

God Will Surely Vindicate You!

I didn't hit a cop. And I didn't resist arrest with violence. But one dishonest police officer with a chip on her shoulder just about ruined my life.

I was in my mid-20s when my fiance came over one day in a foul mood. One unkind word led to another and I found myself ducking a bowl of macaroni that was headed in my direction. I warned him to calm down or I would call the police. Long story short, he didn't calm down. I was scared. I called the police.

When they arrived, I was wearing little shorts and a tank top. Admittedly, I may have looked like someone who would hit a cop. I had a bald head, save a lock of ultra-black hair dangling over my right eye and a piercing in my left eyelid. But I neither committed battery on a law enforcement officer nor resisted arrest, much less with violence. All I did was move two inches from where I was told to sit because I was being eaten alive by ants while begging the cop not to arrest my fiance.

"Calm down or I'll say you hit me!" the officer threatened.

"What? You can't do that. I haven't done anything ..."

Falsely Accused

The next thing I knew, I was being body slammed against the back of a police car and assaulted by this manly female. I cried out for her to stop but the beating continued. I had bruises over much of my body. Ironically, they let my fiance go when I wouldn't press charges. Me on the other hand ... I was charged with two felonies. That sent me into a deep depression and I didn't even fight the charges. I plead no contest, took probation and soon moved about 350 miles south to start a new life.

Despite having authorization to move—I even took my mother with me to the probation office to make sure all the papers were in order—there was a mix-up somewhere. The authorities had my address. They knew where I was. But I never heard another word from them. Within a couple of months, I was married, pregnant and had started a new life. I wouldn't find out until my husband abandoned me and I was about to go to divorce court that there was a warrant for my arrest for violation of probation.

I hired a high-dollar attorney who assured me it would be cleared up without any issue. I had followed all the protocols and papers were merely lost in the system. Unfortunately, I had a money-hungry maid who discovered my plight. She tried to extort money from me. When I wouldn't hand it over, she waited for an opportunity to take vengeance. She found her opportunity when *America's Most Wanted* was in town offering a reward for any fugitives.

My maid dropped the dime on me and I was arrested in the middle of the night. The judge denied me bail three times, even on home arrest with an ankle bracelet. My recently abandoned daughter was in danger of losing her mother, too, as the district attorney sought to put me in prison for five years. The high-dollar attorney I hired suggested I take the plea.

Salvation Comes

Fast-forwarding through a lot of other details, I ended up getting saved in that jail and the Lord told me I would be released on Day 40. It didn't look possible as I was denied bail three times and the judge was on vacation well past the 40th day. I had no teaching about God being my vindicator. But He did give me the gift of faith. Over and over again He confirmed to me the number 40. And I believed it.

My grandmother stepped in and helped me find an attorney that would fight for me. It cost almost me every penny I had—about

\$75,000—but I never had to stand before the judge and I was released on the 40th day, just like God said. Of course, when I emerged from jail I had no savings, no work and nowhere to live. I moved to a small town in the Deep South, lived on food stamps for a year and learned all I could about God.

At a Joyce Meyer conference, I learned that God is my vindicator. He had already vindicated me once. The charges against me were dropped and my name cleared. But His vindication didn't end there. He also restored every penny that the devil stole from me through legal fees or otherwise. He restored my client base 10-fold. He gave me an oceanfront condo. I could go on and on. And I could go on and on about God's vindication. If there is one theme that's run throughout my life, it has been the vindication of God. Hallelujah!

God is Your Vindicator

Here's the good news: God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). If He will vindicate me, He will vindicate you. If He will restore what the devil stole from me, He will restore what the devil stole from you. So I challenge you right now, instead of complaining day and night about what the enemy has done in your life, try praying day and night for God's justice. Are you desperate enough for God's justice in your life that you'll persist in day and night prayer until you see Him move?

"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 18:7-8). Do you believe that God is your vindicator? Is anything too hard for God? (Jer. 32:26-27).

I don't know who has maligned you, who has done you wrong, or what the enemy has stolen from you. But what I am absolutely confident of is that God is your vindicator. If you believe it, and you persist in prayer for justice, day and night, you

can assure someone else of our just God's vindicating power too. Only believe. Amen.

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A Prophetic Word for the Confused, Fearful and Doubtful

If you are going through a season that has left you confused, fearful, doubtful or just plain misunderstood, take John 13:7 as a **prophetic word** over your life even now.

Jesus once spoke those **prophetic words** to Peter, but they are just as relevant for believers who are pressing into the will of God today. Jesus said, "You do not understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later on" (John 13:7, AMP).

Some years back on Jan. 1, the **Holy Spirit** took me to Isaiah 43:18-19: "Do not [earnestly] remember the former things; neither consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs forth; do you not perceive and know it and will you not give heed to it? I will even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

Oh, how exciting to have this *rhema* word from God! Nothing happened for the first 10 months of the year, but I kept holding on to that **prophetic** promise. I continued expecting

something great to happen. I persisted in waiting for the “new thing.” But the new thing wasn’t what I had hoped for, no, not by a long shot.

Is Your World Turning Upside Down?

