

# 6 Ways to Identify the Antichrist Spirit

Back in the 1940s, people believed Adolf Hitler was the Antichrist because he murdered more than 6 million Jews. A couple of decades later, Americans spread the rumor that Communist leader Leonid Brezhnev was the true Antichrist. Then in 1976, the popular movie *The Omen* fueled the idea that the Antichrist might emerge from the United States.

Today the Antichrist mantle has been awarded to a wide range of politicians, entrepreneurs and celebrities. Conspiracy theorists have labeled Bill Gates, George Soros and even Dr. Anthony Fauci the Antichrist since the COVID-19 pandemic began. And almost every American president since Franklin D. Roosevelt has been accused of being the devilish “beast” described in the book of Revelation—including Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

I’ve never believed the Antichrist is just one man. That’s partly because I know from history that Christians have suffered under evil dictators since the first century. In fact, early Christians believed the Roman emperor Nero was the Antichrist.

It’s no surprise that Nero still wins in the “beast” category. He had his own mother killed; he beheaded his first wife and murdered his stepbrother. He kicked his second wife to death while she was pregnant, and then he married a boy. And in his infamous efforts to wipe out all Christianity, he covered Christians in wax and lit them on fire to provide torches during his parties.

But one verse in the Bible gives us a clue that the Antichrist shouldn’t be viewed as one individual. The apostle John wrote: “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that

antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18, NASB).

This verse indicates there is a spirit of antichrist that has been working in the world from the beginning, manifesting in various eras. And throughout the book of Revelation we see that this Antichrist figure works in tandem with the devil and the false prophet to wage war on God and His people. The Antichrist is part of a demonic trinity—a counterfeit of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The spirit of antichrist works inside certain people to carry out Satan's mission.

I don't know about you, but I've never been more aware of this spirit operating in our nation than I have today. The devil is working overtime because he's furious that his days are numbered. He is mustering all his forces because he knows heaven is about to unleash the greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit in all of history.

We shouldn't focus our attention on the devil, but the Bible says clearly that we should not be ignorant of his crafty schemes (see 2 Cor. 2:11). The fingerprints of the Antichrist are everywhere around us today, and if you aren't aware of his strategies, you could come under his influence. Here are six ways to identify the antichrist spirit:

1. **The antichrist spirit hates God.** The devil wants the attention that only God deserves. He hates all righteousness and goodness. He wants evil to triumph. This is why people who hate God celebrate sin. And this is why we see in our own educational system a systematic attempt to replace Christian values with atheism.
2. **The antichrist spirit hates life.** The devil doesn't have the power to create because he himself was created. Jesus called Satan a "thief," and He said his goal is "to steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10b). No wonder

the devil loves it when people abuse alcohol and drugs; he fuels hatred in people so they will kill others. The devil is the author of racism. And isn't it obvious that only Satan would convince people that killing an unborn child, even up until the moment of birth, is acceptable?

3. **The antichrist spirit hates the family.** Not long ago, secular psychologists would have all agreed that children thrive when they have a mother and a father. You can't suggest that these days without being scorned or even "canceled" by social media censors. Our universities have become breeding grounds for hostility to anything traditional, including the simple scientific fact that there are only two genders. The antichrist spirit twists and perverts what is normal.
4. **The antichrist spirit hates authority.** In Romans 1:30 the apostle Paul refers to hardened sinners as "insolent"—which means, "showing a rude or arrogant lack of respect." In Paul's description of the deeds of the flesh, he also mentions "revilers" (1 Cor. 6:10). A reviler is "one who uses abusive or contemptuous speech." I've heard people use crude language all my life, but never to such an extent as we hear today. When you see hordes of people marching through our streets vandalizing property, spray-painting crude words on walls and screaming curse words, you can be sure the antichrist spirit is near.
5. **The antichrist spirit hates the prophetic word of God.** When Elijah called down fire from heaven, and God proved He was real to the whole nation of Israel, Jezebel got very angry. She was hell-bent on killing the prophet before he could preach again. This is why we must pray for all ministers in this challenging hour. We need the courage to speak, especially when God asks us to step on toes and break the rules of political correctness.

