer journey that includes a daily downloadable prayer, a daily scripture guide and some additional mini-course prayer sessions.

Powers says none of that would be possible without the diligent Holy Spirit prayer covering Mamie placed over her from birth. It's the only way she's been able to overcome

sickle cell anemia—a disease that should have taken her life by the age of 30, Powers says.

In fact, her grandmother's prayers are the only reason she didn't take her own life during childhood after displaying suicidal tendencies as early as age 6. And Spirit-filled prayers like those her grandmother prayed are the only reason she can get out of bed each morning, take care of her two special-needs sons and answer the tremendous calling God has thrust onto her.

"My grandmother's prayer and the foundation of her example still carry me through life today," Powers says. "I'm over 40 years old, and she laid a covering over me that has not lifted. Yes, I do have people now who are continually praying for me, but I can distinctly see the places where her prayer is still in operation for me.

"What my grandmother instilled in me through her model was a beautiful example of the reality of God's hand in our world and how much He longs for us to all be like that," she says. "She instilled in me the beautiful example of Jehovah as a brooder who longs to brood over us, our neighborhoods and our schools. She was that example of the God who longs to brood over us.

"It is the reality of knowing that's what God wants that shapes who I am and shapes what I do," Powers adds. "It becomes an immense part of what I go after, to awaken people to that."

Spirit-Filled Grandmother

Powers' parents divorced when she was a baby. Her father lived in Iowa and her mother in Missouri. Powers began attending a school in her grandmother Mamie's neighborhood in Kansas City, and because of that, she spent a great deal of her childhood in Mamie's care.

Powers learned early on what Mamie was all about and the influence she would have over her life.

“Most of the days of my elementary school life, I slept at my grandmother’s house and went to school each morning from my grandmother’s house,” Powers says. “And so I would wake up early in the morning using the bathroom and things of that sort, and I could just hear her singing hymns. It would just be filling the kitchen where she was, and God would just be so real. His presence and His weight in that house and therefore His peace upon my grandmother’s house would just be so immense.

“It was the most beautiful and yet peculiar thing,” Powers says. “When you’re a child, you are really just learning about this reality of God. So [it was wonderful] to live with someone who [gave me] such a value of how she started her day, and how she pulled in her resources and her needs. We didn’t live in the best neighborhood. Our block was beautiful because there were a lot of African American families that were from the older generation. It was almost like an oasis in a desert. So her prayer covering also spoke a lot into the safety of our home.”

Not surprisingly, it was Mamie, a missionary, who first introduced her granddaughter to church at First Baptist Church in Kansas City, Kansas.

“Because of her, you could say I was a church baby,” Powers says. “Because of her giving me that exposure to God’s Word in our church, she got me involved in something we called ‘The Welcome.’ Because she was a missionary, she trained me to go into the Bible for myself to find a Scripture that would help me to speak to visitors in our church.

“I realize now that the foundations of my capacity to teach and to preach—and to speak to people—came a lot from that grooming,” Powers says. “Because of her and that exposure that

she gave, I did understand on some level what was unfolding when I would rise and hear her worshipping and praying in the morning.”

During this time in Powers’ early childhood, she began to experience physical pain. Doctors soon discovered and diagnosed her with sickle cell anemia, a chronic genetic disease that carries with it a short life-expectancy. In 1970, 30% of children born with sickle cell anemia were expected to die before their fifth birthday. And over 40 years ago, less than half of children born with the disease were expected to reach adulthood.

Mamie would instantly recognize those times when Angela began to experience pain, and she never hesitated to pray for her granddaughter, asking that the pain leave her body.

“She would lay hands on me, and the pain would dissipate,” Powers says. “The pain would just go away. That wasn’t wasted on me. I took that model into the entirety of my life. I know God hears us when we pray, and it’s by that faith that I live every day.”

“Sickle cell was the assignment of premature death, and the indictment was that I was not supposed to have kids,” Powers said. “With the duress your body is in, then neither you nor they are supposed to survive. But I knew, through my grandmother’s prayers over me, that the overriding potency of His blood would prevail. Jesus wanted me here, and I needed to be here.” Today, she has two sons whom she bathes in prayer every day, on her knees for God’s protection and wisdom, just as her grandmother prayed for her.

Powerful Prayer Ministry

Later in her life, many others realized the same thing Powers did: God wanted and needed her on this earth to deliver His Word and help others realize their importance in Christ.

Powers realized at age 19 that she had special calling on her life, and in college at Drake University, she began attending a Bible study. During the Bible study, she and her friends held regular prayer sessions, which grew in length every day.

During this time, Powers had regular encounters with the Holy Ghost and matured in the spiritual gifts God had given her.

“When that happens, because He is a prophetic spirit, He begins to really open up your faculties for hearing His concerns and for hearing God’s issues,” Powers says. “That’s when that process began to cultivate, which ultimately led me to a point where I was so drawn into hearing God’s voice, communing with God, knowing what His issues were, His dreams, His visions, knowing things that were getting ready to happen on the planet, knowing about how things were shifting with the church. It was like then I knew I needed training ... I knew this was more than just a ministry calling.”

“This is when the Lord brought me across the path of Dr. Price, and I began to find out about the training programs that she had,” Powers says. “And there was an angel watching over me. I had called into a show she had for some counsel about something prophetic that had happened. At the end, there was some advertising and discussing the fact that they have these mentorship, training programs. An angel of the Lord told me I needed this training, and I said, ‘Yes, I’m going to do this.’”

“That was the beginning of my journey with Dr. Price with her amazing learning systems that have groomed me as a prophet,” Powers says. “And now as the assistant chief prophet of her global prophetic company, and the supervisory prophet over her global intercessors and over the intercessors of her congregation, that training really gave me those missing puzzle pieces I didn’t have before. Once I identified I was a prophet, God began to give me the tools for how to carry out that mandate.”

Widely recognized as a strong international voice in apostolic and prophetic ministry, Price knew immediately that God would use Powers in a mighty way for His kingdom purposes.

“When I first met her, I said, ‘Oh, yeah, she’s a natural-born prophet,’” Price says. “I said, ‘She’s really going to be something.’ Angela is a phenomenal woman, and we have such extraordinary hopes for this woman. Her strength, her drive, her skills and her perseverance are impressive. She is a phenomenal intercessor, and she’s starting to get a lot of requests to help train intercessors. Angela has become this type of woman under extreme duress.

“I have trained a lot of people over the years, and I have heard just about every excuse about why someone can’t go on or why you can’t expect that person to deliver,” Price says. “Angela delivers over and above every time. She has been with us; she’s been through our training.

“Angela exhibits all of the qualities and traits of one who has been born and has been bathed and baptized in it,” Price says. “And then you know she is one who has been taken under the wing of the Holy Spirit. When you are listening to Angela, with her leadership and leadership skills, her talents, her ability to work her staff, and she keeps her peace, it’s incredible. Not a lot of people in the prophetic can keep their peace. She exhibits the maturity we need.

“I have a lot of hope for Angela’s future,” Price adds. “I am definitely convinced that she is a gift, and it’s a mirror to the body of Christ. My perception of Angela—as a leader, as a trainer—is that the world needs to look out, because she’s one of the best I’ve seen in a long time.”

God-Mandated Role

Powers will continue to be grateful for her grandmother’s intercession over her life. She knows full well that her life would have turned out much differently or that she might even

be dead had she not had such a godly, Spirit-filled woman constantly praying over her.

It's why she takes her role as intercessor, teacher and disciple seriously. She's well aware of the perils young people face in this chaotic, ungodly world, and without an intercessor like the one she had, many will struggle, suffer the wrath of the enemy and face an eternal death sentence.

