

How to Tune Your Frequency to Hear God's Voice

One of the most amazing attributes of God is His willingness to communicate. He loves to talk to His people. As soon as He created Adam and Eve at the beginning of time, He blessed them and gave them detailed instructions. God talked to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He gave detailed instructions to Moses, David, Elijah and many other prophets. And today, because we have the indwelling Holy Spirit, He speaks to us.

Yet I meet so many Christians who struggle when it comes to guidance. When they pray, they strain to hear anything. They know God speaks, but either they don't believe He wants to talk to them, or they don't want to obey what He says. Many believers have never known the thrill of hearing God's gentle voice in their spirits.

There are Christians who teach that God doesn't speak to people personally. They believe the only guidance you need comes from the Bible. That's actually a strange doctrine, since the Bible itself says God speaks to individuals. The phrases, "And God said ... " or "the word of the Lord came to so-and-so," appear more than 2,000 times in the Old Testament.

Do you want to hear God's voice more clearly? I believe there are four primary ways He communicates with us:

1. You can hear God's voice by reading the Bible. People sometimes complain: "I just never hear God speaking." Yet when I ask if they read the Bible regularly, they say they're too busy. They might hurriedly read a chapter while getting dressed, or listen to their Bible app while driving. But serious Bible study is rare for them.

God inspired 40 authors over a period of 1,600 years to compile the Bible. After it was written in Hebrew and Greek,

many people were martyred because they translated it in a modern language. God went to a lot of trouble to give us His book. Yet today Bibles collect dust because people are too busy to read His personalized love letter to us.

When you read Scripture with a prayerful heart, God can cause a verse to jump off the page as a direct message to you. Expect Him to speak directly to you from Scripture.

2. You can hear God's voice through the supernatural inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not an eerie presence that just hovers around us. He lives in every born-again Christian, and He comforts us and actively speaks to us. He can do this in many ways: through dreams, visions, warnings, a sense of conviction, or—most often—through what we know as the “still, small voice” (1 Kings 19:12b) of the Spirit.

I have had prophetic dreams and visions, but the most common way the Spirit speaks to me is through a deep sense of inward knowing. I will never forget a time in 1985 when God spoke to me while I was driving my car in Florida. A message came to me, not audibly but in my spirit: “You will move to Washington, D.C.” It seemed to come out of the blue, and I knew it did not originate with me. Four years later I was offered a job in the Washington, D.C., area, and I worked there for three years.

The ability to hear the Spirit's voice is developed over years as we grow in Christ. If you really want to hear Him, you should ask God to fill you with His Spirit. As you allow more of the Spirit's presence and power in your life, you will set aside your selfish agendas and sinful habits so God can communicate without hindrance.

3. You can hear God's voice through people. We are members of His body, the church, and you will hear God better when you are in fellowship with His people. God can speak to you

through a pastor's sermon, a friend's wise counsel, a mother's rebuke, a mentor's phone call or a prophetic word given to you by one of God's Spirit-filled servants. If you live in isolation, you probably won't hear much from God.

God uses the gift of prophecy, but you should never chase after prophecies. I know Christians who will travel across the country to attend a prophetic conference to get a word from God, yet they have not read the Bible in months or sat still long enough to hear from God on their own. Never treat the holy gift of prophecy like fortune telling. When God needs to speak to you in an unusual way, He has faithful messengers who will deliver it to you at the exact time you need it.

4. You can hear God's voice through circumstances. My oldest daughter wanted to attend a college in Tennessee, and we were praying about her decision. Right after we prayed, I got a call from the president of a college in Georgia. He was inviting me to speak at the school, but in our conversation I learned that this school was willing to offer my daughter a scholarship. She ended up enrolling in that school, meeting her future husband there and graduating four years later. God was totally involved in that phone call from Georgia!

God is sovereign. He opens doors that no man can shut. If you have been praying about getting a job at one company, and suddenly you get an offer at a different company, this may be God's sign that He has a better place for you to work. Listen carefully. Tune into His frequency. Be willing to obey Him. He promises to guide your steps. {eoa}

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Can We Stop Arguing About Speaking in Tongues?

I have had a private “prayer language” since I was 18 years old. No one taught me how to pray in tongues. I was raised in a church that didn’t teach about the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament. In fact, the first person I ever heard speaking in tongues was me, at the moment Jesus baptized me in the Holy Spirit.

I don’t think of myself as superior to anyone because I have this gift. Most people have never heard me pray in tongues because I do it in my private devotional time. But because I’ve written about it and preach about it often, some people have questioned it or even accused me of promoting false teaching.

One prominent fundamentalist leader published a book in 2013 in which he claims that the gift of *glossolalia* was only valid in New Testament times. This same leader (whom I consider a brother in Christ) mocked my experience and accused me of heresy. In his theology, all supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit described in the book of Acts stopped after the Bible was compiled.

People will probably argue about speaking in tongues until Jesus comes back. Meanwhile, we have a world to win for Christ. Don’t we need all the spiritual power heaven has offered us?

Paul the apostle, who wrote a huge percentage of the New Testament, didn’t apologize for speaking in tongues. He told the Corinthians: “I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all” (1 Cor. 14:18, NASB 1995). He also emphasized that he

prayed in the Spirit privately. The gift of tongues was not a badge Paul wore to prove he was super-spiritual; it was not to be flaunted, showcased, misused or abused. But neither did Paul ignore it or downgrade it.

For Paul, the gift of tongues was a source of inner strength, and I'm sure it was one of the secrets of his success in carrying the gospel to the whole known world. Here are three of the primary reasons we desperately need this gift today:

Praying in the Spirit recharges you. You would probably never go far from your house without your phone charger. Why? You will be disconnected if your battery dies. Praying in the Spirit is God's provision for the strengthening of your "inner man." Paul said: "One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (1 Cor. 14:4a). The Greek word here for "edifies" means "to restore, rebuild or repair." How blessed we are that the Holy Spirit gives us a means to regain new strength when we are weary, overwhelmed, depleted or simply in need of special help.

