

2016: America Hangs in the Balance

As he walked onstage, the large crowd gathered at The Awakening 2015 conference stood in honor and applauded the son of world-renowned evangelist Billy Graham.

Addressing the audience at Faith Assembly in Orlando, Florida, Rev. Franklin Graham said he didn't have to tell anyone that America "is in trouble."

"You know that, and I think what happens is people after a while just kind of give up," the president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association said. "They think, 'Well, what can I do? It just seems like things keep getting worse and what can I do?'"

But instead of giving up hope and disengaging, Graham said now is the most important time to pray and to become politically active because "there is a battle to fight" against "Satan and his demons and let me tell you something: They have gotten their way ... into every level of our government, and we've got to speak up."

"If you don't like who your government is then you need to stand up and vote for Christians and get Christians to run for office, starting at the local level and filling government up with a generation of Christian men and women who aren't afraid to take a stand for God and His laws and His principles," Graham said.

"Now, some people would say, 'Franklin, You're a lot more harsh than your father. Your father wouldn't have done this.' When my father was born, the Ten Commandments were on the walls of every school in America. When my father was born, the teachers still led classes with the Lord's Prayer. ... We're going to lose everything if we don't get involved in this next

election, and we only have this next election, I think, for our voices to be heard.”

As the 2016 U.S. presidential election gears up, faith and political leaders are calling on ministers to speak up about the nation’s critical issues and encourage their congregations to get politically active. They are also calling on Christians, who historically have had an abysmal voter turnout record, to not only vote in this election, but to run for political office and make their voices heard in the public square.

These pleas come as candidates on both sides of the political aisle are tossing their hats into the ring along with making hefty promises of solutions to an array of national problems.

Presidential contenders vying for the Republican nomination include former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, Dr. Ben Carson, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, as well as Florida’s former Gov. Jeb Bush and Sen. Marco Rubio. On the opposite side of the ropes, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stands practically unrivaled for the Democratic nomination.

As front-runners emerge, one thing is clear: the election of 2016 is a pivotal one and the chosen candidate could have the power to help change the troubling trajectory of America.

“A president sets the tone and frames the issues,” Huckabee told *Charisma*. “A president who believes that America is the result of God’s providence and that it’s sustained by dependence on Him will create a very different atmosphere from one who has ‘a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof.’”

The presidential election isn’t the only imminent shift in political power. High-stakes Senate races are set to take place in Florida, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and other states.

In the coming elections, political analysts and news channel contributors will debate over which societal ill is most responsible for America's decline. Each will have an opinion on which candidate is best suited to solve the problems. But don't be fooled. In this election cycle, neither politics nor politicians can save America.

"At 62 years of age, I've lived long enough to learn that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans can turn this country around; no political party or politician is the answer," Graham told *Charisma*. "The only hope for this country is Almighty God and His Son Jesus Christ."

A Historic Election?

America's faith and culture leaders agree that what makes 2016 possibly the most important election in American history is not the severities of its socioeconomic problems, but rather the depth of spiritual decay into which the American people have fallen.

"I stand convicted and convinced that the 2016 presidential election will emerge as the most important election of our lifetime," says Rev. Dr. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Evangelical Association. "This election serves as a clarion call for every Christ follower to vote and advance the Lamb's agenda with the understanding that today's complacency is tomorrow's captivity. Let us vote, not as white, black or brown people, but as people of the cross."

Mathew Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel, agrees: "2016 is a very critical point in the survival of America, not just another election."

David Lane, founder of the American Renewal Project, says courage is needed now more than ever "for charity toward wickedness is the fashionable vice, and indifference to moral evil is the crowning virtue of this age."

The Politically Incorrect

It's a struggle to admit that America is in decline, isn't it? As Christian citizens, we want to affirm our elected officials and remain supportive of their chosen paths of leadership. But as Washington, D.C.'s officials consistently fail to resolve the public unrest, it is becoming harder to ignore that America daily advances closer to her tipping point.

"We have abandoned our constitutional republican form of government and we are entering into a soft despotism," warns Matt Barber, a popular cultural analyst and an attorney concentrating in constitutional law.

"We are in dire straits. In this election leading up to 2016, we have got to elect in this nation a statesman," Barber says. "Somebody who has a clear understanding of our history, of our founding principles, and who will implement in public policy and in position as the chief executive our constitutional republican form of government and get things back to how they were intended to be because they have worked quite well for us until now."

Now, citizens watch as the \$18 trillion national debt climbs. Small business owners suffocate under government bureaucracy and ever-increasing regulatory red tape. According to Gallup, each year 70,000 more American businesses close. Meanwhile, little is done to balance the federal budget or encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.

Every day a staggering 4,000 unborn Americans are denied the right to life, yet proponents of such genocide are heralded as pro-women, liberated and progressive. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 24 million children in America are growing up in fatherless households. Marriage, an institution that provides the stable bedrock for our society, could be demolished with one quick swipe of the U.S. Supreme Court's pen. Meanwhile, churches and Christians, afraid of being

deemed offensive, scurry to accommodate current cultural trends only to disregard Scripture and claim the Bible sanctions same-sex marriages in the process.

Although headquartered more than 10,000 miles away, militant Islamists threaten American national security on a consistent basis. Whether ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Hezbollah in Lebanon, or al-Qaida in Afghanistan, each has declared jihad, or holy war, against the U.S. Yet, as these terrorist groups kidnap, rape, torture and kill Christians and other religious minorities, the Obama administration refuses to properly acknowledge the Islamic religious motivations behind their ever-increasing terror.

International relations weaken between Israel and America. After Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's victory in the March 2015 elections, President Obama said he would "reassess" relations with America's long-time ally and the longest standing democracy in the Middle East. Tensions, and talk of potential sanctions, between America and Israel arose due to Netanyahu's public rejection of participating in the establishment of an unjust Palestinian state that is committed to driving the Jewish people into the sea.

Support for Israel among evangelical Christians, especially millennial evangelicals, has been wavering. According to a National Association of Evangelicals survey, 40 percent of U.S. evangelical leaders have changed their position on Israel and Palestine over the past several decades.

Amid the chaos, Americans must recognize that the root of our deepest political issue is a religious one. While terror in the name of Allah runs rampant abroad, here at home we have pulled God out of the equation.

Gagging God

For the first time in our nation's rich history we have collectively rejected the role of Judeo-Christian principles

in the public square. As a result, America's brightest freedom is fading fast. What began as a safe haven for Christianity and those fleeing religious persecution now lies on the opposite side of the spectrum. Every day a new contention places God on trial.

In September 2014, Houston Mayor Annise Parker, a lesbian, subpoenaed the sermons of five pastors who publicly opposed a local pro-gay decree created with the intent to censor traditional Christian teaching and silence the gospel. Thankfully, Parker's efforts failed.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF), arguably the largest Christian campus ministry in the nation, is being snuffed out of numerous universities. Because the student-led organization requires its campus leaders to affirm traditional Christian doctrine, InterVarsity chapters were "de-recognized" and stripped of official recognition by Dartmouth, Vanderbilt, Bowdoin College, SUNY Buffalo, Tufts University, Rutgers and all 23 campuses in the California State University system.

We are losing our religious freedoms fast and with them our reverence for the Creator, from whom all freedoms flow.

A Spiritual Referendum

The problem with American faith and politics and the way they are juxtaposed is simply that we no longer know what we believe as a nation. With no singular belief system, we have a hard time choosing leaders who will fight for our national beliefs and values. We are no longer united under the gospel. We have forgotten our foundation as a shining city on a hill, and thus, we are groping around in the dark.

