

Birthing Your Dreams May Mean Shifting Your Direction

I call them “baby dreams”—and these **prophetic encounters** have been a running theme in my life over the past decade. It seems God has been laboring with me to birth a new thing for nearly that long. Along the way, there was at least one Ishmael, a couple of near-abortions, and plenty of **spiritual warfare**. But God in His grace somehow worked all things together for good.

There were lessons in this series of **prophetic dreams**. When I put those principles into practice it caused what looked like a stillbirth to become a healthy baby. I still don't have all the answers, but God has made one thing clear to me: Sometimes a small shift makes all the difference.

The First Dream: Surrendering My Will

The “baby dreams” started about eight years ago. I had a dream I was pregnant. I was not happy about it because it was going to turn my life upside down—but I knew I couldn't do anything about it. I tried to pretend it wasn't real, but ultimately pretending wasn't an option. The lesson of this first prophetic dream was that I had to be like Mary, who gave her will over to the Lord despite the trouble it was going to cause her in the natural. I woke up and committed in my heart to let the Lord's will be done in my life and moved ahead.

The Second Dream: Birthing a Man-Child

About a year after that prophetic encounter, I had a second “baby dream.” This time, I was in the hospital giving birth. When the baby was born, it was like a man-child. It had the appearance of a baby, but it had the features of a full-grown man. Immediately after the baby was born, he started running toward his goal. Those around me said, “It must be nice to birth a full-grown ministry. That's what you can expect.”

The Third Dream: Making Adjustments

Fast-forward another five years. I was in a very uncomfortable position, having the weight of a church plant unexpectedly fall on my shoulders. I didn't sign up to preach, pray, prophesy and administrate the whole church but that's what was happening. I was at a crossroads, praying about whether I should exit or continue to bear the weight—and the spiritual warfare—of another man's vision or move on.

I went to sleep and had another "baby dream." This time I was pregnant. I still wasn't thrilled. I was hungry and the only thing available was some strange combination of eggs and pepperoni. My chair was too low for me to comfortably type on my computer. I had to change into clothes I didn't like. I was thinking about how I could possibly hit the gym with all of this going on. I thought about how I'd be 60 before this kid was grown.

In other words, I was doing a lot of natural reasoning. Eventually, I changed my clothes into something that wasn't ideal but still wasn't too bad. I ate the eggs for the protein and skipped the unhealthy pepperoni. I got a taller chair so I could type more comfortably. Then I woke up. I told one of my friends involved in the church plant about the dream, including the eggs and pepperoni. I had never heard of eggs and pepperoni as a dish—but it was one of her favorites. (Go figure. God wanted her to bear witness to the dream.)

From that dream I learned that I had to make sacrifices and adjustments to do the will of God. In other words, there would be some aspects of birthing this ministry that were uncomfortable, but there were ways to adjust to the circumstances and plow through the pain to get to the goal line of God's ultimate will. At first, I thought it was a message to keep bearing the weight of the church plant. But when the church planter manifested with wrong motives, it became abundantly clear that his vision wasn't my burden to bear and God released me. He actually used the experience to

push me into what He really had in mind the whole time.

The Fourth Dream: Shifting Your Direction

In the last “baby dream,” I finally got the message—and it changed everything. I was nine months pregnant but the baby had stopped moving. The baby wasn’t kicking or rolling or showing any sign of life. (This is about how I felt after leaving the church plant.)

In the **prophetic dream** I thought the baby was dead and I panicked. Then, suddenly, I had the unction to shift the baby’s position with gentle pressure from my hand. (I later researched this and discovered there’s a name for it: the Diaphragmatic Release.) When I did, I could feel the baby kicking again. I knew all was well.

Here’s the lesson I took away from this dream, which connected with the previous baby dreams: Sometimes things look dead but you just have to reposition yourself for life. It doesn’t always take much. Just one gentle movement in the right direction can cause God to breathe on that thing again so you can birth it and begin nurturing what God has given you to steward.

If God has given you something to birth, it may be time to pull an Ezekiel and speak to those dry bones. It may be time to pull an Elijah and raise it from the dead. It may be time to walk away from the Ishmael, refuse to abort and just reposition yourself to receive what God intended all along. You could just be in the wrong place or in the wrong time or with the wrong people. When you decide to obey, when you decide to reposition yourself into God’s perfect plan, the baby he has given you to birth will thrive in His grace. Amen.

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Twitter.

Religious Bullies: Answering the Spirit of Religion's Attacks

Fifteen-year-old Amanda Todd committed suicide after being stalked by a cyberspace bully for years. Over the weekend, I watched a YouTube video she created and, as the mother of a 15-year-old who sees firsthand the pressure today's teens face, it broke my heart.

When Todd was in seventh grade she used webcam chats to meet new people. A man pressured her to "flash" him. As she did, he captured a still image of her nudity and later sent it to everyone she knew. She lost all her friends. She sat alone at lunch. She was ridiculed and harassed by her peers. She even switched schools in hopes of a better life but this immoral bully kept right on using the nude photo to disgrace her.

Todd fell into a deep depression. She was anxiety-ridden. She started using drugs and alcohol to ease the pain. She also started cutting and tried to kill herself with bleach. After several failed suicide attempts, Todd finally succeeded in ending her misery. Ironically, October is National Bullying Prevention Month and yet another teen dies in the wake of relentless bullies.

Power-Hungry Religious Bullies

As I was reflecting on Todd's untimely death at the hand of an immoral bully, I began to think about schoolyard bullies, home front bullies, workplace bullies—and even religious bullies in

the church. Bullies are everywhere you turn, and they can be just as dangerous to eternal life as the cyberstalker who pushed Todd over suicide's cliff. Indeed, **religious bullies** can push people away from Jesus or turn them off to Christianity. And the results could be an eternity beyond heaven.