In an instant, my whole world turned upside down. I had to lay down my ministry, walk away from just about every friend I had, and suffer immense **persecution** in the process. I was betrayed and falsely accused. I was slandered and robbed.

I could have reversed it all in the blink of an eye. I could have bowed under the spiritual abuse and submitted to the spiritual crushing, but ultimately I would have lost myself in the process. Ultimately, it would have prevented me from walking in the knowledge of who I am in Christ. Ultimately, it would have left me as a eunuch in Jezebel’s camp.

So, ultimately, I chose to submit to the **Holy Spirit** and put it all on the altar—my ministry, my friends, my reputation, my comfort, my everything—instead of submitting to man’s will. In other words, I chose to follow God through the valley of the shadow of death rather than to hold tightly onto the things the Lord wanted me to willingly lay down.

Maybe the season you are in is not so dramatic. But that doesn’t discount what you are dealing with, going through, waiting on or otherwise enduring.

Maybe you just sowed a large sum of money into your church by the direction of the Holy Spirit and now you are in a financially dry season. God’s promises for provision are still true and you will understand later on. Maybe your teenaged son appears to be going astray. God’s promises relating to your seed are still true and you will understand later on. Maybe you are struggling with a health issue. God’s promises about healing are still true and you will understand later on.

God’s Ways Are Higher Than Our Ways

So again, if you are going through a season that has left you

confused, fearful, doubtful or misunderstood, take John 13:7 as a **prophetic word** over your life even now. Jesus said, “You do not understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later on.”

That prophetic word has rung true in my life many times—and if you think back you can probably recount instances where you had no idea what was going on or how it could possibly work together for good according to Romans 8:28. But it did. It can—and it does—because God is a lot smarter than we are. Consider this reality:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

“For as the rain and snow come down from the heavens, and return not there again, but water the earth and make it bring forth and sprout, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return to Me void [without producing any effect, useless], but it shall accomplish that which I please and purpose, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:8-11).

Warring With Your Prophetic Words

Most of us have a few prophetic words tucked away somewhere, waiting for God’s perfect timing to manifest. When you don’t understand what God is doing, try warring with the prophetic words you’ve received (1 Timothy 1:8)—or just war with the **prophetic promises** in the Bible—and rest assured that you will understand later on—even if later on is in eternity. That’s just part of trusting God.

Oh, so far as the new thing God was doing in my life a few years ago ... He was setting me free from a toxic environment and drawing me closer to Him. Obedience and sacrifice brought

blessing. He gave me back everything I laid down and more, much more. Much, much more.

I'm reminded of what Kathryn Kuhlman used to say, "I believe that there is nothing impossible with God and that He is still God Almighty. And always remember, no matter what those problems are today, as long as God is still on His Throne hearing and answering prayer, everything will come out all right." Amen.

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Prophetic Evangelism Giving Rise to Prayer Storm

Jesus prophesied, "I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father" (John 14:12). I call this "doing the double," and I believe that you and I are part of a generation that has been called to do these "greater works." By listening to the **Holy Spirit** and then casting our nets where He tells us to, we will be able to haul in a miraculous catch!

This generation, as it arises and breaks out of the box of traditional limitations, carries a number of distinct characteristics:

1. Faith coupled with humility.

2. An appreciation for working in teams (gender-inclusive).
3. Accountability with relational care, so that wounded warriors can be healed.
4. An emphasis of the Fatherhood of God (not only the revelation of Jesus, the Son).
5. Diversities of anointing and releasing the Holy Spirit with creativity (the prophet and the seer), etc.
6. Increased power, clarity and accuracy.
7. An ability to see the target clearly.

The church is our practice ground, but the world is our field of operations. As we come alongside each other to help each other hear and obey the voice of the Spirit, we will find ourselves doing far greater works than Jesus did while He was on earth, thus making it possible for His effectiveness to be multiplied as more territory becomes part of His kingdom. Let His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven!

Prophetic Evangelism

One of the ways of “casting your nets on the other side of the boat” is **prophetic evangelism**, which simply means listening to the Spirit and acting accordingly to bring the kingdom to bear on the world around you.

Prophetic evangelism combines the sustained emphasis on evangelism that was ushered in with the Reformation more than 600 years ago with the more than 100-year emphasis on **prophecy** that began in 1904 when the **Pentecostal outpouring** occurred. The earlier **Holiness movement** shifted into the **Pentecostal movement**, which shifted into the **Charismatic movement**, and laid the groundwork for the current Apostolic movement and beyond.

The priesthood of every believer makes it possible for the whole church to be drawn into new realms of adventure with God. Prophetic evangelism has grown stronger as the church has matured into a clearer understanding of her bridal intimacy

with her Bridegroom Jesus, along with the governmental empowerment (the “bridal rule”) of God’s people.

We are all to be prophetic evangelists, whether we find ourselves in megachurches and massive stadium events, in some back alley ministering to a homeless person, as missionaries in the jungles of the Congo or in Starbucks holding a grande cup of Colombian coffee. The same **Holy Spirit** keeps speaking to us everywhere we go. He will link us with others, equip us, teach us how to combine our gifts, and do **signs and wonders** through us. People will be unable to deny that this is God in action. The power, the love and the unity will make Him manifest to a lost world.

