

The Supernatural Power of Spiritual Vision

The Bible encourages God's people to be men and women of vision. This is one of the main ways we take on the image of our Father. God is a visionary. In the beginning there was nothing but void and emptiness, yet the Creator "envisioned" a universe so vast, so beautiful and so spectacular that those beholding it with worshipful hearts would be left breathless. First, God saw it; then, God *spoke* it; then God *did* it (a three-step pattern we should follow as well).

The next step for this Original Visionary was dealing with a nearly failed vision. His new world became defiled with sin, and Adam, instead of imaging God, took on the corrupt likeness of the prince of darkness. Yet the heavenly King never even considered giving up; instead He "envisioned" an amazing, redemptive plan that would restore His purpose. If our vision ever falters, we must be just as tenacious.

Almost all visionaries in the Bible came to the point where it seemed the vision would not come to pass. Look at Abraham, waiting so long for a son that he and Sarah passed the age of having offspring. Look at Joseph, experiencing the opposite of his prophetic dreams—not reverence, but hatred from his brethren. Look at Moses, attempting to deliver an Israelite and being exiled from Egypt instead. Yet these held on to what God put in their hearts. You can too.

Proverbs 29:18 warns, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." This passage stirs the heart. When God's people become defeated, lazy or unconcerned, those who could potentially be helped instead often "perish"—mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Someone needs you desperately; do not be deterred. When asked what could be worse than being blind, Helen Keller responded, "*Having sight but no vision.*"

The Scripture declares when God pours out His Spirit, “young men shall see visions” (Acts 2:17, emphasis added). Flipping the interpretation, the sign of a godly, youthful heart is one that imagines world-changing possibilities and pursues them with passion. We are only old when all we can do is look back at what we’ve already accomplished. I love Jack London’s words:

“I would rather be ashes than dust. I would rather my spark would burn out in a brilliant blaze than to be stifled by dry rot. I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in a magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. The proper function of man is to live, not exist.”

Visionaries are spiritual explorers. They dare to tread into new territory when other souls timidly accept the status quo. They are thankful, but never satisfied. They are continually reevaluating their lives in order to discover hidden potential. They think creatively. They explore possibilities. They are active, not passive. These are necessary qualities for true visionaries, for:

“Vision without action is only a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. But vision with action can change the world.” –Joel Barker

Mike Shreve, best-selling author of 12 books including 65 Supernatural Promises From God for Your Child and Powerful Prayers for Supernatural Results (from which this article is adapted), has been involved in full-time ministry and evangelism since 1971, sharing the gospel around the world. His passion is to see New Testament Christianity in the earth, the release of God’s glory, the manifestation of His gifts and the fulfillment of His promises. He and his wife, Elizabeth, reside in Cleveland, Tennessee, with their two children.

9 Gifts Jesus Died to Give You

When the holy child was born in a rustic setting near the shepherds' fields in Bethlehem, few knew that heaven's greatest gift had come down to the earth. Mary wrapped "the gift" in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger. Approximately 33 years later, Roman soldiers rudely and cruelly unwrapped "the gift," stripping Him of His clothing and subjecting the Son of God to humiliation and torture. But it was all the unfolding of a plan:

"For God so loved the world that He **gave** His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The Everlasting Father gave the best He had. He gave His only Son. He gave precious, sinless blood. No greater love could have been expressed. No greater sacrifice could have been made. No greater gift could have been given. But the generosity of heaven had only just begun.

Forty days after the stone rolled away, the risen Savior "ascended on high"—and not for His own well-being, but to receive "gifts for men" (Ps. 68:18). How amazing! Usually great liberators are showered with gifts from the grateful masses; instead, this heaven-sent liberator promised to pour out numerous gifts on those who prayerfully call upon His name. In the New Testament Paul explained this prophecy:

"He gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service, and for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge

of the Son of God, into a complete man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13).

So the King of kings gifted the world with empowered representatives who would share liberating truth with the multitudes. But once again, the gift-giver was only getting started. Before He left the world He confided to His followers:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18).

Then He promised to transfer the gift, instructing them to "wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

It entered the upper room like a wind-swept fire as 120 were immersed in the power of the Spirit—receiving power over sin, power over satanic spirits, power over the flesh, power over sickness, power to witness, power to change the world and power to ultimately conquer even the curse of death.

Yet this was no mere solitary gift. Like a pomegranate containing many seeds, all encased in a reddish gel, so this "gift of power" contained a multiplicity of associated gifts—each one of them, purchased by and "encased in" the precious blood of the Lamb, such as:

The Gift of Grace—"But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7).

The Gifts of Salvation and Faith—"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

The Gift of Righteousness—"For if by one man's trespass death reigned through him, then how much more will those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17).

The Gift of Peace—"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you" (John 14:26).

The Gift of Joy—"I have spoken these things to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).

The Gift of God's Word—"For I have given them the words which You gave Me. They have received them and certainly know that I came from You, and they have believed that You sent Me" (John 17:8).

The Gifts of Glory, Perfection and Oneness With the Father—"I have given them the glory which You gave Me, that they may be one even as We are one: I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfect in unity, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:22-23).

The Gift of the Holy Spirit—"Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

The Gift of Eternal Life—"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

How should we react to such abundant generosity from God? Every day of the Advent season we should look forward to the return of the Lord Jesus, and the final gifts of the resurrection of the dead, the glorification of our bodies and the restoration of this world to a paradise state. We should also contemplate these things until we are filled with worshipful awe, often echoing Paul's conclusion:

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

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3 Things to Do When You're Drowning Spiritually

Let's start by focusing on someone who actually did drown—literally—but God rescued him. His name was Jonah, a biblical character known to most people. Few, however, understand the profound depth of what really happened to him.

You might want to grab your Bible and read “The Prayer of Jonah” carefully (Jon. 2:2-9). Most of that pivotal prayer—seven out of eight verses—is actually a psalm of thanksgiving to God for having answered a previous prayer. Even more surprising—that previous prayer was apparently uttered in hell. You are probably squinting your eyes in skepticism at this point, but check it out in the Bible:

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. And he said: “I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice” (Jon. 2:1-2).

Though it can mean just the grave, the Hebrew word Sheol also refers to the underworld: the spiritual realm of departed

souls, both the righteous and the wicked. According to Jesus' teaching, in that Old Testament era, Sheol contained two chambers: one of fiery torment for the wicked and then, across an impassable gulf, a pleasant but temporary abode for the righteous called "Abraham's bosom" (see Luke 16:19-31).

So apparently Jonah drowned when he was thrown overboard, and his soul descended into that horrid place reserved for the unrighteous who die in a state of sin. The erring prophet graphically described his plight:

"I went down to the foundations of the mountains; the earth with its bars was around me forever" (Jon. 2:6).

