

How the Church Must Respond to the New Witchcraft

Ally Tower sat still in the church pew, unsure why she was weeping. She was happy with her life in Wicca. She loved the witches in her coven like family. And with her past full of pain and rejection, she felt more empowered than ever. So why was she weeping?

“I cried through the whole first part of the service—all through worship,” Tower says. “When worship was over, this woman came up and told me that Jesus loves me.”

That night, Tower surrendered her life to Jesus Christ and left Wicca behind. She traded her feminine deities for a heavenly Father and her spells for Bible-centered prayer.

That was 19 years ago. Since then, Tower has watched witchcraft’s hold on American culture strengthen in unprecedented ways. Instead of being a secret to hide, witchcraft is now a trend to try.

If social media is any indicator, Tower is right. Pagan symbols are often used as a fashion statement or joke, such as when summoning circles (candles surrounding a desired object) trended on Twitter earlier this year. Even big companies like Universal normalized the occult meme with lighthearted captions about wishing for more vacation days.

Perhaps as a result of witchcraft’s newfound popularity, Tower sees more people pursuing Wicca and paganism than before.

“Back when I was practicing [Wicca], there was a lot of hard work that went into it—nothing came easy,” she says. “It was certainly not an easy practice. It was something you had to study and you had to work at. In order to obtain knowledge, there were things you had to do. Nowadays, you type it into

the internet, and you pull it up. It's right at your fingertips."

Research seems to support Tower's observations. Trinity College ran studies from 1990 to 2008 that indicated the number of Wiccans in the U.S. grew from 8,000 to 340,000. In 2014, Pew Research found that 0.4% of the American population—roughly 1.5 million people—identified as Wiccan or pagan.

But these numbers only indicate those who identify as witches. Research can't quantify the number of people in the U.S. who secretly practice witchcraft or who dabble in occult practices.

So how should the church respond to this dark trend? To answer that question, *Charisma* interviewed several ex-witches and deliverance experts. Each offered compelling insights and eye-opening stories to help the church not only root out subtle forms of witchcraft among their own, but also reach witches with the gospel.

Witchcraft's Subtle Seduction

Before believers can address witchcraft in the world, though, they must address it in the church. After all, many people engage in witchcraft practices without even realizing it, says former witch Heath Adamson.

Adamson—Christian author, chief of staff of Convoy of Hope and leader of feedONE—says he got involved with witchcraft as a young boy because he didn't realize the sinister nature of certain activities.

"I began to experiment [with the spiritual world], and what started out as fun and entertainment quickly became a stronghold and a bondage," he says. "I became steeped in the occult and even Satanism and witchcraft and some other things at a very young age. Unfortunately, it held me bound for about

17 years.”

But God spoke to one of Adamson’s middle-school friends and told her to pray. Eventually, through this young girl’s prayers, Adamson got saved and delivered, and the two are now happily married.

But Adamson says he’s not the only one to play with dangerous spirituality.

“It starts out with what seems to be the folklore of childhood,” he says. “I meet a lot of people who dabble in reading some books like the *Book of the Dead*, *The Necronomicon*, things like that. People mess around with the board games like the Ouija board, Tarot cards, but the reality is, although some of those things seem innocent, and some of those things seem like just the things kids do, the reality is Scripture does tell us to have nothing to do with things like astrology and mediums and spirit guides. Why is that? Because behind some of these things that appear to be innocent or childish or entertaining are often spiritual realities.”

Former New Age guru Steven Bancarz is another example of unintentionally falling into the dark arts. Bancarz grew up in a Pentecostal Christian home where church was a high priority. His parents home-schooled him with Christian curriculum and raised him to know the gospel. But that didn’t make him immune to the enemy’s wiles. Interestingly, it wasn’t spells or Ouija boards that seduced Bancarz. It was the idea of aliens.

“If there are theoretically millions of planets that are populated with intelligent life just like ours, I couldn’t reconcile these questions with the Christian worldview,” he says. “That really led me down a rabbit trail into the occult where a lot of people who are teaching this idea about aliens are New Age teachers. It’s kind of a package deal.”

Bancarz pursued ufology (the study of aliens and UFOs) to the point of becoming an expert. He began teaching online

followers how to “wake up to a higher state of consciousness” and launched a website that got hundreds of thousands of clicks every day. That translated into tens of thousands of dollars in ad revenue each month.

Bancarz thought he had all he wanted, but his dream life soon turned into a nightmare. During times of lucid dreaming and astral projection, demons would sometimes attack him.

“I thought I was on good terms with the Lord,” he says. “Meanwhile, I was completely fighting for the wrong side of the kingdom. ... My sin started catching up with me and started finding me out. I was totally depraved.”

But one day in his luxurious home, Bancarz encountered Jesus. He was overwhelmed by the truth that Jesus is Lord of all, and he gave his life to Christ.

“My heart’s cry for the church and for the body of Christ is for us to take our relationship with God more seriously than any other relationship in our lives,” he says. “That should be the most important thing to us. From the moment we wake up to the moment we go to sleep, and that really is our only chance to be protected against deception, especially in these end days when it’s only getting more intense.”

Witchcraft in the Church

But witchcraft doesn’t just seduce unwitting believers. Author, speaker and former pastor Andy Sanders says the enemy often sends witches to attack local bodies of believers. In his 26 years of preaching and teaching, he has encountered many witches attempting to infiltrate his congregations.

One was a man posing as a minister who entered Sanders’ church with an air of importance.

“He demanded specifically that he would preach that Sunday night because God told him he was supposed to preach to my

church," he says. "Here's the thing: I was scheduled to preach that day, and I was the senior pastor. That's a key sign right there, when someone comes walking through the door with an entourage demanding that they're going to preach in your church. That's already witchcraft."

After all, witchcraft is as the sin of rebellion, according to 1 Samuel 15:23. In order to deal with that rebellion, Sanders had to be strong in his response to the impromptu visitor.

"I said, 'Absolutely not; you're not going to speak,'" he says. "He not only disrupted my service, but he also went around behind my back to as many parishioners as possible ... and said all of these things about me that were never true. Later, I found out he wasn't even a minister at all. He was actually involved in witchcraft."

Sanders recalls a second instance, this time involving a staff member who had been in the church even longer than Sanders had. Certain people in the church put this person on staff against the previous pastor's will.

"This specific individual had the reign to do whatever they wanted, how they wanted and why they wanted," Sanders says. "And over the years, they continued to grow more and more rebellious."

The problems continued to grow worse, but Sanders couldn't do anything about it—until the staff member started manifesting a demon in the middle of a one-on-one meeting.

"This person manifested a demon right in my office," he says. "I went to put my hands on this person and cast the demon out, but the Holy Spirit said, 'Do not touch this person because they're trying to trap you right now. They're going to say you physically abused them.'"

Sanders says it took a lot of prayer and fasting, but eventually the person went through deliverance and moved on

from that church.

Through his experiences, Sanders learned that witches can infiltrate churches quickly from the outside or gradually from the inside. But both methods involve two telltale signs: an aggressive rise in the ranks of church leadership and a propensity for breeding disruption.

“You’ll always discover that when a witch comes in, he or she is automatically going to disrupt,” Sanders says. “Recently, there was a pastor who, every time they got behind a podium for several weeks, they were tongue-tied and actually couldn’t preach. So they went and began seeking it out. The Lord revealed to them that there was a witch who had come into the church.”

The disruption doesn’t have to be boisterous. Sanders says subtle disruptions like gossip, continually contradicting leaders or a simple disturbance in the spiritual environment can still do damage.

But he makes it clear that the battle is not against the witch as a person. Instead, as Ephesians 6:12b makes clear, our struggle is against “principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Because of this, Christians must also be careful not to prematurely assume people are witches simply because they struggle with rebellion or anger. If a believer suspects someone in the church may be a witch, they should pray before even bringing their thoughts to leadership.

“You don’t want to report on somebody who is innocent,” he says. “Sometimes it is ... the emotion of that person, or maybe that person rubs us the wrong way. If they really know something is going on, especially if they’re involved with children and youth, then pray first. Then secondly, they need to make a personal appointment with the pastor or leadership

team, because the last thing they should do is go behind that individual's back and trash talk them. Satan loves to get gossip going in the church."

John Burton, a revivalist and preacher, has had quite a few run-ins with witchcraft as well. When God led him to plant a church in a city he didn't realize was well-known for its history of witchcraft, Burton had to learn spiritual warfare in a whole new way.

Victory over spirits of witchcraft, he says, starts with understanding how powerful the enemy is—and how much more powerful God is.

"A lot of Christians go about it the wrong way," he says. "The reality is the Bible never says [Satan] is a toothless lion. It says he has teeth. He's seeking to devour. I've never seen a lion devour its prey by gumming it to death. They have teeth. ... We must understand that [Satan] is a vile, murderous enemy, seeking whom he may devour. ... When we have that established, then we have a better understanding of just how much more powerful God is. God is so much more majestic."

Christians also must understand their authority—and Burton says it's not the same for every believer.

"We don't all have the same authority in every realm or every sphere or every place," he says. "I can't just go into another pastor's church and presume that I have authority there too."

He gives the example of having authority in Manitou Springs, Colorado, because God led him to plant a church there. But if he drove to a city just a few hours away, he says he wouldn't have authority over the principality there.

"[In that situation], God hasn't revealed anything to me, and He hasn't given me that assignment," he says. "If I discern someone is demonized, I can't just go up to that person and set them free ... because that pastor has authority, and I need

to be respectful of it. That's why when I travel and speak and minister, it's really important that I understand what authority has been delegated to me by the leadership in the church."

Burton also says timing is an issue. Sometimes Christians move too fast to deal with demonic forces. As a result, the enemy blindsides them with an attack that could have been avoided with more research.

