

When Rock-Star Preachers Spew a False Gospel

When preachers tour like rock stars, it's no wonder sinners flock to stadiums. Of course, preachers holding stadium-sized events packed out with lost souls is awesome—unless those preachers present a hyped-up, watered-down, seeker-friendly gospel that's giving the assurance of heaven while sending people to hell.

I am convinced that too many people who claim to be Christ-followers are not really saved because some **false teachers** and **false prophets** are propagating a “different gospel” centered on “another Jesus” (see 2 Cor. 11:3-4). I am convinced that many self-professing saints are going to sit right next to sinners in hell when it's all said and done—thanks, in part, to rock-star preachers presenting a hyped-up, watered-down, seeker-friendly gospel.

Especially in America, it's easy to say, “I believe in Jesus.” It's called mental assent. I believed in Jesus before I got saved, too, but I was still on my way to hell. Many who have “accepted Jesus into their hearts” have responded to a “different gospel” centered on a false Christ. What do these gospels espouse? These gospels are mixed with compromise. These gospels are impure and defiled religion. These gospels offers a humanistic, self-help message that taps New Age principles. Indeed, these **false teachers** and **false prophets** are moving in a false anointing and presenting a false Christ. And it's deadly.

Perverting the Gospel of Christ

This is not a new problem. More than 2,000 years ago, Paul wrote, “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the

simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches *another Jesus* whom we have not preached, or if you receive a *different spirit* which you have not received, or a *different gospel* which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!” (2 Cor. 11:3-4, emphasis added)

Church, why are we putting up with this false gospel? Why are we spending millions of dollars on books filled with heresy penned by **false teachers**? Why are people flocking to stadiums to worship another Jesus?

They have been deceived by the serpent’s craftiness. Their minds have been corrupted from the simplicity of Christ. The gospel is not difficult to understand, and it’s not difficult to recognize false doctrine if you are a student of the Word. But members of the lukewarm, apathetic, bless-me-only church are too lazy to open their Bibles and read Scripture for themselves. Members of the lukewarm, apathetic, bless-me-only church want to be spoon-fed a feel-good 20-minute sermonette rather than be challenged to die to self, pick up their cross and walk the narrow road. They’ve turned away from the real Jesus to another Jesus. Paul felt the same angst in his spirit that I feel in mine.

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a *different gospel*, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to *pervert* the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:6-9, emphasis added).

Fables and Fairy Tales

I’m also marveling at the masses that are paying to hear a *different gospel*, a perverted gospel—a gospel that will send

them to hell if they embrace its doctrines. What are these gospels? Some of those “gospels” insist there is no hell. Some of those “gospels” say we’re all going to heaven in the end. Some of those “gospels” give you a license to sin without penalty (hyper-grace). **False teachers** are using familiar Scriptures to justify their stance, but they’ve essentially turned the Bible into a book of fables and fairy tales.

I don’t care who doesn’t like it. I’m taking the apostle Paul’s advice: “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

When the Lord called me into ministry, he gave me parallel Scriptures out of Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33. I’m a watchman called to warn the church. If I don’t open my mouth and people die in their iniquity—in their *different gospel* from *another Jesus*—some of the blood will be on my hands (Ezek. 3:17-19). I don’t want any blood on my hands, and I’m not going to shut up just because the **false teachers**—or anybody else—doesn’t like it.

Does He Know You?

Here’s the rub. Jesus is come back to separate the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25:32). And I’m seeing too many goats sitting in the church saying amen to a false gospel centered on a false Christ.

Jesus put it this way: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And

then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matt. 7:21-23)

They never knew Jesus, and Jesus never knew them. They were following *another Jesus* based on a *different gospel* that was more convenient to their humanistic lifestyle, tickled their ears and promised peace when there is no peace (Jer. 6:14).

I shudder to think of the horror on that day, when masses who rushed to the stadiums and megachurches to hear rock-star preachers (or even no-name preachers in small congregations; it's not about the size of the event, it's about the message being preached) present a hyped-up, watered-down, seeker-friendly gospel realize they've been duped. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And there will be suffering for eternity. God forbid. Let us pray that these false teachers and false prophets will be exposed and that discernment will rise among believers and non-believers searching for the true hope of the real gospel. Amen.

Jennifer LeClaire is news editor at Charisma. She is also the author of several books, including *A Prophet's Heart: Avoiding the Doorway to Deception*. You can email Jennifer at @ or visit her website [here](#).

When You Feel Like You're Fighting Alone

I am in a war. Wiccans are cursing me for writing about spiritual witchcraft. The gay agenda is publishing nasty articles about me for suggesting that man lying with man is a sin. Christians with bold **religious spirits** are sending me condemning emails because I drink coffee and don't give away

my books for free.