So Jonah was in a spiritual prison in Sheol. Yet amazingly, he made a decision to seek God anyway, saying:

"When my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple" (Jon. 2:7).

What unshakable trust! What stubborn faith! His name may have been Jonah (which means dove—a very timid and docile bird). But his parents should have named him Chamor (which means donkey—a very stubborn animal). Because regardless of how terribly he had failed, or how severely he was chastised, Jonah refused to stop looking toward his Maker. It worked. Because at some point (we're not told when) his body was swallowed by a great fish, then his soul re-entered his body and he came back to life.

It was at that point that his heart erupted with gratitude, and he authored a prayer of thanksgiving with three short, concluding statements that captured the heart of the God:

"But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD!" (Jon. 2:9).

Three complementary attitudes filled the heart of Jonah that

did not go unnoticed in heaven:

1. THANKSGIVING—even though Jonah was not yet completely delivered (freed from hell, but not from the fish's belly) he maintained thankfulness to God for less than what he needed, and God responded by giving him more than what he asked for (physical restoration and a city-wide revival).
2. COMMITMENT—we don't know what Jonah had previously vowed to God; all we know is he recommitted to certain sacred pledges he had made in the past.
3. FAITH—When Jonah made the declaration, “Salvation is of the LORD,” he was admitting that he couldn't save himself. He was utterly powerless in the face of his impossibility. But he was also affirming that such a dilemma is well within the sphere of God's authority and power and that God has the nature and passion to save those who put their trust in Him.

In response to those three declarations, God intervened marvelously and miraculously. The Most High spoke into Jonah's circumstance, commanding the fish to vomit him up on dry ground. Furthermore, He opened the windows of heaven and sent forth a spirit of repentance on all the inhabitants of Nineveh. An entire Gentile city was converted in one day—Wow! What proof of the power of a thankful heart!

And that is the primary, practical application of this story. Maybe you feel like you're drowning, child of God. Maybe you feel like you are “going through hell”: emotionally, mentally or spiritually. I heard one preacher recently say, “If you're going through hell ... Keep going!” Be just as belligerent as Jonah. Be stubborn in your faith, no matter what. React the same three ways that the repentant prophet did.

- First, instead of complaining and grumbling over what you don't have, thank God for what you do have. If you praise Him for less than enough, He may just give you

more than you ask for and more than you need.

- Second, renew your commitments to God and to others, your former vows and covenant promises.
- Third, declare your confidence that *Jesus* is now and ever will be your “Savior”: You have total trust that He is the “author of eternal salvation” to those who believe (Heb. 5:9).

Then maybe, just maybe, in a similar fashion, God Himself will speak into your circumstance and command the things that are binding you to let you go—and use you as His catalyst for revival!

Let it be so ... in Jesus' name!

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30 Essential Ways to Express Worship to the Holy Spirit

Few Christians actually address the Holy Spirit in prayer. Sons and daughters of God often approach the Father with the statement, “Holy is Your name” (out of the Lord's Prayer). Then, one by one, they celebrate the names and titles attributed to the Almighty. Or they use a similar method in

lifting up the Son of God as they enter God's gates with thanksgiving and praise. But rarely do believers use the same method toward the Holy Spirit (adoringly and prayerfully declaring His many names and titles).

The following prayer, given to me while I was in prayer, showcases over 30 names and titles attributed to the Spirit of God. I would urge you—don't just read this as an article, but pray these prayers yourself, and you will surely sense, in a much greater way, the power of the functions of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Holy Spirit, You Are ...

Holy Spirit, You are GOD (1 John 5:7);
I would be ungodly and godless without You.

Holy Spirit, You are my COMFORTER (John 14:26, KJV);
I would be devastated by the pain of this world without You.

Holy Spirit, You are my HELPER (John 14:26, NKJV);
I would be helpless without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the *PARACLETOS* (the One who stands by; John 14:26, original Greek);
I would be alone and defenseless without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the WIND of heaven (Acts 2:1-3);
I would succumb to this arid wilderness of sin without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the BREATH OF GOD (Gen. 2:7; John 20:22);
I would die of spiritual asphyxiation without You.

Holy Spirit, You are RIVERS OF LIVING WATER (John 7:38);
My inner being would be a cracked, dry, empty riverbed without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the OIL OF JOY and the OIL OF GLADNESS (Is. 61:3; Ps. 45:7);
I would sink into the depths of depression without Your

presence in my heart.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF TRUTH (John 15:26);
I would be utterly deceived by this world without Your
presence inspiring my mind.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF FAITH (2 Cor. 4:13);
I would be in a prison of unbelief without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF LIFE (Rom. 8:1-2);
I would be overwhelmed by the "law of sin and death" without
You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF HOLINESS (Rom. 1:4);
I would be eternally contaminated by sin without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF LOVE (2 Tim. 1:7);
I would be utterly bound by cords of anger, hatred, resentment
and fear without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF POWER (2 Tim. 1:7);
I would be overtaken by weaknesses without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF A SOUND MIND (2 Tim. 1:7);
I would not survive the mental pressure of this world without
You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING
(Is. 11:2);
I would make so many foolish choices without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF COUNSEL AND MIGHT (Is.
11:2);
I would be oblivious to my purpose and powerless to fulfill it
without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF KNOWLEDGE (Is. 11:2);
I would be so ignorant of the things of God without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD (Is.

11:2);

I would be so lacking in reverence toward God without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION (Eph. 1:17);

I would never be able to understand the mysteries of God's kingdom without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF ADOPTION (Rom. 8:15);

I would have never become a son of God had You not regenerated my spirit.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF PROMISE (Eph. 1:13);

I would have never seen the promises of God fulfilled in my life without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF GLORY, THE SHEKINAH (1 Pet. 4:14);

I would have never known the manifest presence of God had You not come.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF JUDGMENT (Is. 4:4);

I would have never been able to identify evil without Your discernment.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF BURNING (Is. 4:4);

I would have been cold toward the things of God had You not consumed my heart with Your "consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29).

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF PROPHECY (Rev. 19:10);

I would not be able to testify of my expectations of Jesus without You.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF CHRIST, the SPIRIT OF THE MESSIAH, and the ANOINTING that destroys the yoke (1 Pet. 1:11; Is. 10:27);

I would still be spiritually bound had You not set me free.

Holy Spirit, You are the SEAL OF THE LIVING GOD (Eph. 1:13; Rev. 7:2);

I would have surely slipped back into the darkness without Your preserving grip.