Praying in the Spirit releases God's wisdom and direction. Paul said that one who speaks in a tongue "speaks mysteries" (1 Cor. 14:2). We don't know what we are saying, yet God reveals His truth to us as we pray. In Romans 8:26, Paul says when we pray in the spirit, "the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

I can't count the number of times God has given me inspired solutions to problems while I was praying in tongues. I didn't know what I was saying, yet thoughts popped into my head that I knew were not my own. Why would you want to lean on your own understanding when we have a means to directly receive God's thoughts and plans when we pray?

Praying in the Spirit unleashes extra power. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples prayed in tongues, and I am sure they continued praying in that manner. The flames on their heads

did not remain visible, but the fire continued to blaze inside them. We should never quench the fire of Pentecost; it should be a perpetual flame that we stoke every day. This is why Paul warned the Corinthians: “Do not forbid to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39b).

Paul prayed both in tongues and in his native language. He wrote: “What is *the outcome* then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also” (1 Cor. 14:15). Paul didn’t limit his prayers to one track; his prayers had what we might describe as a one-two punch. His prayers had double impact because of the added spiritual dimension of a heavenly language.

Like Elisha, we receive a double-portion mantle when we are filled with the Holy Ghost. Why be confined to natural limitations when we have been invited to step into a supernatural dimension? Pray in the Spirit often. Stay refilled and charged. Take advantage of every spiritual gift God has given us so the world can see a demonstration of His power. {eoa}

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5 Ways Another Pentecost Will Surprise Us

When people staged surprise birthday parties for me in the past, I usually figured out their plans. But two years ago some friends organized a party without my knowing, and when I walked into the room I was totally shocked. There were banners, balloons, a cake and 30 people—and I didn't see it coming. This must be how it felt to be one of the disciples on the day of Pentecost.

Jesus told His followers they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit, but He gave them no clue about when or how. The key word in Acts 2 is “suddenly,” found in verse 2. When they were gathered together they heard the sound of wind; they saw flames of fire; and they began to speak in languages they didn't know. The commotion attracted a huge international crowd. After Peter preached, 3,000 people decided to believe in Jesus. And none of this was rehearsed.

We will celebrate Pentecost this year on Sunday, May 23. Are you ready for another surprise? On the first Pentecost, heaven literally came down. The Holy Spirit “filled” the room (v. 2) and “filled” the disciples (v. 4). That's because they needed supernatural power to do the work Jesus commissioned them to do. The church can't do its job if we are filled with ourselves; we must be empty and surrendered, so God can work.

We are overdue for another heavenly visitation. As I have read and reread the book of Acts this year, I see five blessings of Pentecost that we need today:

1. We need the rushing wind of new life. Acts 2:2 says “a noise like a violent rushing wind” filled the upper room where the disciples prayed. The sound was evidence of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit

brooded over the waters of creation to bring life (Gen. 1:2), the Holy Spirit breathed His life into dry bones and brought forth a living church.

We need this new life today. The church is dry. Our congregations are aging. Many churches today haven't baptized a new convert in years. We can't jumpstart new life in our churches with programs, nice buildings or slick social media promotions. We need heaven's wind to resuscitate and revive us. Lord, send the wind again!

2. We need the fire of God's holiness. There was no giant pillar of fire standing nearby on the day of Pentecost. In the time of the New Covenant, the flame rests on each person. The fire burns much closer to us. The Holy Spirit comes to live inside of each of us, and the flame rests on every head. Every believer is ignited with a holy passion for God.

We will not impact our wayward culture unless every Christian carries the fire inside. Not only does everyone need to be filled with the Spirit, but we must also learn to maintain the fire and never quench it. This requires that we crucify our ungodly desires and develop close intimacy with the Holy Spirit. Lord, send the fire again!

3. We need the tongues of supernatural anointing. I hear a lot of talk about the Holy Spirit these days, but words can be cheap. In the New Testament, the disciples had more than words—they had the demonstration of supernatural miracles. They had what the Bible calls "the manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:7). One definition of "manifestation" is "a perceptible, outward or visible expression."

Many Christians today have gone so long without seeing the reality of God's healing power that they don't even believe God heals today. But God never unplugged His power; we short-circuited it with our unbelief. People need to know that the same Jesus who makes lame beggars walk and blind men see is

still working in us. Lord, send Your miracles again!

4. We need bold preaching that produces conversion. The miracles of wind, fire and speaking in tongues were important. But the biggest miracle happened when Peter, a flawed man who had denied Jesus three times, preached a bold sermon. Peter had many weaknesses, yet the Spirit worked through him anyway. He “raised his voice” (v. 14) and bravely defended his faith.

This is a lesson for us all. You may speak in tongues, but if you don't use the Spirit's power to reach lost souls, you have cheapened the definition of a Pentecostal. We often say that tongues is the initial evidence of the infilling of the Spirit. But if someone isn't bold to witness, they can't be full of the Spirit. Lord, give us souls again!

5. We need the miraculous unity of the Holy Spirit. Before the day of Pentecost was over, people from all over the Roman Empire had come to know Jesus Christ—people from Egypt, Libya, Mesopotamia, Rome, Persia and beyond. Peter had prophesied this miracle when he said the Holy Spirit would fall “on all mankind” (Acts 2:17). Pentecost is not Pentecost if it does not break down racial and cultural barriers. The Holy Spirit is grieved by racism and classism. Lord, break down the walls again!