At one point, the kingdom of Israel was in a state of darkness and total decline. Plagued by drought, famine and the deaths of entire dynasties, the nation answered collectively for their leadership's disobedience of God's commandments. Eventually, the prophet Elijah confronted King Ahab and his

wife Jezebel for their idolatry. On top of Mount Carmel with 850 prophets of the false gods Baal and Asherah, Elijah asked the nation, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kin. 18:21).

How frustrating is it to read about the kingdom of Israel's rulers who constantly rejected God? Not learning from their predecessors' mistakes, each new successor led the nation further away from God in pursuit of power. And each leader's sins ultimately led to their downfall and consequently penalties on the nation.

The parallels between the leadership of ancient Israel and modern America are astounding. God has blessed our land, yet our national leaders and the citizens who elect them continue to deny His very existence.

Like Elijah, America's influential Christian spiritual and political leaders are calling for America to turn back to God. In January, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal organized "The Response," a massive all-day prayer rally for America's spiritual revival. In a heartfelt call to pray, Jindal said, "As many of us survey our country today we are worried about what we see. We see a weak economy. Many of us worry about whether our children will inherit the same opportunities. ... Too many think that if we just elect the right politician, pass the right law, pass the right policy, that it will fix all that ails America. But what we really need in these United States of America is a spiritual revival."

In November 2014, pastors gathered at Grace Community church in Houston, Texas, for "I Stand Sunday." Here, Dr. Ronnie Floyd, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, told the audience and the American church, "It is time for us to wake up from our slumber. Our greatest problem is not in the White House, nor is it in the statehouse, but it is in the church house of Jesus Christ. We must get our lives right with the

Lord.”

There is only one solution capable of transforming the hearts and minds of mankind, and His name isn't found in the voting stations. However, His truth is written on the heart of every American, even those who choose not to serve Him.

In the coming 2016 election, it is vital that we as citizens elect a presidential candidate willing to acknowledge the limited nature of humanity. Our next leader must be humble enough to admit he does not have all the answers, and bold enough to put their trust in the One who does.

Kneel Before We Stand

Many Americans are familiar with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s most famous writing, his letter from the Birmingham jail. But many Americans are unaware of the recipients of King's letter. Dr. King penned the letter to local religious leaders, who, in the face of vocal racial discrimination, chose to remain silent. Some local pastors and rabbis even urged Dr. King and his supporters to remain silent as well.

In his letter, a disappointed Dr. King expressed, “If the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club.”

Much like the church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation, the current American church is lukewarm when it comes to government and culture. And like those Dr. King addressed, the church is at risk of becoming an irrelevant social club. The American church has gone from being “the salt of the earth” to being flavorless; something Jesus admonished His disciples not to do in Matthew 5:13-16.

Over and over again I've heard Christians I know personally exclaim, “I'll stay out of the government's business if the

government stays out of my business.” Sadly, it’s too late. The government’s invasiveness has reached our doorstep. Now what?

Not every Christian must pack up and move to Washington, D.C., to help turn this country back toward God. But we do have to act. We have to pay attention to candidates’ actions, not just their words. We have to vote in matters of local, state and federal policy. We need to know what public education is teaching children in their history and civics classes. We need to talk about the consequences of sin and the difficult reality of hell in our churches and small groups. We must understand the urgent need to share biblical truths with our lost neighbors craving His hope. Most importantly, we have to pray.

“Before we take a stand, we must begin on our knees. Even as we march, we walk in a spirit of prayer crying out for God to move, to intervene,” said Metro Pastor Garrett Kell to the Institute on Religion and Democracy. “Because unless He shows up, nothing happens. At least not lasting change.”

Rejoice in knowing there are already Christians—young and old—actively working to spread the gospel throughout politics. But there is still much work to do, and it must begin now. And we are not alone in this task. The Holy Spirit is at our side.

In 2016, the victory of one political party over the other is not going to solve our problems. Our only answer as a country is to fall to our knees before the God whose face we sought at the birth of our nation and elect a president who reflects that humility.

“As a nation, a storm is coming, ... but the church has got a chance,” Graham says. “I don’t know how much we’ve got, but we have a little time so let’s speak up.

“Let’s not be afraid. I can tell you one thing. I’m not going to back off. I’m not going to run. The Bible says He’s coming

back. Jesus Christ is coming back for his church. He's coming back so let's be about His work. Let's be faithful to His Word. Let's be faithful to Him in everything we do and everything we say."

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Franklin Graham shows why "a storm is coming" due to religious persecution around the world at .

Did Don Piper Spend 90

Minutes in Heaven?

A staff member at a Houston-area church in 1989, Don Piper's near-fatal crash with an 18-wheeler semi-truck changed the trajectory of his career.

After an extended period of recovery, once the book about the mishap released and skyrocketed in popularity, Piper left church life behind to speak to audiences worldwide. The one-time Southern Baptist pastor has now logged nearly 2 million miles while visiting all 50 states and many foreign countries.

While acknowledging there are numerous critics of his account, Piper more often encounters former skeptics who—after seeing pictures of his demolished car and multiple scars on his body—apologize for doubting him.

“I’ll say, ‘You don’t owe me an apology,’” Piper says. “If it hadn’t happened to me, I wouldn’t have believed it either. I know this: I was dead on that bridge and I’m alive now. But I don’t harbor any ill will. It’s a faith thing. You either believe it or you don’t.”

In addition to doing his part to spread the Great Commission, the author formed Don Piper Ministries to distribute monies raised by his speaking engagements. Among the many recipients are a Pentecostal church on an Indian reservation in New Mexico, a children’s ranch in Orlando, and a relief shelter for homeless men and addicts.

“People still need hope,” Piper says. “We need hope for now, for a better life and eternal life. This story seems to resonate with people in ways I couldn’t have imagined. Jesus is the only way to heaven. I want to help people go there, and I want to help them have a better life getting there.”

Here's Some Proof of Modern-Day Resurrection

After years of hearing the story from extended family members, Craig Keener verified in 2008 that his sister-in-law, Thérèse, had been raised from the dead in 1960. The seminary professor made the discovery on a visit to his wife's native Congo-Brazzaville. Two witnesses told of how Thérèse had stopped breathing for three hours before an evangelist prayed for her and she sprang back to life.

For the professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, the episode marked the final turning point from skeptic to believer. It was only the latest in a series of incidents he had investigated in a scholarly work on miracles.

"Instead of being a good, critical Western scholar, at this point it was like a burden," says Keener, author of a new report on resurrections for the *Bulletin for Biblical Research*.

"It had gotten to the point where I had come across so much information it would be more irrational for me to disbelieve than to believe these things were happening. It changed the equation. It (raising people from the dead) was just part of their life. They weren't trying to convince me of anything."

Noting that during the first century many discounted the story of Christ's resurrection, Keener details compelling evidence of the reliability of the Bible's account. His research paper also traces numerous historical records of resuscitations, such as:

–Early church leader Augustine claimed local eyewitnesses attested to raisings.

–A second-century source attributed a Mesopotamian bishop's conversion in the year 99 to him seeing a dead person raised by a Syrian evangelist.

–Methodism's founder, John Wesley, recorded in his journal that on Dec. 25, 1742, he had prayed for a Mr. Meyrick, who appeared to be dead and the man revived.

Pentecostal historian Charlie Self offers another: legendary Catholic evangelist, Father Vincent Ferrer. The priest's ministry led to the conversion of more than 20,000 Jews and 8,000 Muslims. The church canonized him as a saint in 1455, 36 years after his death.