My first thought was the words Jesus used to the scribes and Pharisees, who I would describe as religious bullies: "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You won't go in yourselves, and you don't let others enter either" (Matt. 23:13, NLT).

You may recognize this religious bully. It's the same one James called out for dishonoring the poor. James said if we show partiality, we commit sin (see James 2:9). Too often, the biggest tithers are seated in the places of honor while those with less to offer are relegated to the back pews. In other words, religious bullies discriminate against the ones who can't further their agenda. Power hungry religious browbeaters favor the ones who have something they need—and are willing to hand it over.

I cringe at the thought of how many people remain in bondage to the kingdom of darkness because highfalutin harassers refuse to accept the poor (whether they are poor financially, poor emotionally, or poor in skills to help build the church). I also wince when I think of how religious bullies have forced people out of the church because they felt threatened by their gifts and talents. Either way, Christian coercers manifest the hypocrisy that gives the church a bad name.

Pondering Pharisaical Pests

Then there are the condemnation-heaping religious antagonizers who refuse to let someone forget past mistakes. Like the bully who chased Todd around cyberspace posting nude pictures she unknowingly allowed him to capture in a lapse of judgment,

religious bullies hold you to who you were yesterday and won't let you get past your past mistakes.

These Pharisaical pests remind you of who you used to be despite clear evidence of the breakthrough work God has done in your life. While God chooses not to recall the sins for which we repent, religious ruffians throw them in your face every time you try to move forward. These are the same religious bullies who spread rumors about people who leave a church to cover their own sin.

I wonder how many people have given up on fellowshiping in a church because religious oppressors remind them of their past failures. And I wonder how much momentum the body of Christ has lost because religious bullies focus more on tithing (yes, even your birthday money) while ignoring the most important aspects of the law—justice, mercy and faith (see Matt. 23:13). Yes, we should tithe and give but not while neglecting love.

Religious bullies might run in the “right” circles, dress the “right way” and say the “right” things, but inside they are filthy, full of greed and self-indulgence! (see Matt. 23:15) Jesus also called these Pharisaical bullies “whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people’s bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt. 23:27).

Breaking the Cycle of Religious Bullying

So how do you deal with a religious bully in the church? Bullies work through tactics like fear, manipulation, sarcasm, coercion, ridicule, cold shoulder, overreacting, blaming, using the Word as a sledgehammer, verbal attacks, gossip and the like. So the first step in dealing with a religious bully is seeing the spirit behind the bully. This is widely known as the **religious spirit**.

Pray that the religious bully would be set free from the

influence of this murdering spirit. Don't get too emotional when a religious bully confronts you—and don't blame yourself. It's not your fault and you haven't done anything wrong. Religious bullies have emotional problems of their own, so don't engage at the emotional level. Clearly, you are a threat to the religious spirit or you wouldn't be a target.

Don't bully back. It's not worth it. Don't give in to the religious bully's intimidation, either. Ignore the religious bully's tactics if you can. Don't even dignify the bullying with a response. That's what the **religious spirit** wants—it wants to trap you with your words and make you look like the bad guy. The Pharisees constantly did this to Jesus.

If the religious bully won't back off, then don't hesitate to stand up for yourself. Jesus put the Pharisees in their place more than once, while refusing to get into a debate. When the religious bullies were abusing Jesus, He asked, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?" (John 18:23) Turning the other cheek doesn't mean becoming a doormat. You can stand up to a religious bully without stooping to their level. Oh, and if you are a religious bully, I beseech you, repent, because Jesus has one word for you: Woe! Amen.

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Like Father, Like Son

Though Bob Hoskins handed over the reins of OneHope to his son, Rob, in 2004, he remains a prophetic voice to the ministry he founded

“Dad is still a visionary, and God is still speaking to him—and he’s still my mentor,” says OneHope President Rob Hoskins. “God will lay a nation or a part of the world on his heart and he’ll help open doors for us—first in the spiritual realm and then by traveling to those nations to build relationships.”

The senior Hoskins is no stranger to world travel. As a child evangelist he held mass crusades. When he turned 17 he set out to the mission field with a special focus on the Muslim world. The first home he shared with his wife, Hazel, was a thatched roof hut with a mud floor in Africa.

Now 76, Bob has been in ministry for nearly 70 years. He still travels 200,000 miles a year. He’s beaten cancer three times. And he believes he’ll live 20 more years to see the first stage of Vision 2030, OneHope’s vision to engage 4.2 billion young people with God’s Word in the next 18 years, completed.

“I began preaching at the age of 7, and that’s perhaps proof that God has a sense of humor,” Bob says. “As a child I preached to adults, and when I got old God shifted my ministry to children. OneHope is the vision of my lifetime, and I see it so clearly now.”

One (Big) Hope

Though relatively unknown in the U.S., OneHope has the audacious goal of reaching 4.2 billion young lives with the gospel by 2030—and is well on its way. For Rob Hoskins, though, dreaming big is all he's ever known.

Tiffany led her newfound Christian friends deep into the slums of Chorrillos, Peru, to meet her family. Along the way, the 13-year-old held tightly to her Book of Hope, a version of the gospels that missionaries had just placed in her hands. Despite living in extreme poverty, Tiffany welcomed these outsiders to her humble home. But when the missionaries arrived there, they found a devastating scene: builders repossessing the roof and an abusive alcoholic father laying in wait.

“I wanted to pull her out of there, bring her back to America and literally put a roof over her head,” recalls Rob Hoskins, president of OneHope, a global ministry to youth and children based in Pompano Beach, Fla. “I wanted to take her away from that abusive father. But I had to believe the gospel was enough.”

Indeed, the gospel was more than enough. Tiffany brought her mother to Christ that same night. Shortly after, Tiffany's brother and sister accepted Jesus. Eventually her abusive father surrendered his life—and his alcohol—to the Lord. Tiffany and her whole household were saved.