Sometimes it just seems to come from all sides. Sometimes it seems to come from all sides at once. Sometimes in midst of the onslaught it feels like you are fighting alone. And sometimes you really are battling without a prayer partner who could help put an additional 9,999 demons to flight.

Indeed, for all the good-intentioned Christians who tell you they are standing with you and **praying** for you, far fewer actually follow up on the **intercessory** initiative. After all, they are also in a war. And they've got stuff flying at them too.

But if you feel like you are fighting alone, take heart. You aren't the only one who ever felt this way. And you aren't really alone. No, not really.

All Forsook Me

Paul once told his spiritual son, Timothy: "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them" (2 Tim. 4:16). Elijah was convinced he was fighting alone. He once told the Israelites, "I alone am left a **prophet** of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men" (1 Kings 18:22). And after defeating the **false prophets** on Mt. Carmel, twice Elijah told the Lord, "I alone am left; and they seek to take my life" (1 Kings 19:10, 14).

David knew what it was like to fight alone. He fought the lion alone. He fought the bear alone. And he was the only one among the Israelites who wasn't afraid to stand up to Goliath alone (1 Sam. 17). Some of David's mighty men also knew what it felt like to fight alone. After the men of Israel retreated, Eleazar arose and attacked the Philistines until his hand was stuck to the sword (2 Sam. 23:9-10). Can you imagine? Another time, when the Israelites fled from the Philistines, Shammah stationed himself in the middle of a pea field the enemy was

looking to occupy. He defended it and killed the Philistines all by himself (vv. 11-12).

Feelings vs. Reality

Sometimes you may be fighting alone. But many times it just feels like you are standing solo. Elijah, for example, had a wrong perception of the warfare. He was on the run from Jezebel and her witchcrafts. She released a word curse over him carrying fear that struck his heart (1 Kings 19:2). He left his servant, who likely would have warred with him, behind and went into hiding. These are the moves of one weary from battle who feels they are fighting alone.

But the Lord set Elijah straight: "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). Friends, you may be fighting your battle alone, but remember that the Lord has many others who are also taking a stand for righteousness.

When you feel like you are fighting alone, **pray** for all those who are going through a similar battle and have no one to stand in the gap for them. In other words, get your focus off yourself and intercede for someone else. God can move on a total stranger's heart to intercede for you.

The Lord Is a Warrior

David's mighty men were indeed fighting alone from a natural perspective, but it's clear that the Lord's anointing was upon them. Make no mistake, the battle is the Lord's (1 Sam. 17:47). But He often uses us as His warriors in the natural realm as a battle-ax (Jer. 51:20). When you go to battle in faith for His purposes, the anointing will meet you and you will overcome, even if you have to fight alone.

The Bible makes it clear in Eleazar's case that "the Lord brought about a great victory that day" (2 Sam. 23:10) and again in Shammah's case that "the Lord brought about a great

victory” (v. 12). These men were indeed fighting alone, but they didn’t curl up into a fetal position and whine about it. They stepped out into God’s will as battle-axes, and the Lord anointed them to do mighty exploits for His glory. He can do the same for you.

As for Paul, at his first defense, when no one stood with him, note the preface to his statement and the conclusion. Maybe you can relate: “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia ... Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm” (2 Tim. 4:10, 14).

Paul truly did fight alone at times. But listen to Paul’s response to all this **spiritual warfare**, and set your mind to take the same approach when you meet with betrayal, abandonment, false accusations and persecution—or any other warfare—for the sake of Christ:

“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!” (vv. 17-18)

Some days it may feel like you are fighting alone. From a natural perspective, you may be. But the Lord is faithful. This battle is ultimately the Lord’s, and when you stand for Him—and when all hell breaks loose against you for that stance—He will strengthen you! He will anoint you! He will deliver you! He will preserve you! Amen!

Jennifer LeClaire is news editor at Charisma. She is also the author of several books, including *Breakthrough!* You can email Jennifer at @ or visit her website here.

How Would You Know if You Were Believing a Strong Delusion?

I was once deceived. Or, you might say, I've been deceived more than once.

Like you, I was deceived before I was saved. My plan was to live however I wanted, repent when I got into my 40s and start going to church. I figured all would be well with my soul when I was ready to stop living in sin. God, in His mercy, had different plans for me. He encountered me in an undeniable way when I was 30, broke the deception and delivered me from evil.

Soon, though, I fell into another deceptive pit in a hyper-apostolic church that publicly taught "God, family, ministry" but secretly demanded, "Ministry, ministry, ministry." Our Bibles literally fell open to Ephesians 4:11. And we spelled apostolic like this: w-o-r-k. This deception crept in through unbalanced—even extreme—teachings and superhuman expectations that wearied the saints.