6. **The antichrist spirit hates the church.** Americans have enjoyed more than two centuries of religious freedom. But I have friends overseas who live in fear, either because their own government is closing churches or terrorists are killing Christians. Just this week I heard from a man in Nigeria whose wife and two children were killed by Muslim militants. I pray we never see such violence in the United States, but the spirit that is slaughtering Christians in Africa is already lurking in our midst.

I'm not saying these things to scare anybody. I'm not afraid. I've read the book of Revelation, and I know how it ends. The beast and the false prophet will be thrown "into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone" (Rev. 19:20c), and the devil will follow them—"and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10b).

Jesus will rule forever as King of all kings. But until that time, we have some praying and preaching to do. We can't sit back and let the spirit of antichrist gain ground. Let's get serious about pushing back the darkness. {eoa}

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## **Confessions of a Southern White Guy**

A lot of white people today struggle to know what to say to their black friends. "I'm sorry for these police killings" doesn't help much. "I can't imagine how you feel" is maybe a

little better. "I'm not a racist!" can sound defensive.

Many white people have withdrawn from the conversation. We just hope all the tension will end soon so we can get back to normal. But the issue of injustice has reached a tipping point. It's not going away. We have a huge racial wound in this country, and every time a white police officer kills a black person, it underscores the fact that black people are often viewed as less valuable than others.

Some of us struggle with "white guilt." I know I do. My father's name was Jackson Lee Grady. His older brother named him that because he was learning about the Civil War when my dad was born in 1927. My name is Lee. Imagine how awkward it is to be named after a Civil War general when monuments to Robert E. Lee are being removed from public squares in this country? And one of my distant relatives who fought for the Confederate Army is buried near Kennesaw, Georgia.

For the record, I have never owned a Confederate flag; I never saw any Confederate symbols in my house growing up; and my father helped integrate his workplace in the 1960s in Alabama. No one said a racial slur in my house when I was a kid, and I know if I ever uttered that word, my mother would have whipped me with a "switch"—a small branch from a bush in our backyard. I was not allowed to disrespect anybody.

You can judge me for being Southern if you want (I've experienced prejudice from Northern whites who assumed I was uneducated because I say "y'all"), but I can't change my roots. What I can change is my attitude. Ever since I had an experience with the Holy Spirit at age 18 (in a Southern Baptist church, by the way) God has changed my views on race. I can shout from the housetops today that I'm not a racist. Jesus Christ made me a new man.

Here are three things I'm saying to my friends to help the healing process:

1. **“I’m not a racist, but I do come from a racist culture. I want to be part of the healing process.”** There are many things I love about Southern culture: The fact that strangers say “Hey!” to each other on the street; the way little kids politely say, “Yes, Ma’am” and “No, Sir” to their elders; and of course the fried chicken, cornbread, gravy, barbecue, collard greens and sweet potato pie.

I spent my childhood in Alabama and attended high school in the Atlanta suburbs. I have a Southern drawl. I grew up eating grits, drinking sweet iced tea and attending family reunions where the elderly people sat on wide porches and fanned themselves while the kids ran barefoot and the teenagers listened to Lynyrd Skynyrd.

But I’m not going to deny the fact that I grew up with some form of white privilege. The black people my dad knew as a young man could not even vote. Our culture abused African Americans for decades and decades, first with slavery, then with Jim Crow laws and later by refusing to grant equality in education, banking and police protection. Today, with all of our progress, racial justice is moving about as slow as molasses on a cold morning. That needs to change.

2. **“How are you feeling? I want to hear about your experience.”** One of my young black friends, Marcus, told me recently how some cops in California bullied him when he was 18 and made him feel like a criminal—even though he wasn’t doing anything wrong. A pastor friend in Baltimore described an incident in which he was pulled over by cops just because he was driving in a neighborhood looking for a new house. A black missionary I know was bullied incessantly on her school bus every morning, and even at age 65 she still can’t talk about it today without crying.

African Americans know racial profiling is a real thing. Let’s

talk about it. You may be surprised when you ask your neighbors or church friends to share their horror stories.

3. **“When can you come over to my house for dinner?”** These are the most important words we could ever say right now. We need to sit at the table together. I’ve seen many racial forums on Instagram lately as well as televised panel discussions. But celebrities in front of cameras are not going to resolve our racial tensions. We need everyday people to talk to each other in their homes and on their porches.