That would've been a happy enough ending for Tiffany, but the story doesn't end there. Despite a pharmaceutical technology degree that could have taken her out of the slums for good, Tiffany prayerfully decided to stay in Chorrillos. She founded a Christian preschool to deliver the gospel to the next generation of slum kids. And her rehabilitated father is her right-hand man.

“When we went back to Chorrillos and saw how the gospel had transformed Tiffany’s life and family—and how it was impacting her community—I just started weeping,” says a teary-eyed Hoskins. “Thank God I didn’t take her out of that slum. She is the shining light of Chorrillos. The good news of Jesus Christ changed the child—and changed her abuser. Only the gospel can do that.”

Reaching 4.2 Billion Tiffanys

Hoskins can tell story after story about children like Tiffany who received the Book of Hope. But the 47-year-old leader isn’t satisfied with the literal millions of stories like Tiffany’s. Through OneHope, he wants to change the destiny of *billions* of children and youth by 2030.

Tears fill Hoskins’ eyes when he talks about the broken children he’s met on his quest to put God’s Word into the hands of 4.2 billion youth in the next 18 years as part of OneHope’s Vision 2030. But joy fills his heart when he talks about the gospel’s restorative power in the millions of souls, like Tiffany and her family, already saved.

Vision 2030 lays the groundwork for a church movement with the capacity to not only reach 1 billion kids for Jesus every seven years, but eventually reach every child on the planet within two decades. To date, the ministry formerly known as Book of Hope has already touched more than 860 million young lives and in recent years has seen exponential growth in hot spots such as Russia and India.

Vision 2030 is nation-changing and history-making in the truest sense of the words. Hoskins explains the plan by likening it to the Transcontinental Railroad, the first safe way to cross the United States. Known as the greatest engineering feat of the 19th century, the railroad made possible America’s dream of “Manifest Destiny”: one nation united across a continent.

“I was praying about the enormity of reaching 4.2 billion children, many in closed countries. I was overwhelmed,” admits Hoskins, who grew up on the mission field in the Middle East. “In the middle of the night the Lord woke me up and reminded me of the Transcontinental Railroad. We have to lay a track that catalyzes a movement within the church to reach those 4.2 billion children. We have to move into our Manifest Destiny of the Great Commission.”

In the Beginning ...

A ticker on OneHope’s website counts how many children and youth are receiving God’s Word through the global ministry. The number climbs by two or three every second, and OneHope predicts 91.8 million kids will engage with God’s Word through its outreaches this year alone, while partners in other nations will reach millions more.

Launched as Book of Hope in 1987, the ministry’s first Scripture-engagement mission went to almost 1 million children. Bob Hoskins, Rob’s father and the founder of Book of Hope, describes a prophetic vision in which he saw Satan working to destroy an entire generation. He says he saw child soldiers, child sex slaves, poverty, violence, diseases, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide.

“For days I was weeping over what I saw and asking God, ‘Why have I seen this? What I am to do?’” recalls Bob, who was then president of Life Publishers, one of the largest Bible publishers. “During a time of fasting and prayer, God spoke to me. He said, ‘The only thing that will rescue this generation are the truths found in My Word. I want you to take My Word to the children of the world and you’ll do it through leaders.’”

Bob gathered the names of the 50 most powerful leaders in Latin America—presidents, prime ministers, heads of banks and the like—and sent them a leather Bible embossed with their names in gold and a letter challenging them to use God’s Word

as a map for their nation. That heavenly strategy has opened the doors to many nations, starting with El Salvador in 1987.

“El Salvador requested a Bible for every child in the nation. I sent a message immediately and promised to send them. I didn’t even know how many children were there,” Bob recalls. “When I found out there were 1 million children, I really started fasting and praying!”

Bob put the story of Jesus in chronological order and called it *Book of Hope*. His publishing connections allowed him to print three books for \$1. That birthed the ministry and, 25 years later, it only costs 33 cents to give a child God’s Word.

Penetrating Closed Nations

“OneHope is probably the best-kept secret in the American ministry world,” says Phil Cooke, a media maven who has worked with the likes of Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen. “Governments trust them and that gives them entree into places many ministries could never hope to go.”

This remains true today as OneHope penetrates closed nations the same way it did with El Salvador: by building relationships with national leaders. In Muslim nations, Bob meets with leaders to position Jesus as one of the greatest teachers, one who can shape values and character. That approach opens doors for OneHope to bring its materials to religious education classes for the Christian minority. Muslims trickle in by invitation of Christian classmates because the materials are culturally relevant and compelling.

In communist countries, OneHope often works through local churches to gain entry into the society. Then there are the numerous stories of God miraculously opening doors, such as when Bob, a cancer survivor, met a government leader who had also overcome the disease. Their shared personal experience led to an invitation for OneHope to work in that nation.

But ultimately, Bob says it's OneHope's research model, which identifies and offers programs to solve the nations' youth crises, that demands the attention of even government leaders who shun the one true God.

"We take our research statistics to governments and they see the tragic situation of their children," Bob says. "Then we tell them we want to walk beside them and provide material that will help the children. They don't believe Jesus is God but as historians and scholars they respect the moral teachings of Christ and welcome us into their schools."

Modern Missiology Pioneers

OneHope is penetrating closed nations, and shifting missiology with its three-step research process: market research, program research and outcomes research.

"We set up a system and built a database to track what countries these kids are in and what languages they speak," Rob says. "We look at things like literacy—what percentage can be reached with the printed word, what percentage has to be reached through oral communication and what percentage are alliterate, meaning they know how to read but prefer other media."

Keeping in mind cultural relevance and each society's unique problems, OneHope's programs in Japan look much different than its programs in Madagascar.