A Prophetic Prayer Storm

Foundational to prophetic evangelism—and breaking the way for its advance—is **prophetic intercessory prayer**. Another initiative of my own ministry has been what we call the “Prayer Storm.”

We have updated the 24/7, two-century-old prayer model of the Moravians in Herrnhut, Germany, by establishing an Internet-based worldwide community of **intercessors** who commit to **pray** for one hour per week for **revival** in the church, a youth awakening, Israel and God’s intervention in times of crisis. This virtual **house of prayer** is storming the heavens even now, fueled by the responsiveness of the **Spirit of God** to the urgency of the times we live in.

With regular updates and reports, webcasts and other resources, these **prayer warriors** are pioneering something that has never before been undertaken—blanketing the world with **prophetic intercession** around the clock that is not limited to one geographical spot. Along with many other ministries, we are doing our part in restoring and re-releasing the global Moravian lampstand, based on these words from the Book of God’s law: “Fire shall be kept burning continually on the altar; it is not to go out” (Leviticus 6:13 NASB). Yes, you

can join the Prayer Storm—the hour that changes the world—and together we can see global presence **evangelism** take place as it did in the great revivals of the past.

Throughout our **intercession**, we must listen to the **Holy Spirit**. Without His ongoing guidance, we will soon flounder and falter. In concert with Him, we have the perseverance, energy and accuracy to keep praying until we see definite results.

When Jesus Gets Into Your Boat

Prior to the Gospel account of the resurrected Jesus telling Peter, John and the other disciples to put their fishing net on the right side of the boat, we find another story about Jesus and His disciples in a fishing boat. This story contained in Luke 5:1-11 gives us further insights into the adventure of **prophetic discipleship**.

The questions this story raises in my mind are: (1) “What happens when Jesus steps into your boat?” and (2) “How can you get Him to step into your boat?”

Let’s answer the second question first. Obviously, you must go to the water first. He will not get into your boat if it is stuck on dry land. Water, always strongly associated with the **Holy Spirit**, is where your boat needs to be floating. In other words, you have got to get in His presence.

Jesus checks out the boats, sees the one He wants and invites Himself aboard. Will you say “yes” to Him? Knowing that your life may change drastically as a result, will you accept His invitation? If He follows His own example, He will get into only one of the boats that He sees. Just one. Will it be yours? What if it is another’s?

When Jesus gets into a boat, He does it because He has something to say. So, if He gets into someone else’s boat, regardless of how you feel personally, you need to bless that person (or church, or city) and the word that the Lord Jesus

will be bringing them. If He does get into your boat, listen to Him! He may bring a word of correction, clarification or direction. He will say something like, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

He will tell you to do something that you may have already tried without results. "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing ..." Still, you will recognize the voice of God's authority and you will agree: "Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." The results will prove that you have the Lord in your boat.

In response to your own miraculous catch, will you do what Simon Peter did? He fell down at Jesus' feet, humbled and awed, completely aware that he did not deserve this phenomenal **miracle**, and willing to change in any way that the Lord might require. When the Lord Jesus steps into your boat, His presence brings you to your knees. Your response will be humility—and change.

When He gets into your boat, it will cost you your boat, your history and everything you own. What happened to Peter and the others? The catch of fish was so great that they had to have help bringing it in. They brought their overloaded boats to shore, only to drop everything and follow Jesus. No longer would they be known as the fishermen of Lake Gennesaret. They would be changed into fishers of men. Their catch? They shared it with the other fishermen, blessing them instead of hanging onto the blessing for themselves.

A Messenger With a Message

With that one **miracle** and their response to it, Simon Peter and his partners, James and John, changed overnight from ordinary fishermen who spent their time and energy toiling to earn a living, to messengers with a message—a kingdom message. From that time forward, they would have something to say and their voices would be heard.

In the same way, when Jesus steps into your boat and changes your life, He will give you a message. You will become a messenger. Far from being a lone voice in the wilderness, your voice will join the voices of other kingdom messengers. You will enjoy a spiritual synergy and a supernatural convergence with other messengers. You will not be able to claim credit for anything except for having said “yes” to your assignment and to your Lord.

Now God can use you as never before. His blessings will take many forms, and you will hang in there with Him even when the going gets tough. You will go where He goes and do what He tells you to do, living a **supernaturally** natural life in relationship with Him. Walking down the road together, sitting together—or back on the water in a boat together—your conversations will revolve around the things that are on His heart.

You will be passionate because He is passionate and you will enjoy your journey in the company of His Spirit. Gifted with the **prophetic** ability to hear Him even when you cannot see Him, you too will embark upon an endless exploration of the diverse challenges of helping to bring in His kingdom where darkness once prevailed. Yes, this is the purpose of these amazing giftings of the **Holy Spirit**. This is the power of the gospel of the kingdom of our dear Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer For Increase: Going For the Double

In our global Prayer Storm, we will take the topic written up this week, Doing the Double, and we will turn it into prayer. So, let’s pray for the following in our lives, ministries, and cities:

1. Ask Jesus to step into your boat.
2. Step out into fresh adventures in the **prophetic**.
3. Cultivate a culture of the supernatural.
4. Ask the Lord for an increase of revelation in your **intercession**.