"We are living in a climate and a time where there are so many things being opened up, so much occultism—the music, the movies, the entertainment—and everything is evil," Powers says. "You even try to go and get a delicious meal and it's named after something that is really dedicated to hell. The climate has become so infiltrated with so many voices and so many spirits that the first thing we've got to do is to train our youth to distinguish the voice of God. They can't have a voice until they know the voice of God. They've been carried off by other voices and other agendas.

"The church needs to build its stamina again and stand before God in intercession, because the darkness is taking its agenda very seriously," she adds. "We need mothers and grandmothers to intercede for this next generation. If we're to pray with all kinds of prayer, then that means that we also have to be able to stand before God, stand before His holiness and cry out for things that He cries out for." {eoa}

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Charismatic Baby Boomer Pastor Says It's Time to Let the Younger Generation Run for Christ

As a charismatic pastor of Baby Boomer age, Bob Sawvelle has gradually come to a stark revelation: The younger people in his congregation at Passion Church in Tucson, Arizona—and throughout the world—can make a difference for Christ.

And it's time to start allowing them to do so, he says.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the Lord impressed upon Sawvelle's heart a crucial ideal for every believer: understanding their identity in Christ. A disciple of Global Awakening's Randy Clark, Sawvelle addresses this in huge detail in his 2019 book *Fulfill Your Dreams: Seize the Day and Be Extraordinary*.

All believers, Sawvelle says—from age 1 to 101—want to know they are loved, accepted and forgiven by God. And he sees it as his job to make sure that happens.

But the younger generation, the future of the church, needs to hear this all-important message more than anyone else, Sawvelle says. It became increasingly critical following the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdown, as well as a nation-dividing election and the ugly issue of racism that the enemy used to put lies in the hearts of many of his children. Sawvelle's strategy includes teaching young people what God's Word says about their authority in Christ instead of allowing them to listen to Satan's deception that they are undervalued

and cannot make a difference.

“Those of us who are used to a proliferation of teaching, there has to be a shift to more of a heart connection with these young people, and I think we are beginning to see it,” Sawvelle says. “There are a lot of us out there who are teachers and pastors who can tell good stories, and that’s wonderful. But people want more than that. They’ve always wanted more than that ... but especially now. They want to be touched, and they want to be heard. We have to look at new ways to connect with them. There has to be a relational connection.

“A lot of it, for them, comes down to understanding this whole thing of identity, what Christ has done for us and how He’s adopted us,” he says. “When people get saved, they need to jump right in to understanding their new identity in Christ and to understand they’ve been adopted by God, never to be rejected.

“It doesn’t mean we can’t wander from God; and it doesn’t mean we can’t sin,” Sawvelle says, “But I’m saying there’s this security in God because of what Christ has done for us, and all of a sudden, that begins to liberate someone.”

And “someone” might be like the biblical character of Jabez. Sawvelle points to 1 Chronicles 4:9-10: “Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, ‘Because I bore him in hardship.’ Then Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, ‘Oh, that You would indeed bless me and enlarge my territory, that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that it may not bring me hardship!’ So God granted what he asked.”

“In that Scripture, all Jabez really wanted was validation,” Sawvelle says. “He said, ‘Lord, bless me and enlarge my territory.’ What he was really asking for was validation. All he wanted to know was that his life mattered, that he wasn’t

going to cause people pain.

“I think this is where everybody is today, especially the younger generation,” he says. “I recently saw a poll that talked about the Gen Zers, and there were a couple of things they really wanted. No. 1, they want to know that they belong and that they have been accepted by the older generations. No. 2, they want to know they have influence.”

Intergenerational Acceptance

And that doesn't mean decades into the future, Sawvelle says. These young people want their voices to be heard now.

“With the Gen Zers that I have, and I see it all the time with especially my younger ones, they don't want to sit around the church and wait for 20 years until they've done enough that now we trust them to be leaders,” he says. “They want to jump right in. They can, and they're not afraid to. Especially in this digital world, they're not afraid. They are so fast on these smartphones and computers with research on so many subjects that it makes my head spin.”

Sawvelle says he's seen many instances of churches that marginalize their young people—churches that no longer exist. Many of them, he says, do not prepare their young people to assume leadership positions, and when the older pastor either retires or dies, the church isn't ready for the traumatic change.

“They don't have the plans for the transition, and those churches simply die because they haven't trained their younger people to take over,” Sawvelle says. “It's very sad. Churches must be prepared to pass the baton.”

By way of example, Sawvelle points to another passage of Scripture: “I exhort the elders who are among you, as one who is also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, take care of them, not by constraint, but willingly, not for dishonest gain, but eagerly. Do not lord over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of glory that will not fade away” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

But that Scripture gives an exhortation to younger disciples as well. The next verse reads: “Likewise, you younger ones, submit yourselves to the elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and clothe yourselves with humility because ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”

The key to that Scripture, Sawvelle says, is for “all of you to be submissive to one another” and to do it with humility.

“God certainly does give grace to the humble, so you must value one another, work as a team and walk in humility,” he says. “It’s the only way it can work for your church or your ministry.

“When it works right, when we love, honor, respect and value each other in humility, I don’t think you will lose as many of the younger people to the world as we’re seeing these days. We must understand that we are one generation, working together to further God’s kingdom.”

That is one concept Sawvelle has constantly instilled in his older leaders at Passion Church, and they have adopted it without hesitation. Many have taken to mentoring potential leaders for the future, accepting that assignment with exuberance to witness spiritual growth in their youngsters.

True Kingdom Impact

One way Sawvelle and his wife, Carolyn, have seen young people grow is through their personal mentorship of many of the Millennials and Generation Z at Passion Church. Bob says that while he and Carolyn are “not quite there” yet, they have

witnessed some significant changes in the younger groups as they have spent quality time with them through prayer time, meals and just doing life together.

To help the younger people of his church and other churches worldwide, Sawvelle teaches master level classes in evangelism, discipleship and church planting with the Global Awakening Theological Seminary and is an online course facilitator for Global Awakening's Christian Healing Certification Program and Christian Prophetic Certification Program.

Sawvelle says although the classes he offers are online, they are extensive in theological nature. He understands the challenges of church planting, having started Passion Church from his and Carolyn's home.

Next Great Awakening

Like most other Christians, Sawvelle is expecting another Great Awakening. However, he says he doesn't believe it will come until the next generation is released to fulfill its purpose.

"I'm extremely positive and expectant that we're going to see another major move of the Spirit," he says. "I really do believe one of the things we lean into is desiring more of God. But at the same time, we need to be very intentional about raising up others and then giving them an opportunity.

"We can't just make them sit through teaching for years and years before we finally start releasing them," Sawvelle says. "In developing countries, there is rapid church planting taking place. They are raising up leaders and turning them over quickly. It's only here in America that we're a lot slower in doing that. But I think that's changing.

"Our friend Joanne Moody was telling us she knows one leader out there in California who has been the catalyst for

microchurches springing up in the Orange County area, which is mostly around Los Angeles,” Sawvelle explains, “There have been house churches with 30 to 50 people that have sprung up and are going like wildfire. These are young people that are doing this. They’re having beach meetings.

“This is really interesting too because the state of California really closed the churches down during COVID, and they are just now starting to open things up again,” Sawvelle says. “So all of a sudden, there is a fresh move of house churches and, again, it’s younger people wanting to get together, wanting God and wanting to go after it.

“So it’s coming, and I think we need to realize it’s going to come in some ways that for us older ones, maybe we won’t quite see or understand,” he says. “We need to give them space and let them run with it.”