We’re in a season when we need to listen more and talk less—and to be a lot more careful what we post on social media. We need to let down our defenses and ask our black friends to point out our blind spots. And after we chat and drink some iced tea, it would be amazing if we could cry and pray for each other. {eoa}

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## **We Haven’t Cried Yet**

This past weekend, a group of black, white and Latino Christians gathered in the central downtown square in LaGrange, Georgia, where I live. We met to address the pain and anger people are feeling in the aftermath of George Floyd’s tragic death in Minnesota.

Our Christian mayor spoke. Then we heard a short message from the chief of police, who is also a Christian. Then a dozen pastors—black and white, Baptist and Pentecostal—shared from their hearts about the ugly sin of racism.

My 34-year-old daughter, Margaret Grady Turner, who is an ordained minister, stood on the platform toward the end of the event. Her voice quivered during most of her brief message. An uncomfortable hush came over the crowd when she talked about the awkward challenge of raising an adopted black son in the United States today.

“Racism means to me that my black son was scared to be alive this weekend, and my white son wasn’t,” Margaret said.

She also told us that the American church has some unfinished business. “We haven’t cried yet today. It might be time to allow the Holy Spirit to break our hearts,” she said. “If we can’t get together and cry about this, there is something deeply wrong.” (You can watch Margaret’s full message [here](#).)

Margaret’s message helped me determine how I, as a white man, should respond to the racism that has been a part of my culture since before I was born. I’ve felt helpless, especially because I didn’t know what to say to my African American friends who’ve felt fear when they were pulled over by cops or experienced discrimination on the job. The Holy Spirit showed me where I have to start if I want to be a part of the healing in my nation.

Have you wondered what you can do to help the situation? Shedding tears is the best place to begin. “We have to *lament* and *repent*,” Margaret told us.

Lament? That’s a foreign concept in the modern church. In some cultures grieving is viewed as crucial, but in America we rush everything—even the mourning process. We are quick to tell people to “move on” and “get over it” when they experience loss. We are uncomfortable with the feelings of sadness and anger that loss brings.

And yet we have a book in the Bible called Lamentations. Honestly, I don’t enjoy reading it because it’s so negative. Jeremiah describes Israel’s sins—and the horrible

consequences. Then the prophet actually commands the people to cry. He says: "Let your tears run down like a river day and night; Give yourself no relief, Let your eyes have no rest. ... Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord" (Lam. 2:18b-19a, NASB).

Did you know that God actually commands us to cry? Lamentation allows God to download His emotions into our hearts. Unless we lament, we can't repent. Tears have the power to soften our arrogance and neutralize our bad attitudes.

George Floyd's death in Minneapolis triggered many different reactions. We've seen peaceful protests as well as riots, looting and destruction of property. We've seen policemen shot, elderly protesters pushed to the ground, protesters zapped with tasers and small businesses burned to the ground. But in all the newscasts I've watched over the past two weeks, I haven't seen too many tears.

There are many things we can do to address racism. We need to have honest conversations. We need to change laws. We need to address past mistakes. We need to make reforms.

But if we do these things without first lamenting, our words will sound cheap and hollow. We will still address the issues with anger, superiority and self-righteousness. Only if we break up our fallow ground first will we be able to speak with God's tone of voice.

When my daughter Margaret spoke on Sunday, she said: "We are all here because we think that racism is wrong and we think that injustice is wrong. But we need to sit in that lament, because through our mourning the Holy Spirit leads us to movement."

Too often we try to bring change before we ourselves have been changed. Please cry first. Cry for George Floyd. Cry for Ahmaud Arbery. Cry for Breonna Taylor. Cry for all black families that have lost loved ones because of racism or

injustice. Cry for our divided nation.

Let God marinate your heart in His love. And then, with a heart that is full of compassion, go out and work for justice and healing.

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## **The World Is Praying for America. Thank You.**

Over the past two decades, I've spent much of my time overseas. I've visited 40 countries so far, and I keep going back to some of the same nations because I've built close friendships with people from Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. My travel has been restricted during the pandemic, but not one day goes by when I don't speak with at least a dozen overseas friends.

So when a Minnesota policeman tragically murdered George Floyd last week in Minnesota, and peaceful protests quickly turned violent, I urgently asked my international friends to pray for us. We can't handle this crisis alone. We need our brothers and sisters worldwide to hold up our arms.