Holy Spirit, You are the GUARANTEE OF MY INHERITANCE (Eph. 1:13-14);

I would not have blessed assurance of eternal salvation without Your abiding grace.

Holy Spirit, You are the ETERNAL SPIRIT (Heb. 9:14);

I would have never broken free from the imprisoning walls of time without Your liberating power.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF GRACE (Zech. 12:10);

I would have never been recovered from my degraded state had You not rescued me through unearned favor and unmerited love.

Holy Spirit, You are the SPIRIT OF SUPPLICATION (Zech. 12:10);

I would have never been able to pray this prayer successfully or find real communion with God today had You not reconciled me to my heavenly Father and granted me access into His eternal throne room (Eph. 2:18).

Holy Spirit, thank You so much for being in my heart and life today. I yield to You. I surrender to You. I praise You. I celebrate You with all my soul and all my might. I appeal to You to be all that You can be in me today!

May I truly fulfill the wondrous calling of being a temple of the Holy Spirit with every precious minute that passes by.

Mike Shreve has been involved in full-time ministry since 1971, sharing the gospel globally. He is the author of 11 books, most recently *65 Promises From God for Your Child: Powerful Prayer for Supernatural Results* (Charisma House). For more information, visit [www.mikeshreve.com](#). Copyright © 2013 Mike Shreve

Should Christians Celebrate the Feasts of the Lord?

A little over 20 years ago, I was about to go to Russia to conduct a series of gospel meetings just across the street from the Kremlin. Since the iron curtain had recently fallen, we were anticipating a powerful, spiritual awakening. Our evangelistic team was gearing up for great things. Then the unexpected happened; at the last minute, God abruptly changed my plans. He told me not to go to Russia, but to go to Israel for the Feast of Tabernacles, an annual event put on by the Christian Embassy in Jerusalem. I was in awe; why did God change my agenda so drastically? I would not find out until I arrived in Israel several weeks later.

The Elijah Prophecy

One day when the rest of the group was visiting certain sacred sites in Israel, I stayed behind in the motel to seek the face of God. "Why have you sent me here, Lord? What is it I need to understand?" Over and over I petitioned my heavenly Father for an answer. And then it came. The Holy Spirit said, "Go to the last chapter of Malachi and read. When I turned to that page, my eyes fell on the last two verses of the Old Testament:

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6).

The blinders fell off of my eyes, and I began to see vital spiritual truth. Elijah restored Israel to true worship: a more pure experience of the faith of their fathers, uncontaminated by heathen influence. My heart was quickened with the realization that God will once again in these last

days send the “spirit of Elijah” (the spirit of restoration) to the church, restoring us to a more pure and uncontaminated expression of New Covenant Christianity.

John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy on one level as the Age of the Law (which had been corrupted) transitioned into the Age of Grace (see Matt. 17:10-13). However, the Spirit of God let me know there was yet another level of prophetic fulfillment: that in the last days He would turn the “hearts of the fathers” (a reference to the natural offspring of Abraham) to “the children” (the “offspring” of Judaism, New Covenant believers in the Messiah) and there would be a powerful coming together as we become “one new man” (Eph. 2:15). We, the church (made up of both Jews and Gentiles), will turn our hearts toward the Jewish people, with Gentile believers especially realizing their Abrahamic roots, while many of the natural seed of Abraham will simultaneously turn their hearts toward the Church, receiving Yeshua (Jesus) as their Messiah, thus, becoming completed Jews.

The Feasts Are Part of God’s Plan of Restoration

This divine plan of restoration to true worship necessarily involves a renewed appreciation for our true biblical heritage, which includes THE SEVEN FEASTS OF THE LORD (Leviticus 23):

1. The Feast of **Passover**
2. The Feast of **Unleavened Bread**
3. The Feast of **Firstfruits**
4. The Feast of **Pentecost**
5. The Feast of **Trumpets**
6. The Feast of **Atonement**
7. The Feast of **Tabernacles**

Whether we like to admit it or not, the Gentile brand of Christianity has been corrupted with heathen influence, including celebrations like “Easter” and “Christmas.” For

instance, the word “Easter” is found only once in the Bible (Acts 12:4 KJV) and is incorrectly translated from a word that is always rendered “Passover” (*pascha*). The word “Easter” actually refers to the worship of a false deity named Eastre, the Teutonic goddess of spring. What do eggs and bunny rabbits have to do with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus? Absolutely nothing. They are symbols of fertility, which was very much a part of the heathen Spring Festival.

In a similar show of pagan influence, “Christmas” (Dec. 25) is all about the winter solstice, and is filled with non-biblical symbolism (yule logs, mistletoe, decorated evergreen trees, Santa Claus). Besides, only a small amount of research proves it would have been highly unlikely for Jesus to be born at that time of year, especially since shepherds would have long before brought their sheep in from the fields.

All Major New Covenant Events Coincided With a Feast

It is extremely enlightening to see that every important event that ushered in the New Covenant coincided perfectly with the celebration of a major feast. Surely, the genius and sovereignty of God caused this amazing correlation to take place:

- The Crucifixion took place during **the Feast of Passover**.
- The Resurrection took place during **the Feast of Firstfruits**.
- The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place during **the Feast of Pentecost**.

Following this pattern, it is very logical to believe that the Messiah was probably born around the beginning of Fall, when shepherds were still in the fields and when the Feast of Tabernacles was being celebrated (a feast that symbolized how God had “tabernacled” among the Israelites during their wilderness journey). How fitting it would have been for the Messiah to “tabernacle” among us in the form of a baby, during

the very feast that prophetically foretold this grand event!

How Should Christians React to This Revelation?

There are two ways knowledgeable believers should react to this vital insight:

First and foremost, I believe every New Testament assembly should celebrate the feasts. However, if these festivals are ever exalted to the point of being required ritual and a necessary part of being righteous before God, religious legalism has entered the picture and the Crucified One is robbed of the glory He alone should receive (see Gal. 2:21; 4:9-11, 5:1-4).

We should honor the feasts of the Lord because they are replete with symbolism about the full plan of salvation, but not to the point where we give more importance to the mere natural symbols than the glorious supernatural events they symbolized. Yes, we must guard against being too caught up with the “shadow,” when we who are born again are blessed to actually possess the “substance” of what the feasts foretold. The spiritual reality is much more important than the natural foreshadowing. For instance:

- *It is far more powerful* to be washed in the blood of Jesus (the true Passover Lamb) than to eat a Passover meal.
- *It is far more powerful* to actually be filled with the power of Pentecost (the baptism of the Holy Spirit) than to learn how the firstfruits of the wheat harvest were offered on that notable day.
- *It is far more powerful* to have the Messiah “tabernacle” in your heart and life than to build a *sukkah* in your church or in your back yard (the traditional, small, three-walled structure that Jews erect to remind them of the wilderness journey that took place thousands of years ago).