5. Call forth expressions of **prophetic evangelism** in your own life and area of influence.
6. Pray for connections so there will be cooperation and not competition in your region.
7. **Pray** for a harvest in Jesus' name to glorify His name!

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Are Church Cliques Harmful to Your Spiritual Health?

I just couldn't fit in. I loved the worship. The messages were Christ-centered. The congregation was growing. But try as I might—I served on a team, I joined the Bible school, I went to the **prayer** meetings—I just couldn't fit in.

And I wasn't the only one. It was a common malady among new members. We were welcomed with open arms but then kept at arm's length. The group that had helped launch the church was a near-impenetrable bunch of passionate believers. But they were very selective about who they let into their inner-circle.

This **church clique** even had its own buzzwords. Everything was intense. They were always stoked. Many things were profound. And they did everything in the grace of God. There's nothing

wrong with that language, but if you came from another camp in the body of Christ into that one, your speech gave you away—and shut you out of the clique.

It was frustrating, and I had never experienced it before. I was always part of the in-clique and knew the language. But I just couldn't fit in, so eventually I left looking for a place that would not only welcome me with open arms but really embrace me. Since then, I've visited churches of many sizes and denominations and observed the **church cliques** nearly everywhere.

Cliques, Cliques and More Cliques

Recently I found out that church cliques were the object of a study by Balswick and Layne, who identified four types of church cliques. Are any of these present in your church? What does God think about church cliques? And how should we respond to cliques in the body of Christ?

According to Balswick and Layne, there are four typical types of cliques in churches. The researchers have identified them as "clusters." These are: the conjugal cluster (married couples); the Christian education cluster (the group that typically makes decisions on what is taught in the church); the established member cluster (long-standing members) and the prominent member cluster.

I'm not sure there are only four types of church cliques. I've seen cliques of **prophetic** people—and that can be a scary, super-spiritual, nutty group! I've seen cliques of worshippers, who feel elite because they are skilled with instruments and vocals. I've seen cliques within youth groups, cliques within discipleship groups, cliques within races in the church. Cliques, cliques and more cliques!

Sometimes, church feels more like high school with its in-crowds and out-crowds than a place where you can feel accepted and loved for who you are. There's nothing wrong with birds of

a feather flocking together, so to speak, based on common interests. That's natural. But when a **church clique** becomes exclusive or elite—setting themselves apart from the rest of the congregation and tightly shutting up the entrance—I believe it is harmful to church culture.

What the Bible Says About Cliques

I don't think God likes us to form impenetrable cliques. Again, I'm not talking about the groups within the church that meet each week for cooking class or sports events. It's natural for people with common interests to bond. I'm talking about cliques of people based on leadership status or marital status or spiritual gift status or some other status. These cliques are exclusive and, truth be known, their members are often walking in a measure of pride.

Paul exhorts us to, "Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion" (Rom. 12:16). Paul urged the Corinthian church to "all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). James tells us not to show partiality (James 2:1).

Seventeenth-century English Puritan Richard Baxter put it this way: "All other sins destroy the church consequentially; but division and separation demolish it directly." And the late H.M. Carson, pastor, author and former editor of *The Gospel Magazine*, emphatically stated that, "The communion of the saints means, not a series of loosely related cliques, but an all-embracing and self-abnegating fellowship." Finally, the late Robert C. Chapman, known as the apostle of love, revealed, "Humility is the secret of fellowship, and pride the secret of division."

What to Do About Church Cliques

I'm guilty of being in a church clique—in the past. I was in

what Balswick and Layne classify as a “prominent member cluster” at a church I once attended. The senior pastors told me I couldn’t be friends with lay members of the church because they wouldn’t be able to receive from me as a minister. That meant I had a pretty small circle of friends while I was there. I only later found out how cliquy the church really was, and I had to repent for propagating the movement.

So what do you do if you are in a church with cliques? If you lead a church with cliques, talk to your staff and encourage them to discourage cliques at all levels. Help them understand the biblical value of developing a true community of believers who share one another’s lives. If you are in a church with cliques and you can’t seem to penetrate any of the groups, **pray** about talking with a leader in the church about what you are experiencing. Don’t go in with guns blazing and blame slinging. Just talk about how you feel. It’s quite possible they have no idea this is happening and that they can help build a more inclusive community.

Sometimes, if you just don’t feel welcome, the only thing you can do is find a church that will not only welcome you with open arms but embrace you. I assure you, there are churches like that. God has a place for you. Don’t let a bad experience with **church cliques** cause you to go into your shell and give up on the local church. Local churches are vital to the work of God. When you get planted in the place you belong, you will surely bloom.

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You Don't Need a Prophetic Word to Make a Life-Changing Decision

When I left Miami Beach after my ex-husband abandoned me with our then-2-year-old baby, I insisted I would never return to South Florida.

It wasn't a difficult decision. After all, who wants a constant reminder of a life transition that left you in shambles? I continued to head farther and farther away from South Florida—and all the pain it represented—until I wound up in a tiny town in lower Alabama where no one knew my name.