"He went throughout Europe, preaching conversion and repentance," says Self, a professor of church history at Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri. "There is substantial evidence of conversion and miracles and people being raised from the dead through his prayers."

There are plenty of current stories, which Self hears from missionaries enrolled in his master's and doctorate-level classes. The recent survival of Missouri teenager John Smith reminds Self of *Peace Child*, the book by Canadian missionary Don Richardson that is used in many seminaries.

In it, Richardson relates the story of a child from the tribal peoples he worked among in Western New Guinea who had drowned, but came back to life because of prayer.

"We have had a lot of spuriousness that causes a lot of people to be skeptical," says Self, citing accounts that turned out to be a hoax. "I operate out of the theology of a Lord who does these things, as part of His plan. But I also operate out of the view that when God does something, it will be verified."

Still, Keener says the “show me” attitude that causes so many to doubt the possibility of resurrection exposes a large cultural divide between technologically advanced countries and those in the Third World.

In the U.S., he says many look for non-theistic explanations, but the Africans Keener talked with in Congo-Brazzaville and other areas of the world looked to God for help because they needed a miracle.

“If they had adequate medical help to begin with, the person wouldn’t have died,” Keener says. “They wouldn’t have thought medical help was wrong; it’s a gift from God. But they needed a miracle. They needed for God to work this way.”

There is another aspect of resurrection accounts that offers instruction to the church—its link with evangelism.

Miracles such as resurrection, healing and other supernatural signs occurred in Jesus’ ministry as He preached the kingdom of God and expanded its numbers. The same is true today, according to both scholars.

Noting that reports are surfacing today from such places as China, India and Mozambique, Keener’s investigation shows the more dramatic cases seem to occur amid people who are being exposed to the gospel of Jesus.

“It seems to be in places where revival is taking place and the gospel is breaking ground quickly,” Keener says. “You had that in the Korean revival in the early 20th century, which was mostly Presbyterians. Proportionally, it does happen more.”

One of the favors Vineyard founder John Wimber did for the charismatic movement was connecting spiritual power to evangelism, Self says.

“It’s the going out that seems to bring miracles, not the

gathering in,” the history professor says. “God used Wimber to (emphasize) we actually have to tell the (gospel) to somebody.

“As we tell the story, we can trust God to do supernatural work. There’s greater power when the church is on mission, not simply trying to preserve its reputation.”

Modern-Day Resurrections: Are They Real?

After he lay below the surface of an ice-covered Missouri lake for 15 minutes in mid-January, doctors didn’t give John Smith much chance to live, let alone be honing his summer league basketball skills.

Nor is his survival the only startling element of this miraculous story. After rescue workers pulled him from the icy lake about 40 miles west of St. Louis, the teenager spent another half hour without a pulse.

Soon after John’s mother, Joyce, walked into his emergency room ward, Dr. Kent Sutterer told her she could approach John’s bed. But the doctor didn’t reveal he was about ready to pronounce the time of her son’s death.

That announcement never came. After feeling the coldness of John’s feet, his mother recognized that God represented her only hope. The member of First Assembly of God of St. Peters decided to put Bible teacher and author Beth Moore’s teaching on the power of life and death residing in the tongue into action.

Less than a minute after praying, “Holy God, please send your

Holy Spirit to save my son," she watched with joy as a voice rang out, "I've got a pulse!"

"It's hard to put into words," Joyce says of the impact of her prayer. "I've seen miracles happen my whole life. My parents were personal friends of Oral Roberts' family and I grew up in tent revivals. I know God is the God of the impossible, but to see Him answer you at your point of need is awesome."

Dr. Sutterer, who treated Smith before a rescue team airlifted him to a St. Louis children's hospital, says the event resonates with a supernatural aura. When the emergency room physician placed his patient in the helicopter, the ER doctor expected Smith to suffer from unrecoverable brain damage before dying. A reasonable hypothesis, since brain cells can start to wither after five minutes without oxygen.

"I will never be the same again because of the experience," says Dr. Sutterer, who has practiced direct patient care since 1998. "The medical expert in me still knows that this case is not something which I will ever expect someone to survive. Never in my wildest expectations did I expect that I would be having a normal conversation with this young man within two weeks."

Smith, too, was shocked when he awoke in Cardinal Glennon Medical Center, his best friend holding his hand. Groggy from the powerful sedative used to keep him still, once he regained awareness his mother explained what had happened.

Every time the youth went for a breathing treatment or other procedure, Smith listened to music by Third Day, especially the tune, *I Need a Miracle*. He prayed often and thanked God for his life, keeping his friends safe, and bringing him through the ordeal.

"I think He's doing a movement in me," says John, a freshman at Living Word Christian School in St. Peters. "I think He wants me to use this as a way to show people that even when He

doesn't show up right away, He's still there and not to lose faith in Him."

Accounts of Raisings

Was John Smith resurrected from the dead?

His pastor, Jason Noble, thinks so, saying it sparked a wave of supernatural activity at First Assembly of St. Peters. The same week Smith nearly drowned, a long-time church member who had suffered a stroke regained consciousness three days after a call for prayer went out on Facebook.

Soon after, two members were healed of cancer. A man who tore ligaments in his foot laid down his crutches the day after Noble received a word of wisdom on a Sunday morning that the man would be healed. A pastor in the Seattle area until relocating to Missouri last August, Noble compares the event that touched off this wave to the gospel accounts of Jesus raising Jairus' daughter.

"It's the first time I've ever seen someone raised from the dead and healed," Noble says. "We've prayed ever since we got here that the Lord would do miracles. It's bolstered the faith of the whole church.

"When a church is praying, God will show up. Never underestimate the power of a praying church and openness to the Holy Spirit and what God wants to do. We've called it a tapestry of miracles you cannot deny."

Smith's survival has stirred such excitement at the hospital that SSM Health showed a video of his story at this spring's annual professional development seminar for its 13,000 employees in the St. Louis area.

This remarkable story is only the latest in a string of reported modern-day resurrections that will soon receive renewed attention across the U.S. In addition to this fall's

premiere of the movie, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, mid-September will bring the release of the *Touching Heaven* book by Palm Beach, Florida cardiologist Chauncey Crandall. Dr. Crandall's first book, *Raising the Dead*, describes him praying for a patient who returned to life after he had flat-lined.

"It's phenomenal, isn't it?" asks Don Piper, whose *90 Minutes* book has sold more than 7 million copies in 46 languages since 2004. "I think the accounts have always been there; we just haven't talked about them. I think God is doing some of His best stuff now. Because of the communication world we live in, it's easier for these accounts to circulate."

Worldwide, they have surfaced for years, but are accelerating through online video posts and traveling evangelists who claim to specialize in resurrection.

The Wagner Institute of Global Awakening offers an online course on raising the dead. It was also the topic of evangelist Reinhard Bonnke's 2014 book describing the 2001 raising of an African man.

The leader of a ministry in a nation whose government is hostile to Christianity says resurrections have helped plant or strengthen churches there, and save others from extinction. "The raising of the dead is one of the premiere signs," says the missionary, who asked to remain anonymous. "We checked and found five verifiable cases. There were several more, but there was no way to verify them."

Members of Shalom Christian Community in the southeastern Brazil city of Uberlandia, Minas Gerais, are still rejoicing over the 2012 recovery of teenager Mariana de Silova.

Robin Dias, a pastor at the church, says the girl was struck by a speeding motorcycle while crossing a busy street with her brother and mother, Gisele. The impact fractured Mariana's skull and a leg.