For its outreach in Japan, OneHope collaborated with a local partner to address systemic issues in Japanese culture—suicide, social pressure to succeed, academic pressure from families and prostitution. In a Tokyo culture where beauty is valued above almost anything else, programs are based on Matthew 6, which discusses how we are more beautiful to God than flowers.

In Madagascar, reality involves HIV and witchcraft. Many

Malagasy facing family problems dig up their ancestor's bones and sleep with them. Because of this, OneHope's program in Madagascar focuses on God's character and His ability to meet every need—including solving family problems. Hoskins believes this combination of research and Holy Spirit-led programs is the means through which the gospel could reach a tipping point.

"The church has kept up miraculously with the population boom over the last 2,000 years," Rob says. "When you look at population growth from an eschatological perspective, the population boom begins to dramatically decelerate around 2015. When you look at that through the lens of missiology, we see an opportunity to make inroads into the global population if the church continues to grow at its present pace."

All About Outcomes

Those inroads must be followed by outcomes, however. In fact, Rob firmly believes we need a paradigm shift in 21st-century missiology from the pioneer mindset to more collaborative missions—a move from scattering gospel seed in large crusades to specialized ministries that focus on areas such as medicine or creative arts, and a shift from an output-based mentality to a outcome-based mentality.

It's not about disseminating Scripture, Rob says; it's about changing lives and cultures.

"If we hand out 100,000 books, were they read?" Rob asks. "If they were read, were they understood? If they were understood, did it change anything? Did it affect their beliefs and attitudes? Did it make an impact on society?"

Most of the time, the testimonies are heartwarming. Tiffany's story epitomizes the promise of OneHope. But sometimes the results are devastating. Rob uses Swaziland as an example of the latter. On paper, the outreach in Swaziland looked picture perfect, yet despite the presence of many major ministries

nothing was changing.

Swaziland has the world's highest HIV/AIDS rate, with the United Nations reporting that it could become the first extinct nation in modern times. But the real gut-check came when Rob read a story in Swaziland's morning paper about a teacher arrested for molesting a 7-year-old boy. It hurt his heart because OneHope uses teachers to teach students Scripture.

"What if that teacher was sharing our literature?" he asked with a lump in his throat. "What kind of testimony of Jesus is that?" Hoskins shut down the Swaziland program in 2006 to reassess the strategy. That was the beginning of the outcomes-based approach to ministry. He says it's about being wise stewards, and his donors certainly appreciate the due diligence.

"If donors started evaluating most major ministries in America by outcomes, about a third of them would collapse within three months," Cooke says. "Rob was one of the first to figure out the value in outcomes-based ministry and run with it on a large scale."

Mart Green, founder and CEO of Mardel Christian Educational Supply and an heir to the Hobby Lobby family of companies, has been a OneHope donor for about 15 years. It was OneHope's ability to reach three kids for a dollar that caught the attention of his business mind, yet it's the proof of efficacy that has kept him donating.

"OneHope is shaping the next generation," Green says. "OneHope is spiritually strategic, blending research with guidance from the Holy Spirit."

The Tech Vehicle

That blend has also propelled OneHope into the forefront of ministries using innovative technology as a vehicle for the

gospel. Bobby Gruenewald, pastor and innovation leader at and the creator of the YouVersion Bible app, says OneHope has been an innovator for decades—including producing an animated movie about Christ’s life, *The GodMan*, viewed by more than 50 million kids. Gruenewald joined the board about a year ago to help the ministry push deeper into digital technologies, such as Scripture-engaged virtual worlds. As Rob sees it, a virtual world may not look like a missionary going out in a pith helmet and being martyred by a savage tribe but it’s just as critical for this generation.

OneHope’s latest innovation, “Adventus Island,” targets kids ages 5 to 9 in a massively multiplayer online (MMO) game that allows them to earn points for memorizing Scripture. “Adventus Island” uses digital technologies to enhance real-world experiences as one more manifestation of OneHope’s effort to serve the global church with relevant tools.

“OneHope isn’t afraid to try new things,” Gruenewald says. “If it doesn’t work, they’ll shut it down. If it works, they’ll keep doing it or expand it. That’s unique. A lot of organizations stay on a set path regardless of the outcomes. OneHope is constantly looking to adapt and change based on cultural context. Rob understands that one size does not fit all.”

Bringing It Home

“One size does not fit all” has been OneHope’s approach to successfully impacting the youth in foreign nations—which has been the ministry’s primary focus for this stateside ministry. But after 25 years, the ministry is now looking into its own backyard.

“We used to think maybe there’s no need for OneHope in America,” Rob says. “But increasingly we’re finding this resonance for outcome-based ministry and collaboration and specialization. American children growing up in this

generation absolutely do not have a biblical worldview. We are beginning to feel that call here.”

George O. Wood, general superintendent of the Assemblies of God–OneHope’s denominational covering until a few years ago—is confident that the ministry will fulfill God’s will, whether stateside or abroad. He says OneHope’s ability to cross denominational lines represents a manifestation of Jesus’ prayer for church unity in John 17. “Bob Hoskins has always been a visionary leader. Rob is walking in his father’s footsteps and growing the ministry,” Wood says. “It’s a strong example of a well-executed generational transfer.”

And it’s a generational transfer the Hoskins family hopes to see continue reaching billions of kids until Jesus’ return. Despite the grandiose vision, Rob doesn’t pray for money. Despite the huge task at hand, he doesn’t look at the global challenge through overwhelmed eyes. After being miraculously healed from terminal blindness, the deadliest-ever E. coli outbreak and prostate cancer, Rob has the trust of a child in the soul of a man who has laid his life down for Christ.

“We pray two simple prayers over our lives here,” he says. “First, we pray for God to keep our hearts and motives pure, because if we lose that we lose everything; we lose God’s Spirit. We also pray for the laborers. We pray for the people we need to become part of this OneHope vision of catalyzing a movement to reach every child and youth in the world with God’s Word.”