I hated it most of the time. Looking back, it was clearly a **wilderness experience**. When I finally surrendered to the possibility of me, a city girl, spending the rest of my life in this small country town that didn't even have a movie theater or a shopping mall, I was suddenly faced with a difficult decision.

I had a job offer as editor of an aviation magazine—in South Florida. It was an exciting opportunity as I was working to rebuild my life after a financial devastation. But there was one problem: I already vowed never to return to South Florida. Was I really ready, just 13 months later, to go back to the place of my crushing? Was I ready to deal with the people and places that I'd tucked away in a bygone chapter of my life? It was a difficult decision.

Your Fork in the Road

We all face difficult decisions in life. We come to a fork in the road where we need to decide which way we'll turn, knowing

that our choice brings consequences that could change our life for better or worse. The difficulty of making those decisions is compounded when our choice also impacts the lives of others.

So how do you make a really difficult decision? I'm not talking about a decision on where to go to dinner. I mean a potentially life-changing decision. First, let me say that you don't need a **prophetic word** from a prophet every time you have a tough decision to make. God doesn't want you depending on other people to tell you what He is leading you to do. You need to learn to follow the **Holy Spirit** for yourself.

Now, some say follow your heart—if it feels good, do it—but we know the heart is deceitful above all things (Jeremiah 17:9) and that God's will doesn't always feel good at the time. Some look for signs from heaven. But I've learned from experience that the devil can show you what you want to see to get you to head in the direction he wants you to go.

Scripture offers some guidelines. For example, "Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established" (Prov. 15:22). In other words, there is wisdom in the counsel of many. Praying for wisdom in the midst of a difficult decision and seeking wise counsel is, well, wisdom. But ultimately you still have to make the decision yourself, don't you?

Scripture also tells us, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). Being a student of the Word will give you more wisdom and plant the seeds of good decision-making in your heart. Following God's principles will always lead you in the right direction. But ultimately every decision we have to make isn't laid out nicely and neatly in the pages of our Bibles, is it?

When Emotions Hijack God's Will

We should do many things when we have a life-changing decision

to make. We should **pray**. We should be totally open to obeying whatever God may tell us to do. We should even use our mind to reason through the options. After all, God gave us an intellect and He expects us to use it. Often I'll reason out the options and then pray over each one until God illuminates the path.

On the other hand, many poor decisions I've made simply defied common sense. Our emotions can hijack our judgment and lead us right out of God's intentions for your lives. Of course, every choice we make isn't monumental and I believe God gives us a wider latitude than we may think with many decisions. But we're talking about life-changing decisions here, even decisions that impact others.

So, yes, we should pray. We should be students of the Word. We should seek wise counsel. We should follow peace. We should use our God-given ability to reason. But over the years I've learned to do one more thing, which requires patience and maturity that I once lacked—I've learned to take a deep breath and just wait upon the Lord. In other words, I've learned not to make rash or hasty decisions.

The Danger of Hasty Decisions

Indeed, making hasty decisions is dangerous. Both Ecclesiastes 5:2 and Proverbs 20:5 warn us not to make rash promises. Proverbs 19:2 warns "haste makes mistakes." Proverbs 14:29 says a hasty spirit exalts folly while Proverbs 19:2 says those who are hasty with their feet sin. The Bible tells us to count the cost before we start a building project or wage war to make sure we can finish (Luke 14:28-32). Hasty decisions are often regrettable decisions.

These past two years have been decision-making years in my life. Do I leave an unhealthy church or stay and push for reform? Do I file a lawsuit against the believer who stole \$10,000 from me or do I turn the other cheek? Do I plant a church or plug into another one? Do I move into a new dwelling

or stay in the old one? Do I cut off certain toxic relationships or bear up under them?

Unfortunately, I've made some decisions rashly based on emotion or what others thought I should do and some situations turned out miserably. More recently, I became more aware of how **Holy Spirit's** prompting in the midst of the decision-making process. Earlier this year, He instructed me "Pray for 30 days first" and recently He told me, "Don't do anything until September." I believe it's His way to get me to slow down and wait on Him even when emotions, circumstances and colleagues are pushing me in one direction or another.

Whatever you do, remember this: Proverbs 16:9 says, "A man's mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps and makes them sure." It requires faith, trust and patience to wait upon the Lord amid pressures from circumstances, colleagues and even your own soul. But the outcome is worth it: You will be in God's perfect will. And there's no better place to be. Amen.

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Does Everyone Get This Much Spiritual Warfare?

Just the day before I was (barely) sitting up talking to a friend, trying to swallow semi-solid food after catching some violent virus my daughter brought home from the mission field.

This was less than a week after discovering news so devastating I had no choice but to trade sleep for prayer just to maintain. And that was only a week after someone in my inner circle launched such a vicious verbal attack against me that I wondered how I'd misjudged his character so badly.

I could go on and on. That was just the last 14 days of many where it seems all hell was breaking loose against me. Call it a season of **spiritual warfare**. Call it a trial. Call it tribulation. Whatever you call it, I was growing weary in well doing and felt like I was about to faint. And I was whining to my friend about the ongoing onslaught. Whining, and questioning: "Do you think everyone gets this much **spiritual warfare** or am I doing something really wrong?"

Why So Much Spiritual Warfare?