Second, do not become haughty, harsh, judgmental and super-religious about traditional Easter and Christmas rituals.

Children who participate in an egg-hunt are not worshipping the goddess of fertility. They are having fun on a very special day devoted to the Savior conquering death. Families who give gifts around a Christmas tree are not honoring the “rebirth” of the sun-god. If they are spiritual at all, they use that day as a reminder to their children and the world around them that heaven’s greatest gift came to the world about two millennia ago. So the continuation of some of these celebrations is really a personal choice and in many ways, is not an important matter.

So the real issue is not whether or not Christians should celebrate the biblical feasts, or whether or not we continue celebrating the traditional festivals of Easter and Christmas. *The most important issue is that the Son of God came and He made a way for us to have eternal life.*

Let’s celebrate that every day of our lives!

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5 Proofs That God Can Still Bless Cursed People

That’s a title that grabs your attention isn’t it? Yet the truth behind it should grab our hearts even more. Let me give

you just five examples.

ADAM AND EVE, AFTER THE FALL—The holy God of an immense, newly created universe walked in the Garden of Eden knowing evil had crept in before Him. His question pierced an atmosphere that was swirling with demonic activity, “Adam, where are you?” After the vessel that contained His own breath came forth and admitted his error, God voiced the curses that would be dealt out—to the serpent (“he shall crush your head”), to the woman (“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception”), and to the man (“Cursed is the ground for your sake . . . in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life . . . till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return” Genesis 3:17-19). But then, instead of storming out of the Garden in a fiery display of divine wrath, God takes on the gentle role of a Master Tailor, making Adam and Eve coats of skins. Surely He wanted it that way, so that their last lingering memory of Him would be one of tenderness and loving kindness. Furthermore, He put cherubim at the east of Eden and a flaming sword, to preserve the way back to the tree of life. Yes, the Lord of glory truly blessed the ones He had just cursed.

CAIN THE MURDERER—Years later, when the sons of Adam, Cain and Abel, came to offer worshipful sacrifices to God, Abel’s was received but Cain’s wasn’t. So Cain rose up and murdered his brother, the one who had just brought a supernatural response from heaven. Yet instead of the Creator swiftly judging Cain’s deed with some kind of divinely designed execution, upon exiling him, the Lord put a mark on Cain to prevent anyone from slaying him. Why would God do that? Maybe there was true repentance and remorse within Cain. Maybe he never intended to take Abel’s life. Only God knows the heart (see Gen. 4:1-15). But once again the Creator did it. “Mercy rejoiced against judgment” and He blessed one that just moments before He had cursed (see James 2:13). Can anybody say, “Wow!”

ABRAHAM, THE SON OF AN IDOLATER—According to Jewish history,

Abraham's father was not only an idolater but an idol maker. According to Deut. 5:5-9, those who commit that sin pass down a dark curse ("the sins of the father") to the third and fourth generation. On top of that, Abram was married to his own half-sister, a type of union that would later be condemned in the Torah (see Deut. 27:22). So even though the Law was not yet known, Abram was cursed because of his father's idolatry and cursed because of his own marriage, but God manifested Himself to Abram, giving him an opportunity to obey and believe. The Creator pronounced such a blessing through Abraham and Sarah that it was destined to impact all nations and all families of the Earth (see Gen. 12:1-3). Abraham was even called "the friend of God" (James 2:23). How profound is that!

RUTH, THE MOABITE WOMAN—"An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter the congregation of the Lord . . . forever"; that's what God said in Deut. 23:3-4 because the Moabites did not receive the Israelites "with bread and water" when they came out of Egypt, but instead hired Balaam the backslidden prophet to curse them. Yet many years later, Ruth, the Moabite woman, changed the mind of God. After their husbands' deaths, she was so devoted to her mother-in-law Naomi, that Ruth pledged to her, "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God." The Most High received her sincere display of love (toward Naomi and toward Himself). Evidently He was so touched that He allowed Ruth to be redeemed by Boaz, and to marry him—which placed her in the lineage that would one day bring forth the royal line of David, all the kings of Judah and ultimately, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Amazing! That should make us shout!

THE WHOLE WORLD WAS CURSED—that is, until "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). When the Son of God paid the price of redemption on the cross, He absorbed the sum total of all the curses that had or would ever fall on the human race. Yet the Father resurrected

Him, restored Him to righteousness and made Him a channel of blessing to all the cursed sons and daughters of Adam who would turn their hearts toward Him. So the Father blessed His Son (who had become a curse) and He blessed all the seed of Adam (cursed ones) who put their trust in the Savior.

So we see a pattern. Over and over, God does it. It seems sincere love for Him and faith in His promises always makes a difference. When God sees that in the heart of a person, He is compelled to respond.

Yes, it really is quite amazing, but when hearts are genuinely inclined toward the Source of all life, GOD BLESSES CURSED PEOPLE. He's God. He can change His mind if He decides to do so.

So don't ever say that you or any other person have sunk too low or made too many mistakes.

Just pour out love for your MAKER.

He just might become your REMAKER!

5 Reasons Why I No Longer Pray for a Double-Portion Anointing

Not long ago I became very troubled in my spirit about a common Pentecostal/charismatic practice: praying for believers to receive a "double-portion anointing." Many times I have witnessed ministers promoting an altar call with a glowing promise like, "Everyone who seeks God in this altar tonight will get a double portion of the anointing in your life. If

Elijah could prophesy that to Elisha, I can prophesy it to you!"

Forgive me if I sound skeptical, critical or nitpicky, but I don't think this practice is real or right. Don't get me wrong! I love the power, the gifts and the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, but on the highest level, I am a lover of truth. Traditions are expendable; the truth is not.

For 43 years, I have been involved in power evangelism with an emphasis on altar ministry. And unfortunately, I must admit that years ago, oblivious to my error, I prayed this kind of prayer for believers myself—until I jumped over the rusty fence of Pentecostal/charismatic tradition to find the green pasture of what is scripturally pure. I still pray that God will manifest Himself through His people in greater ways and more fully awaken their gifts, but I no longer pray a "double portion" on believers, especially indiscriminately on large groups at the same time—and for the following reasons:

1. The exponential multiplication factor is astronomical.

Just suppose that someone participates in 20 different "double-portion" services over a period of 20 years, with either the promise that a double portion of the minister's anointing will pass to them or a double portion of their own anointing will take place.

If this terminology is to be taken literally, every time that believer is prayed for, his or her anointing should be doubled (twice as much as the previous measure of the anointing). If that be so, the second time this prayer is prayed, it would result in a double portion of the previous double portion; then the next time the doubled double-portion would be doubled; and so on.