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Why Spread Rumors About People Who Leave Your Church?

Over the weekend I discovered a new rumor about why I left a certain church some years ago. Yes, apparently people there are still talking about me years later. I wish I could have told the congregation why I chose to leave, but the **Holy Spirit** told me to “go in peace” and I obeyed.

Unfortunately, the leadership didn't like my reasons and apparently felt threatened. After all, I was highly visible in the church and people would ask questions about my sudden and unexplained departure.

People did ask questions, and they were given all sorts of false answers. Gossip and rumors prevailed and, as the saying goes, rumors generally grow deformed as they travel. Years later, the rumors are deformed into a state that is utterly ridiculous.

When Hugs Turn to Hate

For all the many articles about how not to leave a church the wrong way, can we take a moment to explore what *not* to do when someone leaves a church?

I'm not the only one who has been chased down with ugly rumors after leaving a church. I wrote a post on my Facebook page asking for examples and many people shared stories of how hugs turned into hate when they decided to move on. How that must **grieve the Holy Spirit!**

Pastors, attacking people for leaving your church reflects poorly on you. Your congregation wants a loving shepherd who blesses rather than curses (see James 3:10). When people

decide to leave your church, don't tell them they will lose their anointing and miss their destiny. Don't curse them. Don't tell them they are the problem. Don't tell them they won't find another place where they can use their gifts. And when they do leave, don't make subtle comments that become the seeds of malicious gossip.

Believe me, as a pastor I get it. I know what it's like to watch people come in and out—people who said they wanted to serve alongside you and help build the church only to leave after you've invested your time and effort into them. I know what it's like to watch people backslide into sin and stop coming to church when they were once important leaders in the ministry. I understand the frustration of the setbacks that often come when people leave the church.

Don't Go Into Attack Mode

But pastors, don't go into attack mode. If you are walking in integrity, treating people with love, providing care to the congregation, and otherwise fulfilling your God-given responsibilities as a pastor, then you have no reason to go on the offense. If you are truly a servant to your members, you don't have to fear that one influential person leaving will cause a mass exodus.

Pastors, when people leave your church the congregation is watching you. If you attack people who leave—whether it's directly, through seeded rumors to your leadership, or indirectly through messages from the pulpit, it reflects poorly on your stewardship and your character. It reveals the anger and bitterness in your heart. And you will probably lose more sheep because no one wants an angry, bitter pastor who can't accept that the **Holy Spirit** sometimes moves people on.

When someone leaves your church—especially someone who is a leader or in a visible position—it's time to reflect on your ministry, not attack the person. If possible, speak with the person about why they are leaving. If the exiting member won't

talk to you, it's likely there is either a problem in their heart or a problem in your church. But you can't assume it's the exiting member's issue alone.

When people start leaving, it's not time to go on the attack—it's time to **pray** and ask God if there's anything going on in your church that's causing people to leave. You may be the most loving, caring pastor in the world but you may not see the church cliques or the actions of power-hungry leaders who mistreat the sheep. You may not see the spiritual abuse going on behind the scenes. Again, when people start leaving the church, don't malign their character—check your own and check your church.

This weekend I also saw someone from this church I left in a restaurant. She told me, "I don't care what they say. I still love you." How sad. Pastors, don't let ex-members of your congregation tell the same story. We are all members of the body of Christ. And believers, don't engage in the rumor mill. Refuse to listen to it or spread it. Pastors, show people love while they attend your church and show them love if they leave. If you can't do that, it may be time to step down as pastor.

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Do Prayer Rallies Really Do

Any Good?

Another day, another **prayer rally**. That's the sentiment of the naysayers who don't believe **intercession** can turn the direction of a nation.

After all, they say, you've got IHOPs all over the world **praying**—some of them filling up the bowls 24/7. You've got TheCall. You've got TheCry. You've got the National Day of Prayer. You've got OneCry. You've got Cry Out America. You've got Broken Before the Throne. Indeed, there is a diversity of dedicated **prayer warriors** from coast to coast organizing **solemn assemblies** based on 2 Chronicles 7:14.

If all this prayer worked, the naysayers argue, why haven't abortions ended? Why hasn't revival come? Why hasn't there been a long-prophesied Third **Great Awakening**? Why isn't the prayer changing anything? I believe the prayers are making an impact, even though things often appear to be growing worse despite massive intercession.

Beware the Spirit of Unbelief

Still, some are skeptical. They don't believe that God's Word doesn't return to Him void. They don't believe it accomplishes what He sent it to do (see Is. 55:11). They don't believe if two of us agree on earth as touching anything that we get what we ask for (see Matt. 18:19). Simply stated, they don't believe.

That unbelief leads to questions, arguments and declarations. They ask, "Why even bother praying anymore?" They argue, "This nation is going to hell in a hand basket no matter what we do!" They declare, "It's too late for America."

They are skeptical. I'm skeptical too—skeptical of the skeptics' mindset. Skeptical of mindsets that put more faith in the White House than they put in God. And skeptical of mindsets that so quickly ignore our nation's spiritual

heritage in favor of secularism, humanism, atheism, socialism and other -isms of the day.

I believe every **prayer** lifted to heaven in the name of Jesus makes a difference. I believe every intercessor's Spirit-inspired utterance is making up a hedge of protection around this nation. I believe if the prayer stopped, the skeptics would start asking us to pray again.

America Belongs to Jesus

I've long believed this, but I got a new revelation of the **power of prayer** in Philadelphia this past weekend at the America for Jesus solemn assembly. Some estimate nearly 25,000 gathered in the name of Jesus over the two-day prayer rally.