When I began to question the status quo, they told me I was deceived. Ironically, I only escaped this abusive church after I began praying for God to break the deception over my mind. See, when the deception accusation came, I knew I was indeed deceived. I just didn't know if I was deceived by the church or deceived by wanting to escape it.

Strong Delusions Rising

Deception—and even the strong delusions that will characterize the end times (2 Thess. 2:11)—is already rising in the body of

Christ. And it's far beyond the much-hyped prosperity gospel that mimics New Age philosophies in pursuit of the mighty dollar. Mind you, I'm not against prosperity, and indeed I'm very prosperous. But the love of money is a root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10), and too many prosperity preachers have fallen into deception by getting caught up in the Babylonian paradigm instead of seeking first the kingdom.

Yes, there is a strong delusion manifesting in the church today that goes far beyond the much-hyped prosperity gospel. As Steve Hill pointed out in his recent article, "The 7 Great Lies in the Church Today," there's also an exaggerated view of grace, antinomianism, the deification of man, the challenge of the authority of the Word, the rejection of hell and universal reconciliation.

How do these (and other) deceptions creep in? And how can you guard yourself from strong delusion? One way is to take heed to the many warnings sounding out from prophetic voices in this generation—and in the Bible. Jesus warned us not to be deceived. Paul warned us not to be deceived. Peter warned us not to be deceived. John warned us not to be deceived. James warned us not to be deceived. You can hardly read a chapter in the New Testament that doesn't issue a warning against deception. And yet deception is dominating some camps in the church.

Accepting Charismatic Heresy

Again, what's going on? Deception is a major sign of the last days, and we're seeing deception rise at a rapid clip as megachurch preachers stand before the masses, preach heresy and sell thousands of books. The saints heap praise on false apostles, false prophets and false teachers. Pride is driving people, many of whom aren't even called into fivefold ministry, to don extravagant titles like "Official Prophetess" and "Chief Apostle Bishop Dr." and "Master Prophet Bishop." What happened to the bondservants? The lack of discernment in

the body of Christ is disturbing. Where are the lovers of the truth (2 Thess. 2:10)?

How do you protect yourself from the spirit of error? I believe being a student of the Word is one safeguard against deception. Paul told Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Right after that, he spoke of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who had "strayed concerning the truth" and were "saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:18). In other words, they were preaching a false gospel.

Charismatic heretics are overthrowing the faith of some even now, preaching a false gospel. That's why you can't just be a lover of the Word someone else preaches. You have to study the Word yourself. You have to measure every message you read or hear against the Word of God for yourself. Don't just check to see if the Scripture is in your Bible, but study its meaning in the context of the chapter, book and entire Bible. When you do, much of the heresy is quickly discerned. But the church at large is lukewarm and lazy, preferring to feast on flashy sermons without lifting a finger to open their own Bibles.

A Prayer Challenge

I don't have all the answers, but I've been praying about this for years now. I started praying for God to break deception off my mind and to guard me from deception several years ago. Again, I don't have all the answers. But God has granted me discernment to escape much of the "religion" and deception that has risen in the church in this hour. And I am grateful for that grace.

See, the problem with deception is that you don't know you are deceived. If you knew you were deceived, you'd walk away from the lie and embrace the truth. Lovers of the truth are less likely to be deceived, but anyone can fall into deception. And

if you think you are above the possibility of falling into deception, you are walking in a deception called pride. So I challenge you: Begin to pray for God to break off any deception that has clouded your soul. Beseech Him by His mercy to deliver you from the grip of deception, to shine light on your mind and to give you discernment.

If you aren't deceived, that prayer won't hurt you. And, in fact, I believe we are all walking in some level of deception—even if it's on minor issues—because our minds are not completely renewed. If our minds were completely renewed, I believe we'd be walking in greater authority and seeing more miracles, signs and wonders in our lives. In other words, I believe we're all believing something that doesn't completely line up with God's Word.

So, again, I challenge you—I beg you—to begin to pray for God to break off any deception that has clouded your soul. Beseech Him by His mercy to deliver you from the grips of deception, to shine light on your mind and to give you discernment. You've got nothing to lose by releasing this petition, and you've got possibly your eternal soul to gain as God breaks in with light, exposes the enemy's lies and sets you free—or protects you—from the strong delusion that sends many to hell. Amen.

Jennifer LeClaire is news editor at Charisma. She is also the author of several books, including *Did the Spirit of God Say That?* You can email Jennifer at jleclaire@charisma.com or visit her website [here](http://www.charisma.com). You can also join Jennifer on Facebook or follow her on Twitter.

Why Are So Many Christians Practicing Witchcraft?