When they arrived, Dias says rescue workers couldn't find a pulse. That's when Gisele asked God to send an angel to help. Soon after, her cell group leader arrived and the two women rebuked the spirit of death, saying, "Resurrecting power of Jesus come!"

"At this moment Mariana began to breathe," says Dias, who attributes prayer to also healing the girl of double vision and problems walking. "The Lord's name has been greatly glorified for raising her from the dead and restoring her to perfect health."

In South Africa, Surprise Sithole—international director of pastors for IRIS Global—has observed eight raisings. The thousands of pastors he oversees in the region have reported several hundred.

Among them is a startling experience that occurred in 2005 as Sithole traveled to Zimbabwe with four other pastors to screen the *Jesus* movie. Sithole noticed a man walking ahead of their vehicle, yet they never overtook him.

When they arrived at the village and set up for the showing, a couple came with their 2-year-old child, weeping because the child had stopped breathing. Since the pastors with Sithole didn't believe in praying for the dead, he knelt with the couple.

Before he could say anything, Sithole sensed a presence approaching from behind. He turned around and looked, but saw nothing. It happened a second time, then a third.

"The third time I realized the shadow of the man behind me was the man who had been walking on the road," the pastor says. "As soon as I recognized that, the child was breathing. After the child raised, we said a prayer of thanks."

Searching for Evidence

While such accounts may seem far-fetched, Randy Clark says when witnesses tell stories of people who came to life after having no pulse, locked eyes and a rigid body, even skeptical Westerners would agree resurrections had occurred.

The founder of Global Awakening has videoed numerous accounts in Third World nations, where he says people are more open to the possibility of the supernatural.

“If you’re not in a place where there are hospitals and few doctors are around, you have to know what death looks like,” says Clark, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on miraculous healings.

“I believe (these testimonies) are true because it explains the growth of the church in Muslim areas. I’ve been in villages where that is (the reason) so many of them have become Christians. But do I have medical evidence? I don’t.”

Chauncey Crandall insists he does. In *Raising the Dead*, the Palm Beach heart doctor relates the story of Jeff Markin, a patient whose vital signs stopped as he lay in the emergency room.

Although declared dead at 8:05 a.m. on Sept. 20, 2006, as the cardiologist wrote his report he sensed God telling him to pray for Markin. Doing so under his breath, Crandall concluded, “If he does not know You as his Lord and Savior, raise him from the dead now, in Jesus’ name.”

Shortly after, when the ER doctor walked back into the room, Crandall asked him to shock Markin with a defibrillator one more time. Not only did Markin come to life, the week after he said a prayer of conversion with his cardiologist. Today the 62-year-old man is active in his church’s men’s discipleship program and works with the youth group.

“Theoretically I’m supposed to be a vegetable, but God had a different plan for me,” says Markin, who had an out-of-body

experience during his four days of unconsciousness.

“As much as anything, it’s the miracle of being reborn and moving through that,” Markin says of the significance of this incident. “It’s non-stop. The roots of my testimony are still growing and still spreading.”

The year after Markin’s bypass operation, Crandall presented evidence of this incident to a network of Christian doctors in Miami. The meeting received national attention after journalist Dan Wooding wrote a story about it.

Despite the interest it stirred, Crandall says most doctors are reluctant to verify such incidents in medical reports because of the fear of being labeled a “quack.” In Europe, he says it is illegal for doctors and nurses to even pray for the sick in Jesus’ name. So anyone there who documents the kind of miracle he observed risks losing their job.

Still, Crandall finds it worth risking ostracism and the possible loss of patient referrals.

Recently an eye surgeon approached him and told Crandall his book helped him appreciate taking authority and praying for patients, commenting, “You’re opening my eyes to the kingdom of God.”

“God uses miracles to show people He’s real,” Crandall says. “It’s powerful. When a doctor proclaims the Lord can heal them, deliver them from demons, and raise the dead back to life, it rattles people. Coming out of a doctor’s mouth, they believe it and give their life to Christ.”

A Documented Miracle?

Bonnke says countless salvations have resulted from Christ for the Nation’s video about Daniel Ekechukwu’s rising from the dead in 2001 in Nigeria. After one charismatic church showed it at a Sunday night service, the enthusiastic altar call

prompted the church to order 9,000 copies.

Bonnke's 2014 book, *Raised From the Dead*, renewed interest in the story. The book includes a photo of Ekechukwu in his coffin and another of him holding his death certificate.

"We have seen this video spread across the world and I've heard many testimonies of people who got saved as a result of it," Bonnke says. "I think it is a wonderful tool in the salvation of souls. One can say this is a miracle that has stood the test of time."

Indeed, it still sends chills down the spine of Robert Murphree. The filmmaker is currently working on a documentary in Norway about the Holocaust and Christians who helped rescue Jews during World War II.

In 2001, Murphree was en route to a crusade when Bonnke diverted him to the Nigerian town where Murphree interviewed witnesses about the incident. Murphree calls it one of the best-documented miracles he has ever observed.

Whether the man's wife, pastor, doctor, mortician or others, all the stories lined up. After talking to dozens of people, the producer thought, "If this is a hoax, there are so many people involved it would be a giant theatrical production to pull this off."

Ekechukwu's story especially impressed him. Murphree recalls Ekechukwu walking in looking weak and often needing water. Since the man's wife had such vivid memories, the filmmaker thought hers would prove more interesting.

"I said, 'I guess that's all you have to contribute,' and he said, 'No, there's more,'" Murphree says. "He started talking about what he had experienced. It shook me and all of us there.

"I had the fear of God on me for several days. I hardly slept

for two days and two nights after this. This was a work of the Holy Spirit and the whole thing had a message. At the core it was a salvation message and a sign.”

Yet, doubters soon appeared. They alleged such discrepancies as the lack of visible injuries to Ekechukwu’s face despite reportedly striking the windshield during the accident that supposedly killed him.

Another critic cited the lack of an autopsy, coroner’s report and police report, and conflicting accounts concerning the time the patient was dead.

In an online account posted in 2004, the leader of the Nigerian Humanist Movement labeled it a “fraud.” Among other things, Leo Igwe said medical experts told him that if the patient went three days without embalming fluid injected into Ekechukwu’s body, his abdomen would have been swollen.

Murphree understands the objections that continue to dog this story, saying he feels compassion for the critics.

“I understand why this would be a hard thing for them to accept,” the producer says. “But we were there. When you see things and sense the presence of the Lord meeting you at different stages ... sometimes you have to walk by faith. I can understand why this would be way too much to take in—but it happened.”

Biblical Contradictions

Eyewitness evidence doesn’t persuade doubters, though, who cite contradictions between testimonies of reported visits to heaven and the biblical record. Such concerns have resulted in a number of books and a resolution from the Southern Baptist Convention about the sufficiency of Scripture regarding the afterlife.

Although acknowledging the Bible includes accounts of such

resurrections as Jairus' daughter and Lazarus, it does not include any report of the afterlife, said the resolution. It was adopted at the 2014 annual meeting.

Matthew Hall, the Louisville, Kentucky seminary professor who helped draft it, says fascination with near-death (NDE) and post-mortem experiences have existed throughout American religious history.

Hall, an administrator and professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, says the current wrinkle is the way such accounts have leaped into the publishing world alongside their "democratization" via online postings.

Hall says many heaven observers focus more attention on relatives they see than God; if Jesus is present, He's presented as someone there to put an arm around someone's shoulder than the Christ who holds the cosmos together.

"When you look at heaven accounts, there's very little of God and the biblical there," Hall says. "I'm not convinced these experiences are on the rise. I am convinced publishers discovered they sell.