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In Gang Spiritual Warfare,

Fear is No Option

Fear is never an option when Sonny Lara braves his way in the treacherous, gang-infested areas of San Jose, California. When God instructs him when and where to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, he simply has no choice to shun the fear of man and obey God.

Considering where he came from as a drug dealer and a gang lord—the very pit of hell as he describes it—his mission as a soldier of Christ thrusts him daily onto the front lines of an intense spiritual battle against demonic forces. Through his almost inconceivable life experiences, Lara has gained the favor of God—and the upper hand on the enemy when it comes to evangelizing his own kind.

Through his ministry for the past 30 years, Firehouse Community Development Corporation, Lara has no hesitation in saying he's seen tens of thousands of gang members that might otherwise be languishing in prison or strung out on drugs in the streets of San Jose come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But before that can happen, Lara says, he must be able to hear the voice of God clearly about where he is to preach. Like Jonah, he is sometimes tempted to run the other way when God tells him to “go to Nineveh.”

But unlike Jonah, he never fails to discern God's commands, even if it means staring down the barrel of many guns or the sharp point of a switchblade. And that happens more often than he has cared to remember.

“Take a look at 2 Corinthians, chapter 3 and verses three and four. Paul says that Satan is the god of the world that blinds the minds of non-believers,” says Lara, the host of Miracle Madness on the Charisma Podcast Network. “What we do is we tear that veil off of their minds.

“God gave me a vision from Acts 18, nine through 11. It says there that Paul had a vision and that the Lord told him, ‘don’t be afraid. Speak out. Don’t be silent, for I am with you. No one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me. And it says Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God.’

“You go somewhere you know that’s dangerous because you trust God. When you go on your own accord, you might get beat up or worse. You might not make it out. I’ve known other preachers where they’ve gotten beaten up. They thought that Jesus told them He was going to let them in. It’s not what you say sometimes, it’s how you say things. When you are in their territory, you had better hear God because God will give you the strategy. They will not be able to resist or counter what you say because what you said was spoken through the Holy Spirit. God will give you words that they need to hear that will calm them down. Because of that, you go in pretty fearless.”

And that’s because the favor of man has not only been bestowed upon him, but also the incredible favor of God for the past 25 years.

Since 1986, Lara has been recognized as a gang expert by San Jose city and California state officials. Firehouse is part of the gang task force of the city of San Jose and provides gang intervention, crisis response and leadership to at-risk youth.

The organization has helped decrease crime in San Jose, including homicide and vandalism. Lara and his team have helped transition individuals and families into the mainstream of society as contributing members. Perhaps no one is a better example of this than Anthony Sanchez.

Sanchez is a protégé of Lara and a self-made millionaire. Sanchez often accompanies Lara on his trips to the at-risk areas of San Jose, where they both know their lives can be

snuffed out by a gang member at any time.

“When we go to these places, it’s all God,” says, Sanchez, 30. “We prepare the ground before we get there. We’re always praying, praying, praying because we don’t know what’s there until we get there. Sonny goes into these most dangerous of neighborhoods simply because he has the favor of God.

“When we go to these places, we know they are against us. I feel a lot more pressure on me because I’m younger and they don’t respect me as much as Pastor Sonny. I may not feel as confident or comfortable as he is, but I do feel a warmth of protection because of the anointing I know Pastor Sonny has upon him. I am alert to what is happening and what could happen. They don’t want us there, but we know that God wants us there because we are sent there to do His work and to see lives changed. That’s the comfort and protection that I feel when we go into these dangerous neighborhoods.”

Ruben Chavez, who worked with Lara on gang intervention for several years as a member of the San Jose Police Department and as the Chief of Police in Livingston, California, says it’s hard to miss God’s anointing on Lara’s life, and that’s what keeps him alive in even the most dangerous gang situations.

“Everybody knows about Sonny, and when you look at him, you think, ‘man, this guy is a great preacher,” says Chavez, who is now Chief of Police in Gustine, California. “Sonny has gained the respect of some of the most powerful and high-ranking people in city government, with police chiefs and with the police force overall. They know who he is and they trust him.

“He’s got no fear because he knows God has his back. He’s very bold, and he does things you wouldn’t think anyone would dare do. He trusts God to take care of him, and that’s exactly what he does. Pastor Sonny’s got a unique gift and a vision. When I

was chief of police in Livingston, gang violence and crime was reduced by 90 percent, and a lot of that is due to him and Firehouse. If that's not anointing, I don't know what is."

Headed for Hell, Redeemed by the Cross

Lara's work with Firehouse is long way from where Lara came from as a youth in the 1970s. Living under what he says was a "generational curse," his grandfather was a member of the Hispanic syndicate, and his father always carried a gun for various reasons.

Lara himself became a member of a gang and began to carry drugs at age 12, and he was shot for the first time carrying out gang activity at age 18. With his background, he figured, his life was predestined for nothing but trouble.

"I grew up in the streets where only the strong survive," Lara says. "I've stabbed people, I've been stabbed, I've had my head cracked open many times and I've had guns under my chin. My friends and I formed a gang to defend ourselves and what was ours, and I was the leader. I got kicked out of several schools. I went to school for all the wrong reasons.

"But eventually, God started working on me. John 10:10 says that Jesus came to give us life and life more abundantly. I eventually tried to find God, but I didn't know how to connect with Him. Eventually I got arrested and spent a great deal of time in prison."

Lara says it was after he turned 27 that he dropped to his knees and asked God, 'are you for real?' The voice of God came to him in 1979 and said to him, "serve Me or make this place (prison) your home."

"I was always wanting change, but I didn't know how to do it," Lara said. "I didn't want to go into a program that wasn't for real. I needed to hear directly from Jesus. I asked him to put a desire in me to hear His Word. At first, I didn't want to

read it. I couldn't read it. But the Holy Spirit wouldn't leave me alone."

Indeed, the Holy Spirit kept poking Lara when he was released from prison in 1984. He started his first Bible study in 1985, and Lara says God helped renew and redeem his marriage to his wife, Linda, that same year.

After working with several other agencies, including the Mexican American Community Services Agency, and making a huge impact on the culture of San Jose, the Laras started Firehouse in 1991 and has seen it grow by leaps and bounds.

Firehouse offers programs of intervention, which include mediation and crisis intervention; redirection and education of youth; rap sessions, which consist of individual or small process group discussion which helps you build trust and establish a healthy relationship with staff and peers; tattoo removal, which helps in the assistance in the removal of gang-related, hateful and incriminating tattoos (a program Lara says has saved many lives); and community service, which provides rewarding opportunities for youth to give back to the communities.

Firehouse's Outreach program assists young people in becoming self-reliant and self-sufficient in all aspects of life. Its mobile outreach unit is a team of trained individuals who are contracted with the city of San Jose to identify at-risk youth and to build relationship. Firehouse's goal is to "ignite youth for success" and give them the necessary skills to be productive members of the community.

A Prime Example

The program worked miracles for Sanchez, who met Lara in 2007 and instantly became mesmerized with the message he preached. While Sanchez didn't get saved until 2015, his respect for Lara never waned since they met, mainly because he saw much of Lara in himself.

"I knew immediately that this man had something to say," says Sanchez, who was arrested more than 14 times in his early life. "He once told us that whatever doors God opens for you, no man can close them. He never said that was a scripture in the Bible, but I wrote that down. That's something that a leader would say. Every decision I made after that I took that scripture to heart.

"He invited me to church, and gave opportunities to be responsible, and I took them. He is a very credible person in my eyes. He helped me get through his after-school program and to navigate my way out of the gang lifestyle through his mentorship. He helped me to understand who I am, and who I am in Christ."

But Sanchez knew he simply couldn't leave his gang. He had to fight his way out—literally. He had to fight three members of his gang to resign, and with God's grace, he survived and "jumped out."