When you read the headline of my column you probably had one of two thoughts:

“Christians are practicing witchcraft?” or “I’m not practicing witchcraft! I don’t read tarot cards, mix potions or cast spells!”

The answer to the first thought is, yes, Christians are practicing **witchcraft**. As for your insistence that you are not practicing witchcraft, well, you may not be moving in divination, but that doesn’t mean you aren’t engaging in witchcraft.

Consider what the Bible says about **witchcraft**. It may surprise you to learn that what the world—or even what the Wiccans—call witchcraft is not always one in the same as what the Bible calls witchcraft. For example, when you think of witchcraft, you probably think of black magic or conjuring the dead. Those abominations are covered in the Bible.

But witchcraft is not always so mysterious. Indeed, rebellion, word curses and works of the flesh also fall into the realm of witchcraft. However you define it, though, practicing witchcraft is a serious sin, and far more Christians are experts at sorcery than you may realize.

Rebellion Compared to Witchcraft

Remember when King Saul was ordered to utterly destroy the Amalekites and everything they had: man, woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass? Saul found victory in battle against Israel’s enemy by the grace of God, but failed to obey the voice of God when the dust settled. He spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and kept the best of the livestock (see 1 Sam. 15:1-9).

Saul proposed that his intention was to sacrifice the animals to the Lord, but there's no excuse for disobedience. Saul was so stubborn that he at first refused to admit his disobedience. He actually justified his actions. Only after Samuel rebuked Saul did he catch the revelation that obedience is better than sacrifice (see 1 Sam. 15:22). In that rebuke—and in Saul's response—we find one way Christians are practicing a sin that's in the realm of witchcraft: through rebellion that arises when the fear of man is greater than the fear of the Lord. Let's listen in on the exchange:

“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king. And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice” (1 Sam. 15:23-24, KJV). Unfortunately, Saul didn't learn his lesson. He continued disobeying God and eventually lost his kingdom. Fear of man was at the root of his rebellion, but rebellion grows from many roots. If you see rebellion operating in your life, find the root and rip it out!

Jezebel's Word Curses

Then there's Jezebel's witchcraft. In 2 Kings 9:22, right before the wicked queen's demise, Jehu offered insight into an open door for the Jezebel spirit when he told her son, “What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother **Jezebel** and her witchcrafts are so many?” The spirit of Jezebel is essentially a spirit of seduction that works to escort believers into immorality and idolatry (see Rev. 2:20). And this spirit uses witchcraft against its enemies.

Jezebel's witchcraft was rooted in rebellion, but the type of witchcraft in this verse refers to incantations and spells. In the modern church world, we call them word curses. Jezebel released a word curse against Elijah that carried a spirit of fear when she sent him this message: “So let the gods do to

me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time" (1 Kin. 19:2, KJV).

In modern times, word curses aren't always so dramatic. When we speak negatively over someone's life—"They will never hold down a job acting like that," "Their marriage is bound to fail the way he treats her," "The doctors said he's going to die in 30 days. Isn't that sad?"—we are agreeing with the enemy's plan and giving power to it with our anointed mouths. The power of death and life are in the tongue (see Prov. 18:21). If you are inadvertently—or purposely—releasing witchcraft over people with the words of your mouth, repent and get your mouth back in line with the Spirit of God.

Works of Your Flesh

Make no mistake. The Spirit of God is against **witchcraft** in whatever form it takes, from divination to magic to rebellion to word curses—to works of the flesh. Paul explained that the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. What are the works of the flesh? Galatians 5:19-21 lists them: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like.

Notice that witchcraft is listed right alongside adultery and fornication. Witchcraft is a serious offense in any manifestation. As a work of the flesh, witchcraft violates the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me." The flesh opposes the move of the Spirit and resists all things spiritual. This is a serious struggle because Paul assures us that those who practice witchcraft will not inherit the kingdom of God (see Galatians 5:21).

But there is yet good news. If you walk in the Spirit, you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (see Galatians 5:16). How do you know if you are walking in the Spirit? The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. When you walk in the Spirit, this fruit manifests.

If you know you are disobeying God in an area, repent of this sin, which God views in the same way as witchcraft, and get back in line with the Spirit. If you are cursing people with your negative words of gossip and death, stop practicing this witchcraft and begin blessing. If you are flowing in fleshly witchcraft, crucify your flesh with its passions and desires. If you live in the spirit, walk in the Spirit—and walk free from the practice of witchcraft. Amen.

Jennifer LeClaire is news editor at Charisma. She is also the author of several books, including *Did the Spirit of God Say That?* You can email Jennifer at jleclaire@charisma.com or visit her website [here](http://www.charisma.com). You can also join Jennifer on Facebook or follow her on Twitter.