Here is a math representation of this idea with the number 1 representing the person's original anointing, then doubling that amount 20 times: 1 anointing, $2 \times 1 = 2$ / $2 \times 2 = 4$ / $2 \times 4 = 8$ /

$2 \times 8 = 16$ / $2 \times 16 = 32$ / $2 \times 32 = 64$ / $2 \times 64 = 128$ / $2 \times 128 = 256$ / $2 \times 256 = 512$
/ $2 \times 512 = 1,024$ / $2 \times 1,024 = 2,048$ / $2 \times 2,048 = 4,096$ / $2 \times 4,096 = 8,192$
/ $2 \times 8,192 = 16,384$ / $2 \times 16,384 = 32,768$ / $2 \times 32,768 = 65,536$ /
 $2 \times 65,536 = 131,072$ / $2 \times 131,072 = 262,144$ / $2 \times 262,144 = 524,288$ /
 $2 \times 524,288 = 1,048,576$.

So by the time a believer goes through 20 double-portion services (with a fiery Elijah/Elisha message being referenced), over a million times greater anointing should manifest than he or she started out with. Can you see the absurdity of this idea, just on the basis of this mathematical calculation?

2. Greater works should result.

With Elijah and Elisha, the double-portion anointing resulted in Elisha performing twice as many miracles as Elijah (we assume this by the record contained in Scripture). So anyone receiving a double portion should increase dramatically in the amount of miraculous works he or she is accomplishing for the kingdom of God.

I don't think I have ever witnessed that taking place. Usually participants in a double-portion service remain at about at the same level of spirituality and works when they leave, with only a few exceptions. In all honesty, those who actually do increase in works may accomplish more for the kingdom simply because they got more zealous about fulfilling their calling or became more passionate about manifesting the anointing they already had.

3. Is it biblically correct in the New Testament?

In the Old Testament, Elijah did prophesy a double portion to Elisha one time (2 Kings 2:1-14); however, we find no instance of such a practice happening in the New Testament. So I personally feel it is no longer a proper method to increase the level of a person's spirituality. Ephesians 4:7 says, "But to every one of us is given grace according to the measure of

the gift of Christ [the Messiah, the Anointed One].” Part of the “grace” (Gr. *charis*) God measures out to His people is the personal anointing (Gr. *charisma*) that He places within their hearts.

First John 2:20 declares to every truly born-again member of the body of Christ, “You *have* an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” (NKJV, emphasis added), and 1 John 2:27 affirms, “But the anointing which you *have received* from Him *abides in you*, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” (emphasis added).

The Scripture clearly indicates that we already *have* the anointing (the specific application of the Holy Spirit to accomplish a specific God-given purpose). It never says that this anointing can be increased or doubled. Could it be that we just need to yield more completely to the wonderful application of grace that is already in our lives?

Spiritual impartations are a reality in the New Testament. Paul prayed for Timothy and awakened gifts of the Spirit in his life by the laying on of hands. There is no denying the validity of such an apostolic practice. But the Scripture gives us no account of Peter or Paul or any of the chief leaders of the early New Covenant church praying for someone to receive a double portion. They knew they had already received the ultimate anointing (Heb. *mishchah*) by receiving the Messiah (Heb. *Mashiyach*) into their hearts. Such an amazing, abiding New Covenant gift is far more intense than the Spirit (the anointing) that was on Moses being poured out on the 70 elders chosen by God to serve with Him—for their prophetic sensitivity only lasted a day (Num. 11:24-25).

4. We already have God’s fullness.

John, the apostle who loved the Lord intensely, wrote, “Of His

fullness we have all received” and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, added, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him” (John 1:16; Col. 2:10). Jesus was the entirety of “the Word made flesh,” and He received from the Father “the fullness of His Spirit” (John 1:14; one version says, “the Spirit without limit,” GNB). His inner connection with the Almighty was so absolute, He dared to say, “He who has seen Me has seen My Father” (John 14:9).

If the Son of God dwells within the hearts of true believers, imparting His “fullness” to us, how can that indwelling presence of the Most High God increase? How could we receive more than “the fullness” of the One who is infinitely wise, infinitely powerful and infinitely loving? Undoubtedly, we can yield more completely to His lordship and see greater manifestations of His power and wisdom and love in our lives. But who would be so audacious as to ask for a double portion of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the firstborn Son of God? There is none like Him and none worthy of even being compared to Him. Added to that, we Pentecostal/charismatics have received the baptism, the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Can the Holy Spirit be doubled?

Evidently, there are differing “degrees” of the anointing that manifest through various believers, determined by the callings they are given, the offices they fill, the purposes that rest upon them or the levels of responsibility in God’s kingdom that they bear (e.g., apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher, etc.). These varied anointings probably differ in measure and are distinct from the equal shared “fullness” that every believer inherits on a foundational level. At times, these specific anointings might be increased to accommodate new phases of God’s purposes; but they are certainly not “doubled” over and over again until they are multiplied exponentially.

5. Have we interpreted the Elijah/Elisha story incorrectly?

The term “double portion” was commonly used in ancient days to refer to the inheritance that would pass to the firstborn son. A double portion did not mean twice as much as what the father possessed (which would be impossible); it meant twice as much as the whole amount passed to all the other offspring, or a significantly greater portion.

When Elijah was about to be carried away into heaven in a fiery chariot, Elisha petitioned, “Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me” (2 Kings 2:9, NKJV). Another version says, “Let me inherit a double share of your spirit” (GW). That did not mean he was asking for twice as much of the anointing as what rested upon Elijah. Matthew Henry judiciously explained in his commentary, Elisha was not requesting “double to what Elijah had, but double to what the rest of the prophets had.” That was a well-known interpretation of the term in that day. So those who use this phrase in a modern sense to mean “twice as much” are actually misinterpreting and misapplying this ancient biblical concept.

In Conclusion

As an addendum, I must offer that there are many great ministers of God who pray this “double-portion anointing” on people they minister to—and they do so sincerely. They are just trying to help, to edify, to encourage, to empower. In most cases, I would dare to say they are not intentionally being deceptive or manipulative. They are just following a common evangelistic practice without questioning its validity. But if we are to be true worshippers, we should base our expectations only on that which is true—not on artificial, Pentecostal/charismatic hype that produces a high level of excitement for a few moments in a revival, but doesn’t really work in the long term. Isn’t that a better way of representing our Savior on earth?

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time ministry and evangelism since 1971, sharing the gospel around the world. His passion is to see New Testament Christianity in the earth, the release of God's glory, the manifestation of His gifts and the fulfillment of His promises. He and his wife, Elizabeth, reside in Cleveland, Tenn., with their two children.