"With some people, this frustrates them because in their minds, it overcomplicates things," he says. "But trust me, you do not want to get blindsided by the enemy because you presumptuously moved when you should have waited."

Reaching Out in Love

Although the aforementioned tactics can help Christians protect themselves and their churches, trying to win witches to Christ takes the battle to an even higher level.

Burton recalls one witch who came to him asking for help. He and his wife, Amy, went to the witch's home to pray with her and walk her through deliverance. But for some reason, Burton couldn't pray. His mind and spirit were restless.

He walked through the witch's house to pray. As soon as he set foot in her bedroom, he couldn't breathe.

"The only way I can describe it is like I stepped into a swimming pool sideways," he says. "I walked into this wall of water, and I just really couldn't breathe."

Burton asked the woman what witchcraft-related items she was keeping in that room. They threw away occult T-shirts, a poster, books and a small altar on the nightstand.

"Then the Lord spoke to me," Burton says. "Now everything's opened up, and I can pray. He says, 'John, there's something going on, and the enemy is forcing her to record what happens

in this room by journaling.'”

Burton asked the witch if this was true, and she began to cry. She told John and Amy that this was the real reason she asked them to come. Demons terrorized her every night and forced her to record her living nightmares in dozens of journals.

The Burtons threw away the journals and prayed over the woman, but sadly, her newfound deliverance did not last.

“She did OK for just a little while, but then she ended up disappearing,” Burton says. “And we couldn’t find her. ... She actually had all sorts of medical issues and lost her child and completely turned back. She blamed Amy and me for taking away her power.”

Burton uses this experience as a cautionary tale for pastors—not all witches want to be free. Because of that, pastors must exercise discernment when trying to reach people caught up in witchcraft. It’s not an evangelistic game; it’s a battle for people’s souls.

When witches come to Christ, Burton says, it’s important for them to get plugged into a healthy church community and learn to have deep fellowship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

This can be hard, though, Tower points out, because many witches feel burned by the church.

“Part of the problem is a lot of people, especially witches or Wiccans, have had bad church experiences or situations where Christians have not shown the greatest example of who Jesus is,” she says. “As a church, we’re supposed to be the arms and the feet of Christ. But many times in our own flesh, we fail horribly at that. So we’re not portraying who He really is. A lot of witches have this view of God as judgmental, harsh and careless, as though He doesn’t think very highly of mankind, when all of that is so false. So I would want them to see the truth and to see Jesus for who He really is.

“The best thing to do is to really love them as Christ loves us. And again, that’s a very hard thing to do, especially when someone is so against everything that you’re for. It’s certainly a test of our faith. But the best thing to do is to just be a friend and to pray and allow God’s Spirit to speak to you. Don’t turn them down, but be open and kind to them. Use the fruits of the Spirit to be loving and compassionate and kind.”

She cautions against being overeager or hypercritical when evangelizing to witches. Instead, as Christians speak the truth in love, Tower says, their words will pierce like a “sharp-edged sword.”

After all, Tower knows it was the love of Christ, not harsh words, that pulled her away from her seemingly happy life in Wicca.

“I’ve never experienced a love to that magnitude,” she says. “I’ve experienced love between coven members, but not with any deity and not to that magnitude. It was completely overwhelming.”

Testimonies like Tower’s prove that Christ’s love is, indeed, “as strong as death, passion fierce as the grave” (Song 8:6b). And not even witchcraft is powerful enough to quench it.

For more on spiritual warfare, check out this special \$.99 offer on Charisma’s new e-book, *The Spiritual Warfare Strategy Guide*.

READ MORE: To read more about how Christians can respond to witchcraft, visit .

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the Holy Spirit is doing in the lives of believers around the world. If you are thirsty for more of God's presence and His Holy Spirit, subscribe to CHARISMA and join a family of believers who choose to live life in the Spirit.

5 Stages of Spiritual Growth Every Believer Must Go Through

As I reflect on my own journey, I have come to the conclusion there are at least five major stages of spiritual development. I base this on almost four decades of church and marketplace ministry, which includes serving as a lead pastor since 1984. I have also observed the lives of many other believers.

These five stages are important for us to understand so that we do not become confused when we transition from one stage to the next. However, there are some who stunt their own development through disobedience to their calling. This results in not experiencing anything past the second stage.

Additionally, there is no set time for each stage, and since I am using a broad stroke, each stage may overlap other stages at times. That being said, there is truth in these general observations.

My objective is to encourage believers to press through to all five stages, no matter how difficult.

Stage One: The Honeymoon Stage

This is the stage when we are excited about our newfound salvation. After all, Jesus told us to rejoice because our names are written in the Book of Life (Luke 10:17–20).

In this stage, we are not thinking about our calling; we are just excited about finding this new life in Christ. Nothing else matters except Jesus! It's like when you first fall in love with that special someone: The goosebumps and romantic feelings are so amazing you cannot picture them ever leaving you.

However, as good as this stage is, God prods us to enter the next one.

Stage Two: The Experiential Stage

This is the stage when we begin to learn how to walk with God and process our faith during the challenges and minutiae of everyday life. During the experiential stage, we learn how to apply our faith to our personal life, family, spheres of influence and responsibilities. We learn how to respond and repent in the midst of our own shortcomings and sins.

In this stage, we also begin to learn how to “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12b). Generally, this is the stage that uses tests and trials to reveal our heart, motives and level of commitment to Christ. In the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, Jesus illustrates how people in this stage can sadly fall away from Him because they lack strong roots due to persecution and a lack of understanding (Mark 4).

Stage Three: The Discovery Stage

During the third stage, we first become aware that we have a purpose and calling in Christ. It is an exciting stage as we realize that we were not just saved to go to heaven but to

walk in a divine purpose. This is when we first realize God has called us to have a major impact in our spheres of influence, whether with a few or with many.

Here in the discovery stage, the Spirit of God will challenge us to be responsible as His stewards to manifest His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven (Luke 11:2-4).

Stage Four: The Purpose and Identity Stage

After we discover the fact that we have a purpose, we almost become obsessed with identifying that purpose through analyzing our natural gifts, abilities and personality. This is the stage in which we learn to walk a purpose-driven life and begin investing our time in learning and growing in our capacity as a Christ follower. This is also the stage in which we begin to sift our time commitments and relationships so we can streamline our focus and hit the mark of our divine calling.

Although this is an exciting stage, it is not the most important one. Until recently, I thought this stage was the most rewarding and highest of all stages. However, the next stage is by far the most important one.

Stage Five: The Unison Stage

This fifth stage is when we experience such oneness with Christ that we no longer obsess over our purpose or identity because we have lost our functional life in Him (Gal. 2:19-21). Jesus' prayer to the Father was that His followers would be "one" with the Father and with Him (John 17:20-24).

Although there is a positional and legal element to oneness that has nothing to do with us, my experience has shown me that there is also an existential and experiential oneness. Some may even label this stage mystical. I have referred to this stage as "unison" because it describes the reality of losing one's self in Him to the point in which our desires,

plans and passions emanate out of His heart and will.

In this stage, you are walking in freedom and an almost unbroken fellowship with Him while becoming ever more acutely aware of your own shortcomings and unholy motivations and desires. In this stage, you not only treasure your times worshipping and adoring God, but learn to delight in doing His will, no matter how painful and joyless it may seem at time (Heb. 12:1-2).

During the unison stage, we learn that the highest expression of loving God is not just to enjoy the person and presence of God but to put our flesh on the cross and obey Him without complaining and remorse (Luke 22:42, Rom. 6:6-9). We live to express Christ alone, and anything else—including our individual purpose—becomes boring and unappealing compared to His splendor and majesty.

I discovered the unison stage initially out of concern that I had become bored with thinking about my purpose and identity. It wasn't that I was disinterested in my calling anymore; on the contrary, I am even more passionate now than ever about serving Christ! It was that I found myself so consumed, enamored and identified with Jesus that I intuitively knew my calling would unfold organically as I continued to walk in His steps. I have discovered that Christ is all (Col. 1:16-19).

In reflection, I also discovered that when we are obsessed or passionate about our divine purpose, it can still be about us and not Him. Moreover, being passionate about our purpose is still showing more spiritual development than the first three stages, but it is not the highest level of faith and practice.

The apostle Paul said the high calling of God is to know Christ Jesus above all else: "Yes, certainly, I count everything as loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have forfeited the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ,

and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God on the basis of faith, to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if somehow I might make it to the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:8-11).

The temptation here, of course, is to think you are already in the fifth stage because your spirit leaps when you read about it, and your rational mind agrees with the concept. However, it takes years of brokenness, poring over Scripture, and emotional and spiritual growth before you begin to grasp this degree of unison. Truly, one of the most important attributes needed to unleash potential is simply patience. As we go through God's building process, we must be patient with ourselves and those we are called to mentor or lead.

We read in Numbers 14:20-38 that a whole generation of the children of Israel failed to reach their potential and enter the promised land because they were filled with unbelief and gave in to grumbling and complaining against the Lord. They became impatient with God's process and lost their inheritance. Instead of destroying the whole nation for their sin and unbelief, God patiently waited until the next generation was ready to take the promised land. This teaches us that God will not promote us unless we pass the tests of faith and patience while in our wilderness experiences. It also reminds us that God's purposes cannot be thwarted even by our impatience. If we are unworthy or unwilling to do what it takes to accomplish God's plans, they will be fulfilled through the lives of the next generation.

In conclusion, my prayer is that the truths regarding the process of maturity in Christ will encourage all of us to continue to press on to know the Lord (Hos. 6:3) and "that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through

faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:16-20, NIV).

Joseph Mattera has served for almost 40 years of ministry in which he has personally nurtured many high-impact leaders. He has become one of the primary spiritual leaders in his community.

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What These 2 Church Camps Get Wrong About God

Why be a Christian? This question is of utmost importance. Do you have an answer?