I mean, most of my friends are dealing with the occasional common cold, cranky kid or flat tire. Meanwhile, I'm laid out flat on my back with some strange illness while trying to process devastating news and enduring a Judas. Sometimes I wish I had my friends' problems instead of mine, but that's really not the right attitude, is it?

The Bible says, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). The Bible also says, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12).

Amen. But that didn't answer my question: Does everyone get this much **spiritual warfare** or am I doing something wrong? The Bible says, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may

also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Amen. I could go on and on with Scripture that tells us we will have tribulation but to take heart; with Scripture that tells us to be patient in tribulation; with Scripture that tells us we are blessed when others revile and **persecute** us and say all kinds of evil against us falsely because of Jesus. And I’ll say amen and amen. But that still doesn’t answer my question: Does everyone get this much **spiritual warfare** or am I doing something wrong?

A Supernatural Revelation

I’d have my answer the next morning when I met Rob Hoskins, president of OneHope, an international children’s evangelism ministry. I was interviewing him for a cover story for *Charisma* magazine later this year. I had missed my first interview with him because I was plastered to my bed with the virus I mentioned. He was gracious enough to reschedule. Honestly, I had no idea the night before how I’d make the 30-minute drive and sit upright through the three-hour interview except for the grace of God. I was still that ill.

When I met Rob, I quickly discovered why Paul said it’s not wise to compare (2 Cor. 10:12). After serving me an espresso, Rob sat down at the conference room table and within two minutes I’d learned that he almost died last year from what the World Health Organization called the deadliest E. coli outbreak on record. Through that incident he discovered he had a fast-growing form of prostate cancer that could quickly move through the bladder wall and spread like wildfire through his body. Now that’s **spiritual warfare**. He miraculously survived to tell the story with a smile.

When he got done telling that tale, he shared his testimony of nearly going blind some years ago. Doctors told him they would try to save his eyes, but there wasn’t much hope. His daughter was only a month old when he underwent pneumatic retinopexy, a surgery in which doctors take out the eye, put a gas bubble

behind it, reinsert the eye and then leave you lying face down for six weeks to heal. The father of lies invaded Rob's room in the night hours and fear gripped his heart.

"God, if I can't see my daughter, if I can't see my wife, why did you put this vision and burden in me for the nations? Now I am going to be a blind man. I'd just rather die. Just take me now," Hoskins said just before finally surrendering all to the Lord in complete consecration to His will—even if that meant blindness.

After his wife laid hands on him and started praying, the presence of Jesus filled the room and Rob received three Scripture passages and a confirmation that he would be healed gradually. Now that's **spiritual warfare**. He was miraculously healed and you can see the sparkle of joy in his eyes when he glorifies His healer.

Learning to Trust God More

The point of the story was that the Lord wanted Rob to trust Him at greater levels. By trusting God through the attack of blindness—trusting Him for this gradual healing—Hoskins would be able to believe God for the miracles it would take to head a global ministry that aims to reach every child with God's Word by 2030. After experiencing that attack so long ago, the and cancer wasn't so daunting. (Wow!)

Through faith and trust, God delivered Hoskins from blindness. God delivered him from . God delivered him from cancer. And I am sure God delivered him from other perils he didn't have time to share with me. As I sat there listening, all I could think of was how small my battles are compared to his. And that's not to say that I haven't faced some intense **spiritual battles** because I have. (I'm sure you have, too.) At some level, it's all relative. That's why we can't compare our spiritual warfare to another man's spiritual warfare. It's just not wise to compare.

And so God gave me the answer to the question I was asking just 12 hours earlier: “Do you think everyone gets this much spiritual warfare or am I doing something really wrong?” No, everyone doesn’t get as much **spiritual warfare** as I do (or as you do). But some people get more—far more. And no, I’m not doing anything wrong—I haven’t opened a door to the enemy. Quite the contrary, I’m advancing the kingdom of God and I’m a threat to the powers of darkness.

So are you, and you should remember that next time you take a hit for righteousness. Don’t whine about the spiritual warfare. Rise above it. After all, you are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Don’t fear the spiritual warfare. Trust God. Paul put it best when he said, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). Amen.

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Jezebel, Occultism and the End-Time War on the Saints

At first, I thought it was New Age culture. But I was wrong. It was occultism.

As I strolled through the streets of Key West on a 24-hour

getaway with my daughter, I noticed something that I had never witnessed in Key West before: occultism seems fully woven through the culture.

I've been going to Key West for more than 20 years and have spent weeks at a time on the tropical island. But something disturbing has happened in the 10 years since I last visited—and it's merely a microcosm of what's happening in the world today.

You can no longer walk down Duval Street—the famous drag of shops and restaurants—without running into the likes of Mahadeo Jerrybandhan, a renowned “peerless palmist” from Trinidad with a long white beard and an even longer white robe. But Jerrybandhan is not alone. He has plenty of peers in Key West, from psychics to mediums to channels to healers to tarot card readers to astrologers. The only group I didn't find down there were the crystal readers.