Burned Out on Religion? Catch a Different Spirit

If you've ever been weary, you are in good company. Moses grew weary of holding up his hands when the Israelites battled the Amalekites (Ex. 17:11-13).

Job grew weary in the midst of his heart-wrenching trial (Job 10:1). And David grew so weary with his groaning that he soaked his pillow with tears and drenched his couch with weeping (Ps. 6:6). Now that's weary!

What is weariness? Exhausted strength. Failing endurance. Washed-out vigor. Weariness brings with it spirits of heaviness and fainting that make you feel like quitting.

Weariness skews your perspective. It causes you to look at the world—and maybe even the church—through bleary eyes. Weariness has friends named Discouragement and Confusion, and the trio sings a chorus that sounds something like this:

“I’m bending over backward, and I’m not getting anything but an aching back. The only light at the end of the tunnel is a locomotive coming to mow me down. Nothing’s ever going to change so I may as well stop trying so hard. I don’t even know what I’m even supposed to be doing anymore!”

Have you heard that refrain, or something similar? It’s easy enough to chime in and form a quartet with these voices—or even take the lead. You’ll sing your weariness song to anybody and everybody who will listen. Other weary soldiers may join the chorus and even add new lyrics. Remember the old tune, “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen ... Nobody knows my sorrow”? I think that goes back to Job’s days, but many of us still sing that same sad song from time to time.

Look, if you are doing anything great for the Lord—whether that’s heading an international ministry or a single-parent home—then you can expect weariness to visit your dwelling place. Jesus noticed 2,000 years ago that the harvest was plenty but the laborers few (Matt. 9:37). Unfortunately, not much has changed in that regard since His days on earth.

So what’s a believer to do when weariness comes humming its tune? Well, first fold up your “Super Christian” tights nice and neat and hang up your cape in the closet. In other words, take some rest at the first sign of weariness. Remember, weariness is the first stop on the road to burnout. God commands us to keep a Sabbath day once a week. Even Jesus got tired sometimes—and He is the Son of the Living God!

Remember when Jesus and His disciples were on their way from Judea to Galilee? The apostolic gang had to travel through Samaria. Jesus arrived in a town called Sychar near the tract

of land Jacob gave to Joseph. Jacob's well was there. We're told, "So Jesus, tired as He was from His journey, sat down [to rest] by the well. It was then about the sixth hour (about noon)" (John 4:6, AMP). Jesus got tired, and it was only noon! So give yourself a break. It's OK to be tired.

Jesus even encouraged His disciples to rest: "And He said to them, [As for you] come away by yourselves to a deserted place, and rest a while—for many were [continually] coming and going, and they had not even leisure enough to eat. And they went away in a boat to a solitary place by themselves" (Mark 6:31-32, AMP). I can just hear some of you right now, crying out, "Send that boat my way!"

Now, if you go off in that boat and rest for a while and you are still weary, well, my friends, we've got a different issue. The writer of Hebrews warns us not to grow weary because we could lose heart and faint in our minds (Heb. 12:3). Of course, the enemy plans attacks against us while we are weary and weak (2 Sam. 17:1-3). Again, I believe weariness brings its cousins Discouragement and Confusion, and their melody is as miserable as the saddest country song you'd ever want to hear.

You already know the answer to weariness, of course. It's in the Word of God. As I searched the Bible, I was encouraged and decisive (the very opposites of discouraged and confused) about the remedy for weariness. Indeed, the Bible is full of promises to the weary soldier. So tune up your vocal chords and get ready to sing these verses to the enemy next time you feel weary:

"Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall

utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” (Is. 40:28-31, KJV)

We have a part to play. We have to wait on the Lord. I like how the Amplified Version expounds on the word “wait” in this verse: to expect, look for and hope in Him.

When David was in a weary land where there was no water, he earnestly sought God, crying, “My soul thirsts for you, my whole body longs for you” (Ps. 63:1, NLT). He prayed to God, “Strengthen me according to your word” (Ps. 119:28, NIV).

If you are weary, Jesus is calling to you now. He is saying, “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly” (Matt. 11:28-30, MSG). *Unforced rhythms of grace* ... I like that promise.

Let me leave you with one more from Galatians 6:9 (AMP): “Let us not lose heart and grow weary and faint in acting nobly and doing right, for in due time and at the appointed season we shall reap, if we do not loosen and relax our courage and faint.”

Jennifer LeClaire is news editor at Charisma. She is also the author of several books, including *Did the Spirit of God Say That?* You can email Jennifer at jleclaire@charisma.com or visit her website here. You can also join Jennifer on Facebook or follow her on Twitter.

Ask, Seek, Knock: God's Formula for Persistent Faith

If faith without works is dead, then asking without seeking and knocking is just as lifeless.