Some would say, “You should be a Christian because you will be a happier person.” Really? The first person I baptized in London was a Los Angeles Jewish businessman who was converted one Sunday evening at Westminster Chapel. We later became friends, even spent parts of holidays together. He was wonderfully converted, but he said to me one day, “Before I became a Christian, I was a happy man.” He wasn’t complaining;

he was admitting that being a Christian was costly—and sometimes painful. None of his family or his friends became Christians.

Some might answer this question, “You should become a Christian because it could help your marriage.” Really? Divorce rates might prove otherwise. I have found that marriages are helped when couples put Jesus Christ first in their lives; they are not only faithful to each other but stop pointing the finger and mutually forgive each other for the other’s faults.

The reason a person should be a Christian, says Paul, is because of the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18, 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10). Most Christians can quote John 3:16 (NIV): “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish [meaning that they will not go to hell] but have eternal life.” Once a person is a Christian, he or she becomes a part of the body of Christ—the church. God wants the church to be the salt of the earth. We become salt and light when we uphold the Scriptures and manifest the power of God with equal force. The last thing we want is for these two to be separated, and yet they have been.

Sadly, there has been a divorce between the Word and the Spirit. I believe God hates this type of divorce as much as He hates the divorce of a husband and wife—even more so, if that is possible. It was a silent divorce. It is impossible to know precisely when it took place. It may have happened many times in the course of church history. Sometime before A.D. 65, Paul wrote of a future “rebellion” (2 Thess. 2:3). The King James Version calls it “a falling away.” Between A.D. 90 and 100, Jesus—speaking from the right hand of God in heaven—said the church of Ephesus had “abandoned the love you had at first” (Rev. 2:4b). What was their first love? The gospel. Read the book of Ephesians alongside Acts 19 and 20. The gospel was paramount at Ephesus. So too was the evidence of power.

What is more, when you read the earliest writings of the apostolic fathers (people such as Ignatius and Polycarp from the second and third centuries), the gospel appears to have been replaced by moralism and emphasis on good works. The gospel is the “power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16). But Paul said that in the last days there would be people “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5a, ESV). That is the Word without the Spirit.

It is a gospel sometimes upheld by cerebral teaching that intentionally rejects the gifts of the Spirit. Often it is good, sound doctrine, but it lacks power. Paul calls this quenching the Spirit or putting out the Spirit’s fire (1 Thess. 5:19). An example of this is cessationist teaching. Such teaching—which has utterly no foundation in Scripture—quenches the Spirit before the Spirit is allowed to manifest His power.

When there is a divorce, sometimes the children stay with the mother; sometimes with the father. In the divorce between the Word and the Spirit, you have those on the Word side and those on the Spirit side.

Take for example those on the Word side. Their message is that we must get back to the Bible, earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), get back to Reformation doctrine (justification by faith as taught by Martin Luther), rediscover assurance of salvation as taught by John Calvin and return to the teaching of the sovereignty of God as preached by Jonathan Edwards.

What is wrong with this emphasis? Nothing, in my opinion. It is exactly right.

Take those on the Spirit side. Their message is that we must get back to the book of Acts where there were signs, wonders and miracles—gifts of the Spirit in operation. When they had a prayer meeting, the place was “shaken” (Acts 4:31). Get into

Peter's "shadow" and you were healed (Acts 5:15). Lie to the Holy Spirit and you were struck dead on the spot (Acts 5:1-10).

What is wrong with this emphasis? Nothing, in my opinion. It is exactly right.

The problem is that neither will learn from the other; they talk past each other and don't take the other point of view seriously.

In my experience Word people resent it if someone says they are ignorant of the Holy Spirit. They are indignant. "Whatever do you mean? We believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!" I don't mean to be unfair, but I have sometimes wondered if their true conviction is "God the Father, God the Son and God the holy Bible," as Jack Taylor often puts it.

Likewise, Spirit people feel insulted if someone says they are ignorant of the Word—or at least good theology. "We believe in the Bible! That is all we preach!" they will say with fervor. To suggest they don't have much interest in sound theology puts their backs up. They don't get it.

This is why we have the two camps today. Like a divorced couple, neither really listens to each other since each group is totally convinced they don't have a problem. Hence the problem continues. The church is asleep. The world is going to hell, and we don't seem to care all that much. We all want to stay in our comfort zones.

Problems on Both Sides

I must now discuss sad developments in both the Word and Spirit camps from the last couple decades, although both maladies have been in existence for longer than that.

On the charismatic side, I must address the rise of prosperity teaching and faith healers. The common denominator that held

most charismatics and Pentecostals together in early years was an emphasis on signs, wonders, miracles and the gifts of the Spirit—mostly healing. However, that is not true in some charismatic or Pentecostal ministries today, where the emphasis has shifted to prosperity teaching.

Here is partly how it happened. There was an undoubted anointing of healing and miracles in the 1950s. People were truly healed—of cancer, polio (before the Salk vaccine became widely used) and immobility. People in large numbers got out of wheelchairs and either carried their wheelchairs home or threw them away. In the meantime, some of the high-profile people who emphasized healing—and who saw people healed—began television broadcasts. The money flowed. But for some reason, healings started to wane. With fewer genuine miracles, one needed another reason to keep people watching and keep the money flowing.

Around this time, the emphasis switched from healing miracles to financial miracles. Nowadays a TV personality seldom finishes a show without mentioning finances and giving the implication that God does not want you to be poor. I am not saying there is no biblical basis for some of this teaching. I have written a book called *Tithing*, and in it I stress that “you cannot outgive the Lord.” However, I fear some have gone too far in their emphasis.

My friend Rev. Kenny Borthwick, a Church of Scotland minister and unashamed charismatic, told me he often watches religious television through the eyes of unsaved people. After watching for hours, he turned to his wife and said, “If I did not know otherwise, I would say that Christianity is all about money.”

What is more, I fear that many prosperity teachers have, sadly, given sincere and sound charismatics a bad name. I know many charismatics, and I do not wish to paint with too broad a brush and say that all charismatics are focused on prosperity. Still, there is no denying that we only find this unhealthy

emphasis among charismatic ministries.

Sadly, some who prayed for the sick became known for three other problematic things. First, they kept people in wheelchairs away from the front of the auditorium, where they would have more hope of receiving prayer. One famous faith healer refused to pray for people in wheelchairs.

Second, they began blaming people who needed healing for their lack of faith if they were not healed, giving people with sickness or disability a guilt trip. This sort of thing did not characterize the era of healing anointing that was around decades ago.

Third, a spirit of arrogance seems to have emerged in some when it comes to one's own faith. For example, one famous preacher said, "If the apostle Paul had my faith, he would not have had his thorn in the flesh." This kind of teaching is wrong, and many sincere people who don't know solid theology are carried along by it.

On the evangelical side, however, I must also address the Word camp's avoidance of both the Spirit and serious issues. I will not enter much further into the cessationist issue, as I have dealt with that elsewhere. But it is my observation that evangelical ministers generally who are not cessationists might as well be. They keep a safe distance away from anyone who might cause a stir. They fear losing members or getting involved with anything that might hurt their finances. They remain in their comfort zones. They often seem terrified at any current activity of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, I will repeat what I have said many times—that if it were not for the gift of speaking in tongues, there would probably be no objection to the gifts of the Spirit. True revival never comes in a neat and tidy package.

I also must mention the lack of preaching on eternal punishment in most pulpits today. I'm afraid this would

include a growing number of charismatic churches too. Those who have chosen to believe in annihilationism—the view that people come to nothing as being the meaning of eternal punishment—have increased dramatically. Also, many of those who reject annihilationism seldom emphasize that the lost will go into conscious eternal punishment after they die.

Furthermore, most people today have never heard of the word “propitiation”—the heart of the gospel. It means that Jesus’ shed blood turned God’s wrath away. The justice of God was satisfied by the death of His Son. For people to be saved, they need only to transfer their trust from good works to Christ’s shed blood.

To summarize: As the church in Ephesus had left their first love, the gospel, so too do many who believe the gospel in their heads but do not preach it with passion. Soul winning is never popular.

The Coming Awakening

In John 14:26 Jesus said the Holy Spirit would bring to our remembrance what we had been taught. When you read that verse, don’t forget that Jesus’ disciples had been trained. They were taught by Jesus Himself; they’d heard a lot and learned a lot. Would they forget what they had learned? “Don’t worry about that,” Jesus said. “The Holy Spirit will bring to your minds what you learned.”

I hear people talk about the desire to be Spirit-filled, and I applaud that desire. However, I have to tell you that if you are empty-headed before you are Spirit-filled, you will be empty-headed after you are Spirit-filled. The Spirit cannot remind you of something you never knew in the first place.

I believe that revival is coming—an unprecedented outpouring unlike anything our generation has seen. The question is, are we ready for it? Have we been trained? Have we been taught? The people God will use most are those who have sought His

face (getting to know Him and desiring more of Him) rather than His hand (what they can get from Him). He is looking for a people who have searched His Word and stood in awe of it.

Job could say, "I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread" (Job 23:12b, NIV). The psalmist could say, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11). How many of us memorize Scripture—an art that has virtually perished from the earth? You ask, "What's the use? Why read the Bible? Why memorize Scripture? Why endure teaching? It is so boring; it is so uninspiring."

I answer, "One day it will pay off; the Spirit will bring to your mind what you've learned."

Make no mistake: the gospel of Jesus Christ is complete without signs and wonders. However, the Bible is not complete without signs and wonders.

If we want power, it's going to have to come from the Spirit. If we are going to get on good terms with the Spirit, then we have to get on good terms with His book—His greatest product. We honor Him when we show that we love His Word—so much so that we want to know the Bible backward and forward.

Do you say that you love the Holy Spirit? He's asking you today, "Do you really?" A release of the Spirit will result in a personal renewal of power that will restore the honor of God's name.