Then there's “Robert the Doll.” Key West profiteers have designed so-called ghost tours that explore the haunted history of Key West, including old wooden houses where spirits purportedly walk. Tour guides will tell you that Key West is one of the most haunted cities in the world with elevated paranormal activity. A local voodoo'istic icon, Robert the Doll will supposedly curse you if you take his picture without permission or forget to thank him for the privilege.

The Abomination of Occultism

As you can imagine, seeing all this grieved my spirit. But I should not have been so surprised. Occultism has been slowly creeping into American culture for decades as movie makers exalt witchcraft and vampires while the music industry pumps occult rock. Beloved, we are in the midst of a great spiritual crisis even now. Our literature, music, video games, comics, films and television shows are full of mysticism and the occult. Some of it is subtle. Some of it is blatant. All of it is wicked.

Again, this is nothing new. Occultism—which broadly includes magic, séances, channeling, hypnosis, necromancy, astrology, extra-sensory perception, alchemy, spiritualism and **divination**—is strongly condemned in the Bible.

“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire [which is an ancient occult practice], or one who practices **witchcraft**, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord” (Deut. 18:10-12, brackets added).

The Lord rebuked Israel for practicing astrology (Isaiah 47:10-14). **Jezebel** practiced witchcraft (2 Kings 9:22) and we know how that ended. Ephesus was known for a population that practiced magic arts (Acts 19:19). And the book of Revelation makes it clear that “the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8).

Kabbalah, Kundalini and Jezebel

And yet we see occult practices, like Kabbalah, gaining momentum in the church. We see “**prophetic words**” delivered in what appears to be Kundalini fashion, with violent shaking and demonic tongues against a backdrop of tribal bongos that set the congregation into hysteria. We see a **Jezebel spirit** working to seduce saints into idolatry and sexual immorality—and oftentimes succeeding. We see all sorts of strong delusion and strange fire with occultic ties in the modern church.

But we should not be surprised. The rise of occultism is a sign of the end times. Satan’s plan is to fascinate our hearts with occult power and deceive us. The Holy Spirit, meanwhile, wants to fascinate our spirits with a revelation of the Son of God. I believe God’s people are enticed by occultism when they

begin seeking spiritual experiences above seeking God. It's a subtle—and dangerous—shift. Many Christians are on fire for God, but that fire can suddenly turn strange if we are not rooted in the Word. If we seek supernatural experiences, we will find them—but they don't always come from Jesus.

Beloved, we must not play with strange fire. Ultimately, the occult leads to murder and mayhem—immorality of all kinds. It's not likely that you would ever willfully visit the likes of Mahadeo Jerrybandhan, the peerless palmist—or any of his peers. But could you ignorantly be engaged with occultic practices that are opening the door to deceptive dangers? Could it be coming from what appears to be godly influences—even within church culture?

Discernment or Deception?

Don't brush the question off before praying about it. If you want the truth, the Holy Spirit will lead you and guide you into all truth. Please hear me! Even a little occult is a deadly poison—a little leaven leavens the whole lump. The Bible warns about deceptive teachers, false apostles and deceitful workers. The Bible warns about self-deception. And it's your responsibility to keep your heart pure. If you've stepped into this demonic ditch, repent now and warn others.

Friends, we're in an end-times war with eternal consequences. Satan is using the occult to seduce people away from the kingdom of God to dance in the kingdom of darkness. I pray that the Lord gives you discernment and awakens your spirit, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming (Matt. 24:42).

Let me leave you with a warning from the apostle Paul: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). Amen.

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Waging War on Misguided Motives

I don't expect this column to be among the most popular I've ever written. In fact, if you are looking for **prophetic insight** into the latest trends in **spiritual warfare**, you may as well stop reading. But if you are interested in touching God's heart now and heaping up eternal recompense, then join me in pursuing the rewards of obscurity.

In the **Sermon on the Mount**, Jesus outlined three specific areas in which we are tempted to put on a show for man: giving, praying and fasting. Giving, praying and fasting should be motivated by love and an obedient pursuit of His will that comes out of that love. When we give, pray and fast with the right motive, we can be sure rewards are waiting.

On the other hand, making a show of giving, praying and fasting ultimately backfires. Rather than love and an obedient pursuit of His will that comes out of that love, people who put on a show have their reward in full. That reward is called the recognition and admiration of man. I don't know about you, but I'd rather receive God's slight nod over man's standing ovation. And you get more than God's slight nod when His kingdom purposes motivate your heart.

Are You Tooting Your Own Horn?

In Matthew 6, Jesus said, "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men.

"Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (vv. 1-4).

Can you imagine? The religious leaders of the day—Jesus called them hypocrites—actually sounded a trumpet to draw attention to their good deeds. Their motive was clearly to look like the hotshots of Israel. And despite how deeply they dug into their pockets, the only reward they would ever get was the attention of man. God wants no part in that pretense. The one poor widow who is willing to quietly throw two mites into the offering touches the Father's heart more than every attention-seeking **religious spirit** put together (see Mark 12:41-47).

The Attention-Seeking Prayer Warrior

Jesus then said, "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to **pray** standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:5-6).

Once again, Jesus points out the hypocrites. Their motive is to be seen by men and they have their reward through those who marvel at their dedication to prayer. Or maybe their motive is to demonstrate their ability to shout the devil down louder than their neighbor so they can prove what a fierce **spiritual**

warrior they really are.