America for Jesus was especially significant in many ways. This solemn assembly was held exactly 40 days before the **presidential election**. This solemn assembly gathered all races, parties and denominations in prayer for the healing of our nation and to call America back to God. This solemn assembly was set against a historical backdrop where our Founding Fathers signed the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution. And this solemn assembly was launched by people whose prayer rallies sparked **revival** in the 1980s.

As I looked on at the gathering, the **Holy Spirit** told me the remnant is rising. It was indeed a solemn moment as I realized I was witnessing part of the remnant in action. I watched as people sobbed in repentance over our nation. I watched as people worshipped the Lord with all their might. I watched as people cried out to God in agreement with the prayers going forth.

Discerning the Spirit of Intercession

I watched and as I did I was struck by the power of prayer. A **spirit of intercession** fell on the gathering and prayers of the saints literally shifted something in the heavens. It was

as if this gathering commanded heaven's attention. Angels were surely posted round and about to stand guard over this solemn assembly. The atmosphere was charged with unity like I've rarely seen. The corporate anointing was strong. A spiritual work was accomplished and I believe we'll see the fruit of those prayers manifest sooner than later.

Yes, America for Jesus was significant. But I believe all prayer rallies are significant. I believe they all make an impact. I believe where two or three gather in the name of Jesus, He is there in the midst (see Matt. 18:20). I believe if one puts a thousand to flight, two can put 10,000 to flight (see Deut. 32:30). And I believe when thousands gather despite race, culture, denomination or agenda, it touches the Father's heart and He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we have asked of Him (see 1 John 5:15).

Another day, another prayer rally? Hardly. That's the sentiment of the naysayers who don't believe prayer changes things. As for me and my house, we'll keep praying and believing for a **spiritual awakening**. Amen.

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The Remnant is Rising!

When I arrived at Independence Hall last Friday night for the **America for Jesus** solemn assembly, I was struck with the reality that our Founding Fathers had gathered in that very

spot more than 200 years ago to declare freedom and deliverance for our nation.

Just steps away from where Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison and others drafted and ratified the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution, a **remnant** of impassioned believers gathered to declare freedom and deliverance for our nation once again: freedom from the spirit of greed; deliverance from the spirit of Jezebel; liberation from pride; and justice for the unborn.

As the youth rally got underway, I stepped aside to observe and **pray**. As I did, the **Holy Spirit** showed me the remnant is rising. After all, it was a remnant who founded this country—a remnant looking for, among other things, **religious freedom**. A 21st century remnant was now making a new declaration of independence from the ties that are binding our nation.

The Holy Spirit told me this:

There is a remnant and the remnant is rallying in prayer.

I have preserved a people in this generation to speak forth my word without compromise. Their voices will continue to rise in boldness for the cause of righteousness but few will listen. Just like the days of old, my prophetic voices are crying out to a nation with deaf ears who continue serving idols instead of the life giver.

Yet the remnant is rising and their voices are growing louder. And there will come an hour when the circumstances of the day will demand that a wicked generation take notice of the righteous remnant and turn their hearts back toward Me.

Some will continue to mock My Son, but many will break free of the deception that besets the land. So continue to cry out and continue to call out in My name because I hear you and I am answering you for My Son's sake.

I will not turn my back on those who fear me. I will not.

Glory to God! The remnant is rising and refuses to bow down to the **principalities and powers** that have targeted this nation for destruction. The remnant is humbling itself on behalf of a nation whose pride is pushing it toward a fall. The remnant is praying fervently for God's kingdom to come to the United States, just as it is in heaven. The remnant is seeking His face. The remnant is repenting on behalf of a nation that has slipped from its former glory.

And God hears from heaven. And God will forgive our sin. And God will heal our land. Back in 2007, the Holy Spirit told me it would get darker before the light shines brightly again. I believe we're going to see a great revival, a third Great Awakening. Until then, walk by faith and not by sight. Don't stop **praying** even if evil appears to be overcoming good. If the remnant stops praying, who will declare God's will for our nation? Amen.

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I'm Sorry if This Article Offends You. Please Forgive Me.

When I went to journalism school, they told me I needed to develop thick skin. People don't always like what you write,

even when it's 100 percent accurate.

When I went into ministry, they told me I needed to develop a big heart to go along with that thick skin. People don't always like what you say, even when it's 100 percent in love. But you have to love even your worst detractors.

That's never been truer than in recent months. Most of you seem to enjoy this weekly column, but you'd be surprised at the vitriolic (a fancy writer's word to describe acidic speech) emails I get from some readers. It never feels particularly good for people to judge your heart.

In the early days of ministry, my skin was so thin you could practically see my heart beating through my chest. I could literally feel the adrenaline flowing through my body as I digested the verbal attacks. I sent the hate mail I received around to all my trusted friends so they could assure me I was on the side of truth. I used to get offended at some of the hate-mail writers who mocked my physical appearance, even down to the color of my hair.

Now I have thick skin, but not a calloused heart. (Importance difference!) When someone launches a fiery dart of accusation because I call sin *sin*, I realize it's only because the rock I threw into the enemy's camp chipped away at their justification for transgressing.

When someone takes a **prophetic word** out of context, twists it in an unrecognizable knot and calls me a **false prophet**, I rejoice in the **persecution**. When someone judges my heart, I **pray** for them because they are opening the door for someone to judge their heart. I refuse to fall into the enemy's snare.

Don't Bite the Bait

What about you? Do you have thick skin and a big heart? You may not have to deal with hate mail like I do, or bloggers coming against your character or your physical looks because they don't like the truth coming off your lips. But it doesn't

take a **prophet** to foresee that you run into your fair share of opportunities to get offended. That's one of the reasons the Bible says to guard your heart with all diligence—out of it flow the issues of life (see Prov. 4:23).