That's when he began to become a successful businessman. At 23, Sanchez made his first million through an online company. He parlayed that venture into several other businesses he now owns that helps him to give back to the community with both his time and money.

"We do fundraisers, we've provided a building for an after-school program for at-risk kids, and we have an outreach team as well," Sanchez said. "I'm in a position now to give my money and to support things we really believe in, like Firehouse and Pastor Lara. We've seen a lot of changes in kids, a lot of behavior changes, and it's very rewarding to see families reunited and to see these kids get back on the right path."

Another Redeemed Life

Along with his wife, Linda, Lara has helped build a team that is making a huge impact for Christ in the impoverished areas

of San Jose. One of his team members, Outreach Supervisor Jose Marquez, is a former gang member who says he was “deeply caught up” in a life that “was headed nowhere” prior to meeting Lara in an evangelism situation in 1993.

After first rejecting Lara and his “Jesus” message, at 14 Marquez began to listen intently to Lara’s words simply because of their similar backgrounds. When Marquez began to learn more about Lara’s life filled with drugs, violence, arrests and prison, he soon came to the realization that the life he led had little meaning. The desire to escape that life began to consume him.

Connecting himself with Lara—and Jesus—he thought, was the only way out.

“My parents were good people, it’s just that they worked all of the time and they rarely were able to spend any time with me,” Marquez says. “But in my neighborhood, there were two gangs, one northern gang and one southern gang, and we were part of the southern gang. When I started getting older, the older kids in our neighborhood began feeding us lies about how different the members of the northern gang were, kids that I had spent my elementary school years with. And that’s how it all started.

“At first we didn’t want to have anything to do with Sonny. We actually thought he was from a rival gang. And then his sister-in-law brought him in, and his message was positive. We liked what we heard, and he kept coming around. I liked his story of everything that he had been through. It was real, and he began to encourage us that there was something better in life.

“Sonny was able to get me a job when I was 18, and I began to realize that Sonny really believed in me. That was a good feeling. I’ve been with Sonny since 2007, about 14 years, and it’s an honor for me to work beside him and to help him,

though Jesus, to save other people's lives."

Marquez has seen both good and bad times in his work with Firehouse. He has seen youth that he has personally worked with get killed through gang activity, and the enemy almost convinced him to give up because that experience.

Marquez says he's had more guns pointed in his direction than he cares to remember.

But thankfully, Marquez says, through his co-workers, and the Holy Spirit, he was convinced to stay with it.

"I've been doing this for a while, and I like to work with kids that are high risk and get to them before they are recruited by these gangs," Marquez says. "I have seen some of these kids really break out and make something of themselves. They are adult men now—some construction workers, some electricians and others—and they have families now. They've learned the life skills to keep them out of trouble.

"A lot of these kids we work with are stuck in the neighborhood, but we let them know that, with Jesus, there is light at the end of the tunnel. There's more out there to explore. I know that I have to keep running the race God has set before me, and that's what I tell these kids. They need to do the same thing and they will be rewarded."

No Fear

With the backing of the mayor's office and the city of San Jose, Lara and Firehouse has helped change the cultural landscape of the city of San Jose. And, he says, he will continue to infiltrate areas of the city—and other cities when needed—to spread the gospel of Christ without fear for his own life.

"I go back to the apostle Paul and the book of Acts. It says, 'don't be afraid, no one will attack and harm you, for many

people in this city belong to me.

“God is sending us to these dangerous places because we are the light to darkness. God gives me verses like Proverbs 16:7, Psalm 23:1-5, Proverbs 3:5-6, 2 Timothy 1:7 and Psalm 91:1-16 because He doesn't want me to be afraid and because He wants me to know that He is with me.”

For those who wish to escape the gang lifestyle or who need prayer, please contact Sonny Lara at linsonlara@yahoo.com.

Shawn Akers is an assistant online editor with Charisma Media.

Tasha Cobbs Leonard Is Still Breaking Chains for Jesus

Tasha Cobbs Leonard was born into a musical family, but she didn't sing in public until she was 15—and that only out of necessity. She was directing a community choir filled with other teenagers when the person scheduled to lead a key song couldn't make it to the concert in time.

“Everybody was looking at me like, ‘Tasha, you're going to have to do this song,’” Cobbs Leonard says. “I'm thinking, I don't sing in front of people. I'm here to direct the choir.” She ended up singing the solo, her eyes closed in nervousness.

“When I opened my eyes, people were in tears,” she says. “They were at the altar in worship, crying out to God with hands

lifted. ... Everybody was just lost in the presence of God.”

Cobbs Leonard is no doubt a powerhouse vocalist, but her vocal prowess alone has not caused songs such as “Break Every Chain,” “You Know My Name” and “This Is a Move” to resonate with audiences around the world and win Grammy, Dove and Stellar awards. So much more than her voice led to her being named Billboard’s Top Gospel Artist of the Decade at the end of 2020.

Cobbs Leonard’s acclaim comes instead because her songs carry an anointing and authority that has broken true chains in people’s lives and caused them to believe the words she sings. It comes because she’s a prophet and preacher as much as a singer, and regardless of the venue—Lakewood Church, Liberty University or the Essence Music Festival—she’s the same Cobbs Leonard who flows in and out of all those gifts.

“I have an assurance that when I lift my voice or my instrument, that God is going to show up, or that healing is going to show up or freedom will show up, because this is the gift God has given me,” Cobbs Leonard says. “That’s the confidence that I stand in when I’m ministering.”

Cobbs Leonard grew up in the church her parents pastored, Jesup New Life Ministries in Jesup, Georgia. Her father, the late Bishop Fritz Cobbs, cultivated the preaching and prophetic gifts he saw in her as she moved toward leading worship at the church. In 2005, while attending a ministry conference, she heard the Lord say she had four months to move to Atlanta. At the same conference, the Lord spoke to well-known gospel artist Bishop William Murphy, worship leader for the event, and told him to start a church.

Four months to the day God spoke to her, Cobbs Leonard moved to Atlanta! Upon arrival, she attended the inaugural service of the church where her cousin was leading worship. It happened to be Murphy’s brand-new Dream Center Church.

That day, in a jam-packed room, only one person joined the church, which Murphy says was “completely deflating.” But in what the two now see as a divine synchronicity, that one person was Cobbs Leonard.

Given the blessing of Cobbs Leonard’s father, Murphy became a spiritual mentor, training her in prophetic worship. She eventually became the church’s worship pastor and traveled with him in ministry.

“William Murphy gave me the grace to grow,” Cobbs Leonard says. “He would go on social media and say, ‘This is my daughter, Tasha Cobbs, and she’s a bridge to the nations.’”

But it wasn’t until she released “Break Every Chain” that she understood what those words meant. “It became real to me,” she says. “I just loved that he saw it 15 years ago, before I did.”

Murphy says he quickly realized that though Cobbs Leonard wasn’t his biological daughter, her calling connected with his. “I knew Tasha had taken on a part of the mantle that’s upon my life, and that was to be a bridge to pull different cultures and colors and denominations together,” Murphy says. “That’s always been a signature of my ministry, that my songs have always been cross-cultural, that you can go into any denomination and hear a William Murphy song. Well, that’s been magnified times ten with Tasha Cobbs.”

“For years, the church has been so fractured and so divided, and of course music is the language that creates synergy and unity,” he adds. “Just name any one of her songs; those are bridges that people of charismatic backgrounds or Pentecostal backgrounds or white or Black or Latino—they all sing them. And they’re all blessed by them, and it creates bridges, because now I can walk into a room and sing a William Murphy song or a Tasha Cobbs song, and everybody in the room—regardless of race, creed or color—is singing. That’s

what it means to be a bridge.”