I've always wondered what kinds of prayers the Pharisaical hypocrites prayed. Maybe it sounded something like this: "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:11-12). God much prefers the one who cries for mercy. There's nothing wrong with praying in public; it's the motivation that matters.

Why Are You Really Fasting?

Finally, Jesus said, "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:16-18).

Every year, we see ministries call fasts. And that's an awesome thing. There is flesh-killing power in fasting. But if we are motivated by putting our name on the church's fasting list so others can see how we're starving ourselves for the cause, then our motives are all wrong. How ironic that even in fasting some have fleshly rather than godly motives.

I'm Not Trying to Impress You

Beyond giving, fasting and praying, people do all sorts of things to look more spiritual, more humble, more "whatever" than the other guy. The point is this: When you do things to impress people, you have your reward. Even if you start off in obedience to God by giving away your most prized possession, if you make a big deal about it—if you make sure everyone knows what you did so you can look like a sacrificial giver—you have your reward in full.

We should ultimately be motivated by eternity. When we look at

our actions through an eternal lens, we see what really matters and what really doesn't. When we behave as if an eternal God is watching—and He is—then we become aware of what truly matters and what truly doesn't in this life.

The rewards of man may feel good in the moment, but even man's greatest rewards are fleeting. Ultimately, only God's rewards can truly satisfy our hearts. That's why I choose to pursue the rewards of obscurity. Anything that's not motivated by love won't last in eternity. Amen.

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Connecting the Prophetic Dots of Your Destiny

When God first called me into **prophetic ministry**, I couldn't see the forest for the proverbial trees. In fact, I didn't even get it.

The **Holy Spirit** was dropping prophetic puzzle pieces along my path, but since I didn't have any real understanding of modern-day prophetic ministry at the time, I continued to walk around as if I was clueless.

Soon, I began to see a running theme in my dealings with the Lord. He was showing me through books I was reading the earmarks of my calling. I was still unsure and didn't mention it to anyone.

Within months, someone **prophesied** over me in a prayer line, proclaiming that I was a “voice of governing authority.” I had no earthly idea what that meant. So I went home and researched each word in the Bible and the dictionary.

Prophetic Dot-to-Dot

The Holy Spirit supernaturally took me to the same Scripture reference in three of the Gospels about John the Baptist being a voice crying in the wilderness. I finally got the revelation. But that was just the beginning.

I’ve had a series of baby dreams over the years, each a few years apart, that offered additional clues as to what I was birthing and the uncomfortable process I’d have to go through to see the prophesied ministry become a reality. I’m walking in a measure of those **prophetic dreams** now. But, again, it’s progressive.

Recently, when I was worshipping at the International House of Prayer in Atlanta, God connected so many dots in about 30 minutes that it was overwhelming. I have enough clarity now to move ahead to the next season. But I’m convinced that there is much more that I still don’t see. If you had told me 10 years ago I’d be serving in the capacities I am today I probably wouldn’t have had the faith to believe it. What about you?

A Prophetic Coloring Book

Whether God has called you into **prophetic ministry** or something else, in order to get glimpses of your destiny you often have to connect the prophetic dots, so to speak. That can take years because when we first catch on that God is calling us, we’re typically only catching on to the first season of our calling.

Sure, God can open your **spiritual eyes** and show you the end from the beginning. But more often than not your calling will progress and evolve much like a child’s dot-to-dot coloring book. In other words, you may see the outline of the image but

the intricate details that make it a picture worthy of hanging on the refrigerator are yet missing.

The Bible says, “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

God reveals our progressive calling to us through His Spirit. Sure, He may use a person to **prophecy** over you. He may use a sermon or book to open your eyes. He may use **divine appointments** to get your attention. The Holy Spirit is actively offering you clues to your destiny. It’s up to us to connect the prophetic dots.

So how can you connect the prophetic dots to get a clearer picture of your calling and destiny?

1. Be a student of the Word. We must stay grounded in the written **Word of God**. God speaks to us through His Word by outlining timeless kingdom principles, but He can also give us a **rhema word** that stirs our spirits to move toward His plan for our lives. I urge you to be a student of the Word.

2. Pray in the Spirit. “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries” (1 Cor. 14:2). I remember when a very wise man explained to me that if I **pray in tongues** and **meditate on the Word**, that combination would unlock God’s best in my life. He was right.

3. Write down prophetic words. When the Holy Spirit speaks to you through a dream, a vision, an impression, a still, small voice or through another prophetic voice—however He speaks—write it down. It’s much easier to connect the prophetic dots when you have a **prophetic history** to draw from. Chronicle the prophetic moments in your life.

Overall, stay sensitive to His Spirit. Stay connected with people. He uses them to help you take you where He wants you to go. And know when to share what the Lord has said to you and when to keep your mouth tightly shut up until the promise manifests. Remember Joseph.

Take heart. I can assure you that God has a great plan for your life and He's actively working to share His plan with you little by little. If He revealed it all at once, the enemy would come in like a flood to try to destroy your destiny. By revealing your calling progressively God can protect your prophetic destiny even as He prepares you to fulfill it. Amen.

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