There are many reasons why you may not be receiving **prayer** answers, from doubt in your heart (see Rom. 10:9) to asking with wrong motives (see James 4:3) to unconfessed sin (see Is. 59:1-2) to unforgiveness (see Mark 11:25) to strife on the home front (see 1 Pet. 3:7) to turning away from Scripture (see Prov. 28:9).

But you can believe purely, ask with right motives, have a clean heart, forgive all your enemies, avoid arguments and soak in the Word all day and still not see prayer answers. That's because asking—without seeking and knocking—flows from the same lazy river as faith without works.

Before you take offense and stop reading, ponder Jesus' promise on determined, active faith, and then consider two Bible characters' strategies for getting what they wanted. Let's start with Jesus' promise: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matt. 7:7-8).

Most Bible translators didn't do us any favors with this rendition because it suggests a single request will get the job done. Sure, sometimes a single request suffices. You ask Him. You thank Him for it. And you keep praising Him until you see the prayer answered. But sometimes it takes persistent faith to receive God's promises. Sometimes you have to go after it with godly determination that won't quit.

Three Steps to Reviving Your Faith

That's why I like how the *Amplified Bible* translates Matt. 7:7-8: "Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking [reverently] and [the door] will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps on asking receives; and he who keeps on seeking finds; and to him who keeps on knocking, [the door] will be opened."

This is a promise from God. So long as what you desire is His will—and His Word is His will—you can be assured that if you keep on asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking, you will eventually receive the promise. Let me expound on these three principles:

1. Ask. Although God knows what we need before we ask Him, He usually won't provide our needs until we ask because He wants relationship with us. So ask, and keep asking, until you feel a release in your spirit—and then thank Him until you see the promise manifest.

2. Seek. It's not always enough just to ask. More often than not, you also have to seek. In other words, add some works to your faith. If you've asked Him for a new job, seek a new job. If you've asked Him for reconciliation in a relationship, seek reconciliation. If you've asked Him for healing, seek healing. Don't sit back and wait for an angel to do all the work. Faith without works is dead (see James 2:26). (Be led by the Spirit, of course. You can't bulldoze your way through the doorway to God's promises.)

3. Knock. If you seek, you will find. Once you see God's promise in clear view, knock and keep on knocking until the promised door is open. Let's say you've asked Him for a new job. You're seeking a new job and you know in your Spirit (or even hope in your heart) that it's a perfect match. Start knocking. God opens doors that no one can shut (see Rev. 3:8), but often, you have to knock.

So, How Do You Knock?

In the context of Matthew 7, knocking means “importunity in dealing with God,” according to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*. That suggests urgent and persistent requests. In other words, once you’re sure you’ve found what you have been asking for—once you see the breakthrough within reach—turn again to asking but with greater urgency.

David sought the Lord in this manner: “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (Ps. 27:4, NKJV). David didn’t just have a desire, he sought after the object of his godly desire. He had persistent faith. If you read the Psalms, pursuing God was a constant theme in his writing. Looking at our three-step process, David desired (ask) and sought (seek). Based on David’s relationship with the Lord, which we read about in the Word, I believe he found what he asked for, then inquired (knocked). God opened the door to intimacy.

Much the same, consider the parable of the persistent widow. Jesus used the parable to teach us that we should always pray and not lose heart. Jesus also showed us that the widow did more than ask: she kept on asking, kept on seeking and kept on knocking. Read the parable and see this with your own eyes:

“There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’” Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the

earth?" (Luke 18:2-8)

Pray Once or Keep Praying?

Can you see it? There is a time to pray once, hand it over to God, and trust Him to answer. But there is also a principle of persistent faith where you ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, and knock and keep on knocking until you receive the promise. How do you know the difference? The easy answer is to be led by the Spirit.

A deeper answer is to consider the opposition. When you face opposition to walking through the doorway of promise, ask God to show you what to do to position yourself for the manifestation, then take any God-inspired action (seek) to find the doorway He leads you to. Once you find the door, start knocking and keep knocking. God will surely open it at the appointed time. Amen.

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The battle really is in the mind—or at least it starts there. Last week, a friend of mine who had a stroke many years ago began manifesting with post-stroke symptoms out of the blue. The enemy was working on his mind, trying to convince him that what he had been delivered from was returning. Meanwhile, a lump manifested on the back of my neck that itched and burned like fire, followed a few days later by ear pain so bad that I could hardly think, the feeling of knives in my throat when I swallowed, and rocks in my stomach all at once. I finally broke down and went to the doctor. My vitals were normal. No sign of infection. I am convinced every bit of it was witchcraft.