Breaking Chains

Although people would weep and run to the altar when Cobbs Leonard ministered, off the platform she was going through a battle. “I was dealing with depression, suffering from rejection,” she says. “There would be seasons in my life where I would minister to people, kiss babies, hug people and watch people be delivered and set free, and I would go home for days and be in a dark room crying and under the covers, really warring with depression.”

After she and some friends ministered at another church one night, she was making the three-hour drive back to Atlanta, listening to songs on rotation on her phone as everyone else slept. That’s when “Break Every Chain” started to play. At the first three words, “There is power,” tears ran down her face.

“That song spoke to me spiritually,” Cobbs Leonard says. “At that moment, I felt those chains of depression and rejection and darkness and fear and anxiety breaking off of my life. For the entire three hours, I put that song on repeat, and I allowed the Holy Spirit to minister to my heart. For probably about two weeks, it was the only thing that you would hear in my house.”

She began to minister “Break Every Chain” at her church and saw people experience God’s power to break chains in their own lives. When it was time to record her album, *Grace*, which released in 2013, she knew she had to include it.

“I knew that song ministered to me, and I knew it would bless people,” Cobbs Leonard says. She had no idea it would minister across racial and denominational lines and resonate with people around the world.

Through the years, she has received multiple testimonies about how the song changed lives. One woman wrote about her husband,

who lay in the hospital, paralyzed and comatose, while she played "Break Every Chain" in his room 24/7. Cobbs Leonard says, "She said, 'I'm writing you to let you know that my husband is completely free, completely healed, completely whole as I write this letter to you, and I just want to say thank you for your yes to God.'"

On another occasion, she was ministering before thousands of students at Liberty University's convocation. During the service, an announcement was made: A traumatic car accident had injured three students. One of them, Ruthie Rogers, had been placed on a ventilator with bleeding on her brain, completely paralyzed on her left side. As Rogers' mother streamed the service into her hospital room, Cobbs Leonard began ministering, "Break Every Chain."

"We started to declare that the power that's in the name of Jesus is breaking those chains off ... and that she's responding to her doctors and that she will walk again," Cobbs Leonard says.

While they were still singing, campus pastor David Nasser shared with the assembled group a text message update: "The ventilator is off. Both of her legs are now moving."

"I believe it was a modern-day miracle, which most people don't get to witness," Rogers says about what happened that day. Although she still faced a long healing process, she says, "Before convocation, a full recovery wasn't on anyone's mind."

Stories like these explain why Cobbs Leonard never gets tired of singing that song. "Each time we minister 'Break Every Chain,' God's Spirit meets us in a different way," she says. "It is absolutely always refreshing. That song, it changed my life."

As for her battle with depression, Cobbs Leonard has been candid about seeking help from a counselor as well as seeking

God. "Prayer works, and we know that," she says. "But God has also given us the responsibility to do what we can do as it pertains to moving forward in our purpose. I don't think it's an either-or thing; it's both [prayer and counseling]."

Cobbs Leonard also began confessing daily, "I curse the spirit of rejection, and I receive the spirit of adoption." It's a practice she continues to this day. "Though my testimony is that I've never been back in that dark place, I've experienced it trying to come back. But I just will not allow it in my life because I know who I am."

Crossing Boundaries

As "Break Every Chain" stretched across cultures, Cobbs Leonard gained a new understanding of her purpose in ministry. "I'm always Tasha no matter where I am; you're always going to get the Pentecostal squall, the shouts," she says. "It's just who I am. ... I am always positioning myself where, no matter who you are, there's something about my ministry that you can relate to."

As a case in point, her most recent project, *Royalty Live*, was recorded at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium and has some country influences. She has recorded songs with a cross-section of artists, from gospel singer Kierra Sheard-Kelly to the country-tinged We The Kingdom. U.K. worship leader Matt Redman wrote her song, "Gracefully Broken," and Cobbs Leonard performed her chart-topping "You Know My Name" with worship leader Jimi Cravity.

But her most controversial pairing thus far was with hip-hop artist Nicki Minaj, featured on "I'm Getting Ready" from her album *Heart. Passion. Pursuit*. Many observers found it ironic that Minaj, known for her explicit lyrics, had a song at the top of the Billboard Gospel charts. But Cobbs Leonard says she doesn't regret the collaboration. She's heard from people who told her that song got their attention because of Minaj but

ultimately led them back into relationship with Christ.

“It is my assignment to bring the awareness of God’s presence no matter where I am,” Cobbs Leonard says. “And I believe that song gave me an opportunity to reach millions of people I may have never been able to reach had it not been for the door God used through Nicki Minaj.”

Cobbs Leonard acknowledges there are additional challenges that come with being a bridge connecting diverse people and cultures. “You run into racism; you run into hatred; you run into injustice,” she says. “It’s a very, very thin line that you have to walk, and it’s not always easy.”

Yet with the rise of young worship artists such as Chandler Moore, Naomi Raine and Brandon Lake, as well as Maverick City Music, which features a cross section of artists from diverse racial backgrounds and musical genres uniting in worship, she sees the walls that divide Christians breaking down even further.

“This is something we’ve been working toward now for a decade, and now to watch these doors open where there’s so much kingdom that’s embedded in what they’re doing, it makes me so proud,” she says. “I know that our world has experienced a lot of friction and a lot of pain as it pertains to injustice, but I’m always looking at where Christ is and how Christ is always in the midst of it. And to watch how ministries like Maverick City are being birthed, I know that God’s hand is still at work and He gets the glory out of every situation.”

Obeying God

On April 11, 2020, one month after the COVID-19 pandemic put most of the country in lockdown, Cobbs Leonard and her husband, music producer Kenny Leonard, whom she married in 2017, started The Purpose Place in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Church services had been virtual thus far, but Cobbs Leonard says she’s been amazed at the hunger she has seen in

the congregation, even online.

“It’s been so refreshing to be able to watch this community of people grow spiritually from their homes,” she says. “To watch them log on with their hands lifted, prepared for worship, crying in their homes, some of them with their pajamas on—it has been such a refreshing experience for me.”

Cobbs Leonard believes when churches are meeting unhindered in buildings again, the challenges the pandemic brought won’t have been in vain. “I believe it was a reboot, like a revival for us to explore personal relationships with Jesus Christ again outside of having a worship leader tell you, ‘Lift your hand,’” she says. “We do it on our own now. Instead of having an intercessor to tell you, ‘Now is our time to pray,’ we pray on our own now. We study the Word of God on our own.”

In many ways, she says, the pandemic has done the church a favor. “I believe more people have now had an opportunity to see and hear the Word of God than ever would have if we had not had to leave our churches,” she says.

While some worry that physical church attendance will never return to pre-COVID levels, Cobbs Leonard remains optimistic. “I do agree that the church will never be the same,” she says. “I don’t believe we’ll ever go back to how it was, and I don’t want to. I believe we’re going to grow from this encounter. I know churches may be thinking people aren’t coming, but I would beg to differ. I believe they’re going to crowd our churches because they’re going to be looking for a Savior to help them manage the trauma that they’ve gone through. And the church will be prepared to serve them.”

In addition to her church ministry at The Purpose Place, Cobbs Leonard oversees an imprint, TeeLee Records, through her label, Motown Gospel. She plans to release music from those who are also called to impact the nations. Her first artist, Anna Golden, sang on Radio Disney as a teenager before

becoming a worship leader at her church. Cobbs Leonard describes her as “relevant and necessary voice to this generation” whose “influence has already crossed barriers and built bridges culturally.” Golden’s single “Peace” released in April 2020, and her album *Peace Live* debuted in May 2021.