8 Things Jesus' Resurrection Does for You Right Now!

Most believers view the resurrection of the Lord Jesus either through a historical or a prophetic lens. They tend to look backward or forward. Too often, sons and daughters of God fail to grasp the present-tense benefits that have come to us as a result of this grand, spiritual conquest that took place when the stone rolled away almost 2,000 years ago. Before we dive into those, let's take a quick look at how we limit ourselves by adopting a purely past- or future-tense view of the resurrection.

Past-Tense View Is it inherently wrong to look back and remember what Christ accomplished? Of course not! When we look back to the crucifixion and resurrection historically, we understand that Jesus tasted "death for everyone" when He assumed our sin debt (Heb. 2:9).

The One who did not deserve to die instead took our place in death. The curse of death that should have fallen on billions of wayward souls, swallowing them up eternally, instead fell on the Savior who said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

In Samson-like manner, He pushed against the pillars of this

unconquerable stronghold and brought it crashing to the ground, accomplishing more in His death than in His life. When He arose victorious, the spiritual atmosphere surrounding this globe was changed drastically and permanently, for Yeshua (Jesus, meaning “the salvation of Yahweh”) succeeded in “saving” us from the greatest archenemy of the human race.

Future-Tense View The past-tense view awakens within believers the prophetic expectation that one day, in the not-so-distant future, we will also conquer death when. As 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 says, “The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” First Corinthians 15:54 expands on the meaning of this: “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”

This is the spectacular and wonderful future scenario, but if we limit this glorious past event to only a future application, we have missed a grand portion of our inheritance as “children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36). So let’s review the present-tense benefits that have been passed to us as a part of our glorious inheritance.

Present-Tense Benefits of Jesus’ Resurrection

1) Deliverance From Spiritual Death “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Eph. 2:4-5). Read those two verses carefully again. When Jesus came out of the grave, believers were delivered from spiritual death right then.

We were “made alive together with Christ,” resurrected from the grips of sin. When we received the resurrected Savior in our hearts, He began the resurrection process. Just like Adam

in his fallen state died spiritually and then began dying physically, so believers are resurrected first spiritually on their way to a complete physical resurrection at the coming of the Lord. God puts a “new spirit” within us (Ezek. 36:26).

2) Restoration of Spiritual Breath After Jesus arose from the dead, He appeared in the upper room and “breathed” on His disciples, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). This was a restoration of what Adam lost in the beginning. The Bible explains that “the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being [a living soul]” (Gen. 2:7 NKJV/KJV).

After the rebellion, Adam and Eve lost the breath of God. They may have retained breath naturally, but not spiritually. God does not breathe oxygen and other gaseous vapors; God “breathes” His own divine essence. The word inspiration means “to breathe into.”

When Adam sinned, he lost divine breath in his spirit, so he could no longer live an “inspired” life—full of divine wisdom, knowledge and love. Jesus came out of the grave with the passion to restore this breath of inspiration, to breathe into us the life-giving attributes of God’s character and image, and to make us “living souls” once again.

3) Justification and Righteousness Romans 4:25 reveals that Jesus was “delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” To be “justified” means to be legally acquitted of all guilt and reckoned righteous, as if we never sinned. What an amazing truth!

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12). Because of what Jesus did, God has made us righteous in His sight, given us “the gift of righteousness” and even named us “the righteousness of God in Christ” (Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21).

4) Hope Peter launched his first epistle with the statement of praise, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). At one time, we had "no hope, without God in this world" (Eph. 2:12). Then "the God of hope" filled us "with all joy and peace in believing" (Rom. 15:13).

Hope is desire married to expectation. The most hopeless scenario in this world is death, but because Jesus conquered death and gave His people the gift of immortality, we have endless, boundless hope—in every situation.

5) Healing Malachi 4:2 prophesies of the resurrection with wonderful imagery: "But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings." He was a healer before the resurrection, before the complete price was paid for us.

How much more did He come out of the grave with a passion and power to heal us completely—body, mind, soul and spirit. He is Yahweh-Rapha ("the Lord our healer"), the Great Physician, who now presents to every human being the invitation, "Do you desire to be made whole?" (John 5:6).

6) Peace, Wholeness and Prosperity After Jesus arose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples several times, greeting them with the word "Peace." (Most likely, He actually spoke the Hebrew word "Shalom.") Shalom is a rich spiritual term with multiple meanings, including peace, rest, welfare, health, wholeness, happiness and prosperity in every area of life. The "chastisement of our peace [Hebrew: shalom] was upon Him" (Is. 53:5).

In other words, He went through the mind-piercing pain of Calvary, crowned with thorns, so we could experience being crowned with life. Now "He is our peace" and we have received

“peace with God,” “peace from God” and the “peace of God that passes understanding” (Eph. 2:14; 2 Cor. 1:2; Phil. 4:7).

7) Daily Renewal Second Corinthians 4:16 encourages those who are troubled: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” The cells in our physical bodies are constantly renewed by fresh blood removing death-dealing toxins and infusing every cell with life-giving oxygen from the lungs and nutrients from the digestive system. So it is with our spirits.

The blood of Jesus flows through us constantly, removing the toxin of the lower nature and infusing us with the resurrection life of the Word and the Spirit, constantly renewing our status of victory and righteousness. This is a “mini-resurrection” on a personal and spiritual level that takes place over and over again all day long, as we abide under Jesus’ lordship. No wonder, “No weapon formed against you shall prosper” (Is. 54:17).

8) Ultimate Victory and Total Dominion Let’s end with the scripture passage we began with, yet adding the verse that follows: “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and has raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-6).

To be raised up to sit together with Christ is to be enthroned with Him in a position of power, authority, rest, victory and dominion. He has made our enemies our footstool. All things are under His feet, and now all things are under our feet as well. This is the restoration of the dominion Adam and Eve lost in the beginning, and this speaks of absolute victory over every negative we face in this world—not just historically and not just futuristically, but right here, right now. Yes, “this is the victory that overcomes the

world—our faith” (1 John 5:4).

Begin claiming your resurrection rights today! Jesus bought them; now they are yours to enjoy!

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7 Promises of Gifts God Gives You

In Deuteronomy 16:16-17, God directed the people of the First Covenant to gather three times a year for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. He also commanded that none were to appear before the Lord empty, but that “every man shall **give** as he is able.” Recently God burned this passage into my spirit, but with a different twist. Notice the rich were not to give little and the poor were not to give much, but all were expected to **give** to the level of their ability.