"It says something about the books Americans want to buy and read. I'd want to particularly look at that phenomenon and say: What does it tell us about evangelicals? Are we holding fast to that biblical authority?"

In her book, *Testing the Spirits*, now-retired Wheaton professor Elizabeth Hillstrom writes: "It is possible that some NDE accounts are grossly exaggerated or even outright fabrications, concocted for profit, publicity or attention."

Though Hillstrom wrote those words 20 years ago, they are still relevant following young author Alex Malarkey's admission that his story of visiting heaven after a serious car crash was a hoax. Malarkey was 6 years old at the time of the accident, which left him in a coma for two months.

In an open letter to “marketers of heaven tourism,” Malarkey—whose father co-authored *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*—said he made up the account because he thought it would attract attention.

“When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible,” Malarkey wrote. “People have profited from lies, and continue to. They should read the Bible, which is enough. The Bible is the only source of truth. Anything written by man cannot be infallible.”

In January, Tyndale issued the following statement: “(In January) Tyndale learned that Alex Malarkey, co-author of *The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven*, was retracting the story he had told his father and that he recounted in the book they co-authored for publication in 2010. It is because of this new information that we are taking the book out of print. For the past couple of years we have known that Beth Malarkey, Kevin’s wife and Alex’s mother, was unhappy with the book and believed it contained inaccuracies. On more than one occasion we asked for a meeting with Kevin, Beth, Alex and their agent to discuss and correct any inaccuracies, but Beth would not agree to such a meeting.”

The incident shows why no one should put any stock in resurrection accounts, says St. Louis-area apologist Kurt Goedelman. The founder of Personal Freedom Outreach says many resurrectionists are “frauds” and questions placing any faith in their grandiose stories.

Medical Recoveries

The other moderating influence to reported resurrections is they may not be as miraculous as they initially appear. Restarting a person’s heart via defibrillators or cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is a regular occurrence.

Such realities stir skepticism like a report last year in the *BBC News Magazine*. While not naming Dr. Crandall, the story

referenced an American heart surgeon who “allegedly” brought a heart attack patient back from the dead with prayer.

“But he was also using a defibrillator, and other doctors find the story entirely unremarkable,” the *BBC* wrote.

After West Virginia college student Zach Sandy got struck by lightning at a youth camp softball camp in the summer of 2012, the ER doctor who tended to him before the teen’s transfer to a burn center in Pittsburgh credited CPR as a primary factor in his survival.

“The key is if CPR is started at the scene,” says Dr. Anthony Kitchen, a staff member at Camden-Clark Medical Center in Parkersburg. “I resuscitated someone (recently). I shocked him, but his girlfriend had administered CPR and he was close to the hospital.”

However, even the restarting of someone’s heart doesn’t guarantee a positive neurological outcome—which is where the circumstances surrounding the cases of Zach Sandy and John Smith assume such a miraculous tinge.

Given the nature of Sandy’s injuries, Kitchen was pessimistic about the then-18-year-old’s chances of survival. When Kitchen learned earlier this year that Sandy had been released after a short time in the burn center and was doing fine, the physician was amazed.

“From a medical standpoint, it’s pretty astounding,” says Kitchen, who says so many circumstances had to line up properly that it challenges conventional theories. “So many things had to go right. For the kid not suffering damage from that and having neurological function—it would be rough for medical science to explain.”

After observers raised the question of whether the frigid water might have played an element in Smith’s survival, the doctor at Cardinal Glennon who treated Smith pointed out the

outcome of such cases is usually negative.

Dr. Jeremy Garrett says although a study in the Netherlands reported that 60 percent of 160 childhood drowning victims were resuscitated after 30 minutes, many suffered brain, neurological or other damage.

Another in the Pacific Northwest noted that with cold water drowning patients, none with prolonged restriction of blood supply to tissues survived deprivation longer than 10 minutes.

While medically there are several factors that gave Smith a hope of survival, to survive fully neurologically intact is beyond rational explanations, Garrett says.

“Results like this are not what knowledgeable physicians specializing in pediatric emergency care, pediatric critical care or pediatric neurology would expect, even with the best of care,” the doctor says. “If I had not been part of John’s care from presentation to recovery, I’m not sure I would have believed it myself.”

Joyce Smith believes, citing the blind man Jesus healed. When the Pharisees demanded proof, he replied, “One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

“All I know is my son didn’t have a heartbeat for 45 minutes and he’s alive and flourishing,” she says. “He’s an A and B student and doing well. The naysayers can say what they want, but the proof is on my side.”

Ken Walker is a freelance writer and book editor from Huntington, West Virginia. A longtime contributor, Walker wrote about prophetic evangelism in the May issue of Charisma.

Learn more about Dr. Crandall’s miraculous resurrection prayer

in this in-depth TV news story at .

Finding Courage by Tapping the Mind of God

In 1949, China's ruling party wanted to restructure how every man, woman and child in the entire country was thinking.

The government conducted research and realized that if they could control the stories that were told to one another, as well as the stories that average citizens told themselves, they could actually get the whole nation to think the same way about various subjects, including God and people in the Western Hemisphere.

China implemented "idea training":

Tell them what you want them to hear. Force them into small groups to repeat the words verbatim. Grade them on accuracy of repetition, not whether they believe the words. If they fail the accuracy test, they have to start idea training all over again.

Everyone is on the lookout for those who are opposed to the story. Then, the people are told to listen to words of others at work and in everyday life to see if the stories or everyday speech contradict what is learned in the idea training.

This true story of how small ideas and thoughts can be used to shape our realities, even the futures of nations, gives a glimpse into what your enemy wants to do to you. The smallest thought can lead to your worst defeat or your greatest victory.

Recently I was in Israel and asked an archaeologist to share behind-the-scenes stories about discoveries made since the time of Jesus. She had incredible insight because she had actually worked on certain digs and uncovered artifacts that had been buried for hundreds of years.

Unearthing Your Wrong Ideas

An archaeologist looks for clues about ancient cultures by uncovering material objects and then analyzes the data collected. Your most hidden thoughts can help explain the origin of the beliefs that keep you from facing the giants in your life.

Your thoughts have an archaeological background. Sometimes you just have to dig a bit into why you are thinking a certain way.

Perhaps you've been dwelling on the wrong ideas that were ingrained in the stories of your early childhood. Maybe pop culture and American greed have shaped your thought life more than it should. All of that can change. Allow God to help you rewrite your own story according to His Word. Reading the Bible is a great way to begin intentionally shaping your own thoughts toward the things taking place in your life.

Thoughts just happen. Somewhat like protons and neutrons that can be split, pre-thoughts and notions can be discovered before they turn into words and actions. It just takes a little work on your part. Your action and movement forward always emerge from thoughts and speech.

You are shaped in your thinking for good or bad through several main streams of influence that contribute to your everyday thought life: family, education, social relationships, arts and culture, governments and religion.

God Uses the Underestimated

David was surrounded by negative thoughts, and given his youth and inferior role within his family, he didn't seem like a likely giant killer.

Jesse, his own father, saw him simply as a delivery boy. This is noted not only in the story of David and Goliath, but also in the prior story about when the prophet Samuel came to anoint one of David's brothers as king—David wasn't even invited to the announcement!

The narrator uses David's life to teach the nation that God selects and uses the underestimated. David's own brothers belittled him as unimportant and called him arrogant, even evil. What are the thoughts your family has put into your head over the years?

The embedded lies of Goliath went deep into the psyche of the Israelite army. David witnessed it firsthand. Goliath, just like the Chinese, used the method of getting the intended audience to repeat thought-shaping phrases.