I hope you are praying for another visitation of Pentecost. We can't predict what it will look like exactly, or where it might begin, but our hearts should be desperate for God to unleash it. {eoa}

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Please Turn Off Your Phone

On any given day I communicate with dozens of people through texts, calls or video chats. Thanks to apps such as iTranslate and WhatsApp, I can talk on my smart phone with friends on the other side of the world who don't speak English. You will never hear me complaining about the blessings of technology.

But there's a downside to the digital age. What began as a tool has become a tyrant. So many people today are slaves to their phones. We use them to read books, watch TV, shop, order food, play games, follow the news, check facts, pay bills, monitor the weather and plot the route to a destination. Sometimes I wonder how we existed back in the days of paper maps, phone booths and brick-and-mortar stores.

Smartphones make communication so much easier, and yet they have ruined communication. I've seen groups of friends sitting together in a coffee shop, gathered around a table, yet everyone is engaged in his or her own private phone conversation. With all of our texting, calling, FaceTime chats and social media posts, we sometimes ignore the people who matter most.

We've become "experts" at multi-tasking. People talk on their phones or check their Apple watches while they carry on live conversations with friends. They text and drive. People even surf the Internet in church, not to look up Bible verses but to see yesterday's Instagram posts.

We are hopelessly distracted. We are everywhere, and yet we are nowhere. With all of our digital savvy we forgot how to care. We know how to download an app, but we forgot how to focus on those we love. If this is true for you, I recommend

three steps to reclaim genuine human contact:

1. **Change your phone settings.** My phone has a button on the home screen called “Do Not Disturb.” I use it often. If you’re eating dinner with your spouse, meeting a friend for coffee or gathering in a small group, you don’t need to hear every text or call that comes through. Unless someone you love is in the hospital, silence your phone. Common courtesy demands that you prioritize the people you are with.
2. **Retrain yourself to make eye contact.** I’ve noticed that young people today aren’t always comfortable making eye contact with others. We are so used to texting, sitting behind anonymous Uber drivers or ordering food at fast-food counters that we don’t know how to look into someone’s eyes and have a meaningful conversation. With all our modern connectivity, we are the most disconnected generation in history.

When I meet with someone for mentoring, or just for a casual conversation, my goal is to make them feel special. I look them in the eyes, ask questions, pay attention to details and deeply engage. If I’m constantly looking at my phone while I’m in a conversation, I am rudely saying, “You aren’t important to me.”

When Jesus saw Nathanael from far away, He noticed details about him. When they met, Jesus said: “When you were under the fig tree, I saw you” (John 1:48b, NASB 1995). Nathanael was amazed that Jesus took such genuine interest in him. That small gesture changed his life! If you want to communicate love, stay focused.

3. **Learn to listen with both ears.** When my elderly father sustained a brain injury a few years ago, he lost the ability to filter out background noises. Every sound was amplified to the same level, whether it was the person

talking to him directly, the icemaker on the other side of the room or a passing train a mile away. He heard every sound equally, so he couldn't focus.

Today many people have lost the ability to focus. In this noisy, media-saturated culture, we are too easily distracted. We are losing the ability to listen.

This distraction is actually a form of laziness. We are too undisciplined to focus on one thing, and this can ruin relationships. If people see you constantly answering texts or glancing at your phone notifications during a conversation, they will tune you out. It's obvious you don't think they are worth your full attention.

An old Irish proverb says, "God gave us two hears and one mouth, so we ought to listen twice as much as we speak." I urge you to evaluate your communication skills. People in this fast-paced, distracted world need someone to talk to. They need a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. If you will turn off your phone, look them in the eyes and listen carefully, they might open their hearts and ask you to tell them the secret of your genuine kindness. {eoa}

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Why You Should Never Bury Your Pain

Recently the Lord gave me a specific word of knowledge as I was finishing a sermon in a church. The Holy Spirit showed me, through a strong impression, that there was a woman in the crowd who struggled with serious, ongoing depression.

I knew this woman felt as if she were trapped in a dark box of emotional pain. I also sensed that the heaviness was causing sleep problems. So I shared all of this from the podium.

I don't expect people to raise their hands and admit their struggles publicly in situations like this. Sometimes God just wants the person to know He is there, and He understands. But in this case, a woman who fit this exact description came to me after the service ended. She was shy and tearful.

She told me that she immediately froze when I shared the word of knowledge. Shame and fear paralyzed her. Yet she knew God was calling her out of that box.

I made her feel safe and gently asked her to share her experience. Her life was marked by painful abuse—including physical violence from a former husband. And, sadly, she had never asked a trusted Christian friend to pray for her. Intimidation and guilt kept her in a prison of pain.

I was not only able to pray for her, but I connected her with a woman from the church who is trained in biblical counseling and healing prayer. They exchanged numbers and scheduled a time to meet. I'm thrilled that a victim of abuse found freedom that day. But I'm also sad because I know that so many people in this woman's situation have still never told one human soul about their inner turmoil.

I can't count how many times people have opened their hearts

and told me horrible things they endured in life—sexual abuse, abandonment by a parent, bullying or physical violence—and then they admit, “I’ve never told anyone about this until today.”

If you have endured some form of trauma or abuse, or if you are holding on to a painful secret that you’ve never shared, please take this as the strongest hint possible that you need to open your heart and ask for help.

Ever since Adam and Eve hid their nakedness from God, human beings have been looking for creative and deceptive ways to hide their sin and shame. The Bible describes our hearts as both “hard” (Zech. 7:12) and “deceitful” (Jer. 17:9). We would rather pretend that we have it all together than to admit we have a weakness. And if we experienced something shameful or traumatic, our tendency is to bury the memory—either because we think it was our fault, or because we fear people will reject us if they know what happened.