Within two hours I received responses from people from almost 30 nations. In spite of all our national sins, our institutionalized racism and our foreign policy blunders, I could see that people around the world still love America. I cried when I read prayers posted by Christians from as far away as Sri Lanka, Kyrgyzstan, India, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Romania, Nigeria, Bolivia, Australia, Mauritius and Malaysia.

When I asked my friends to pray for the United States, I shared these four simple points. I'm sharing these requests today, hoping that more people will join us:

1. **Pray that the United States will repent for years of racism and cruelty to minorities.** Many African Americans feel frustrated and ignored, especially after the senseless murder of George Floyd on May 25. We are grieving for his family and grieving for our own shameful legacy of racial inequality. These kinds of incidents happen almost regularly in our country, and African Americans feel hopelessly vulnerable to mistreatment. The injustice must end.
2. **Pray that God would restore peace in our streets.** Many people began protesting the killing of George Floyd last week. These protests were originally intended to honor Floyd's life and to call government leaders to enact justice swiftly. Peaceful protests are helpful because they give people an opportunity to express their anger and pain. But other protesters infiltrated the marches who seemed more interested in looting buildings and burning down stores. Entire communities are now traumatized by acts of destruction.

We are now in our sixth day of violent clashes with police. Please pray against a spirit of anarchy. Pray that the protests will honor the memory of George Floyd—who was a Christian brother. This week, Mr. Floyd's own brother begged protesters to keep the marches peaceful.

3. **Pray that God will give our leaders wisdom to know how to deal with this crisis.** Right now, America is more divided politically than at any point in my lifetime. People are hateful and vindictive. We are still dealing with the coronavirus crisis, but our hate is worse than any virus. We need leaders who will be peacemakers and reconcilers.

Pray for President Donald Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell. Pray that governors, mayors and law enforcement officials all across our nation will lead with compassion, wisdom and courage. At this time, politicians are very angry at each other. Our president sometimes uses inflammatory language that doesn't promote healing. Please pray that the Lord will set a guard over his mouth, according to Psalm 141:3.

- 4. Finally, pray that God will mercifully pour out His Spirit on America again.** We are overdue for another spiritual revival. Unless God changes hearts, we have no hope. In the past, America generously took the gospel to the nations and gave hope to the world. Now we are biting and devouring one another, and we are sliding toward a national judgment. Without God's mercy, we cannot recover from this.

The ultimate solution to our problems is not political. Neither Democrats nor Republicans can save us. Our salvation is not in Joe Biden or Donald Trump. Right now a virus has shut down our economy, and stores that were preparing to reopen are now looted and vandalized. Our leaders are divided. Even Christians have stopped talking to each other because of political divisions.

If we ever needed spiritual support from our overseas friends, it is now. I am standing on Lamentations 5:21: "Restore us to You, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old." Regardless of where you live around this world, please translate these requests into your language and share them with local intercessors. Please pray that America's light does not go out.

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# Why Is the Gift of Speaking in Tongues So Awkward?

Churches across the world will commemorate the day of Pentecost this next Sunday, whether they meet online or in their buildings. Most will celebrate the need for the Holy Spirit's power, and they might read Acts 2:1-4, which tells how the Spirit's flame rested on all the disciples who prayed in the upper room that day.

But when they read verse 4 (NASB)—"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance"—some people will shift in their seats or clear their throats. This aspect of Pentecost makes people uncomfortable. We don't know what to do or say about tongues. It's just too weird for most people.

It was awkward for me too, when I first heard about it. I'd never met a Pentecostal. Speaking in tongues wasn't part of my church tradition, and I had never heard anyone do it. In fact, the first person I heard speak in tongues was myself, when I was baptized in the Holy Spirit in 1976!

Since then, I have prayed for countless people to be filled with the Holy Spirit. I don't force them to speak in tongues. I just warn them that it might happen, since it happened in Acts 2.

Several years ago, when I was teaching at a ministry school, a 22-year-old guy from Maryland asked if I could pray with him. He had heard me share how I was baptized in the Holy Spirit at age 18, and he wanted the same experience.

This young man, Eric, understood that he already had the Holy

Spirit living inside of him. But he knew that Jesus offers us more. He knew the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second experience in which the fullness of God's divine power anoints us for ministry.