David had not gone to school to learn the art of killing giants. David also had a major deficiency in his network of friends. At that point in his life, he didn't have any. We see no mentors handing down wisdom to David, and only Jonathan, the son of King Saul, emerged later in his life.

How did David live encouraged and so confident in his God with an unsupportive family life, no education and no social network to shape or mentor him? It's a part of the story few people think about but may be the most significant fact of all. God was David's source of strength.

An army had been put back on their heels and retreated day after day muttering to themselves Goliath's threats against them and their God. David, for reasons only God might know, was the one who saw this pressure on their identity as a people and a nation as an opportunity for God to do something.

David said to Saul, as it's recorded later in 1 Samuel 17:32-37: "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

At the time, David wasn't officially anything to anyone. No one in his family, the spiritual authority in his life, or the entire army believed he could defeat Goliath. Yet David believed God could do anything.

Tapping the Mind of God

Perhaps you are always underestimated and no one believes you'll be able to defeat any giant.

You must aggressively untangle yourself from bad thinking. Continually feed your mind God thoughts.

If you are frozen from taking action and believe nothing is going to change, it's a sign you are too passive about the situation and believe the threats of the enemy more than the promises of God.

Have you allowed your own intellect, a professor at college or the mainstream news to infiltrate your thought life and indoctrinate you?

Some well-trained religious leaders with sophisticated vocabularies may have convinced you that God is too holy to be bothered with your life.

They've convinced a generation of young and old believers that they are to struggle and muddle through the Christian life! Is that the power of Christ at work in our world today? Defy that giant and hellish thinking!

Defeat the Mental Giants

Jesus came to defeat the giants of death, hell and the grave. When your giant is defeated, you know in your heart you're going to give God credit. You know you won't praise your

willpower, creativity or even your education.

Think about your thought archaeology and start eliminating the stories and bad theology that lead you away from an effective Christian life and walk with God.

Move boldly to the frontlines and start living every day to the glory of God. He hasn't given you a spirit of fear, but of love, power and a sound mind (see 2 Tim. 1:7). A mind war is the collision of anti-God thoughts against God thoughts. If you are constantly thinking and living differently than you desire to be, then dig deeper into why you are thinking the way you are. Confront the embedded lies deep within your personal view of God, the world, yourself and the giants around you. Your mind war starts by confronting thoughts that push you into a powerless attitude of retreat and negativity.

Don't let your giant implement idea training into your life. Giants will work overtime to barrage you with threats that are specific to your own situation. His first big milestone in your defeat is to get you repeating the threats that he's planted in your head.

Reject those threats and live like young David, seeing a different reality from what the giant is suggesting and attempting to do.

Stop allowing the mysteries of how and why God would love us to keep you from thinking and walking in that love every day, all to the glory of God.

Mike Rakes serves as the lead pastor of Winston-Salem First in North Carolina with his wife, Darla. Rakes has an M.A. in biblical literature and a . and . from Biola University. He is passionate about the spiritual health of the U.S. church and is committed to mobilizing faith communities for God and the good of humanity.

Francis Chan shares what true discipleship is and how to deal with thoughts that contradict the Bible at .

If you liked the article, you'll love the book:

In his latest book, *Slings and Stones: How God Works in the Mind to Inspire Courage in the Heart* (Charisma House), Pastor Mike Rakes uses the story of David and Goliath to show how even the underdog can rise to the top by tapping into "God thoughts." You can find this book wherever Christian books are sold or at .

21 Days with the Holy Spirit

Jesus realized that, without the Holy Spirit, His followers—including us—would not be able to fulfill God's call on their lives. So He sent the Holy Spirit to be our Helper, Teacher, Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor, Strengthener, Standby, Revealer of truth and the One who empowers us. He does so much for us!

Developing a relationship with the Holy Spirit is crucial for those who desire to discover and fulfill God's will for their lives. Yet the truth is that many Christians are on fire for God and love Jesus with all their hearts, minds souls and strength, but they remain less familiar with the Holy Spirit. Some long to fellowship with the Spirit of God and hear His still, small voice but don't know how or don't believe they can.

The following is a 21-day devotional guide to start you on a

journey to knowing the Holy Spirit more intimately. Each devotional contains prophetic words the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart day to day as I spent time with Him. I pray that they also speak to your heart, stir your faith and cause you to press in to hear the Spirit of God for yourself.

Day 1

Determine to Follow Your Desires

Determine to follow your desires, for I have placed those desires in your heart as you have delighted yourself in Father. As you continue to seek first the kingdom and Our righteousness, I will direct your steps on a lighted path that will take you where We both want you to go. Apart from Christ you can do nothing, but you are not apart from Christ. You are in Christ, and He is in you. If you determine to reach His high calling for you and lean and depend on Me to guide you, nothing shall by any means stop you.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 37:4; Matthew 6:33; Proverbs 3:5

PRAYER: *Thank You for Your faithfulness to the dreams You have put in my heart. Give me a determined heart that will not turn to the right or to the left. Help me to stay focused on Your perfect will for me this day and every day.*

Day 2

I Love to Hear You Pray

I love to hear your voice in prayer every morning when you awake. It's one of My favorite parts of the day. When you awake and begin declaring your love for Us, it moves Our heart. When you inquire of Me, it is My pleasure to answer. When you speak to My heart, it is My joy to speak back to yours. I hear your voice even when the hectic pace of life makes it difficult for you to hear Mine. So keep lifting your voice to Father in prayer. Keep telling Me about your

struggles, fears, dreams and victories. I'm listening.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 63:1; Psalm 27:4; Psalm 34:15

PRAYER: *Remind me to begin each day praising Your name and lifting up my petitions to Father's throne—and help me, because I do not know how to pray as I ought. I trust in You to help me touch Father's heart in prayer.*

Day 3

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Jesus once asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Many people knew He was a great prophet, but only Peter received the revelation that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Now, I ask you, who do you say that I am? Many people disregard My work in their lives because they don't understand who I am. And even those who know Me don't always have a continual awareness of My presence and a deep revelation of My love for them. Who do you say that I am? Search My heart, and I will show you a new realm of My faithfulness, My kindness and so much more. Search My heart.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 9:18-21; Isaiah 11:2; Galatians 5:22-23

PRAYER: *Holy Spirit, I know what Jesus said about You, and I've read about You in Scripture, but I want to know You more and more—experientially. I want to experience who You are in a fresh way. Help me to search Your heart, and show me more about Yourself.*

If you liked these entries, you'll love the book, Mornings With the Holy Spirit. [Click here to order it.](#)

Day 4

Look Ahead to Your Destiny

Don't look back. I know your hurts. I know your wounds. I know

your disappointments. I saw the betrayals. I saw the tears. I was with you through the pain, and I am here to make it right. I will work it all—the hurt, the disappointment, the betrayals—together for your good because you love Me and I love you. I will give you beauty for ashes. But you have to leave those ashes behind so I can resurrect with newness of life those things the enemy tried to steal, kill and destroy. Remember Lot's wife. Don't look back. Your destiny is ahead, and I am leading you toward your dreams.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:12-14; Isaiah 61:3; Romans 8:28

PRAYER: *Thank You for Your healing power in my soul. Give me the strength to press beyond the past and toward my high calling in Christ. Show me how to make the divine exchange that will give me beauty for ashes, and I will glorify Your name.*