But closing your heart is never healthy. Even secular counselors will tell you that living in denial of a painful experience will create further emotional problems. Toxic emotions, if locked inside you, will build up like a pressure cooker. The dark goo of anxiety, fear, anger or unforgiveness will become like a fermented poison in your soul—and it can cause mental anguish, headaches, chronic pain, stress, lack of energy, nightmares and even disease.

James 5:16a (NASB) says: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.” The “sins” here can be either sins we committed or sins that were committed against us. (Of course abuse is not the victim’s fault, but in either case, transparency is crucial.) God didn’t create us for isolation, and our hearts shouldn’t require a padlock to open. To be emotionally healthy you must learn to process your pain with someone who cares.

I experienced sexual abuse when I was just a boy of seven, and I never told anyone about it until I was 19. For all those years I stuffed my feelings and pretended to act normally, even though I was limping and bleeding inside. Thankfully a load of shame was lifted off of me when I shared my painful burden with a trusted friend and counselor. Waves of healing followed. The devil could no longer use that embarrassing incident to taunt me. I was free.

If you are haunted by any form of painful trauma, be assured that God wants to heal you. Don't limp through life, pretending that your pain isn't real. Be honest. Unlock your heart. Let your guard down. Let the tears flow. Be willing to trust a mature Christian to pray with you. Vulnerability is the key to your deliverance. {eoa}

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God Is Calling His 'Unqualified' Warriors Out of Hiding

My friend Jesse has been following the Lord faithfully for 25 years, and he and his wife are raising two daughters to love Jesus. Jesse has been a fixture at Life Church in Allentown,

Pennsylvania, since 1997, and he has served wherever needed—as an usher, a greeter, in the marriage ministry and on the homeless outreach team.

But like so many Christians I know, Jesse has stayed behind an invisible line in regard to certain leadership responsibilities. He especially doesn't like the microphone, even though people are blessed when he shares anything from the pulpit. He feels so insecure about public speaking that the thought of giving a sermon triggers intense anxiety.

Jesse feels more comfortable on the sidelines. But in this pandemic season, when so many people are still in quarantine, God is calling Jesse out of the shadows.

I relate to Jesse because I used to live in the shadows of insecurity and fear. God began calling me out of my comfortable hiding place 24 years ago, and I wrestled with Him for months before surrendering.

Is he calling you, too?

When the Lord sent the prophet Samuel to anoint the next king of Israel, David was on the backside of the family farm. He was not even invited to greet Samuel. Apparently, David's father and the others there did not consider David worthy to be considered for this job interview. But after Samuel met seven of David's brothers, the Lord said, "The Lord has not chosen these" (1 Sam. 16:10b).

When Samuel asked if there were any more candidates, David's father admitted there was one other son, the youngest, who was busy tending sheep. David was awkwardly presented to the prophet as an afterthought. But when Samuel poured the oil on him, and "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David" (v. 13b, NASB 1995). The unqualified suddenly became a warrior.

Whenever I pray over the global church in this season, I see a massive crowd of people on the edge of a battlefield. Some are

awkwardly wearing battle armor; others are sitting down on benches; all are avoiding the spotlight. This crowd represents the reluctant warriors God wants to use. They know they are called, but their feelings of insecurity, disqualification and fear have paralyzed them.

They are stuck in a valley of shadows. But I hear the Holy Spirit saying this: "Now is the time for my reluctant warriors to surrender. Strip off the labels of failure you have been wearing. Stop listening to the accusations of the enemy. I have not disqualified you! Put on your armor and take your positions in battle. I am mobilizing My army, and I need my timid soldiers to come out of hiding."

If you are one of these reluctant recruits, you must make a powerful decision. You have been stuck in limbo, but God can deliver you from this paralysis. I would advise you to take a posture of surrender—get on your knees, lift your hands and tell God that you will do whatever He says, go wherever He commands you to go and say whatever He tells you to say.

Your prayer should be, "not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42b). Then take these three steps:

1. Surrender your fears. Whether it's a fear of public speaking, a fear of leading a small group, a fear of social interaction or a fear of criticism, renounce your fears in Jesus' name. 2 Timothy 1:7 says: "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline." Don't wait for the butterflies to go away or for your palms to stop sweating. You'll never break free until you actually step out and do what you fear. Goliath may look intimidating, but the truth is he is afraid of us because God is on our side.

2. Surrender your comforts. Many people have become complacent in this season of quarantine. Life is easier when we are cocooned inside our homes, watching TV in our pajamas and hiding from the stresses of life. But God didn't create you

for selfish isolation. Whether you feel like it or not, venture out. It will feel very awkward when you first get out of your boat, but if you keep your eyes on Jesus instead of the waves, you will learn to walk in a new way!

3. Surrender your plans. Too many of us have settled for less. We've boxed ourselves in to the ordinary and predictable. Be willing to set aside what you thought was best, and ask God to reveal His big dreams for you. Simply pray: *"Lord, don't let me live a status quo life. I yield to Your plans, no matter how much bigger they are than my own."* {eoa}

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How 'Woke' Race Theory Contradicts Christian Faith

Unless you've been hiding under a rock for a year, you know America is now "woke." People are tearing down statues of Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and other historical figures connected to racism. Celebrities are "canceled" because of racist comments they made 15 years ago. Protestors are burning down government buildings or looting stores to denounce racism.

At the root of this discussion is something called Critical

Race Theory, or CRT, an idea that began decades ago on college campuses but became popular in 2020 after the tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The philosophy was summarized in a bestselling 2018 book called *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo—a white woman who is described as a “diversity consultant.”

Ironically, an African American professor at Columbia University, John McWhorter, picked apart *White Fragility* last year in his scathing review of the book in *The Atlantic*. This discerning Black writer didn’t buy DiAngelo’s argument, and he described *White Fragility* as “the prayer book for what can only be described as a cult.”