I explained to Eric that speaking in tongues makes no sense in the natural. It actually sounds like gibberish, yet the Bible says praying in the Spirit strengthens us profoundly (see 1 Cor. 14:2, 4). I laid hands on Eric and asked Jesus to fill him with divine power and to release the Holy Spirit's language as a manifestation of the overflow.

Nothing dramatic happened at that moment, but I told Eric to remain expectant. I've learned that oftentimes, the release of the Spirit comes more easily when people are alone and not distracted by people standing around. I encouraged him to go home and pray some more.

A couple of days later I received a message from him, letting me know that a small miracle had occurred in his life. He wrote: "Thank you for praying for me to speak in tongues. That night was interesting because phrases started to pop into my head. I began speaking the phrases, and by the next night I was speaking in tongues as I was falling asleep. Now, every moment that I am not worshipping, praying, eating or speaking to someone, I am practicing this gift. Praise God!"

Many of us fall into the trap of downplaying speaking in tongues, even after we've received the gift ourselves. We may consider it divisive (and it certainly can be when it is abused) or we're embarrassed because it seems fanatical to our friends or family members.

Yet when I read the apostle Paul's comments on the issue, I realize that speaking in tongues was a key component of the New Testament church. Not only did tongues play a fundamental role on the day of Pentecost when the church was born, but this strange gift also fueled Paul's personal zeal. The same

apostle who wrote the book of Romans and preached to Caesar wrote: "I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all" (1 Cor. 14:18). Paul most likely prayed in tongues for hours at a time.

Paul also instructed the Corinthians: "Do not forbid to speak in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:39). He knew that even though some people might be tempted to misuse this gift (and this is usually why people restrict it), we must never shut it down.

Eliminating the gift of tongues can have a direct impact on the flow of the Holy Spirit's anointing in the church. If you forbid tongues or pretend this gift is not needed today, you might as well flip a breaker switch and turn off all the lights.

Speaking in tongues doesn't make us holier than anyone else. And if we don't exhibit love and Christian character, Paul said it becomes a useless gift comparable to a noisy gong (see 1 Cor. 13:1). But when stewarded properly and tempered with humility, this seemingly insignificant gift becomes an invisible spiritual weapon.

I'm not saying we should showcase tongues in church gatherings, scream at people in tongues or make people feel like misfits if they haven't experienced the gift. (We must forgive immature Christians for doing those things.) When the Corinthians put tongues on the platform and turned their meetings into chaotic circus sideshows, Paul rebuked them sternly.

But the same apostle who warned his followers not to flaunt tongues in public also spent countless hours praying in tongues privately—because it's a vital source of spiritual power that we must never neglect. This Pentecost, don't apologize for the secret of the apostle Paul's power just because it's awkward. We need the Holy Spirit's power like never before.

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# God Has Pushed a Big Reset Button

Unless you've been hiding under a rock for three months, you know gasoline is at record low prices. I paid \$ a gallon last week in Georgia. Some states are reporting prices below a dollar a gallon.

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

As I pondered this situation a few days ago 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. I believe God is asking the church in this season of lockdown to fill our spiritual reserves.

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. Right now, during this pandemic, God has hit a "reset" button because He wants us to be ready for what's coming.

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? Do we have enough oil in our lamps to handle the next revival? Here are three things you should do immediately to prepare your heart for what's coming:

1. **Pray for a spiritual reset.** When the pandemic started in March, my schedule was canceled, and I realized how busy I'd become. As uncomfortable as it was to adjust my routine, I knew I needed the break—even if it meant less income. I asked the Lord to change my habits, purify my thoughts and attitudes, and give me more hunger for Him. I wanted personal revival.

As I began soaking in God's Word, I realized the day of Pentecost is May 31. The Lord told me to read the book of Acts every day in May leading up to that date. Reading about the early church has stoked my hunger for God even more. I don't want to settle for anything less than New Testament revival. The book of Acts is still God's template for how He works, and we need to adjust our lives to it.

2. **Let God refine and prune.** Before Jesus came, John the

Baptist had to prepare the way. That process requires repentance and a washing away of the old. Whenever God is about to do a new thing, He recalibrates us so we don't go back to our old ways. He can't put new wine in old wineskins. The way we did things in previous seasons won't work in this next move. Ask God to trim away the dead branches of stale religion—in your life and in your church.

3. **Seek a refilling.** 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.