The Greek word for *offense* in the Bible is *skandalon*, which is the name for the part of the trap on which bait dangles to catch prey. We know that Satan roams about like a roaring lion, seeking prey to devour (see 1 Peter 5:8). And he often uses offense as his bait. *Vine's Dictionary* defines offense as a hindrance or a stumbling block. The offense is a hindrance to walking in God's best plan for your life because it can lead to resentment, **unforgiveness**, bitterness and even hatred.

If you are easily offended, ask the **Holy Spirit** what Satan has found in you. What strings is he pulling? Maybe you are selfish and get offended with people who won't do things your way. Maybe you have some hidden insecurity and you feel rejected (and offended) when someone disagrees with you. Maybe you have some pride issues and get offended easily when someone offers constructive feedback about your work.

What Would Jesus Do?

If anyone had opportunities to be offended, it was Jesus. Jesus' relatives were ashamed of Him. His disciples couldn't stay awake with Him to pray for even one hour during a critical turning point in his life. The Pharisees said He had a devil. And let's not forget that Peter actually denied Him—three times—and Judas betrayed Him. On the cross, one of the sinners at His side mocked Him.

Jesus had plenty of “natural” reasons to be offended. Those are just a few. But Jesus didn't take the bait. Satan found no place in Him. Jesus knew who He was in God. Jesus' security in the Father allowed Him not to react in offense. His response: **“Forgive** them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:24, KJV).

Jesus saw the big picture and He knew who He was: the Son of God. Do you know who you are? You are a son of God—the bride of Christ. You have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. You are the head and not the tail, above and not beneath. You are blessed going in and blessed coming out. Blessings chase you down and overtake you—unless you stumble over offense.

Who cares if you didn't get invited to the birthday party? Who cares if someone forgot yours? Who cares if the clerk in the grocery store was rude? Who cares if someone interrupts you while you are talking? Who cares if the pastor didn't say hello to you on the way out the door? Who cares if nobody agrees with you? When you get all wrought up over these sorts of things, you are hurting yourself. Sure, you may upset other people with your cold shoulders or tantrums, but ultimately offense leaves you in bondage.

I could get offended with the bloggers who call me a **false prophet** or the commenters who judge my heart and label me with all sorts of mean-spirited monikers. I could get offended, but instead I take pity on the ones who are bringing the offensive words. Jesus said, "Woe to the man by whom the offense comes!" (Matt. 18:7, NKJV) Sometimes offenses are imagined. Other times they are real. Either way, when you begin to feel offended, **pray** for the one bringing the offense. Ask the Lord to forgive them and bless them. It keeps your heart clean. Amen.

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Mormonism, Goose Bumps and the Great Falling Away

I was once married to a bona fide, white-shirt-and-tie, bike-riding, garment-wearing **Mormon missionary**. And not just any Mormon missionary—a master soul-winner for this Christianesque cult.

Of course, I had no idea when I met him that he was even a Mormon. All I knew was he had just returned from a two-year mission to Europe, he never said an unkind word about anybody and he had a sweet heart.

He seemed righteous enough—more righteous than me. But I wasn't born-again and I didn't know the difference between a **false religion** that incorporated Jesus into the mix and true Christianity. My Southern Baptist grandfather tried to warn me, but I just couldn't see the harm in a Jesus-centered religion. So I ended up marrying a Mormon.

I learned plenty about the secret rituals that Mormons practice, but that's not what I want to share with you. You can read about bizarre Mormon beliefs in many places on the Internet these days. What I learned being married to a Mormon—a Mormon who later abandoned his wife and baby to have an affair with a woman just more than half his age in a foreign country—was the danger of **false religions**.

Doctrines of Demons

We know that there are deceitful spirits and teachings of demons that will lead some to depart from the faith (see 1 Tim. 4:1). We know that there are **false prophets** and teachers who proclaim Jesus but don't truly serve Him (see 2 Peter 2:1). We know that Satan disguises himself as an angel of

light to deceive people (see 2 Cor. 11:14). And we know that some are perverting the grace of God into sensuality (see Jude 1:4).

We know all of this and yet some in the body of Christ—born-again, blood-bought and yes, even tongue-talking—are embracing aspects of false religions. It's a subtle deception and one about which I will continue sounding the alarm until Jesus tells me not to. I'll keep sounding the alarm and speaking this truth in love in hopes that some will avoid the great falling away.

What I learned being married to a Mormon is how these deceitful spirits work. My ex-husband used to urge me to read the Book of Mormon cover to cover and then **pray** about whether or not it was true. Mormons promise a "burning in the bosom" will come as a confirmation when you release that **prayer**.

Mormons also cite James 1:5 to back up their carnal claim with actual Scripture: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." Mormons teach that any positive feelings you have after that prayer are from the **Holy Spirit** and any negative feelings are not from the Holy Spirit. And if you don't get the "burning in the bosom," they suggest you pray more sincerely until you do.

Don't Follow the Goosebumps

This demonstrates a grave danger. We cannot base truth on how we feel, whether it's a goose bump, an emotional high or a burning in the bosom. Proverbs clearly states, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered" (Prov. 28:26). And God warns us that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (see Jer. 17:9).

I believe an unbalanced pursuit of **supernatural experiences** opens the door to demon-inspired encounters and emotions that

validate a person's erroneous theology. Some in the **prophetic movement** claim to hold regular conversations with angels, which become the source of their **prophecies** and sermons. Yes, angels are **prophetic messengers** but most often the **Holy Spirit** will lead us and guide us into all truth Himself. And our sermons should be based on the Word of God—and our prophecies from the Spirit of God—not mystical revelation that doesn't line up with the Bible.

Chasing the supernatural above the God of the supernatural is not the only example of emotionalism gone amuck. The **prosperity gospel** can also get out of balance. I've read about merchandising evangelists leading people into financial devastation after a so-called supernatural promise that gave them false faith to believe their debt would be canceled in 30 days. Yes, I believe in supernatural debt cancellation but there is an abuse of this gimmick. People fall for it because they are in their emotions rather than in the Word of God. They tap into the hype and the shyster taps into their pocketbooks.