Here is the “hinge,” the idea on which this article turns: God would never demand of His own something that He would not do Himself. If God expects us to **give to His work** according to the level of our ability, then certainly we can expect Him to move for us according to the level of His **divine ability**! Now this insight gains intensity.

There are seven main Scriptural declarations of God's ability toward us. Certainly His abilities go far beyond these seven areas—however, He must have emphasized these seven areas for a reason; therefore, we should magnify them as well by embracing these promises and often declaring their fulfillment:

1. All Grace

Second Corinthians 9:8 declares, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." Grace is unmerited love and divinely imparted ability. There is no limit to the amount of grace available flowing from the throne of God. Grace is just as infinitely inexhaustible as the God who gives it. God only requires that His people exhibit: (1) faith (Eph. 2:8), (2) humility (1 Pet. 5:5) and (3) sincere love (Eph. 6:24). If these attitudes are in us and abound, the deep river of divine grace will abound toward us.

2. Divine Help

Hebrews 2:17-18 explains concerning Jesus, "In all things it behooved Him to be made like His brothers, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, having been tempted, He is able to aid those who are being tempted." How comforting it is to know that in our temptations and trials, the Lord Jesus is sympathetic and ready to assist us in our journey! He is compassionate and committed. Having faced every same temptations that we face in this world, He understands our plight and stands ever ready to help us, even to the point of marshaling the host of heaven.

3. Power to Stand

Two scriptures relay this excellent promise two different ways. First, Jude 24 says, "Unto Him who is able to keep you

from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” The most noticeable revelation from this verse is that it is God’s great joy to uphold His people and render them blameless in His sight.

If that will be the case in the great day of resurrection (as this verse foretells), it is certainly the case even now. The second Scripture, Romans 14:4, warns: “Who are you to judge another man’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand: for God is able to make him stand.” The one says God is able to “keep us from falling”; the other, that God is able to “make us stand”—so one way or the other, we are going to survive with the God of heaven on our side.

4. Preservation

Paul said, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). Notice that God can only keep what we place under His authority. Only if we give Him all our hearts and lives can we expect such blessed security. “That day” may refer to the Day of Judgment; then again, it may refer to those days when it seems calamity and confusion knock at our door.

5. Salvation

Jesus is revealed in the Scripture as the great High Priest, the great Intercessor, who constantly searches our hearts and “ever lives” to make intercession for us “according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:27). Because of this, Hebrews 7:25 announces, “He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him.” Nothing can withstand or thwart His prayers for those who walk in covenant with Him.

When God announces His intention to save us, it covers every negative thing to be faced in this world: He will save us from sin, from satanic powers, from mental and emotional distress,

from failures, from sickness, from death, from the grave and from eternal destruction. He is ever interceding over us, and the Father never fails to answer His appeals.

6. Incredible Provision

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Eph. 3:20). Notice this release of incredible blessing hinges on the power that is within us—the power of faith, the power to imagine possibilities, expect the miraculous and praise God in advance for their fulfillment. Notice, however, that God declares He is not bound just to the limits of our expectations but is able to go far beyond what we can even conceive possible. What a promise! Let it be so, Lord!

7. Final Glorification

“For our citizenship is in heaven; from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall transform our lowly body, that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20-21).

To be changed into the image of the firstborn Son of God—what a destiny! Shining like the sun in the kingdom of our Father—what an ultimate outcome to this journey through time! If God can subdue the dust of mortality to His will and might, releasing us from the curse of death and propelling us into the glory of everlasting life, if He can take spiritual paupers and turn them into kings, to reign with Him forevermore, then truly God can subdue “all things” to Himself. Let us praise Him in expectation!

Glory to God for His awesome ability to do these things! Let us walk into the portal of 2014 fighting the good of faith concerning these promises—claiming their manifestation in the name of the Lord!

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Stretching the Truth About Yoga

Have you noticed a major trend gaining momentum in our eclectic Western society—the rise of interest in yoga? The word *yoga* means “yoke or union.” It speaks of being yoked with God or in union with God.

Yoga, on the surface, appears to be nothing more than a highly developed low-impact exercise regimen. What could be wrong with stretching, twisting, bending, breathing, sweating it out and getting the body in shape, regardless of the method used? Absolutely nothing—if that’s all there was to it.

Unfortunately, there’s more to yoga than meets the eye. The deeper levels of its practice and the religious doctrine that forms its base can be detrimental to followers of Christ, in particular, and these negative effects are almost always, to one degree or another, attached to a yoga experience. This makes it not only unwise but ill-advised for Christians to participate.

Let me share with you how I know this to be true.

My Spiritual Résumé

Before I became a Christian in the fall of 1970, I taught kundalini yoga at four universities in Florida. Several hundred students attended my classes. I studied personally under a guru named Yogi Bhajan and ran a yoga ashram (a commune where yoga devotees apply themselves more intensely to its practice). Each day was consumed with intense spiritual disciplines from 3:30 in the morning until about 8:30 at night.

In my classes, I incorporated many yoga exercises as well as other meditation and mantra techniques specifically aimed at experiencing higher supernatural realms.

I was very devoted to the practice of yoga until I had an amazing encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. This pivotal experience revealed to me the vast difference between the biblical approach to God and any methodology offered in Far Eastern religions. Since then, I have never practiced any kind of yoga.

In more than 40 years of ministry, I have often been asked if it is acceptable for a Christian to practice yoga. My answer is always in the negative, and those inquiring are often surprised by my reaction. But the love of God, the love of truth and the love of people compel me to assume this posture.

There are five primary reasons I advise Christians not to practice yoga. I categorize them as: 1) spiritual roots, 2) spiritual perspective, 3) spiritual transfer, 4) spiritual intrigue and 5) spiritual endorsement. Let's visit each of these points in greater detail.

Reason #1: Spiritual Roots

Yoga is based on a Far Eastern view of both the physical and spiritual aspects of a human being. Be assured, these exercises are not just meant for your physical well-

being. They have been specifically created to supposedly “open up the chakras.”

According to yogic lore, seven “chakras,” or spiritual energy centers, exist in the body. The first five are located along the spine. The sixth is the “third eye,” and the seventh is the crown chakra, located at the top of the head.

Adherents believe something called the *kundalini* (the latent “serpent power” supposedly coiled at the base of the spine) rises up through the chakras especially during deep meditation. This “awakening of the kundalini” is considered essential in bringing a person to “God consciousness.” Each chakra is also associated with a certain Hindu deity. These deities are all mythical beings, full of humanlike frailties and faults.

A yoga practitioner is believed to be able to exit his body through these chakras, especially the third eye or the crown chakra, and experience higher, spiritual realms. Yoga allegedly prepares one for these kinds of experiences.