McWhorter’s words confirmed what I felt in my gut when I studied DiAngelo’s philosophy. Critical Race Theory might sound good on the surface to some people, but it’s a deceptive idea that divides people, makes race relations impossible and actually demeans people of color.

Critical Race Theory, in summary, says this:

- All white people are inherently racist, whether they realize it or not.
- White supremacy is built into our government and institutions—and even in the U.S. Constitution—because white people inherently seek to maintain power through law.
- White people must work hard to rid themselves of the need for “white privilege,” but in the end they really can never be truly free of their whiteness. They will always be at a disadvantage because they are forever linked to institutional racism.

If that sounds depressing, you haven’t heard half of it. Some people who embrace CRT believe we should abolish all law enforcement; they believe destroying neighborhoods can be an acceptable form of protest; and some have even suggested that

private property ownership should be abolished.

Here are three fundamental ways Critical Race Theory contradicts our Christian faith:

1. Racism is a human problem, not just a “white” problem.

The “woke” crowd today insists that all white people are racists, but it leaves no possibility that a Black, Asian or Latino person can be racist because they are not “in power.” To believe this is to deny the record of human history.

I’ve traveled all over the world, and I’ve see racism in every culture: White Europeans mistreat the Gypsies; Indians have marginalized Indians from lower castes; in Africa, various tribal groups oppress each other, sometimes brutally (for example, in Rwanda in 1994, members of the Hutu tribe slaughtered up to 600,000 of the Tutsi tribe.) In Latin America, white Spaniards mistreat indigenous people; in China today, mounting evidence shows the government is brutalizing the Uyghur people, a Turkic minority.

And let’s not forget that there is such a thing as Black supremacy, a philosophy promoted in the United States by several groups including the Nation of Islam. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in a 1966 speech, famously declared: “A doctrine of Black supremacy is as dangerous as a doctrine of white supremacy.”

We all have a common ancestry; our skin color is a secondary characteristic. Acts 17:26 (NKJV) says: “He has made from one blood every nation of men.” We are all created by God, and because of Adam and Eve’s sin, we all share in a fallen nature. Any fallen human being is capable of oppression and racial injustice.

2. Racism is a sin that can be confessed and forgiven. The early followers of Jesus were all Jews, and they held to a form of Jewish elitism. But when they were filled with

the Holy Spirit, their hearts changed toward people of other races. Peter first struggled when he went into the house of Cornelius, an Italian, but when the Holy Spirit fell on those Italians, he said, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality" (Acts 10:34b, NASB). The Jewish-only mindset changed; suddenly the church became a loving family of all races and cultures.

In today's "woke" debate, there seems to be no hope of unity. The implication is that our entire society must be burned down and rebuilt in order to right the wrongs of the past. But that is a total denial of the redemption of Jesus Christ. When the Savior paid for our sins on the cross, He also paid for the sin of racism. That means that when people trust in Jesus, and embrace His love and mercy, their sins are washed away, and their hard hearts are transformed.

3. To heal racism requires forgiveness and restitution, not revenge. Many proponents of Critical Race Theory teach that the only way to purge the world of white privilege is to dismantle our institutions and give minorities special privilege. Their unspoken mantra is: "Burn it down." But this is not the heart of Jesus, who told us to love our enemies and to pray for them. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. taught us in the 1960s that violence is never the answer. He preached: "He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love."

America has reached a critical junction: Will we choose the narrow path of Christian love, non-violence and forgiveness? Or will we embrace the wide road of hatred, division and woke political theories that have no power to transform us? I pray we will walk in the footsteps of Jesus. {eoa}

Don't Slam the Door on the Holy Spirit—Invite Him to Move!

This past weekend I preached at a growing church in Lake City, Florida, about an hour west of Jacksonville. For several weeks the pastor, Chris Jones, has been taking his congregation through the book of Acts—chapter by chapter—because he wants to create a culture of hunger for the Holy Spirit.

Jones is aware that many new people have joined his church who come from various denominational backgrounds. Some have never had the personal experience of an infilling of the Holy Spirit, or they have never seen the gifts of the Spirit in operation. He invited me to share my testimony of how I received the baptism of the Spirit when I was a teenager and to pray for people to go deeper in the Spirit's power.

I'm thankful that this young pastor wants his people to go beyond shallow Christianity. Many church leaders today are afraid to allow the Holy Spirit to move. We've put the Spirit in a box. But because Jones encouraged his people to break free from fears or religious traditions, everyone in the Lake City church seemed wholeheartedly open. At a special Sunday night service, dozens of people came to the altar to receive the baptism of the Spirit, while others wanted a fresh refilling.

This should not be a once-in-a-decade event. People need the reality of God's power. My prayer lately has been that we will stop being so worried about how the Holy Spirit will show up or what He might do. Do you want this freedom in your church?

Here are six practical things you can do to open the door wider for a revival of Pentecost:

Teach about the Holy Spirit often. The Holy Spirit was rarely mentioned in the church I grew up in, so we never expected Him to do anything. Yet the Bible is full of stories of people who did supernatural things because the Spirit worked through them. We must stop ignoring Him. Invite the Spirit to move and speak in your church by giving Him the place He deserves.

Leave room for altar ministry. A church without altar ministry is like a hospital without a maternity ward. New life often begins at the altar—whether it is salvation, healing, prophetic ministry or the impartation of a fresh anointing. Today many churches that offer multiple services often skimp on ministry time because they are focused on herding the 10 a.m. group out of the sanctuary to get ready for the 11:30 a.m. crowd. Multiple services are fine, but we are crowding the Spirit out of the church if we don't schedule time for people to respond to the message. Don't be in such a hurry to end a service that you quench the Spirit.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches stopped having altar ministry because of the need for social distancing. But God is not limited by a virus! I've seen healings happen recently when I prayed for people on a Zoom call. And the most dramatic miracle I ever witnessed in my own ministry happened when I prayed from the stage for a woman in the back of the auditorium! You do not have to touch a person physically to see a miracle.