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Snap out of it! Get the Word of God in your mouth because it's your spiritual sword (Heb. 4:12). Speak the Word to your problems because the Word of God always accomplishes its purpose (Is. 55:11). Bind the enemy's operations in the name of Jesus, and loose the opposite of what's manifesting in your life with the power of life that's in your tongue. And plead the blood of Jesus over your mind (Rev. 12:11). You've been bought with a price—spirit, soul and body. Your soul includes your mind.

I could write a book on spiritual warfare strategies against **witchcraft**—and maybe I will. But there is tremendous power in these fundamentals if you will apply them. The challenge is often discerning that we're under attack. That's where relationships with other mature Christians are helpful. They can often see what we can't—and they can help us battle what's coming against us. So when you are under spiritual assault, don't isolate yourself and let Jezebel beat up on you with her witchcrafts. Run for cover. Run to your own company. Run to

Jesus. Amen.

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When Intercessors Are Afraid of the Devil

When we walked into the **prayer** meeting, I sensed it was going to be an all-out war. Of course, the moment we got saved, we enlisted as soldiers in the army of the Lord. We are, indeed, in a war. The enemy of our souls is lurking and looking for an open door to attack. And sometimes his demons don't wait for an open door. They just attack.

The enemy is already a defeated foe. Jesus disarmed principalities and powers, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by His work on the cross (see Col. 2:15). As born-again citizens of heaven, we remain here to enforce Christ's rule in a foreign land. So, we effectively live in a war zone.

Jesus gave us authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means harm us (see Luke 10:19). But that doesn't mean we don't have to wage **spiritual warfare**. It just means when we wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (see Eph. 6:12) ... When we seek to enforce Christ's rule on this earth, He always leads

us into triumph (see 2 Cor. 2:14).

The key word is “leads.” Nevertheless, I’ve met some **intercessors** who are downright scared of the devil. Instead of following Christ into triumph, they follow fear. How can a prophetic intercessor effectively wage warfare when they are flowing from a place of fear instead of victory in Christ? Selah.

Scared of Demonic Retaliation

When we walked into the prayer meeting and I sensed it was going to be an all-out war, I looked for fearless soldiers to run to the battle line with me—those fully armored up with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit (see Eph. 6:14-16). We war from a place of victory in Christ. Still, no victorious soldier goes into battle without getting armored up. There is wisdom in warfare.

Long story short, we engaged the enemy over our territory. Prophetically, we identified strongholds in our region and took authority over them in the name of Jesus. We stood on God’s Word. We worshipped the King. But some of the intercessors weren’t ready for what happened next: demonic retaliation.

When you are wrestling against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places—which I wouldn’t recommend you do unless you are in a corporate setting and unless the **Holy Spirit** leads you to—it literally is a wrestling match. And in a wrestling match the opponent doesn’t go down without a fight. And in a wrestling match with demons the enemy doesn’t fight fair.

The Masked Assassins

When I was a kid, my friend’s dad watched wrestling matches on TV. The stars of the day were Dusty Rhodes with his “bionic

elbow” and the Masked Assassins with their yellow and black disguises. Rhodes was the All-American hero and the Masked Assassins were the evil ones. I remember the tag team fights where the Masked Assassins would fight dirty against Rhodes, hitting him with chairs or bringing an extra man in to the tag team match to get an upper hand.

That’s how the enemy works. He doesn’t fight fair—and he doesn’t fight alone. Have you ever noticed how, at times, you take authority over one spirit in the name of Jesus and it seems like nothing happened? That’s because there’s a vast army of demons under Satan’s command and he often dispatches them in an onslaught. If you take authority over one demon, another may be sent to retaliate against you in rapid-fire succession.

That’s just what happened after our **prayer** meeting. Some of the intercessors were dizzy all night long. It was uncanny. What are the chances that the intercessors would all manifest with dizziness so severe that you couldn’t even stand up without risk of falling down? It was retaliation from the enemy. When it happened to me, I pled the blood of Jesus and thanked God for protecting me. The dizziness *eventually* left.

Fearful Intercessors Are Ineffective Intercessors

The enemy got to one of the intercessors, though. Ironically, she had propped herself up as the most experienced of us all. She often boasted about her experiences sending the devil running and was bold in prayer. But this experience struck fear in her heart. She began to criticize the prayer meetings—even though it was extremely rare that we entered into that level of warfare. She began to question the leadership. And she never came back to the group. In a way, the enemy gained a victory. He took her out with a little bout of dizziness.

Fearful intercessors are ineffective intercessors. If you are too scared of the enemy to follow the Lord into battle, you

are walking in a measure of defeat rather than the Christ-won victory. They say dogs can smell fear on you. Well, so can the enemy. So enter into battle from a position of victory, understanding your authority in Christ. And when the battle is over, plead the blood of Jesus over yourself, bind spirits of retaliation and walk in freedom rather than fear.