Day 5

I Can Do More Than You Can Imagine

Take the limits off. Do you realize that the power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead dwells in you? Do you know that I am able to do more—much, much more—for you than you can ever imagine? Do you know that I want to? Will you believe in Me the way I believe in you? Take the limits off! Dream with Me! Let your eyes see, your ears hear and your heart dwell on what I have prepared for the one I love. Your best is yet to come. Only believe.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:19-20; Ephesians 3:20; 1 Corinthians 2:9

PRAYER: *Your promises are glorious, and I want to walk in every one of them. I want to see things the way You see them. Reveal to me the things You have prepared for me in love. Stir my heart to follow You toward Your perfect will.*

Day 6

Your Weakness Does Not Disappoint Me

I know you feel weak on some days. Rejoice! My strength is made perfect in your weakness. Your weakness does not surprise Me or disappoint Me. I knew that you would not always win your inner battles with temptation when I wooed you into this relationship. You are a work in progress, but I see you as a masterpiece despite your failures. I see you as a winner! I see you through the eyes of love. I see you through the blood of Jesus. So call upon Me to strengthen you, and I will help you overcome your weaknesses.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 12:9; Ephesians 2:10; Ephesians 3:16

PRAYER: *I'm so glad that nothing can separate me from Your love. Strengthen me in my inner man so I can resist all the temptations of the evil one. And help me see myself the way You see me—complete in Christ.*

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Day 7

I Love You Just the Way You Are

You don't have to try to be someone you are not. I love you just the way you were created. Don't compare yourself to anyone else. I have given you unique gifts and talents, and I have called you for such a time as this. If you allow frustration to flood your heart, you only hinder My grace. So reject comparisons. Reject frustrations. Reject striving. Embrace who you are now. Move forward as the person I've called you to be, and your unique gifts will make room for you.

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 4:8; 2 Corinthians 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12

PRAYER: *You see into my heart in ways that I don't see myself. Help me not to compare myself to others or give in to the frustrations of daily life. Help me to rest in You instead of striving. Show me how to do things Your way instead of my way.*

Day 8

Don't Doubt!

Doubt is the doorway to unbelief. Doubt is a cousin of fear and suspicion, and it blocks discernment. The enemy wants you to walk in the curse of doubt. He wants you to worry day and night. But Jesus came to redeem you from the curse. Father has given you the measure of faith that opens the doorway to His promises. Resist doubt as you would resist the devil, and let your faith rise as you meditate on the blessings I've promised you.

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 3:13; Romans 12:3; Joshua 1:8

PRAYER: *Show me when doubt is trying to enter my soul. Give me a discerning spirit so I can recognize the enemy's attempts to muddy my faith with his lies. I submit myself to You. Give me the strength to resist the devil so that he will flee.*

Day 9

It's Never Too Late to Start Over

No matter what destruction the enemy has brought to your life, you can start over again. Father started over with Noah after the destruction of the Flood. He made a covenant with man never to flood the earth again. And He has made a covenant with you through His Son. So be at peace, knowing that when the enemy comes in like a flood, Father will raise up a standard against him. And what the enemy meant for harm, Father means for good. You can start again in My grace. It's never too late to start over in Christ.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 9:17; Isaiah 59:19; Genesis 50:20

PRAYER: *Thank You for Your covenant with me. Thank You for protecting me from the wiles of the enemy. Thank You for giving me a fresh start in Christ. Anoint me to walk out of the old season and into what You have planned for me.*

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Day 10

I Want to Help You

I know it's too hard for you, but it's not too hard for Me. I want to help you. I am your Helper, and I find joy in coming alongside you, sharing My strength, showing you things to come and giving you the right words to say. I know sometimes things look impossible and you can't see the way out or the way through. But I know the Way: His name is Jesus. I'm here to lead you and guide you, so follow Me, and the confusion and stress will give way to clarity and peace.

SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 32:27; John 14:26; John 16:13

PRAYER: *Holy Spirit, I need Your peace. I need Your strength. I need Your guidance. Please help me become more sensitive to Your leading at every turn, and flood my soul with confidence in Christ and the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. I am willing to follow You.*

Day 11

I Am Your Devoted One

Even those little moments when you think of Me ravish My heart. You are My devoted one, and I am your Devoted One. I have eyes only for you, and when you so much as look My way, it thrills My heart. Our fellowship is My delight. Your voice is like a sweet melody in My ears. I am always in your presence, and you are always in Mine. Together, we can do

anything. I am your Grace. You are Our beloved.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 17:8; Song of Solomon 1:13-16

PRAYER: *I've never known anyone as beautiful as You. Will You keep me as the apple of Your eye? Will You hide me in the shadow of Your wings? Protect me and keep me, and I will lavish my love upon You. You are worthy of my all.*

Day 12

I Will Reveal Jesus to You

It's My joy to reveal Jesus to your heart. He loves you with a passionate love. He is always interceding for you to Father. And He always has a word of comfort and strength to share with you. I want you to know Him the way I know Him. Will you allow Me to make more of Him known to you through His Word? Open the gospels in faith, and I will pour out a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus. As we gaze upon His beauty together, you will be transformed into His image.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:17; Psalm 27:4; 2 Corinthians 3:18

PRAYER: *Your promises overwhelm me, and I say yes! Give me revelation and wisdom in the knowledge of Jesus. Show me Your glory. Show me Your beauty. Fix my eyes on Your heart. Help me to focus on You and You alone.*

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Day 13

You Can Tell Me Anything

You can trust Me. I am your Confidant. I am your Counselor. You can tell Me anything. Share your God-given dreams with Me, and I will help you bring them to pass. Share your fears with Me, and I will help you overcome them. Share your prayers with

Me, and I will help you lift them to Father. You can trust Me. Seeing you walk in everything Jesus has for you—helping you reach your destiny in Christ—is part of My mission. I am on your side! I am for you, not against you.

SCRIPTURE: John 14:26; Romans 8:26; Romans 8:31

PRAYER: *I need Your help more than I realized. Please hear my heart and help me to lean and depend on You as the Lover of my soul. Deliver me from evil, and help me become all Jesus died and rose again for me to be. Help me to trust You more.*

Day 14

I Will Give You Wisdom and Strategies for Victory

Just as I was with Moses, Joshua and David, empowering them with wisdom and revelation and delivering them from the hand of the enemy, so I am with you. I am the power that defeats all your enemies. Speak against your spiritual foes in the name of Jesus, and I will enforce His will against your enemies—they will fall in defeat. I will give you wisdom for every battle and reveal strategies for victory. Just as I was with Moses, Joshua and David, so I am with you.

SCRIPTURE: Zechariah 4:6; Psalm 31:8; Psalm 24:8

PRAYER: *Give me a revelation of Your presence and an understanding of the power of the name of Jesus, that I may stand confidently—fearlessly—against the wiles of the enemy and see Your victory in my life. Thank You for the authority to use Christ's name!*

Day 15

I Am Waiting to Reveal Truth

I am nearer than you think. I am closer than you know. I am always with you—waiting. I am waiting for you to engage in a

conversation with Me. I want to show you things to come. I desire to reveal more of Jesus and Father to you. I love it when you ask Me questions because it is My joy to lead you into all truth. I am right here. I have all knowledge. What do you want to know? Ask Me in faith. I will lead you and guide you to the information and revelation you desire.

SCRIPTURE: John 16:13; James 1:5; Matthew 7:7

PRAYER: *You are the Revealer of Truth and the Giver of Wisdom. Will You give me the wisdom to ask You what I really need to know? Show me what to ask, and I will grow in Your wisdom and joy. I am open to receiving Your wise counsel in every area of my life.*

Day 16

Prepare for a New Season

I've given you a gift, and I expect you to use it. You've wondered many times why your gift has not made room for you. But, My friend, you must take the first step and make room for the gift. You must put away from you and lay aside those things that are distracting you from My higher purpose for your life. I want to take you into deep waters. Prepare yourself now for a new season in which My gifts will manifest through you for the glory of Christ.