Now is the time to ask Him to fill you. Don't wait until your regular routine resumes. The last thing we need is to go back to last year's "normal" setting. What God has in store for us in 2020 is unprecedented. Only those with full tanks will be able to handle it. {eoa}

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# 5 Ways to Become a Prayer Warrior

We are living in one of the most uncomfortable times I've ever known. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world to its knees. Workplaces are closed, and the global economy teeters on the edge of collapse while everyone shelters in place. Fear is spreading faster than the virus itself.

In April, I asked the Holy Spirit to help me understand what's going on and how the church should respond to this crisis. As I prayed in the spirit, I sensed He spoke to me: "Remember Rees Howells—and pray like he prayed."

Rees Howells was a humble missionary who established the Bible College of Wales in 1924. During the years leading up to World War II, he led his students to pray for the defeat of dictators like Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. They also prayed fervently for Allied forces during the Battle of Britain, Dunkirk and D-Day.

Before his death in 1950, Howells became a model of what prayer can accomplish. Like Daniel, Ezekiel and Elijah, Howells believed God can use one person's faith-filled prayers to change history. And like the apostle Paul, Howells taught that Christians must engage in intense spiritual warfare against invisible demonic forces.

Biographer Richard A. Maton wrote: "Rees Howells was taught by the Holy Spirit that any person, government or international situation that hindered the spread of the gospel would become a legitimate target to be challenged and defeated through intercession. It was the Lord's will for the gospel to go to every person, and anything that got in the way of God's plan had to be confronted."

If there were ever a time in history when we need the faith of

Rees Howells, it's 2020—when dark spiritual powers are conspiring to stop the next great spiritual awakening. Our comfortable Western churches cannot hope to defeat this enemy. We must become a praying church again.

I don't feel qualified to be an intercessor of the same caliber as Rees Howells, but I'm asking God to train me for battle. Are you willing to be a spiritual warrior? Here are a few ways to begin:

Become more aggressive. When Elisha told King Joash to take arrows and strike the ground in preparation for a battle, the king halfheartedly hit the ground only three times. Elisha said, "You should have struck it five or six times. Then you would have stricken Aram until you had finished them" (2 Kings 13:18-19). Too often we get small victories because we don't pray with enough intensity.

Ask big. We can limit what God wants to do by praying in a puny way. Rees Howells and his small band of prayer warriors in Wales asked God to remove Adolf Hitler from power. We must stop being so timid and begin to ask for global miracles.

Combine fasting with prayer. There are certain spiritual obstacles that need an extra push. When speaking of a demon that needed to be cast out, Jesus told His disciples: "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21). With all of us sheltering in our homes, this is the perfect time to fast and pray.

Do a night watch. There are moments in our lives when the Lord may woo us to spend time with Him in the night hours. Many of us are too distracted by the busyness of life to hear God call us to a season of prayer. Yet the Lord is looking for people who will listen to His battle secrets. Will you let Him pray through you?

Go to the depths of prayer. People who have allowed God to use them in intercession know certain situations require travail.

The apostle Paul also knew this level of agonizing travail, and he told the Romans the Holy Spirit “intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26b). Too often we are too busy, too lazy or too distracted to venture into this realm of selfless intercession.

When Rees Howells engaged the spiritual forces operating in Nazi Germany, he said: “This is the battle of the ages, and victory here means victory for millions of people.” We, too, must know that millions of souls are hanging in the balance. If we really want the world to find Jesus in the midst of this dark crisis, we must allow the Holy Spirit to pray through us in a deeper, messier and noisier way. Please enlist now.

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**Don't Lose Sleep Over Scary**

# Conspiracy Theories

Back in March when the COVID-19 crisis erupted, the U.S. government created a website called “coronavirus rumor control.” It was an attempt to squash some of the bizarre theories people were hearing, including the bogus idea that the National Guard was being dispatched, with machine guns and tanks, to force everyone to stay inside their homes.

This rumor about martial law kept spreading—like a virus, of course—and it spawned more conspiracy theories. People posted their fears on social media. Not surprisingly, many of the people sharing those conspiracy theories were Christians who don’t trust mainstream journalists.

Now, in the midst of this pandemic, a new conspiracy theory pops up every other day, fueled by suspicion. Different versions of these theories are spread on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Here are some of the most well-known rumors:

—Many people believe China’s communist government deliberately manufactured the COVID-19 virus as a biological weapon.