Have small groups where people can use the Holy Spirit's gifts. It's not practical for everyone to prophesy or exercise other spiritual gifts in a large congregation. But if people are plugged into small groups, there will be opportunities for believers to encourage one another in supernatural ways. And people are more comfortable stepping out in faith in front of 10 people than they are in front of 3,000.

Train people in prophecy, healing and Spirit-led ministry.

Many pastors clamp down on spiritual gifts because a few fanatics with inflated egos pulled the church into weirdness. But in our effort to protect the sheep from chaos, let's not swing the pendulum to the other extreme by forbidding the gifts of the Spirit. Paul told the Corinthians, "Do not forbid speaking in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:39b), and he told the Thessalonians, "Do not despise prophecies" (1 Thess. 5:20). If we shut down the gifts, we are essentially telling God that we can run our meetings without Him.

Expose your church to healthy ministries that flow in the anointing.

God not only gave the church pastors—He also gave evangelists, teachers, prophets and apostles (see Eph. 4:11). Yet many churches today know only pastors. We need life-giving traveling ministries because God sends them to win new converts, heal the sick, unleash prophetic power, train leaders and impart new vision in congregations. We should not be afraid to open our pulpits to the ministry gifts God has raised up to bless the church.

Give time for testimonies of God's supernatural power.

Nothing raises the faith level of a congregation like someone's raw experience with God. If a man was healed this week in your church, let him shout it from the housetops. If an infertile couple got pregnant, let them tell about the goodness of God. If a teenager led another student to Jesus, let him share his story. Testimonies trigger a holy expectation in everyone—and God gets the glory for His miracles.

Pentecost is May 23. As you prepare for that big day on the church calendar, lift your hands in surrender and pray, "Holy Spirit, come." Instead of being afraid of what the Spirit might disrupt or whom He might offend, let's rather fear what our churches would be like without Him. Let's fling open the doors and allow the Spirit to have His way. {eoa}

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in

our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.

After the 2020 Election, Can We Salvage the Gift of Prophecy?

It's been more than two months since Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States. Some people rejoiced that day because their candidate won. Supporters of Donald Trump mourned the loss, and some of them claimed that voter fraud occurred in several states. It was one of the most contentious elections in my lifetime—and the anger exploded on Jan. 6 when activists stormed the U.S. Capitol.

In the midst of the hateful name-calling, some Christian leaders were thrust into the national spotlight because they prophesied—in the name of Jesus—that Trump would be reelected. In the embarrassing aftermath, some prophets apologized; others dug in their heels and announced that Trump would still be installed in office during Biden's term. Still others said Trump actually did win the election, but they insisted that miscounted votes skewed the outcome.

In the end, we were left with a mess. Some voters lost faith in the integrity of elections. Democrats impeached Trump even when he was out of office because of the Capitol insurrection.

And Congress is more bitterly divided than at any time in our history.

Meanwhile, Christians are left wondering about the gift of prophecy. Is it real? Can we trust any leader again to say, "Thus says the Lord," about anything? Believers were left scratching their heads as they listened to Christians scream at each other from both sides of the political aisle.

I kept my mouth shut during the early days of this disaster. The Bible says we are to pray for those in authority "so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim. 2:2b, NASB1995). I've seen very little tranquility, godliness or dignity during the past year, so I'll keep praying. My prayers, and yours, are certainly more powerful than any article I could write.

But after taking time to pray, and to calm my own nerves, I'm ready to share three things I've learned from this unfortunate fiasco:

1. **New Testament prophecy has a specific redemptive purpose.** When I teach about prophecy to ministry school students, I always start with 1 Corinthians 14:3: "But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation [comfort]." Prophecy conveys God's heart to His people; it encourages us and propels us into His purpose. Prophecy is like God's wind in our sails. It is not for fortunetelling or prediction as much as it is to impart God's strength into His people. It gives us the hope of God's promises.

In recent years we've created a cottage industry of charismatic prophets who sell books, do podcasts and make predictions about elections, global disasters and even Super Bowl winners. People chase these prophets to get the latest scoop on world events—while the genuine gift of prophecy is neglected. While biblical prophecy can be predictive, it is

not focused on foretelling tomorrow's headlines. We should stop looking for the sensational and get back to encouraging people!

- 2. Propheying about politics is divisive.** The last time I checked, my Bible says those who divide God's people into camps are actually quenching the Holy Spirit. Paul rebuked the Corinthians because they separated themselves into ethnic and theological camps, "of Paul," "of Apollos," "of Cephas" and even "of Christ" (see 1 Cor. 1:12). We've done the same thing today, only we are "of Trump," "of Biden," "of conservatives" or "of progressives." We should be ashamed of ourselves for splintering the body of Christ.

This doesn't mean we can't stand for what we believe, campaign for candidates or work to further civic goals. We need Christians in the public arena; we are the salt of the earth. But the pulpit of a church is not the place for a campaign rally. A minister carries a special responsibility to call a congregation to focus on the kingdom of God.

In the last election, some preachers denounced Trump and said Biden was the only candidate for people of faith; other preachers denounced Biden and made Trump into a Messiah figure. It would be better for every leader to challenge God's people to vote their consciences and leave the political dogfight alone.

That doesn't mean we don't stand for righteousness or denounce ungodly laws. But ungodliness exists on both sides of our political system, and if we refuse to admit that, we align ourselves with darkness. Unless our message transcends politics, we can no longer be a prophetic people.

- 3. This isn't the first time prophecy has been misused.** In the 1980s, Christian leaders told us Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev was the Antichrist. Then when he died,

they said it was Yuri Andropov. Then they said it was Mikhail Gorbachev. Guess what? None of those Soviet communists led a worldwide revolt against God. All those leaders died, and the gospel kept spreading in Russia.