Forgive me if I'm wrong, but I suspect that when it comes to the theme Word and Spirit, evangelicals seem to be more interested in the Word than they are the Holy Spirit. Charismatics seem to be more interested in the Holy Spirit than they are the Word. It is my view that we must love both equally, pursue both equally, and emphasize both equally.

I fear that some have so little confidence in the authority of

the Word that it has hardly crossed their minds how the Word of God can astonish. Jesus could astonish people with the Word as easily as He could with signs and wonders. You might say, "Well, if only I could have Jesus teaching me personally all the time, I too would be astonished."

I answer: You have the greatest expositor with you. He is in you: the Holy Spirit. We will release the Spirit to the degree that we stand in awe of His Word, stop quenching the Spirit by unbelief and stop grieving the Spirit by bitterness and unforgiveness.

The scope for power, therefore, will be found to the degree that we value His own Word. Signs following will be His seal on us. Power that flows from His name will be in proportion to our love for His Word. When we express that love, don't be surprised to see healings, miracles, signs and wonders take place even during the preaching of the gospel. There may be no need for people to get into prayer lines. It can happen right where the people are.

My father named me after his favorite preacher, Dr. R. T. Williams (1883–1946), who used to say to young preachers: "Honor the blood and honor the Holy Ghost." By that he meant that the gospel should emphasize Jesus' blood and that the Holy Spirit should be in control of the services we lead. We must never upstage the gospel, but we must be open to the Spirit.

I, therefore, fear that a silent divorce has taken place between the Word and the Spirit, between the Word and the name, between the Scriptures and the power of God.

In our day there are those whose sole emphasis is the Word. Others say, "I want to see power." There are those who come to our services expecting to hear the Word. At Westminster Chapel, I used to hear, "Thank you for your word." That is what they came for; that was what they got. Others want to see

a demonstration of power. They want to see things happen.

When these two—the Word and the power of the Spirit—are brought back together, a remarriage will occur. The simultaneous combination will create a spontaneous combustion. The day will come when those who come to see will hear, and those who come to hear will see.

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Spiritual Warfare, Contemporary Culture and Politics

When Paula White Cain walked to the podium in Amway Arena in Orlando on June 18, 2019, the crowd was teeming with excitement, anticipating President Trump's announcement he was running for re-election.

Wearing a bright red dress, "Pastor Paula" positioned the mic and began to pray as if she were at a service at New Destiny Christian Center, the large charismatic church she pastors in nearby Apopka, Florida, rather than a political rally.

After invoking the name of Jesus and thanking God for the "great United States," she prayed: "Father, You have raised President Trump up for such a time as this," and invoked biblical blessings. Then Paula began to come against "principalities and powers"—terminology rarely heard or understood outside charismatic churches.

"Let every evil veil of deception of the enemy be removed from people's eyes in the name which is above every name, the name of Jesus Christ," a YouTube video shows her saying. "You said in Your Word ... in Ephesians 6:12, that, 'We are not wrestling against flesh and blood but against principalities, powers, against rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.'

"So right now, let every demonic network that has aligned itself against the purpose, against the calling of President Trump, let it be broken. Let it be torn down in the name of Jesus. Let the counsel of the wicked be spoiled right now, according to Job 12:17.

"Now I declare that You will surround him and protect him from all destruction. That the angel of the Lord encamp around about him. Around his family, according to Psalm 34:7. Establish him in righteousness, and let oppression be far from him, according to Isaiah 54:14. I deploy the hand of God to work for him in the name of Jesus. I secure his calling. I secure his purpose. I secure his family. And we secure victory in the name which is above every name, the name that has never failed for this nation and for my life, the name of Jesus Christ. And everybody said, Amen."

The respected charismatic teacher Dutch Sheets was watching

the livestream of the Orlando rally in Dallas. "I have never seen anything like that on TV," Dutch said. "I literally sat there with my mouth hanging open. I couldn't believe she had the boldness to do that or was allowed to do it. It was as if she drew a line in the sand spiritually."

While the Christians who agreed with Paula were rejoicing, the secular press took her apart for her prayer, mostly because she used the phrase "demonic network," which they misunderstood as demonic news networks even though Paula was using scriptural terminology.

Paula is no stranger to criticism, but she told me that "absolutely nothing" compared to the 12 days of controversy her Orlando rally prayer brought.

Light versus darkness. Good versus evil. God's plans and purposes versus the enemy's deceitful agenda. That is the binary way Bible-believing Christians see the world. So the struggle politically isn't just between differing political philosophies, but between good and evil.

My readers who are Pentecostal or charismatic are probably familiar with the phrase "spiritual warfare." At times when we are under spiritual attack, we can feel an increased intensity or struggle to accomplish what we feel God has called us to do.

I like the way Daniel Kolenda, international missionary and successor to world-renowned evangelist Reinhard Bonnke as president and CEO of Christ for All Nations, explains where we got the phrase "spiritual warfare." He writes in his new book *Slaying Dragons* that the term comes from military analogies biblical authors used to describe how Christians should withstand evil.

Kolenda explains it this way: "[Satan] has no real power in this world except what we, the gatekeepers, give to him."

So if we can accept that there is a devil and he influences humans to do his bidding, then we can conclude that people are subject to these spiritual authorities even if they don't understand what they are doing or why.

But just as Paula prayed the Scripture in Ephesians 6:12, we Christians know we aren't fighting against people, but against demonic forces. Spiritual warfare surrounds us all the time. It's a daily battle the enemy wages in our personal lives, in our homes, in our cities and even in Washington.

Only those with spiritual discernment will understand this and take authority like Paula White Cain did in that public setting.

Stephen Strang is founder of Charisma and author of the new book God, Trump and the 2020 Election, from which this column was excerpted. The book will be released Jan. 14, 2020, but you can order it now on .

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Angels of Destiny Help to Fulfill God's Prophetic Word

Over You

Heaven's angels have received a new assignment. God has released angels all around you—to help move you forward along your chosen path. I call them angels of destiny. They are assigned to the prophetic word over your life, and they help you fulfill it. The Bible calls them “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14).

Many of God's chosen have been receiving prophecies about promotion, and when there's promotion, there's always an adversary who wants to stop us from going through the door. But God is releasing a new force, a new company of angels that will be governed by the Holy Spirit, to break you through. They will war with you, protect you and bring you to that place of new beginnings.

During my prayer and study time, God has continued to put images of angels before my eyes. He keeps challenging me to study them. He's been showing me that He is doing something new with angels on behalf of the chosen. He is reintroducing us to a whole company of supernatural agents on call to do our bidding. To get them to act on our command, we must speak what God is speaking. Our actions and instructions to them must be in line with God's will. Angels are not genies, and they are not subject to flesh. This is why it is so important that we walk according to the Spirit and in the knowledge of God's will for our lives.

As we pursue God and press into the Spirit, the Lord will begin to give us revelations about the natural army—you and me—and the spiritual army—the angelic host of heaven—moving together. What we see with this collaboration is a picture of the natural and the spiritual converging in the coexisting spirit realm. I want to show you how to stir up the angelic spirits sent to minister to us and the various roles they play

in the lives of the chosen.

Dispensing Angels

When I would see angels, the Lord would tell me to lift up my voice in praise and worship. "You are dispensing the angels," He'd say. He was helping me understand that praise and worship are how we release angels to set up ambushes against our enemies. We forget that at times, but when we open up our mouths and praise the Lord, angels start moving on our behalf.

This is exactly what the Lord did in 2 Chronicles 20:21-22 (NKJV) when King Jehoshaphat and the people of Israel were facing a mighty army where their defeat was inevitable in the natural. They sought the Lord about what they should do. Here is the word from the king: "When he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the Lord, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: 'Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever'" (v. 21).

This was the outcome: "Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated" (v. 22).

The account says, "the Lord set ambushes." But I believe by the Spirit of God, God dispensed angels to do this work. Their praise moved the hand of God, who then dispatched angels to set ambushes against their enemies. We see that when they began to praise and magnify the Lord, compassion for their predicament rose up before Him, and He was compelled to act.

In another example, two of God's chosen apostles, Paul and Silas, were in prison for preaching the gospel and casting out demons. Late into the night, Paul and Silas began to pray and sing hymns to the Lord. "Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's

shackles were loosened" (Acts 16:26, MEV). I believe this to be another angelic intervention, which eventually led to many lives being saved into the kingdom of God.

The Lord has been saying to me, "Tell My people I am releasing a new company of angels, angels of My presence. These are the angels of your destiny."

Certain angels will move with you, but others will be assigned to your specific assignment. They are door-opening, chain-breaking, earth-shaking, ambush-setting angels who will be released when you open your mouth in prayer, praise and worship before the Lord and in the face of your enemies.

Do you remember in Acts 12, when Peter was in prison? The church kept a 24/7 prayer vigil going on his behalf. As they prayed, the hinges of the prison doors blew off, and the angel of the Lord came and said, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me" (Acts 12:8b). Step by step, the angel was with Peter, shielding him from being spotted by the guards, telling him which direction to walk in and clearing all exits until he was safely out.

God is getting ready to blow some hinges off some doors. When you learn how to praise Him and say, "The Lord is good and His mercy endures forever," and when you can say, "Oh, God, we bless You," even as the enemy is coming against you like a flood, you will see God release His angels to encamp around you and miraculously deliver you back onto your chosen path.

Let's now get familiar with the company of angels God has made available to us.

Angelic Functions

Psalm 103:20 tells us that angels hearken to the voice of God's word. Angels excel in strength. Angels are powerful spirits that have been sent to assist us in advancing the kingdom.

Though it can be hard to realize, it is important to know that we are not alone. First, God has given us His Spirit to comfort, guide, teach and empower us for our chosen assignments, but we also have the ministry of angels, who have been sent forth from the throne of God to minister on our behalf. They give us supernatural assistance.