—Months ago a rumor started in Europe that radiation from 5G phone towers can cause the body to weaken and catch the coronavirus. Some 5G towers were actually attacked and burned in Europe because of this theory.

—A Florida pastor recently circulated the idea that Microsoft founder Bill Gates is the Antichrist, and that he is planning to use his wealth to create a vaccine that will kill a large percentage of the world’s population.

—Others have pushed the narrative that billionaire George Soros is the Antichrist, because he is using his money to fund liberal political causes and to control the world from behind the scenes.

–The so-called “QAnon” theory has gained huge traction in recent months. It claims that influential politicians who are part of the “deep state” shadow government are running an international child sex trafficking ring. Theorists claim that New York financier Jeffrey Epstein was part of this conspiracy, and that his reported suicide in August 2019 was actually a murder, carried out by the deep state to hide the truth about his connections to Hillary Clinton and other leaders.

–The fastest-spreading conspiracy theory these days was presented in *Plandemic*, a 26-minute video that was seen by more than 7 million people before it was pulled off YouTube and Facebook. The documentary claims that a Dr. Judy Mikovits tried to warn government officials that vaccines damage people’s immune systems. Mikovits claims that Dr. Anthony Fauci, who has served the Trump administration as a public health adviser, has nefarious plans to manipulate the COVID-19 crisis for political purposes. (The video also claims that wearing a mask can actually “activate” the virus.)

Some people have lost a lot of sleep during the past two months because they entertained these theories. The rumors trigger hand-wringing and nail-biting, but in most cases the stories are based on conjecture and misinformation—or they simply can’t be proven.

I’m not buying into these conspiracies, for three reasons:

1. **God is on the throne, not evil people.** Since the pandemic began I’ve been parked in Psalm 2, a passage that proclaims God’s sovereignty over men and nations. It acknowledges that evil men have indeed conspired to rule the earth, but it says God will overrule them. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord,” verse 2 says. But it goes on: “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord ridicules them” (v. 4).

I'm not worried about George Soros, Bill Gates, Dr. Fauci, Hillary Clinton or communist officials in China. Whether these rumors are true or not, the Bible says God will deal with those who oppose Him. Men are not in charge of this earth. No matter how much money or power evil men have, God will always have the last word.

2. **God has not given us a spirit of fear.** The most common command in the Bible is, "Fear not." Those exact words appear in the New International Version of the Bible 70 times. I've looked at the fruit of conspiracy theories, and it's not good. Why focus on something that only stirs up fear and anxiety?

British preacher Charles Spurgeon said: "The fear of God is the death of every other fear; like a mighty lion, it chases all fears before it." Focusing on the devil's work is depressing. I choose to keep my eyes on Jesus during this crisis.

3. **My security is in the Lord.** At a time when rumors were spreading in Israel, God told the prophet Isaiah: "You should not say, 'It is a conspiracy,' concerning all that this people calls a conspiracy, neither fear their threats nor be afraid of them. Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread" (Isa. 8:12-13). Don't let rumors quench your faith!

God is saying to us today, "Don't fear what everyone else fears." Our God is victorious! He's not worried about a pandemic. His throne is immovable. He's not wringing His hands over Bill Gates or George Soros. The Deep State, if it exists, is not a threat to the Lord. God is big enough and strong enough to take care of His enemies.

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# Pray for the Nations Suffering in This Lockdown

Americans living in their comfortable suburbs are quick to scold people for not staying indoors during the COVID-19 pandemic. We work from home on our expensive laptops, buy our essential items on Amazon, order in pizza and wear designer masks—and then condemn people who want to venture back to “nonessential jobs” because they can’t pay their rent.

I understand we need to be careful about spreading the virus. But I wish smug Americans could understand how this forced quarantine is affecting people in developing countries. A dose of reality might make us more sympathetic and a lot less self-righteous.

This past week, I raised almost \$10,000 from donors to send to church leaders in eight countries where the lockdown has triggered unimaginable suffering. In some of these countries, people can’t practice social distancing because 10 people live in one small room. Villagers make their daily wages selling food or other items in the streets—and now they are told they can’t go outside. Meanwhile, hospitals and clinics in these countries don’t have COVID-19 test kits, ventilators or even masks or other protective gear for health care workers.