Murphy says Cobbs Leonard’s influence comes as a result of her faithfulness to obey God’s calling. “Everybody wants to be famous, and everybody wants to be great, but fame is the result of faithfulness,” he says. “She was faithful to her dad’s ministry, faithful to our ministry, and now God has given her her own ministry. People call it the secret of success, but it’s really not a secret. It’s a formula. You do what your Father’s asked you to do.”

Despite seeing God do so many incredible things through her music ministry, Cobbs Leonard says she never ceases to be amazed by God’s goodness. “All my life I’ve been prophesied to that God is going to do something great through me,” she says. “But no matter how He makes it happen, my mind is always blown by His goodness, by how amazing He is. I know that God is good. I know that He’s great, and I don’t discount that. But every single time He does something, it is amazing, and it’s always mind-blowing.” {eoa}

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Joyce Meyer: Bearing Good Fruit When Hard Times Come

The Bible talks about bearing good fruit and how that is God's purpose for our lives. In John 15:5 (NIV), Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." And Psalm 1:3 says that the person who follows God's ways is "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers."

When we understand what it means to bear good fruit, then we can fulfill our destiny as representatives of Christ in this world (2 Cor. 5:20). We do this by working with the Holy Spirit to develop the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23) and by displaying that fruit as we help others.

Many people want the "fruit" of more money, more opportunities in their career, more material possessions or to be more well known. But this kind of fruit is not what they are really hungering for because it won't fulfill them or make them permanently happy and peaceful.

We need to go deeper than that! The good fruit God wants us to have in our lives is peace, joy and mental and emotional stability when the storms of life come. And the Bible teaches that we can grow to the point where we are so deeply planted in the love of Christ that when the storms of life come, we still bear good fruit! (See Ps. 1:1-3 and Eph. 3:16-19.)

The real fruit of Christianity is seen in your life when you can bear good fruit when hard times come—and we all have difficulties in life. It may be an unexpected illness, the stress of financial debt or being betrayed by someone you thought you could trust. God wants us to be peaceful under pressure and have a good attitude in the midst of pain because when others see us behaving differently, they'll want to have what we have, too!

Colossians 3:12-15 gives us a detailed list of genuine, acceptable Christian behavior, and it should be our goal to live this way every day. Verse 12 says that “as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved,” we should “clothe [ourselves] with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

Now, I want to say here that we can't just live this way in our own strength, without God. I remember when I would decide in the morning: “I’m going to be nice to everyone today,” and I succeeded while I was home alone. But when the people came home, I had trouble with my attitude. I had to pray for God to help me put on the right attitude and mindset, so I could treat others with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, “[which has the power to endure whatever injustice or unpleasantness comes, with good temper]” (Col. 3:12, AMP). I had to put my faith in God to give me His grace—His strength to do what I could never do in my own effort—believing that He would do it because of who I am in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17, 21).

These verses in Colossians should be our No. 1 goal as believers in Christ. As new creations in Christ, saved by

faith, we have a desire to do good things. And as we grow in our relationship with Him, we learn new ways to act and respond to others.

I know this is not always easy. It won't always feel good to obey God, and you may have to sacrifice something to do it. It can seem unfair, but when we choose to trust God and do what He tells us to do no matter how we feel about it, what we think about it or what others think we should do, then we'll have the amazing life Jesus died for us to have!

We don't have to settle for anything less than God's best for us. Make a decision today to trust God to change you and help you do what's right in every situation. Remember John 15:16b (NIV), which says He has chosen you "and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" at all times of your life!

Joyce Meyer is a *New York Times* bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries Inc. She has authored 130 books, including *Battlefield of the Mind* and her newest devotional, *Quiet Times With God (FaithWords)*. She hosts the *Enjoying Everyday Life* radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit joycemeyer.org.

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How a 3,000-Year-Old Psalm Predicts What's Happening Today

These are certainly uncertain times politically, culturally and spiritually. On my *Strang Report* podcasts I invite Christian leaders to help put things into perspective. [One with Mike Bickle](#) was so good I want to devote this month's column to showing how the current crisis was actually foretold 3,000 years ago in Psalm 2.

Mike Bickle is a longtime friend and the founder and director of the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri. He believes this Scripture helps us understand why Christians are experiencing increasing levels of bias and even persecution for their beliefs. It seems this occurs not just in America but around the world, not just with governments but powerful corporations and institutions that seem to work in tandem to censor the role of Christianity in public life.

"I'm convinced it's already starting in a mild way," Bickle says in our podcast interview. "For the folks who are getting hit, it doesn't feel mild, but it's a small number right now. But I see that number increasing dramatically."

Bickle wrote about this topic several years ago in his book, [*God's Answer to the Growing Crisis*](#), which details the Psalm 2 prophecy by King David: "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us'" (Ps. 2:1-3, ESV).

"The kings of the earth" and "the rulers" who will come together, Bickle says, are "the leaders of the culture, not just smaller political leaders and the kings, but the leaders of academia, the media, marketplace, economics, military, sports—all of those rulers of the culture, they will come together, not 100% of them, but enough of them for David to say, 'They will come together.'"

What those leaders will do, he says, is work together to "plan and scheme." Their goal is laid out in verse 3, where King David "in essence says they're going to drive the influence of the Word of God out of the culture."

"Now he doesn't use the words 'the influence of the Word of God,'" he says, "they're going to break God's bonds off the people and cast away God's cords. God's bonds are God's cords. To the secular mindset, God's Word is bondage, and it stifles our human potential—old archaic laws in the Bible that are keeping us back from our full potential.

"The kings of the earth are going to plan—together with the rulers of the culture—to take the bondage of God's Word, from their point of view, and break it off of cities and nations, break it off the culture," Bickle says. "That means to get rid of, dismiss the Word of God in the public square in every way possible. And that has really accelerated in the last 12 months and then much faster in the last 12 weeks."

Bickle says this increase is due in part to the internet, which, he says, "has given language and accessibility for all

kinds of people to voice their opinions and in essence to validate and embolden the people who are like them. ... People who would have never thought of certain things are now not only thinking about them, they're enraged about them, and they see themselves as experts on them."

Bickle also says that the internet, in some ways, represents the restoration of the unified language displayed in the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11. "At the end of the age, right before the Lord returns, the human race has entered into a realm of darkness and interaction with demons beyond any time of history," he says. Of course, he explains much more in his book.

I believe that, like the sons of Issachar (1 Chron. 12:32), we must be aware of the times. And I believe this somewhat obscure psalm helps us understand what is happening in our day. Most charismatics and Pentecostals believe there will be difficult times before the last days.

If you're like me, you probably assumed these would come after our lifetimes, but with the way the world is going, they may arrive sooner than we expected. Yet God's revelation of these truths to King David 3,000 years ago reminds us once again that He has everything under control. {eoa}

Stephen Strang is founding editor of *Charisma* and host of the *Strang Report*, which just passed 10 million downloads, on the Charisma Podcast Network.

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Why You Must Help Spread Holy Spirit's Fire Globally Right Now

Even during the darkest weeks of the 2020 pandemic, a common theme circulated during Zoom calls and virtual church meetings. Pastors and prophets alike spoke of a coming spiritual awakening. At a time when churches were closed, conferences were canceled and missionary travel was restricted, God assured us that hopeful times lay ahead.

Charisma interviewed a wide cross-section of church leaders to see what God is revealing about the coming days. Even though many believers face the challenges of political divisions, economic turmoil and even persecution, the leaders we interviewed believe we stand on the cusp of a global revival of faith. These leaders, from Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America, all expect a widespread outpouring of the Holy Spirit amid this challenging season.