Since then, “prophets” predicted a Y2K disaster in 2000 that never happened; one famous prophet predicted a California earthquake disaster; and a few bestselling authors said the world would end on a certain day. Their failed prophecies discredited them, but that doesn’t mean we throw out the authentic gift of prophecy.

I’m not saying God can’t give someone a prophecy about an election. But the apostle Paul said, “For we know in part and we prophesy in part” (1 Cor. 13:9). Nobody has the whole story. In cases like this we have to be very careful that we aren’t promoting our own wishes or biases in the name of the Lord. And we must never use a spiritual gift to manipulate people.

When the real gift of prophecy is in operation, it brings encouragement, comfort and strength to the church—and it never distracts us from Jesus. Let’s ponder the mistakes of 2020, learn from them and ask God to help us use prophecy in a healthy way. {eoa}

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.

We Were Born to Burn in a Baptism of Fire, So Let's Tend to the Flame

A few years ago the Lord challenged me about my level of spiritual hunger. He showed me that even though I had stood in many prayer lines and repeatedly sung the words, "Lord, I want more of You," I wasn't as passionate for Him as I thought I was.

My church sponsored a conference on the Holy Spirit. At the close of one service, I was lying on the floor near the altar, asking God for another touch of His power. Several other people were kneeling at the Communion rail and praying quietly for each other.

Suddenly I began to have a vision. In my mind I could see a large pipeline, at least eight feet in diameter. I was looking at it from the inside, and I could see a shallow stream of golden liquid flowing at the bottom. The oil in the giant pipe was only a few inches deep.

I began a conversation with the Lord. "What are You showing me?" I asked.

"This is a picture of the flow of the Holy Spirit in your life," He answered.

It was not an encouraging visual. It was pitiful! The capacity of the pipeline was huge—enough to convey tons of oil. Yet only a trickle was evident.

Then I noticed something else: Several large valves were lined up along the sides of the pipeline, and each valve was shut.

I wanted to ask the Lord why there was so little oil in my life. Instead I asked: "What are those valves, and why are

they closed?"

His answer stunned me. "Those represent the times when you said no to Me. Why should I increase the level of anointing if you aren't available to use it?"

The words stung. When had I said no to God? I was overcome with emotion and began to repent. I recalled different excuses I had made and the limitations I had placed on how He could use me.

I had told Him I didn't want to be in front of crowds because I wasn't a good speaker. I had told Him I didn't want to address certain issues or go certain places. I had placed so many conditions on my obedience.

After a while I began to see something else in my spirit. It was a huge crowd of Africans, assembled as if they were in a large arena. And I saw myself preaching to them.

Nobody had ever asked me to minister in Africa, but I knew at that moment I needed to surrender my will. All I could think to say was the prayer of Isaiah: "Here am I. Send me" (Isa. 6:8b). I told God I would go anywhere and say anything He asked. I laid my insecurities, fears and inhibitions on the altar.

Three years later I stood at a pulpit inside a sports arena in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. As I addressed a crowd of 8,000 pastors who had assembled there for a training conference, I remembered seeing their faces in that vision. And I realized that God had opened a new valve in my life that day when I was on the floor of my church. Because I had said yes, He had increased the flow of His oil so it could reach thousands.

We Need More Oil

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, gasoline fell to record low prices. I paid \$ a gallon in my home state of

Georgia. Some states reported prices below a dollar a gallon.

There were two reasons for the dramatic price drop: Not as many people were buying gasoline because of the pandemic, and Russia and Saudi Arabia were engaged in a price war, causing the oil supply to swing up. Market analysts said they'd never seen such a glut of oil on the market.

As I pondered this situation, the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and said: "Now is the time to fill up." I knew He wasn't talking about my car's gas tank. Sometimes there are things in the natural world that send spiritual messages.

Jesus talked about the importance of having enough oil. The five wise virgins in His parable in Matthew 25 made sure they had enough oil for their lamps, while the five foolish ones weren't prepared. They were locked out of the wedding feast because they didn't consider oil an essential commodity.

This same is true today during this strange international crisis. God wants us to be ready for what's coming. We need more of the Holy Spirit's oil.

We've been much like the foolish virgins. The oil of the Holy Spirit hasn't been important to us. We can take it or leave it. We don't think we need God's supernatural power because we have technology, comfortable church buildings, economic prosperity, eloquent preachers and slick contemporary worship.

We figured out a way to do church without God's help. We even have books and church growth gurus to teach us how to manufacture a cool vibe, entertain people for 60 minutes and get them out quickly. Revivalist A.W. Tozer said it this way: "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95% of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference."

Many churches today are devoid of the Holy Spirit's raw power. Conversions are rare. Baptismal tanks are dry. Altars are

empty. We don't hear many testimonies of healings. And how long has it been since someone was freed from a demon? Our processed version of Christianity doesn't resemble the book of Acts.

This must change. What if God wants to send a global awakening of the Holy Spirit after this coronavirus pandemic ends? Do we have enough oil in our lamps to handle the next revival?

Dependence on the Holy Spirit was the early church's secret. The Spirit anointed the first disciples to heal the sick, discern evil spirits and carry the gospel boldly to difficult places. How did we ever think we could do ministry without that power?

When Paul went to Ephesus, he met some men who believed in Jesus in an intellectual way, yet they had never been born again. In fact they didn't know there was a Holy Spirit (see Acts. 19:1-7). This reminds me of many American churches. We go through the motions of church, but we are clueless about Pentecost.

Many of us have a habit of asking for more of God's power and anointing. We love to go to the altar for a touch from God. We love the goosebumps, the shaking and the emotion of the moment.