I talked to friends in Uganda, Pakistan, India, Guatemala, Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa and Tanzania, and all gave me the same story: They are suffering.

—“Many people started getting hungry in the very early days of the lockdown,” says Mondli Myeza, who pastors His Church in Durban, South Africa. “They were living hand-to-mouth prior to the crisis. Many households have lost all income,” he says,

adding that domestic violence has increased.

–Robert Kaahwa, a pastor in Masindi, Uganda, says the lockdown in his country has been unbelievably harsh even though there has only been one reported case of COVID-19 in his city. Cars are not allowed on roads. Kaahwa is trying to feed destitute families in his community, even though he struggles to feed his wife, two children and the 12 people who are currently living in his house because they got stranded when the lockdown began eight weeks ago.

–“The economy is collapsing,” adds Ugandan evangelist Medad Birungi, who is based in Kampala. “People have lost their jobs, businesses are closed and it has left people very poor,” he said, noting that women have been dying in childbirth because they can’t get transportation to clinics. “The government has added two more weeks to the quarantine, so it is going to be terrible. Many families are going to starve,” Birungi added.

–Kelechi Okengwu, a leader in the Assemblies of God in Nigeria, says forcing people who live in slums to shelter in place may actually be spreading the virus. But people are afraid to venture outside because security officers have at times been violent with those who disobey quarantine orders. The BBC reported that security forces killed 18 Nigerians in April. “There is so much fear that without divine help, Nigeria may be the next epicenter of the virus,” Okengwu said.

–There have only been a small number of COVID-19 cases in the small African nation of Malawi, with just three deaths. But the president called for a 21-day lockdown, and this sent the nation over the edge. “Some people would rather die from the coronavirus than to die from hunger,” says pastor Tony Mkamanga from Mzuzu. “Others have locked themselves in their homes for the fear of COVID-19.” Because Malawi is so poor, there are only four hospitals in the entire country where people can be tested for the virus.

–The nation of Kenya was already dealing with a devastating locust plague before the virus crisis began. Now the nation is on lockdown, even though there have been only 24 deaths from COVID-19. Pastor Elijah Wafula, from the city of Moi’s Bridge, near the Uganda border, says three people have already died from police beatings after the lockdown began. Says Wafula: “Many people are saying they can’t sit and die in the house of hunger. They would rather die of coronavirus.” Starvation is a real possibility because people can’t sell anything in the markets, and poor farmers are prevented from going into their own fields to tend to crops, Wafula added.

–“We are going through a time of calamity,” says Pastor Fredy de Mata from Estanzuela, Guatemala. He notes that more than 70% of Guatemalans depend on street vending or other limited businesses, but most of those jobs are shut down now by the lockdown. “People are living right now in fear and panic, and they are losing hope of a tomorrow,” he says.

–Berrings Mlambya, a Pentecostal pastor in Iringa, Tanzania, describes COVID-19 as a terrifying storm. “It is as if everyone is strangled half to death,” he said. In a nation where most people normally live on less than \$1 a day, the lockdown is a death sentence. “It is now a miracle to see a quarter of a dollar. There is no way to express our anxieties—we just pray, ‘Lord Jesus, save us!’” Mlambya says.

I hear Americans complaining that their stimulus check hasn’t yet arrived, or that certain items are hard to find on Walmart shelves. Please remember that the rest of the world doesn’t live in our comfortable bubble.

Pray for nations where a lockdown is creating a starvation crisis. And consider adopting a church overseas and helping to feed people who are falling through the cracks during this global catastrophe. COVID-19 has had a terrible impact on our country, but the impact on poor nations is unimaginable. {eoa}

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# You Can Have a Personal Pentecost During This Quarantine

I'm an impatient guy. When the COVID-19 crisis shut down everything in March, I wanted things to get back to normal fast. I don't like quarantines. I'm an extrovert, so I hate being isolated. I miss my gym. I miss eating out. And I miss church meetings!

But pandemics don't comply with our hurried schedules. Health experts say the virus hasn't run its course. Some states aren't relaxing restrictions until the end of May. And some pastors say they may not host public meetings until Sunday, May 31—which happens to be Pentecost.

Could this be a divine setup? I don't believe God sent the coronavirus. Sickness is from the devil. But could it be that the Lord wants to use this COVID-19 situation to quarantine us with Him?

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."

They 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).

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.

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?

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."*