Practitioners of yoga may have no knowledge of these things when participating in this form of exercise, but ignorance does not sanctify or purify the system from its attachment to spiritual falsehood. Those who believe in the one true God—if they are faithful to their belief system—cannot involve themselves in anything that accepts the worship of false deities. That may seem like too strong of a statement, but to participate could smack of idolatry and blasphemy.

Furthermore, no promises of body transcendence or elevated consciousness are attached to aerobics, isometrics, weightlifting, jogging or other methods of exercising.

If the out-of-body experiences tied to yoga were legitimate, leading a person to a real relationship with God, there would be no problem. However, I discovered the opposite to be true. Without a doubt, during the out-of-body experiences I had

during long periods of yogic meditation, I was actually overtaken by demonic beings that granted me false experiences of the supernatural world. (Upon receiving Jesus as Lord of my life, I was delivered from these spirits.)

According to the Bible, the presence of God can only be accessed through the soul being washed in the blood of Jesus and a person being born again. This regenerative experience definitely leads one to a “higher state of consciousness”—a conscious awareness of the reality of God—but it is totally different than anything offered through Eastern religions.

Biblical salvation is not the result of some “serpent power” traveling up through the spine from within. It is the result of the power of the Holy Spirit entering *into* a repentant person from *without*. The contrast of these two approaches to spirituality reveals two very different views of God in His relationship with creation, pantheism versus theism, which leads us to our second reason.

Reason #2: Spiritual Perspective

Most yoga advocates embrace a pantheistic view of the universe and its relationship to God. In pantheism, which is an idea that dominates Hinduism, the universe is an emanation of God. Because God veils Himself in the appearance of physical matter, it is taught there is a spark of divine nature within everything and everyone. So, to find God, you look within. In theism, the biblical perspective, God exists apart from physical creation and approaches man from without. In pantheism, God is an impersonal, cosmic energy. In theism, He is a personal God. These two views cannot coexist in one belief system.

The “serpent power” unleashed in meditation is not the power of the Holy Spirit, nor is it merely the latent power of the soul. It is a power even gurus admit can be very destructive to the yoga practitioner.

So, where does this power come from that can potentially be so dangerous? We know it doesn't come from God. It should help the inquisitive reader to see there is absolutely no account of anyone in the Bible being harmed by being filled with the true Holy Spirit—symbolized by a dove, which is a harmless creature. But there are accounts of insanity or dark, occultic powers following an encounter with this power likened to a serpent—a venomous and dangerous creature that can be quite harmful. Belief in this power is at the root of the yogic system of thought.

If we are going to live free from deception, we must inspect the root of yoga practice and not be merely concerned with the fruit of a body that gets in better shape. We should remind ourselves that one of the Ten Commandments warns in no uncertain terms, “I am the Lord your God. ... You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:2-3).

Reason #3: Spiritual Transfer

Though I was unaware of it at the time, when I studied yoga, I came under the influence of a counterfeit spiritual power that was not the true power of God. This passed to me from the guru under whom I studied. (Actually, many yoga devotees often seek this transference of supernatural power from various gurus and swamis with fervency, thinking it is a faster means of attaining higher levels of consciousness.)

There are many sweet, gracious, kind and compassionate people studying yoga who would never purposefully seek to come under the influence of dark, deceptive, demonic powers. Most are genuinely seeking truth and Ultimate Reality. Some are striving for no more than just to shape up their bodies. Because of this, in some cases it is possible to go to a yoga class and never be introduced to any kind of false spiritual power, especially if all the participants are only into the physical aspect or if all participants are Christian believers with a pure doctrinal stance.

However, if the teacher of the class is involved in the philosophy behind the entire yogic system, there will be a subliminal spiritual transference from the teacher to the student that is likely not the true Spirit of God and can be very misleading. Those who are weak in their Christian faith may find their belief system eroded over a period of time and themselves drawn into this Far Eastern, mystical point of view to the detriment of their own souls.

It should be mentioned that in order to be a certified yoga teacher by the standards of that industry, a teacher must spend a certain number of hours studying Vedic philosophy and the teachings of certain yoga masters from the East. Do you want that influencing you?

Reason #4: Spiritual Intrigue

Even if a yoga class atmosphere is relatively harmless, there is normally an arousal of curiosity on the part of those involved to learn more about the whole system of yogic thought. For instance, I recently visited a yoga center in California in order to share the gospel.

There I met a teacher, a gracious young man who claimed to be a Christian. However, all around the studio were magazines, books and videos that presented the Far Eastern worldview. There were also Buddha statues and pictures of Hindu deities.

Almost any person attending classes at this studio would inevitably be drawn to look at these books, magazines and tapes and become intrigued about other, deeper aspects of yoga. So, as is often the case, yoga becomes the bait that carries people into a vast belief system that involves much more than physical exercise. When curious seekers begin exploring these ideas, they are usually carried far away from the power and purity of the simple gospel of Christ.

Reason #5: Spiritual Endorsement

Let's suppose everything is relatively benign in a yoga class, that no one promotes Far Eastern philosophy, that all the teachers are Christians and that even Christian music is played. Is there still a negative? Yes, there is!

If a Christian goes to classes—even yoga classes that have no spiritual emphasis whatsoever—a signal still goes out to others that could easily be misinterpreted. Those who see Bible believers participating in yoga classes could easily construe their actions to be an endorsement for the whole system of thought.

This issue is very similar to Paul's admonition to early Christians not to eat meat offered to idols. He explained that the idol didn't really exist and that certainly people needed food, so eating it would be all right. However, he said weak Christians or nonbelievers might interpret such an act to be an endorsement of idolatrous practices. (Read all of 1 Corinthians 8 for more on this.)

For this reason, Paul asserted he would never eat that kind of meal again, lest he become a stumbling block to any spiritually weak person. It makes sense that our final conclusion should be just as strong with regard to the practice of yoga.

The Obvious Conclusion

I know what must be going through your mind at this point: "Guess it's time to break out the old jogging shoes. Treadmill and racquetball court, here we come! Push-ups and sit-ups—oh no, back to the old grind!"

Well, not necessarily so.

I have a number of friends who have developed yoga alternatives who feel the idea of "Christian yoga" is an oxymoron. I agree with them. There is no way Christianity can truly be mixed with yoga. Even recognized Hindu leaders have

admitted that.

The following websites offer a low-impact exercise approach free from false mystical entrapments. In fact, they include the quoting of Bible passages and Christian music in their disciplines.

- WholyFit:
- PraiseMoves:

And the next time you're asked to join a yoga class—whether by Christians or unbelievers—remember that yoga goes far beyond a mere stretch.

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Former yoga instructor Mike Shreve explains why the term *Christian yoga* is an oxymoron at