We love to fall on the floor and experience one filling after another. But I am afraid some of us are soaking up the anointing and not giving it away. Our charismatic experience has become inward and selfish. We fall on the floor and vibrate; then we get up and live like we want to.

But Pentecost is not a party. It's not about us. If we truly want to be empowered, we must offer God an unqualified yes. We must crucify every no. We must become a conduit to reach others, not a reservoir with no outlet.

Search your own heart today and see if there are any closed

valves in your pipeline. As you surrender them, the locked channels will open, and His oil will flow out to a world that craves to know He is real.

Lord, Send a Fresh Pentecost

On Feb. 17, 1967, more than 54 years ago, a miracle happened near Pittsburgh that the world has largely ignored. It happened at a small Catholic retreat center called The Ark and the Dove, where a group of students from Duquesne University had gathered for a weekend of prayer. Suddenly and without any warning, those students were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Patti Gallagher Mansfield, one of the first students to experience this outpouring of the Spirit, says she knew something remarkable and otherworldly had happened.

“Within the next hour, God sovereignly drew many of the students into the chapel,” she writes. “Some were laughing, others crying. Some prayed in tongues, others like me felt a burning sensation coursing through their hands.”

Gallagher had prayed a simple prayer prior to experiencing her personal Pentecost. She prayed, “Father, I give my life to You. Whatever You ask of me, I accept. And if it means suffering, I accept that too. Just teach me to follow Jesus and to love as He loves.”

The world was in turmoil in February 1967. Israel was on the verge of war with Palestinians. Racial tensions in the United States were triggering violence. Young protesters were demanding an end to the Vietnam War.

Few people noticed what happened to those students at Duquesne, but the fire that fell on them spread quickly to other campuses. Within a year, the Catholic charismatic movement spread to millions—and it jumped the theological firewall to touch Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and believers from all denominations.

It became the largest Christian movement since the Protestant reformation. Today, 70% of all Christians in Latin America are part of the neo-Pentecostal movement. Similar growth has occurred in Africa and parts of Asia.

The wave of supernatural renewal that swept across the United States in 1967 continues today. The Holy Spirit has not withdrawn from us. He longs to fill us, refresh us and empower us in this new season. But if you want to experience your own Pentecost, you must surrender as Gallagher did. You must want more of God.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told His disciples to stay in spiritual lockdown. He said in Luke 24:49 (NASB): "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

The disciples didn't know what they were waiting for. They had no idea what "clothed with power" meant. Jesus didn't give them a church bulletin with specific times, and He didn't warn them that they might experience wind, fire or strange languages. All He told them was "Stay put."

I imagine some of the more impetuous disciples were eager to venture out and tell others about Jesus, since they had seen Him after His Resurrection. But they obeyed the Lord. They went to the upper room in Jerusalem, and there they were "continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14a, NASB 1995).

And the waiting paid off. Several days later, the promised power arrived. Suddenly, the heavens opened. Just as Elijah left his mantle for Elisha, the glorious mantle of Jesus came upon His followers. Every person in the upper room was filled with the Holy Spirit, and they were transformed into blazing spiritual torches. Before the day ended, 3,000 people believed in Jesus and were baptized.

This is the message of Pentecost. Prayer comes first, then power.

Our tendency is to run ahead of God. We like shortcuts. Or we arrogantly assume we can do a better job with our money, education and technological savvy. Yet the truth is that many American churches are just spinning their expensive religious wheels. We are very busy, but we are ineffective.

British missionary C.T. Studd, who lived from 1860-1931, saw this tendency years ago. He wrote: "How little chance the Holy Ghost has nowadays. The churches and missionary societies have so bound Him in red tape that they practically ask Him to sit in a corner while they do the work themselves."

I intend to pursue a personal Pentecost during the month of May, and I invite you to join me. I will soak in the book of Acts during those days, and I will squeeze every drop of revelation possible out of those 28 chapters. I'll read the first chapter on May 1, the second chapter on May 2, and so on.

(If you'd like, you can also follow along in my 28-day study of the book of Acts on the YouVersion Bible app. Just download the app and search for "Rekindle the Flame.")

I will also pray for a rekindling of the Holy Spirit's flame in my life and in the global church. We are in desperate need of fresh fire today. The church is sick with hidden sin and weak with moral compromise. We have left our first love. Could it be that God is giving us this special "time out" to prepare us for the coming harvest?

Do you have the fire of Pentecost? The apostle Paul tells us that all Christians should have a spiritual temperature that reaches the boiling point. In Romans 12:11 he commands us to be "fervent in spirit." The Greek word for "fervent" is *zeo*, which means "to boil like hot liquid or to glow like hot metal." I challenge you to use this extra time to examine your

heart in these areas:

- Am I fully surrendered to God in all areas? Is Jesus truly my Lord?
- Have I allowed the things of the world to steal my passion for Jesus?
- Do I need to repent of any hidden sins or unhealthy habits?
- Is spending time with the Lord a priority, or have other things become more important?
- Am I using my spiritual gifts to serve others?

Am I bold enough to share Jesus with others? Or am I ashamed of my faith?

Have I fully surrendered so the Holy Spirit's oil can flow through me in fullest measure? Or have I blocked the flow of that oil with my own selfishness?

If you are willing to take this risky journey, please join me as we pursue a fresh Pentecost. You can say this prayer as you begin:

"Lord, please set my heart ablaze. Send a fresh wave of the Holy Spirit to my church, my city and my nation. We need another earth-shaking revival like the great awakenings of past generations. Do it again, Lord. Let the book of Acts be repeated in my lifetime. Unleash the full force of Pentecost, and let me be a part of it. I don't want to be a spectator in this movement. I want to be in the very middle of it! Let me heart burn with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and let me carry that fire everywhere You send me."

READ MORE: Fire up with the power of Pentecost at .

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