Many who hear the word of the Lord spoken over their lives wonder how His word can manifest in their lives. Have you ever received a prophetic word that seems almost impossible? God has assigned angels to make it so. They help fulfill His divine purposes. When we speak and decree the word of the Lord, they begin to minister on our behalf.

Angels are at work behind the scenes, influencing cities, nations, governments and history, and as we've discovered, they are also sent to minister on behalf of individuals. And yes, angels are involved in helping you fulfill your destiny and purpose.

In Genesis 28:12, Jacob saw a portal through which angels were ascending and descending. This portal is Bethel, the house of God and the gate of heaven. The house of God today is the church. We are now Bethel.

A portal to heaven opens up when we pray, praise, worship, preach and prophesy. Angels ascend and descend through this portal. They are sent to help and assist us.

Angels are connected to God's chosen prophets and prophetic people. Jacob encountered a host of angels in Genesis 32:1-2: "Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, 'This is God's camp.' So he called the name of that place Mahanaim."

Here, the angels were assigned to bring Jacob to his designated place. In other words, angels were a part of him fulfilling his destiny. Mahanaim in the verse above means "two camps." This was an angelic army sent to assist Jacob.

The prophetic word reveals and releases destiny. God has a destiny for each person, and we are responsible to discover it, pursue it and walk in it. Angelic assistance includes angels that go before us and angels that protect us. They assist us against human and demonic opposition. They assist us in overcoming resistance to the fulfillment of His word.

Angels were instrumental in the giving of the Law. They were involved in the establishment of the covenant between God and His people. Angels are always involved with God's covenant people. Those in covenant with God are not alone. We are not left to our own strength in fulfilling the word of the Lord.

Angels are spirits (Ps. 104:4). They operate in the invisible realm. They are spiritual beings who respond to the word of the Lord. They respond to prayer, praise, worship, fasting, preaching and prophecy. Spirits respond to spiritual activities.

Angels go before us to drive out the enemy (Ex. 33:2). They go before us to make way for us to possess our possessions. The word of the Lord is often a declaration of what belongs to us. We are not alone in trying to possess it.

Angels help us experience significant breakthroughs, overcome impossible odds and overcome giants and strong enemies.

Activating Angels

As I said earlier, once the word of destiny or prophecy is spoken, angels are released to help fulfill it. The word of the Lord initiates the activity of angels in our lives. I also believe that different angels can be assigned from heaven to us at different times. God's word will prosper or succeed wherever it is sent, and angels can be sent before us to prosper our way (Gen. 24:40, Isa. 55:11). We can also prosper through prophesying (Ezra 6:14).

Prophetic intercession and prophetic utterances are

instrumental in releasing the ministry of angels. God is committed to performing His word on behalf of His chosen ones, and He sends His angels to assist in its performance. God performs the counsel of His messengers (Isa. 44:26). His messengers were the prophets. God is committed to His word, and He sends angels to cause it to come to pass.

I love Jeremiah 1:12, which says, "Then the Lord said to me, 'You have seen well. For I will hasten My word to perform it.'" God watches over His word to perform it. Angels excel in strength to do the will of God. God has made them strong for this purpose. Angels are involved in what God's messenger speaks. We do not have the strength or wisdom to do the great things of which God speaks. Man is limited in his power and ability to perform the counsel of God. We are dependent upon heaven and its resources.

We can trust God to release His angels on our behalf when we speak and walk in His counsel. Angels are given charge over us. In other words, they are appointed over us. They assist us and protect us as we walk in God's purpose for our lives (Ps. 91:11).

Angels delight in hearing and fulfilling God's prophetic word. Angels take pleasure in assisting us to fulfill God's plans. They continually wait on God and His people. Angels love God's word, and they love performing it. Angels love God's presence, and they love to praise and worship Him. Angels visit our services, and it is possible that they have been there in the form of humans without us being aware (Heb. 13:2).

Strong worship is an atmosphere for angels and the chosen. The Hebrew word *nataph* means "to prophesy." Heaven drops at the presence of God (Ps. 68:8). As we know, the chosen also love God's presence and His word. Angels join us in our worship. They also listen to the word of the Lord.

Angels have a great desire to look into the things of which

God speaks (1 Pet. 1:12). They are interested in His prophetic plans and seeing them come to pass. I believe they rejoice at the fulfillment of His word.

Angels often stand behind prophets and their ministry gifts when they are preaching. We have seen this many times in our services. Angels often stand on the platform. They are involved in what we are preaching and declaring.

Provoking Angels

Angels can even be provoked. God warned Israel not to provoke the angel sent before it (Ex. 23:20-22). Disobedience to the word and voice of the Lord can provoke angels. "Provoke" is the Hebrew word *marar*, meaning to make bitter or make enraged. This is a sobering thought. Angels don't like it when God's word is disobeyed; they place high honor on it. They are committed to God and His word.

Angels are therefore absolutely committed to seeing God's word come to pass. They are faithful servants of God and faithful to us as well when we walk in and obey God's word. The prophet Elisha was aware of the heavenly host and prayed for God to open the eyes of his servant (2 Kings 6:17). The Lord also opened the eyes of Balaam to see an angel in the way (Num. 22:31). This angel was sent to withstand Balaam, who was called by Balak to curse Israel. Balaam was spared and prophesied blessing over Israel, which enraged Balak.

We don't want to provoke angels. We want them on our side assisting us. They make great helpers but formidable enemies. When we submit to God's prophetic purposes, they will be our friends and not our enemies. They will help us succeed and fulfill God's prophetic word and plan for our lives.

When prophets prophesy judgment, angels can be released to fulfill it. Angels assist in carrying out God's judgments. Individuals and nations can come under judgments executed by angels (Acts 12:23). God watches over His word to perform it

(Jer. 1:12). God can use human armies and angelic armies to release judgments. Angels are involved in the judgments released in the book of Revelation. And in 2 Kings 19:34-36, an angel destroyed the camp of the Assyrians after Isaiah released the word of the Lord to Hezekiah. This was an immediate fulfillment which again shows the power of angels and their obedience to the word of the Lord.

The chosen are connected to the angelic realm. The invisible realm responds to our commands as we align with the will of God. Our words are spirit and life, and the spiritual containers of the will and purposes of God. It is important that we grow in our understanding of how the angelic realm serves us.

I decree now that the heavens be opened and angels be released as God has commanded. I loose angels to ascend and descend the ladder to the gates of heaven on our behalf. I loose angelic protection over the lives and assignments of God's chosen. I decree that we will hear the voice of destiny pulling us forward and that destiny angels will be with us. I decree that angels will connect us to our destiny and people who will help us along the way. I loose angels of prosperity and promotion, destiny and purpose to minister to us in this season.

READ MORE: To learn more about angels, visit .

Michelle McClain-Walters is an author who has traveled to more than 50 nations to lead prophetic schools and training.

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Why Spirit-Filled Pastors Need to Preach on Holiness Again

Years ago, pastors used to preach a lot of sermons on holiness. But times and attitudes have since changed, and we don't often hear people talking about holiness anymore. Unfortunately, that includes charismatic Christians. Yet Christian historian David Barton says we could win this nation back if the church would simply revive its passion for holiness and discipleship once again. If we don't, the results could be disastrous.

Barton says when charismatic pastors ignore crucial biblical teachings on holiness and discipleship, it affects the entire body of Christ in America. He told me his son attended a Pentecostal university. During the 2016 election, his son asked his conservative classmates if they preached about marriage, life or abortion. They said, "Absolutely not. That's not to be covered in the church."

This, Barton says, is where many Pentecostal and charismatic preachers are today—and even conservative pastors too. Many know the truth but don't preach about it.

"We don't have the fear of God anymore," Barton says. "There's no sense of having to give an account to God for our behavior or our beliefs and our thoughts—all the things we should teach. So now we've become a user-friendly kind of church."

Sadly, it's not just Christians in general who are to blame. Much of the problem, Barton explains, lies in pastors' priorities for their churches. Barton and George Barna teamed up to survey theologically conservative pastors. They asked them how they knew whether their churches were successful or not. The top five answers evangelical pastors gave were the offerings, the number of people who attend the church, the number of staff meetings, the number of programs they offered and the square footage they had. None of these answers is based on Scripture. And Barton says that is a major red flag indicating where the American church is today.

"If your No. 1 issue is offerings, then you are not going to say anything that will jeopardize offerings, which means you're not going to say a whole lot of stuff," he says. "You're not going to do anything to jeopardize attendance. So that's why they will not talk about these things. I grew up in that [Holiness] background ... and we're not finding holiness taught anymore. We're not finding people confronting the lifestyle saying this is morally right or morally wrong."

But what caused the church to get to this place of seeker-sensitive preaching? Barton says it's because the church—especially charismatics—is overly focused on crusades and revivals.

"We have guys going to Africa [with] crusades of 10,000 people or 100,000 people," he says. "Right now, it's all about converts and getting people to say the sinner's prayer."

Of course, Jesus had His moments of preaching to thousands. But Barton points out that it wasn't the large crowds who changed the world. It was the handful of disciples Jesus poured into on a regular basis.

"That's where we've failed as charismatics," Barton says. "We're measuring the wrong things, and we're using the wrong behavior. ... No American church today is being accused of

teaching hard stuff and driving people away with disciples staying behind to be taught more. ... In the Pentecostal world, there's no holiness teaching anymore."

If the American church refuses to focus once again on discipleship and holiness, Christianity could face a worldwide crisis, Barton says. After all, in the last 300 years, 85% of all evangelistic resources have come out of the U.S. Because of that, 32% of the world today professes to be Christian. (For comparison, 21% are Muslim, 14% are Hindu and 7% are Buddhist.)

That's a great number, he says, but the only way to truly increase the percentage of Christians in the world is if each believer decides to reach just one person this year—minister the gospel and teach them how to follow Jesus. If every Christian did that, then by this time next year, Christians would make up 64% of the global population.