Yes, sometimes the devil hits you back. But God is in control. Don't give up because the devil retaliates. Get more revelation that "the Lord is a warrior" (see Ex. 15:3) and "the battle is the Lord's" (see 2 Chron. 20:15-17). Get more revelation about your authority in Christ (see Luke 10:19). And get equipped practically with training on how to use the weapons of your warfare. Amen.

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What Not to Do When People Leave Your Church

We were about to take a great leap of faith. Everyone was excited about the new season. But I sensed something awry among the leadership team.

As I stood before the group, the **Holy Spirit** moved me to warn them that the enemy was looking for opportunities to knock folks out of their positions. I knew in my heart that not all of them would make it.

After the warning I put forth a call for commitment, asking, “Does everyone in this room absolutely know that God has placed you here? Does anyone have any doubt?” Across the board, everyone voiced their agreement that God called them to serve in the local body. Some clearly thought it was strange that I even asked.

A few days later, the **Holy Spirit** showed me some weren’t called to be there. After a few days more, one of them—one who had been the most vocal about his calling to the house—disappeared. He wouldn’t return my calls or text messages and finally told the senior pastor he was leaving. He never spoke to anyone else. He never said goodbye to the people he served with. He just left without a trace, just a week after he vowed God had sent him there to serve.

When I write about topics like **spiritual abuse**, folks invariably email me with their horror stories and ask for advice on whether or not they should leave their church. Lee Grady recently penned a column, “When Is It Time to Leave a Church?” that offers some solid advice. But there’s another side to the church-leaving coin: what *not* to do when people leave your church.

Whether you are in leadership or just a member, it can be disheartening to see someone leave your local church. But there’s a right way and a wrong way to handle these situations. Here are five things not to do when people leave your church.

1. Don’t keep your leaders in the dark. This first one is for pastors. When someone leaves, especially someone who had a visible place in ministry, don’t keep the reason a secret from your presbytery. Failing to offer any explanation—or just giving a pat answer—for why someone with a position in the church left suddenly can hurt morale. There needs to be a level of honesty and transparency among your core leaders or distrust grows roots. It’s not necessary to tell the entire

congregation, but your core leaders should pray together about the matter (Acts 15:6).

2. Don't make assumptions. When people leave your church, it can lead to a lot of assumption and presumption among the congregation. These are dangerous waters. If leadership doesn't offer an explanation about why a person with a visible position in the ministry left (some things are best kept private), you have two choices: You can ask the person yourself or you can let it go. But don't sit with your friends and try to figure out why someone left. That typically leads to presumption, and the Bible doesn't have much good to say about presumption. Remember what the Preacher said: "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Prov. 10:19).

3. Don't spread rumors. I wrote more about this in my column, "Why Spread Rumors About People Who Leave Your Church?" Assumptions can lead to gossip and gossip fuels rumors. If someone comes to you with gossip and rumors, tell them you don't want to hear it. Bring correction in love. Exodus 23:1 says, "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness." Even if you know the rumor is true, you should direct your energy to prayer, not gossip. Paul wrote, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Eph. 4:29). One way to get someone to stop gossiping is to immediately suggest praying for the one who left. Usually, that ends the conversation.

4. Don't paint them as the enemy. Some churches position exiting members as enemies. (Some actually curse them on their way out the door.) And some even make it clear that you are no longer allowed to associate with the one who left. This is not the love of God. We are all members of the kingdom of God. If someone leaves trying to drag other members out the door with them, it's understandable why the leadership and the

congregation would be cautious. That's wisdom. But we still have to walk in love, and that includes our words. We are to bless and not curse (see Rom. 12:14).

5. Don't burn bridges. When someone leaves your church, that doesn't necessarily mean the relationship has to end. You never know what synergies remain between you or what the next season will bring. I've only attended a handful of churches in my Christian lifetime, and I still have good relations with all of them, save the one where spiritual abuse reigns. And I am praying for them all the more. Remember, it's about the kingdom.

Sometimes, it's better that people leave your church. Remember, before the incident where the sold-out ministry leader left, the **Holy Spirit** showed me not all would make it. He also showed me some people in the congregation needed to leave. People who flow in wrong spirits and won't repent, people who are practicing sin and won't give it up, people who consistently breed strife and division ... these are like weeds in your church plant. If they won't repent, it's usually better that they leave because a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Jezebel rips churches apart. Sin can spread like wildfire. But you still shouldn't make assumptions, spread rumors about them, paint them as an enemy or burn bridges when they do leave. I assure you that you can walk in wisdom and walk in love at the same time. Amen.

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