As we prepare to celebrate Pentecost on May 23, we pray these words from leaders around the world will ignite fresh hope.

✘ Tunde Bolanta, Restoration Bible Church & Ministries International

Kaduna, Nigeria

The global shaking of the past year and the present distress of nations are labor pangs for the revival ahead and a season of boot camp training for the church. Like the early church, this revival will come with persecution as a catalyst for growth and increase, just as the olive oil comes out of a great press and the Israelites multiplied in Egypt during their time of affliction. God showed me a healing revival where creative miracles like amputees receiving new body parts will be commonplace. In addition, a great harvest of souls such as we are witnessing in the monthly birth of new churches in northern Nigeria and other frontline mission nations will occur. There will come a new passion for authentic Christianity in the pulpit and the pew; false ministries will fall and be exposed; and a great revival and fresh fire will fall on the altars.

✘ Rev. Yang Tuck Yoong, Cornerstone Community Church

Singapore

Two identifiable signs are taking place in Singapore to reveal that we are on the cusp of a mighty move of the Holy Spirit: the proliferation of prayer groups all over our city and a greater sense of unity and love for one another. It was only when the early church behaved in a totally unselfish way and started to live for one another that great power and great grace came upon them. The prefix "great" was only added in Acts 4:32 when believers started loving one another in practical ways, and we are seeing this happen in Singapore.

I believe everything God has done in my life up until now took

place to prepare my people and me for this great end-time revival and harvest of souls. Revival is in my DNA, and 2 Chronicles 7:14 is the key. We must do all we can to be ready because God only uses the prepared.

✘ Avi and Chaya Mizrachi, Dugit Outreach Ministries

Tel Aviv, Israel

We believe a new birth took place in 2017 during the Feast of Tabernacles, when local Israeli Messianic leaders hosted the Welcoming the King of Glory gathering in Jerusalem. This event forced us to take our place in a new way, welcoming the Good News back to Israel from the ends of the earth. Then in 2019 we hosted Welcoming the King of Glory 2 gathering in Nazareth, coming together in Hebrew, Arabic and English to repent for rejecting Yeshua as Messiah. This event caused a significant shift for the body in Israel.

Since the events of 2020, our message to the people of Israel is “Repent, for the kingdom of God has come” and as believers we are to “Arise and shine, for the light has come.” The veil is being lifted from the eyes of the Jewish people. More than ever, it is time to share the Good News. The harvest is ready!

✘ Natalia Schedrivaya, Village Gospel Harvest, Calvary Fellowship of Churches

Moscow, Russia

Since 1993, God has been speaking about a great revival that will take place in Russia and all over the world, a revival of the church rising to the standards of the truth, purposes and life of the first apostolic church. God spoke to me before the pandemic, mainly for the Western church:

“The days of doing church in the usual old ways are over; the days of doing evangelism the old ways are over. I will not bless evangelism where one man is a star. Instead, I will

bless evangelism Jesus' way, the Samaritan woman's way, Zacchaeus' way—a more personal way. I want My people to learn to love the hurting world, to have compassion, just as Jesus had when He watched the weary and confused crowds following Him.”

People today are hungry for the truth as never before. I challenge the church to stop and ponder its message and even its language. When simple men listened to Jesus, they all understood, and their lives were radically changed.

✘ **Pastor Elijah M. Wafula, Life Missions Ministry**

Moisbridge, Kenya

Christianity was birthed in a society that was as anti-God as could be, and yet the church thrived, influenced cultures and stayed relevant enough to remain alive for more than 2,000 years. I believe strongly that this decade is ushering the church in unprecedented revival that will bring a young generation back to God.

The church should be a force to declare the Word and the will of God by preaching the gospel and living a legacy of excellence both as a body and as individuals. Everywhere we go as Christians—even in a worldly system—we leave a mark for God. We need believers everywhere to express the manifold wisdom of God by preaching the gospel of Jesus and the truth, which is the power of God unto salvation.

✘ **Teresa Arce de Gomez, Esmirna Iglesia**

Tarapoto, Peru

What God has shown us during the pandemic is a revolution of intercessory prayer for healing, salvation and a cry for the church and families in the nations. The pandemic has brought pressure to believers to act on the Word of God along with a yearning to see miracle manifestations in the face of a virus

that has paralyzed the entire world. In Peru, we saw the raising of altars for family worship, a flame of the Holy Spirit lit in homes in spite of so many deaths.

This prayer revival has not stopped. Without a doubt, the movement of the Holy Spirit will come, and we will see the greatest revival not only in Peru but in other nations as well. God spoke to my spirit, saying, "Whatever happens, do not be afraid of what you see, and do not lose focus on My Word and My power." He is the mighty one of Israel; we must believe in the work Christ has already completed on the cross and in the coming outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

 **Bishop Charles Agyinasare, Perez Chapel International**

Accra, Ghana

The global church must do what it was always called to do, patterned after the early church: Work together with God in the areas of prayer, obedience and the Spirit-powered preaching of the Word. This collaborative work comes first in rekindling the fire of prayer by making it an essential in churches, not an accessory, exhorting God's people to pray everywhere and always, lifting up holy hands in faith. In other words, we must get rid of sin, pursue righteousness and holiness, and pray correctly. In addition, as the Lord instructs, the church must walk in constant obedience to His word and His leadings. Finally, the global church must return to preaching the unadulterated Word of God in every place, both publicly and from house to house.

 **Simon Hemsley, His Church**

Durban, South Africa

The church needs great reform to break out of our Sunday traditions and podcast culture. We need a huge paradigm shift, repositioning our mental schematic to help us see the Holy

Spirit and the divine design for inward intimacy with Him as not only necessary, but critical.

Something is changing. The Lord is raising up a remnant from among His people who would dare hold up a new pattern for life and ministry, revealing our need for God in us. We need Him not as our quietly received theological promise but as our majestic companion who speaks and declares to us, deep calling unto deep. In this way, we will make known our need of Him and the world's need of us, everyday people awakened and empowered by a love and a Spirit-birthing power that satisfies all.

✘ **Oystein Gjerme, Norwegian Pentecostal Movement, Salt Church**

Bergen, Norway

The book of Acts lays out the pattern for how the Holy Spirit moves. When the gospel was preached widely, the number of disciples multiplied. Among those disciples, an increasing number of leaders was raised up. We see particular evidence of this through the ministry of Paul, but we must recognize it all as the Holy Spirit's work. The people caught His direction and leading as they prayed and fasted (Acts 13:2). If we long to see a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, this is what we also must do.

✘ **Abby Olufeyimi, Builder's House**

Croydon, England

I have observed an ecumenical revival as churches come together in unity to pray and to serve. We are listening to each other; listening to the community around us; responding practically; and above all, listening together for the heart of God and responding to the Spirit's call to pray. We are simply praying more, and I dare say as never before.

Against the backdrop of a global pandemic and a post-Brexit United Kingdom, the church's response is one of compassionate

care and engagement across social strata. Indeed, there has been an increase in people wanting to know more about the Christian faith. The church may have left the building; however, its presence demonstrates the relevance of Christ amongst us. As the prophet Elijah once spoke, the cloud may be the “size of a man’s fist,” but the church is preparing for a deluge of rain.

✘ Igna de Suárez, The Father’s House (church and foundation)

Bogotá, Colombia

I believe God is about to bring a great revival to the world and is preparing the church even now. There is no doubt that everything we’ve gone through in the COVID-19 pandemic has led many to seek God and has made us respond as a church to this difficult situation. So what must take place for us to see this great revival?

1) The church must turn its heart to God in brokenness, in humility and in lives of commitment and holiness.