"If we got back to that local focus of 'I'm going to take care of my town'—if Christians did that all across the United States, we would have America back in a heartbeat," Barton says.

Listen to my exclusive interview with Barton at [. I hope every Christian reading this article takes these words to heart today. The charismatic church needs to revive our passion for holiness out of love for Christ. The stakes are too high to stay as we are.](#)

Stephen Strang is the founder of Charisma and CEO of Charisma Media. He is author of the best-selling book Trump Aftershock (FrontLine/Charisma House). Follow him on Twitter (@sstrang), Facebook (stephenestrang) or Instagram (stephenestrang).

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Don't Forget to Abide in God's Word

In 2018, the American Bible Society commissioned a study conducted by the Barna Group. Over 2,000 people were surveyed about how they engage with Scripture, and the results were shocking. The study concluded that 52% of Americans don't read their Bibles at all; 8% read it three to four times a year; 6% read it once a month; 8% read it once a week; 13% read it several times a week; and only 14% read it daily. Even more disturbing is the fact that over half of those polled have no engagement with their Bibles at all. It seems most of us are happy to leave the Bible on our shelves.

Yet it's not for a lack of time. A recent study shows people ages 15-25 spend more than 50 hours a week in front of their phone, computer and tablet screens.

As a Christian, I simply don't get this. My time in God's Word is paramount to my spiritual, mental and physical well-being. Over the last 40 years, Scripture has been the wind in my sails, strengthening me through the trials of life. Without the Word, my life would break down.

When we look around, we see a world where loneliness, depression and suicide are on the rise. We see a church rife with division, impotence and uncertainty. Could these symptoms be related to our casual and, at times, dismissive approach to

God's eternal Word? Where is the desperate hunger for the bread of life? Instead, it seems we've settled for likes and mentions on our social media platforms, searching for validation in the arms of the world.

Please understand, my intent is not to shame or condemn you. Rather, I want you to find the peace and assurance that come with simple obedience. Jesus told us to abide in His Word, and that is why a daily diet of God's Word is necessary for our well-being. So let's get personal for a moment. Ask yourself this question: "Is God's Word the foundation of my life?"

We cannot follow Christ without doing what Scripture says, yet there is evidently an alarming number of us who downplay its importance. Satan knows he cannot destroy the Word of God, but he sure tries to diminish it. This was his strategy with Eve in the garden—questioning God's Word and swaying her from godly wisdom. Has Satan succeeded at doing the same to us?

Think about it. If Eve could be deceived in a perfect environment, how much more are we susceptible to Satan's tactics?

Throughout the Bible, we can read of its significance in our life. That's why I believe it's helpful to remind ourselves of its importance. Paul, in particular, made some strong statements regarding God's Word. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, he writes, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Like any good father, God wants the best for His children. That's why He's given us His Word—which, states Paul, is profitable to us. We profit from the Bible through the doctrine (teaching), reproof (rebuke), correction and instruction found within it.

As our children were growing up, my wife, Lisa, and I would

periodically purchase items for them that required assembling. I'd often ignore the instruction manual, assuming I knew what to do and could figure it out on my own. Oh, how wrong I was! Halfway through construction, I would realize I had missed pivotal steps and left out crucial pieces—then I would have to deconstruct everything and start over.

Similarly, we can often assume we know what's right and best for our lives and neglect God's instruction manual—the Bible—only to later realize how wrong we were. However, as we take to heart God's Word and apply it obediently, we'll find ourselves strengthened in our faith and equipped for our calling—building our life according to God's wisdom and ways.

When I consider things to come and the trajectory many are on, I believe the Holy Spirit is saying, "Abide in My Word." The Scriptures are pivotal to building a life that endures, both now and for eternity. Without them, we'll never grow into the fullness of our identity as sons and daughters of God.

During the close of his ministry, Paul said, "So now brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32, NKJV).

Paul didn't just commend believers to God, but to God and the word of His grace—which are vital to our spiritual growth and our relationship with the Lord. So let's dust off our Bibles and restore the Word of God's supremacy and wonder in our lives.

John Bevere is an international speaker and bestselling author known for his bold and uncompromising approach to God's Word. John and his wife, Lisa, are the founders of Messenger International.

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The Dark Night of the Spirit

Perhaps more than any other denomination, Pentecostals need to rediscover the spiritual discipline of Sabbath. I could demonstrate this any number of ways: biblically, historically, logically or even personally. But I've found the most effective way to teach this truth is the same way Jesus taught us: through stories.

A friend once told me a story, which he referred to as "the story of the flood." After purchasing their newly constructed suburban home, he and his family quickly began enjoying the benefits of living with all their new stuff—new friends, new paint, new lawn, new appliances and new faucets. Everything was new!

After nearly six months, nothing seemed to threaten their new life. That is, until one fine Tuesday, when the floorboards in the kitchen gave way to a basement brimming with a deluge of rotten water. The nightmare scenario could haunt any new homeowner: A slow, undetected water drip in the sink had slowly become a virtual cesspool under the kitchen, eventually eroding the very boards under their feet.

Something that was no more than a small problem at first ultimately destroyed even the house's foundations. No one

could have predicted the impact this leak could cause. But sometimes the only way to discover what is wrong is to wait and observe.

A similar leak threatens today's Pentecostal church. Like my friend's house, Pentecostalism is still "new," historically speaking. Emerging in the early 1900s, it took the world by storm, bringing revival, evangelistic fervor and ecumenical renewal. But as my friend discovered, with anything new, problems arise. After a century of observation, we have had enough time to study the well-being of Pentecostals. The results are in—and the diagnosis is burnout.

Nowhere is this more evident than in pastors' kids (or PKs). Over the last decade and a half, I have witnessed the real pain and anger of the children of Pentecostal pastors and ministers. I have met a generation of PKs who feel the need to deconstruct their faith and the church because of what they have seen the church do to their Pentecostal parents. In short, the church stole their parents from them.

This storyline has power to bring tears to any of us in vocational ministry. The work of ministry is so demanding, difficult and disappointing that our commitment to it is stealing us away from the little ones God has put in our lives. Our children are paying a major price for the way we embody church.

This is our slow drip, and the rot has been exposed. In many of our Pentecostal and charismatic denominations, pastoral burnout has become a virtual norm. Except now it isn't just our senior leaders who are burning out; it's our youth pastors. Time and again, we are seeing that everyone is susceptible to burnout in the structures and systems we have created.

In fact, so much of our contemporary Pentecostal culture mirrors our formative years. In my own Foursquare

denomination, we are still coming to grips with the patterns of life of our founder, Aimee Semple McPherson. McPherson believed, as did her evangelical contemporaries, that "lifetime" was "working time." In her 1994 biography of McPherson, Edith Blumhofer said that attitude was the spirit of the age, like the Torrey-Alexander revival song: "Spend no idle days; work, ever work, for Jesus."

Or as John Andrews pithily observed, "Mary had a little lamb, was given her to keep. It joined the Pentecostal church and died through lack of sleep."

To further the problem, rather than dealing with the lack of health, we almost make a virtue out of burnout. We say things like "They did it for the Lord," "Man, they are committed" and "Their reward will be in heaven." So we let the drip continue, trying to sell the lie that the flood in the basement is really just a dirty pool we should accept as the real cost of following Jesus.

Pentecostals and charismatics have been awesome at renewing the world, but we have forgotten to be renewed ourselves. In short, we have ignored God's invitation to rest. And until we heed it, we will keep burning out.

Rest and the Bible

My spiritual director likes to remind me, "We don't fix reality by ignoring it." Here is the reality today's church must face: What if in all the renewal, rejuvenation and revival that the Pentecostal and charismatic world has brought, we have overlooked the simple importance of rest?

For the last three years, I've sought to bring that message to churches across the country. I've fought to bring this Christian discipline back to the Pentecostal table through pastors retreats, speaking at churches, counseling pastors, radio interviews, and writing articles and even a book. Along the way, I've found that the Bible actually has a lot to say

about this.

One particular theme that has stood out to me is the intersection of biblical rest and the Holy Spirit. We see this dynamic connection many times in the Bible.

For example, Isaiah the prophet described to his audience the day of vengeance when Israel would be judged, through which all things would be made right by Yahweh. In Isaiah 63:13-14, he describes God's faithful leadership of Israel: "Who led them through the deep, as a horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? ... The Spirit of the Lord caused them to rest. So You led Your people to make Yourself a glorious name." God's Spirit, the one who hovered over creation, hovers over Israel, bringing them to a place of rest where they will be at peace with God and themselves.

Interestingly, it was on the Jewish day of rest—the Sabbath—that Jesus preached His first sermon—a sermon, mind you, about the Holy Spirit. In front of His hometown crowd of Nazareth, Jesus proclaims, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18a). On the day of rest, Jesus reveals His identity as the Spirit-anointed Messiah who came to bring the year of Jubilee to the world.

Peter picks up on this same theme of the Spirit and rest. This time, we see it from a different angle. In the context of the baby church suffering as the result of persecution and cultural marginalization, Peter writes, "But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1 Pet. 4:13-14, NIV). This time, rather than describing the Spirit who will give us rest, we find the Spirit resting on the church. Again, rest and the Spirit—together.

This theme of the Spirit “resting on” the church, no doubt, harkens back to the post-creation story of Noah. In Genesis 9, a raven was sent out to find dry land. It could not. There was no place to rest for the bird in the old creation. But soon Noah sent out another bird—the dove—to search out a suitable place to rest. It never returned, the implication of which is that it did find a place to rest—in the new creation.

This is the key to understanding the baptism of Jesus, whereupon the Spirit rested upon Jesus with the accompanying words of affirmation from the Father: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matt. 3:17b, MEV). The Spirit can’t land on the old creation of sin and death, but only on the new creation of life and redemption. As the Spirit rested on Jesus in His baptism, so the Spirit rests on the new creation of the church today.