Idolatrous Prophecies Abound

If you've been following my work for any length of time, you know that I'm all about **prophetic ministry**—true prophetic ministry. It's vital in this hour. But **false prophecies** that tap into the idolatry in people's hearts may cause them to get married to the wrong person, get divorced against God's will, quit their jobs and pursue other wrong moves because of a "feeling" they got when they heard a **prophecy**. Yes, God gave us emotions but our emotions should be submitted to the Word of God and, I might add, some common sense.

Above all, my concern is a greater **deception** that leaves people with greater troubles than just bankruptcy, divorce or talking with angels of light. My concern is that exalting "feelings" over the Word of God will lead many into eternal fire. "For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great **signs and wonders** to deceive, if possible, even the

elect," Jesus said. "See, I have told you beforehand" (Matt. 24:24-25).

See, I am telling you beforehand. The New Testament is overflowing with warnings not to be deceived. Even with the Word of God, we are charged to rightly divide it (see 2 Tim. 2:15). We are in the last days. Can we really afford to let charismatic preachers tell us what the Word says? Shouldn't we be students of the Word ourselves? We all have a responsibility to guard ourselves from deception and staying rooted in the Word of God is the best way I know to do that in this hour. It may not give you goose bumps, but it will set you free. Amen.

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Prophetically Discerning Your Times and Seasons

I had never stepped into a church like it before. The **worship** ushered in the presence of God in a way I had never experienced. And I knew I was home.

Within seconds, the **Holy Spirit** told me it was a "safe place for this season." I rejoiced in knowing it was a safe place after following Him out of a spiritually abusive church. But my heart simultaneously sank when He said it was "for this season." From the moment I walked in, I never wanted to leave that place.

See, to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven (Ecc. 3:1). I had entered into a season of refreshing and restoration after escaping a congregation where control and manipulation held many in bondage. The **Holy Spirit** needed to heal me where pastors had worked to shame me. And I needed rest for my weary soul that had been pushed to perform beyond the grace of God.

When the Holy Spirit's work was done, though, that season was over and He sent me out to do a work for Him in a new vineyard. The Lord had to almost physically push me out of the door to get me to go when the season was over because I didn't want to leave! Let's just say I didn't transition gracefully. I resisted the next movement of God in my life. God had to make it so uncomfortable for me to stay that I had no choice but to leave.

Don't Fear Change

That's often the case when we are transitioning into new seasons. And it makes the move a more trying, confusing experience than it needs to be. Typically, it's not rebellion that keeps us from transitioning to the new place God wants to take us. It's often just ignorance, immaturity or fear of change. But failing to move in God's timing can bring unwanted consequences, such as strained relationships, financial loss and stress. We need to **prophetically discern** the times and seasons we're in and move with the **Holy Spirit**.

In Ecclesiastes 3, the Preacher said there is a time to break down and a time to build up. Are you breaking down what God is trying to build in your life by refusing to let go of what lies behind and press on to what lies ahead? The Preacher said there is a time to gain and a time to lose. Are you trying to hold on to something God wants you to give up? Likewise, the Preacher said there is a time to keep and a time to throw away.

Do you see a running theme here? We can't hold on to something

that God wants us to let go of and move into the next season of blessings He has ordained for us.

Sometimes letting go means willingly, at God's direction, giving up friends who have been negative influences in your life. I've had this happen more than a few times. The **Holy Spirit** led me to leave Florida and everyone I knew 11 years ago in order to flush all the poisonous relationships out of my life. I had a **supernatural boldness** to leave but once I got there, I didn't transition well.

Just Surrender

You might call it my **wilderness experience**. I remember sitting on a curb in a tiny Alabama town three days after arriving and crying my eyes out because I didn't know a single soul. I was there for 13 months and I resisted the transition for 12 of those months.

It's no coincidence that the Lord sent me back to South Florida one month after I told Him, "I don't like it here, but if you want me to stay here the rest of my life I will." Once I surrendered, He knew I was ready to go back and fight the proverbial lions, tigers and bears in South Florida again. I was looking out my window to the Atlantic Ocean within weeks.

Sometimes letting go means giving up your rights and allowing God to be your vindicator. God has vindicated me time and time again when I refused to retaliate against my (Christian) enemies.

I've endured emotional terrorism at the hands of church leaders who said they loved me. I refused to return evil for evil, and God promoted me. I've been robbed by Christian contractors more than once and had opportunities to prosecute but, led by the Holy Spirit, I refused to defend myself. God returned everything I lost and more. I could go on and on about the vindication of God in my life. But I had to learn to surrender, and sometimes it was a struggle.

Discerning Times and Seasons

It isn't always easy to transition from one season to another even in the best of circumstances. Even great blessings can bring difficult transitions. The key to transitioning well is to first **discern the change in season**.

When you notice things beginning to rumble in your life, ask the **Holy Spirit** what is going on. Think back to the prayers you've released in recent weeks, months and years. Dig out **prophetic words** that have been spoken over your life. And stay prayerful. This will help you distinguish between the work of the enemy and the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, which isn't always obvious—especially in the face of loss.

Once you've discerned that the Lord is ushering you into a new season, quickly get into agreement with Him. The Bible says, "(How) can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Surrender your will to the Lord's will and be sensitive to the leading of the **Holy Spirit**. When you do, you'll find peace and joy even in the midst of the most difficult transitions. When we resist the will of the Lord we find ourselves without the grace we need to rise to the occasion He is calling us to. He gives grace to the humble and He gives us the grace to be humble.

So no matter what season you are in now—and no matter what season the Lord has for you next—be encouraged. The Lord would say to you, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you ... thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). Seasons may change. Winds may blow. But God is the God of all seasons. Amen.

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