2) The church must return to evangelism with the true message of the cross. Ministers must return to the preaching of the Word, a Christ-centered word that confronts, edifies and transforms.

3) The church must bow the knee in intercession so heaven touches earth, a united crying out to God throughout the world by pastors, leaders, men, women and children. Let’s keep crying out to God until His revival comes, and we see every knee bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Ana Paula Valadão

Brazil

One evidence that the Lord is awakening Brazil is the rise of the interest in prayer. We have witnessed big crowds coming

together to worship in the past, but now we see people signing up for prayer schedules and participating in prayer conferences, collective prayer initiatives and individual prayer commitments as never before. During the pandemic, online prayer gatherings are also happening. I've often seen prayer leaders have bigger audiences on their YouTube, Facebook and Instagram lives than Christian artists. In one of the many online prayer watch movements, groups of tens of thousands of Brazilians have been praying in the middle of the night. Prayer has been a key to every revival in history, so we remain expectant for the Holy Spirit to bring it once again in our day!

READ MORE: Experience the Holy Spirit's fire as you absorb the inspiring stories about revival at revival.charismamag.com.

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Joyce Meyer: There's Amazing Freedom in Self-Control

Most of the time when people hear the words “discipline” and “self-control,” they groan. It makes us think of depriving ourselves or being denied the things we desire and enjoy. But I've discovered that self-control is actually my friend because it's the key to having the things I truly want in life.

Self-control gives me an amazing freedom to say yes to what I truly want and no to what I really don't want.

In John 8:31-32b (NIV), Jesus says, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” It's important to understand that it's not just hearing the truth that makes us free; it's applying the truth to our lives that makes us free. And doing this requires some discipline and self-control.

Having real freedom doesn't mean we can do whatever we want, whenever we want, with no negative consequences. The truth is we will reap what we sow.

Galatians 6:7-8 says, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

When the Bible talks about the flesh, it's referring to the desires and cravings of our body and soul apart from the Holy Spirit. Many times our flesh wants something that the Holy Spirit says is not good for us; however, as we learn to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, we become truly free to do what we really want to do.

The question is what do you truly want?

I say “truly” because sometimes we want two things at the same time—the flesh wants instant gratification, and the spirit wants what is best for long-term results.

Here’s a personal example about self-control and eating. Dave and I ate at a restaurant that has really good lobster bisque. It’s so good—smooth, creamy and with just the right amount of flavor—but it’s also very fattening.

Now, I know what I can eat and still maintain the weight that is best for me; I can’t eat everything I’d like to have all the time and do that. So I ordered a salad, but I asked Dave to order the soup so I could have a taste of it.

This morning, I was thinking, “Maybe I’ll get a bowl of that soup for myself today.” My flesh wanted the soup, but my spirit was saying no. I had to stop and think about what I really wanted because what I wanted in the moment was not what I would be happy with later on.

The amazing thing about the fruit of self-control (Gal. 5:22-23) is that it gives me the freedom to do what I really want to do—not to let my flesh control me and dictate what I do. I’m free to overcome the temptation to do the things that will give me bad results and put me in a place I don’t want to be.

This is why self-control is freedom, not bondage. It’s Spirit-led management of your life!

Self-control is also about controlling myself, not others. I’m responsible for my own choices. There have been times when I’ve wanted to change my husband or my kids or anyone else around me who wasn’t doing what I thought they should do. But only God can change people, and my responsibility is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and let Him help me do what’s right.

I want to encourage you to ask God to help you do what’s

right—what’s best for you and not just what your flesh wants you to do in the moment. Stop and think: If I do this now, what will it mean for me later on?

Remember that every choice you make is a seed you sow, and every seed comes with some kind of harvest, or consequence, in our lives. I’ve seen so many people make poor choices that have led to devastating results, destroying their lives. But with the Holy Spirit living in us as born-again believers in Christ, we can have godly wisdom in every decision we make (John 15:5).

Spend time with God every day in prayer and Bible study. Follow His lead, and He’ll show you how you can have the life you really want!

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times’ bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries Inc. She has authored 130 books, including *Battlefield of the Mind* and her newest devotional, *Quiet Times With God (FaithWords)*. She hosts the *Enjoying Everyday Life* radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit joycemeyer.org.

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Pentecost Empowers Women in Ministry

As a journalist who has worked in Christian media for more than 45 years, I've interviewed many key leaders in the charismatic world. But a recent conversation I had with Dr. Beth Grant for my *Strang Report* podcast moved me deeply. Grant, the first female executive presbyter of the Assemblies of God (USA), highlights a powerful link between Pentecost and women who are empowered by the Spirit and called to ministry. Because of its importance in the month we celebrate Pentecost, I want to share it with you.

Women continue to face challenges—both inside and outside the church. Through the years, various denominations have denied them the right to seek ordination or other credentials for professional ministry.

But as you have read in this issue, the Pentecostal-charismatic movement has a powerful history of women in ministry. People still talk about female ministers such as Maria Woodworth-Etter or Aimee Semple McPherson, who founded The Foursquare Church, or even Kathryn Kuhlman, whom I interviewed shortly before she died in 1976. And of course the more contemporary charismatic female leaders such as Marilyn Hickey, Joyce Meyer and Paula White-Cain bless us today.

I've always been grateful that the Assemblies, my own denomination, has a long history of women in ministry. In fact, my grandmother Alice Kersey (later Farley) was ordained as an Assemblies minister in 1914, the very year the denomination was founded. She served as an evangelist for a number of years as a single woman and then ministered

alongside my grandfather, also ordained in the Assemblies in 1919.

“It’s great to look back at the beginning of the history of the Assemblies of God,” says Grant, the co-founder with her husband, David, of Project Rescue, a ministry devoted to restoring victims of sexual slavery. She adds that from its earliest days, the denomination “was comprised of powerful pioneer women who were called to pastor, to evangelism, to missions. Many places in the world, there were women who were the first ones to go into countries—many of them single women—who were incredibly courageous. And so we had this great legacy.”

“And so from the very beginning, the Assemblies of God has had very much as a part of who it is, the recognition that when the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—is moving, there are women and little girls, as well as men and boys, who stand up and say, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,’” Grant says. “‘He has anointed me; He’s called me to preach. He’s called me to teach.’”

Grant says Dr. George Wood, who later served as the denomination’s general superintendent, contacted her some 20 years ago because the percentage of credentialed female ministers in the Assemblies had dropped to just 15%. “And he said, ‘Considering our history and our theology, what is going on?’” she recalls.

“And so his heart was to initiate something which would encourage women ministers to step up and become credentialed, but not because that’s where ministry comes from,” Grant says. “That credential doesn’t give us a call, and it doesn’t empower us, but in a sense, it acknowledges and recognizes, ‘We see God’s hand on your life.’”

In response to Wood’s request, Grant started a task force to call out and empower women in ministry. Their approach was:

“How can we equip you? How can we encourage you? And how can we empower you to fulfill the call of God, whatever that may be?”

Grant says the task force worked with female ministers for about 10 years. Today, “We are to a point where 30% of the credentialed ministers in the Assemblies of God are female,” she says.

But God’s work through women extends far beyond the Assemblies, Grant says, adding that this Spirit-birthing call on women’s lives represents a prophetic movement in the world. “What I feel passionately, the more I look at Scripture: The call of God is not a gender issue. It’s an obedience issue.”

I agree with Grant, and I want to go on record as standing behind her statement that God’s call extends past gender, nationality or denomination. Scripture makes it clear that God uses women. We must not attempt to construct man-made boundaries around the power of Pentecost.

Stephen Strang is founding editor of Charisma. Learn about the books he’s written at stevestrangbooks.com.

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