The connections continue. Acts 16, for example, sees Paul approaching Bithynia, a region in modern-day Turkey where the gospel had yet to be proclaimed. The harvest was plentiful. No one had preached there. Yet Paul’s missionary venture was soon disrupted: “When they came near Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not allow them” (Acts 16:7).

Imagine Paul’s consternation and even anger. Souls hung in the balance. The door of ministry was wide open. And as he was about to go in, the Spirit said no. Not this time. Not here. Not now.

As my preaching hero Roy Hicks Jr. used to say about walking in the Spirit, “Not every need represents God’s will in my life.”

I even find it interesting that the Pentecostal and charismatic practice of being “slain in the Spirit” connects the coming of the Spirit on a particular person with them being rendered flat on their face before the Lord. Like Paul in Acts 9, the work of the Spirit does not always immediately

send us out into the world. Before that can happen, we must first be broken down before the Lord.

The Spirit's Inward Work

One of the primary draws of the Pentecostal and charismatic movement is the power and proclamation of mission that Pentecostalism has brought to the table. It certainly has been for me. And that's not a problem. The problem has been an overemphasis on the outward work of the Spirit, to the ignorance of the work of the Spirit inside of us.

When I want to learn about mission and miracles, I go to Jack Hayford, McPherson and Bethel. But if I am honest, when I want to learn about spiritual formation and character development, I find myself going to Dallas Willard, Richard Foster and the Catholics.

We need both—mission and power as well as character formation and discipleship. It was Martin Luther, in his theology of the doctrine of revelation, who sought to separate out “general revelation” from “special revelation.” General revelation—what Luther called “left-handed” knowledge of God—was that knowledge that God made available to the whole world. Special revelation—or “right-handed” knowledge—was the knowledge God shared about His character in context to His covenant people. I call them God's “outside voice” and “inside voice.”

To draw a parallel, Pentecostalism has marvelously modeled the left hand of the Spirit—the work of the Spirit out there in the world. We do mission, empowerment and the miraculous like no one else. But in so doing, we have overlooked the right-handed work of the Spirit—the work of the Spirit inside each of us. When we search our own hearts, that is what we yearn for, isn't it? We want to walk in Holy Spirit power in this world, all the while being deeply formed by the Spirit in our body, soul and spirit. We want to become sanctified into wholeness as integrous, emotionally-healthy individuals.

Why can't these go together?

Practicing a day of rest every week does just that. Taking a day of Sabbath rest every week will not distract us from ministry. Sadly, too many believers often think it does. I'd be a millionaire if I could count the number of times I've heard well-intentioned Pentecostals say, "I shouldn't take a day of rest because the devil never rests." My response to this? "That's precisely why he is the devil. He's beyond exhausted."

That is the problem with evil: It does not know how to rest. When Jesus cast out the woman's demons, He was clear: "When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it" (Matt. 12:43, NIV). There is no room for rest for the demonic.

I know that might sound somewhat comical, but it is really at the heart of the matter. We need to learn from Jesus: Resting is actually the way we become aware (in a dynamic way) of the power of God within us.

In John 4:1-26, Jesus sits by a well. His disciples have run off to get some food. John tells us, "Jacob's well was there. Jesus, therefore, being exhausted from His journey, sat down by the well. It was about [noon]" (v. 6, MEV). Jesus gets tired. And sits. He does nothing. Then a woman comes to the well, and Jesus has a conversation with her about the kingdom of God. She experiences His message and eventually becomes the first missionary in John's Gospel.

In this story, God's mission takes place as Jesus takes a rest and sits by a well. He welcomes a woman into His rest, and she immediately experiences the grace of God's kingdom. The Sabbath provides space in our schedules to waste time with others and, just like Jesus, minister out of our rest.

In *Working from a Place of Rest*, Tony Horsfall powerfully writes about how the posture of rest opens us up to the Spirit

within us and the needs of the people around us: “Everything that happens in this story happens because Jesus was doing nothing. ... We can learn to work and minister as Jesus did, from a place of rest.”

We should even keep in mind what Jesus is doing right now. Jesus is sitting at the right of the Father, simply trusting the work of the Spirit in the world that is drawing all into their courtroom. God’s rest is always more effective than man’s work.

Space for the Spirit

The number of times God’s people in the Bible are given space should astound us. Most of Abraham’s life wasn’t worth including in the Bible. Israel walked in the desert for 40 years. Paul went to his hometown for three quiet years after his conversion. Almost nothing is written about the first 30 years of Jesus’ life. All the biblical characters had lots and lots of downtime, obscurity and mundanity.

To our own detriment, the modern world has been sanitized of any kind of downtime. We don’t rest anymore for one day each week on the Sabbath. We don’t have time to process the news for a day before the newspaper comes again tomorrow. We don’t even have a few precious moments in the bathroom anymore—we find ourselves texting with our few minutes of respite. In fact, it’s so bad that a friend texted me while I was writing this: “There’s a guy in this coffee shop sitting at a table, not on his phone, not on a laptop, just drinking coffee, like a psychopath.” I couldn’t help but laugh out loud. This is our world now.

We can all start to see the consequences of a world without rest. Something tragic is lost when we no longer give space to the Spirit to open us up to what the Spirit is saying in our lives. Something is lost when we turn busyness and numerical growth into the initial sign of the evidence of the Holy

Spirit. Something is lost when busyness is the virtue of maturity. We are lost when we no longer have time to simply walk around the Garden of Eden with God one day a week.

As I reflect on all of this, I find myself drawn back to Jesus' baptism. There, on the banks of the Jordan, Jesus will be anointed by the Spirit for public ministry. The dove found a place to rest—on the head of the new creation who was breaking into the world.

I find it somewhat telling that in Mark's account of the Spirit's descent on Jesus, the next thing to come down upon Jesus was a very sick man, the paralytic. In Mark 2:1-12, men climb onto the roof of a home to lower down a man who could not walk. Mark 1 is the Spirit coming down upon Jesus. Mark 2 is a sick man coming down upon Jesus.

As I think about that, I think about how often I try to do the work of ministry—of healing, preaching and binding—all on my own strength. I try to do Mark 2 without ever having done Mark 1. But we don't get to reverse the order. Acts 2 (Pentecost) can only come after Acts 1 ("waiting" for Pentecost). Without waiting, we aren't ready for the work of ministry. We become so excited to go out and do the work that we forget the work of God inside us. And that is what Sabbath offers: a chance for God to do something within us before He works through us.

The Sabbath is a dark night of the Spirit. It is going into the dark to find the work of the Spirit before we go out to do the work of the Spirit. It is the Mark 1 before Mark 2. It is the Acts 1 before Acts 2. And we are so desperate for it. It is the slow and patient that comes before the spontaneous and the miraculous, the contemplation that comes before the activism.

Pentecostalism taught me about the outward forms of the Christian life—how to share the gospel, preaching, miracles. For that, I am deeply grateful. But I had to go elsewhere to

learn how to go deep. Pentecostalism taught me about mission, but formation had to come elsewhere. As Pentecostalism begins to reflect on what it has become nearly a century after its birth, it is a good time to reflect on who and what we want to be in the next century.

I, for one, am hungrier for the Spirit than I ever have been. And I can't imagine that hunger being satisfied by having more on my calendar. {eoa}

READ MORE: To learn more about rest and the practice of Sabbath, read more stories at .

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Rise of the Warrior

Cora Jakes Coleman knows how to wield the weapons of spiritual warfare. She shouts the praises of God, claims biblical promises and boldly declares the Lord's will in prayer. She's not afraid to go toe-to-toe with the devil and take authority in the Spirit. As a result, she's witnessed God's faithfulness many times—on others' behalf and her own.

But what does a prayer warrior do when the dream God gave her looks like it's about to die? Coleman had to wrestle with that very question the day doctors told her she would have a hard time conceiving. Her desire since childhood was to be a mother, but suddenly, all the prophetic words she had received about motherhood seemed like distant fantasies. In the spirit realm, it looked like Satan combating her spiritual productivity; in the natural, it looked like a hormonal disorder called Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS).

Looking back, Coleman now sees how God had to take her through that difficult journey of infertility to forge her into the prayer warrior she is today. She enjoys a vibrant ministry as an author, speaker and pastoral overseer of Destiny World Children's Ministry at The Potter's House Church. And as the firstborn of Bishop T.D. Jakes, Coleman loves to preach almost as much as she loves to war in prayer. But like most experienced warriors, Coleman remembers the original sting of her battle scars.

"When infertility first hit me, it devastated me," Coleman says. "It shattered my faith. It completely destroyed me. But it also birthed me in a way, I believe. The same thing the enemy uses for evil, we know God will turn it around for good. So although I felt I was destroyed, broken and, for lack of a better term, 'damaged goods,' God was able to show me how I could use my ministry in the barren place to bring other people beauty."

Coleman's battle began when she started getting ovarian cysts at the age of 14, but doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong. She spent the next eight years suffering from PCOS without even knowing it—until a car crash revealed the truth.

"I would not have known how bad my reproductive system was, or how damaged it could have become, had I never gotten into that car accident," she says. "And if I hadn't gotten into that car accident, I could have risked my whole reproductive system

shutting down only days after that crash. ... Finally, a doctor was just honest, and said, 'You know, I don't know what it is. But I know it's not supposed to be inside of you. And we need to get you into surgery immediately.'"

She found out days after the surgery that the doctor had removed one of her ovaries and a fallopian tube. Less than a year later, she married the love of her life, Richard Coleman, but doctors warned her it would be difficult to conceive.

Coleman was devastated, yet knew her battle wasn't with the doctors or even with her own body. Her battle was with a spiritual foe.

"Infertility was not just about conceiving a child but conceiving at all—conceiving a dream, purpose, businesses, books," she says. "The enemy was attacking my ability to produce. So I had to pray because I was under attack for my productivity."

The Colemans tried in vitro fertilization (IVF), but each attempt failed. Instead of waving the proverbial white flag, though, Coleman chose to pray.

"I knew that it couldn't be some little patty-cake prayer, but I had to really war against unproductivity in my life," she says. "So I got into a prayer life that continues to change me even now. Since that moment, my prayer life is my biggest, if not my strongest, weapon."

Coleman says the weapon of prayer bore miraculous fruit. For each failed IVF cycle, she and her husband were able to adopt soon after. After all, Coleman says, it isn't just giving birth that makes a woman a mother. After the first failed IVF cycle, the Colemans adopted Amauri, who is now 11 years old. And Jason—affectionately known as "Tuga"—joined the family at birth, only four months after the second IVF cycle failed four years ago.

“Both of my children’s adoptions were long, tedious battles,” Coleman says. “And I wouldn’t change it for the world, because they are my heart babies. I birthed them in my heart.”

Coleman’s fierce battle with infertility inspired her to write her latest book, *Ferocious Warrior*.

“Spiritual warfare is not just really loud praying,” she explains. “Spiritual warfare is about the enemy trying to take what he doesn’t have the authority to take and you establishing and taking authority. ... There is a weapon in the stomping of your feet, there is a weapon in your praise, there is a weapon in your worship, and there is a weapon in the very way that you consider God in the war. And so spiritual warfare is not just about your praying, but it’s fasting and praying and worshipping and reading the Word of God, which is our greatest sword against the enemy.”

Praying With Authority

From the moment of Coleman’s own conception, prayer has played a significant role in her life. Bishop Jakes and his wife, Serita, went through their own battle with infertility after their marriage in 1980. It took seven years of prayer and spiritual warfare to give birth to Coleman. But the devil’s attacks didn’t end there.

“After the birth, the enemy still attacked me even as a little girl,” she says. “When I was about 4 months old, I got a bacterial infection, and the doctor said I was not going to make it. So they had to rush me to the hospital. They could not find a vein to put an IV in, so they put IVs into my head, but I snatched them out. My mom says my arms swelled up like a baby doll. And so even as a baby, the enemy has been trying to take me out of here. ... I am a product of faith and a product of prayer.”

Miracles like these are perhaps why Coleman has had the gift of intercession as long as she can remember. Her younger

sister, Sarah Jakes Roberts, remembers her being a bold intercessor in the Jakes home.

“She would be 5 years old, and Cora would pray at dinner, Cora would pray at church,” Roberts says. “When Cora prays, ... she has faith for the thing she is praying for. And she has had that same faith since she was 5 up until now. She believes that when she calls on the name of Jesus, when she taps into heaven’s resources, and when she makes a mandate for what she wants to see in earth, it will happen.”

But even though Coleman grew up under her parents’ discipleship, she says she heard from God personally for the first time at 12 years old. Hearing the Holy Spirit’s audible voice sparked a desire in Coleman to know Jesus more.

“He told me I would go through everything a young woman goes through in order to minister effectively,” she says. “And with that wisdom, I would supersede the anointing my father has given me.”

Coleman has many reasons to respect her father, whom she describes as a fiery preacher who isn’t afraid to cast out demons with his God-given authority. She recalls how he delivered one woman who was controlled by a demon passed down from her mother and grandmother.

“I may have been 14 or 15,” Coleman says. “[This woman] was literally roaring like a lion, coming down the aisle and contorting her body in different positions. My father and my mother were standing down there, and my father kept telling her, ‘Come on, come on, come on.’ And she kept roaring and screaming. It was a distorted type of roaring—I’ve never seen anything like it before and still have never seen anything like it since then. My father prayed and laid hands on her and spoke over her spirit, and she got delivered. She started running around the church and praising God with tears in her eyes.”

That instance and others like it taught Coleman how to stand in her authority as a believer. She says that in all her 31 years of life, she has never seen her mother or father frightened by a demon or witch.

Now, Bishop Jakes gets to see his daughter walk in that same boldness.

“In all of my 42 years of ministry, I’ve not seen anyone with a more vibrant faith and fury,” Bishop Jakes says. “Cora has such conviction and a relentless, bulldog faith that it seems to combust into an explosion of dogged tenacity when she is under attack. Her church, her family and the enemy have come to respect her ability to go to war for the promises of God. ... My daughter has totally redefined what it means to fight like a girl!”

Despite her father’s fame as one of the most popular preachers in the U.S., Coleman says the Jakes family is as normal as can be. Her home life as a child didn’t consist of constant Bible studies or “flinging oil around the house,” she says. On the contrary, she describes a laid-back atmosphere full of goofy jokes, comfortable clothes and close-knit relationships. Even now, when Coleman isn’t busy ministering, she can be found binge-watching television shows or playing with her kids. But growing up a famous preacher’s daughter didn’t spare her from tragedies many young women face. For instance, Coleman was molested as a child, and later on when she was an adult, her boyfriend date-raped her in her own apartment. Although she wasn’t abused on a consistent basis, that didn’t make her experience any less traumatic.

“I used to have anxiety attacks every time I would think of him,” she says of her ex-boyfriend. “It was actually during an anxiety attack from seeing him in church one Sunday that my Aunt Betty changed my whole mind. She said to me, ‘Cora, you can’t give anyone that kind of power, especially in environments where you know nothing is going to happen to

you.’ It was in that moment I realized I had to forgive him and everyone else who had hurt me for not having the capacity to love me with compassion. I also had to forgive myself for beating myself up about not being stronger than I thought I should be in the circumstance.”

Coleman is not alone in her experience. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 3 women in the U.S. experience some form of sexual violence during their lifetime, and 1 in 5 women experience rape. And while statistics on sexual abuse in the church are scarce, the recent rise of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements reveals that harassment and abuse among Christians are far more common than once thought.

Yet Coleman refused to let sexual abuse define who she was. Instead, she pressed into God for healing: “Lots of prayer and reading the Word took place in this space. I wouldn’t wish sexual abuse on my worst enemy, but going through that dark place gave me the power to fight back and not let anyone else take my light or power from me again.”

Embracing a Prophetic Call

The same strength that carried Coleman through abuse empowered her to be a prophetic voice to Roberts when she got pregnant at 13. The two sisters—only about a year apart in age—always had a close relationship, but Roberts often felt out of place in a family full of ministers.

“Growing up, I didn’t feel like I wanted to be a preacher [like Cora did],” Roberts says. “At that time, I felt very isolated. And then when I had my pregnancy, I felt even more isolated. And Cora really believed, ‘Sis, you’re going to get through this. Sis, you’re going to be fine.’ She told me, ‘You’re a healer.’ And I didn’t know what she meant by that.”

Coleman’s words to her sister proved true. Now, 16 years after Roberts gave birth to her firstborn, Malachi, she has an

extensive ministry called Woman Evolved. She preaches at conferences and on tours, and she seeks to inspire her 1.1 million social-media followers toward Christlike living. And with followers like Rihanna, Roberts says she has the opportunity to minister to many outside the church.

“Because of the isolation I felt in the trenches, I’ve been able to help them heal and come back into relationship with God,” Roberts says. “So Cora knew that I was a healer, even in the midst of my brokenness, but she warred for me in the spirit realm. She warred for my son. So that in those moments where I didn’t have faith and I didn’t have belief, she had enough to get us through.”

That healing insight God gave Coleman for her sister comes from her prophetic anointing. She says God has given her a twofold prophetic gift, the first of which comes in the form of words of knowledge for the purpose of inner healing. The second part of her prophetic gift, she says, is for “the reconstruction and revolution of the systems of the church. ... God is cultivating my prophetic gift to make me a general for the young generation.”

Coleman receives the latter type of prophetic words during her personal devotion times with the Lord. She says the Holy Spirit has been burdening her heart lately with where the church is sorely lacking.

“I believe that the church needs to be more focused on a fear of the Lord instead of the fame or the platform,” she says. “And I think that some of our churches have neglected deliverance so that they can entertain. And so it’s really a need for the church to get back to the relationship portion of God. It is time for the church to get back to delivering people from things that have bound them and have kept them from moving forward in God. It is time for the church to get back to true, authentic worship and not performances, ego or even competition. I feel that we are very good at being

programmatic, but we are not very good at producing change. And that is what is needed.”

To help reach that vision, Coleman strives to equip her followers with truth and hope. She says at the age of 18, she ran away from the call of God on her life to teach and empower believers, but over the years, she has learned to embrace it, even if some disapprove of her.

“God has been teaching me how to be OK with people not liking me,” she says. “He’s been teaching me how to be OK with being bold with my gifts and with my calling. ... One of the most important things is just being confident in my call and in my prophetic gifts, that I may walk in it in this time, because it’s needed.”

Coleman knows that whether the enemy uses others’ disapproval, sexual abuse or infertility to halt her productivity, her power to fight back comes from God. And if she’s learned anything from each intense battle, it’s that God is good and cannot change, even in the barren places.

“I can honestly say that had it not been for my battle with infertility, I’m not sure I would have become the woman I am today, the ferocious warrior who was created from that place,” she says. “I found out who I was in my barren place. I found beauty in the things that were supposed to break me. I learned who God is when [I was] going through our barren places more so than any other time.”

Coleman’s faith in God’s goodness is so strong that, even though she and her husband look forward to adopting more children, they still believe they will one day have a biological child.

“I’ve been dreaming about birthing my own son since I was 10 years old,” she says. “And I have received too many prophetic words, too many confirmations that it’s going to happen. So we’re just waiting on the Lord and being of good courage until

it's time for us to reap."

Refusing to lose faith in what God promised—for Coleman, that's what it means to be a ferocious warrior. {eoa}

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