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 18:16; 1 Corinthians 13:11; Hebrews 12:1

PRAYER: *I want to glorify Christ with the gifts You've given me. I will yield to You, Holy Spirit, if You make Your way known to me. Help me to turn away from anything and everything that's distracting me from Your love, Your presence and Your will.*

Day 17

Don't Allow People to Distract You

Evaluate your life. When you take time to reflect on your relationships, it becomes easy to see who is supporting you and who is distracting you from Father's will. Know this: The enemy of your soul is on assignment to hinder your destiny. He often works through people—sometimes even people you like. The enemy uses people you don't know as well as people who are close to you to pull your attention away from Our will. Love the people. They don't know the enemy is using them. But don't be deceived. Stay focused on what Father has called you to do.

SCRIPTURE: John 10:10; Ephesians 5:2; James 1:22

PRAYER: *Help me stay focused on You and Your will for my life and not on what people think I should do. Please give me discernment to recognize when the enemy is using the voices of people around me to distract me from Your true direction.*

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Day 18

Forget What Lies Behind

It's a new day. Forget what lies behind, and press on to what Jesus has for you. Don't let your mind wander to the people and places of the past, no matter how good or how bad. If you try to move forward while looking back, you will stumble. You will stumble over frustration, either because things didn't go the way you hoped or because your current circumstances do not live up to those of your past. Don't look back. Stay focused on your mission in Christ. He will take care of the past, present and future if you keep your mind stayed on Him.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:13-14; Isaiah 43:19; Ephesians 2:10

PRAYER: *Holy Spirit, when my mind wanders away from Your truth, please speak to my heart and remind me that the past is the past and the future is bright. Please give me a glimpse of*

what lies ahead so I can press on toward that higher calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Day 19

Keep Crying Out

Sometimes when you stand up for what is right, people around you will call you a fanatic and say you are overreacting. But truth is truth, and you are called to proclaim it. Sometimes when you pursue Jesus with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul and all your strength, people will say you are too fervent. But fire is fire. Remember blind Bartimaeus! He needed a touch from Jesus, so instead of remaining silent when the Messiah went by, he cried out to Him. The people around him told him to quiet his mouth, but he cried out all the more. Don't stop crying out for truth. Don't stop crying out for a touch from Jesus. Don't let anyone put out your fire. We love it!

SCRIPTURE: Luke 10:27; John 14:6; Mark 10:46-52

PRAYER: *I want to burn and shine for You even when people don't understand my love for You. Help me to share Your heart with the people around me so they can know You the way I do and burn and shine with me.*

Day 20

Set Your Mind and Heart on Jesus

Always remember this: You are in the world but not of the world. Set your mind and your heart on Jesus, and He will refresh your soul. Don't look to the right or to the left because that's where the enemy lies in wait. Look for Jesus along the narrow way. Wait on Jesus. Trust in Jesus. Father gave you the dreams, visions and desires of your heart, and He will bring them to pass in His way, in His time and in His season. Don't give up now. The enemy is no match for the one

who loves Jesus. Take hold of My heart afresh. I won't let you down.

SCRIPTURE: John 17:16-26; Hebrews 12:2; Psalm 37:4

PRAYER: *Give me laser-like focus on Your will so that I will not be moved by the distractions that come from the world and from the enemy of my soul. Teach me to trust You and Your timing for the good things You have planned for me.*

Day 21

Ask Me for the Wisdom to Set Boundaries

People will push you to the point of absolute exhaustion if you let them. They don't mean to, and you don't have to let them. Some people always want more, more, more and more, and they don't realize you don't have more to give unless you tell them. You need to give out only what We give you to share. If you don't set boundaries in your life, you will become stressed out and worn out and will eventually burn out. But seclude yourself in My presence, and you will find refreshing and restoration for your weary soul. I have the wisdom you need to set the proper boundaries in your life. Just ask Me.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 5:15-16; Matthew 5:37; Matthew 11:28

PRAYER: *My heart is to help people, but I sometimes wear myself out by not asking You first. Remind me to acknowledge You before making a commitment so I don't burn out and end up resenting the people I have a heart to help. Teach me to say no graciously. With the Holy Spirit, which releases this month and from which this article was adapted.*

Jennifer LeClaire is the news editor of *Charisma*. She is also the author of several books, including *Satan's Deadly Trio* and *Mornings With the Holy Spirit*, which releases this month and from which this article was adapted.

Watch Jennifer LeClaire offer tips on how we can know the Holy Spirit better at

If you liked these entries, you'll love the book, Mornings With the Holy Spirit. Click here to order it.

Charisma News editor and author Jennifer LeClaire provides intimate and inspiring daily devotionals in her latest book, *Mornings With the Holy Spirit* (Charisma House). Each day brings a new, encouraging prophetic word and several passages for further study. You can purchase this book wherever Christian books are sold or at or .

5 Ways That Words Can Ruin a Life

“Sorry I’m late for the meeting. Traffic!” Half-truths such as this one were becoming easier and easier for me to tell.

Of course, there had been *some* traffic on the freeway, but nothing that would have delayed my arrival if I had left on time. The real truth was that I had overslept because I had stayed up to watch the late-night edition of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

Notice I didn’t actually say that traffic was extremely heavy or that it was the traffic that had delayed me. I just *implied* it so that my team members would conclude my tardiness was outside my control.

For some time prior to this incident my husband had been trying to convince me that *any* intent to deceive is a lie. My conscience had also been faithful to remind me of Proverbs 12:22: "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight" (NKJV).

I had to acknowledge that whether the misrepresentation takes the form of a half-truth, flattery, an exaggeration or blatant deceitfulness, it is still a lie—plain and simple.

I've been challenged with sins of the mouth for as long as I've been able to talk. However, a few years ago, I reached the height of frustration with my tongue after some unguarded words I spoke wreaked havoc in a valued relationship. The moment I uttered the words, I regretted them. I knew that trying to get them back was as impossible as recapturing a pillowcase of feathers released in the wind.

I decided then that it was time to bring my tongue, that unruly member the apostle James talks about, under control. I began my journey by researching every negative use of the tongue I could find in the Bible. I ultimately identified 30. I'm sure there are more but I knew that if I could conquer even half of them, I would have gained a major victory.

I made a commitment to go on a 30-day "tongue fast," a period of verbal abstinence from all ungodly speaking. With my arsenal of Scriptures, I embarked upon my quest for a wholesome tongue that would be a wellspring of life in every situation.

I knew the task would be impossible without God's help. I was well aware of James' warning: "But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8).

Nevertheless, I took courage from the words of our Savior, " 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God' " (Luke 18:27). Each time I caught a negative talker in the act, I drafted her to join my mission.

My strategy when faced with the temptation to dishonor God in any way with negative speech was to catch myself, stop midsentence and exclaim, "Tongue fast!" It seemed that I had to restart the fast a zillion times during the first few days.

I would succumb to some of the tongue temptations even though the Holy Spirit was flashing a yellow caution light, warning me to stop. Sometimes I deliberately ran the red light and said the wrong thing; other times I stopped and won the battle.

It was eye-opening as well as disappointing to find out I wasn't the only one suffering from tongue trouble. During my fast I realized that this is a big problem throughout the body of Christ.

Many people seem to be oblivious to the power of their words to build up or tear down, motivate or discourage, heal or hurt, spread or squash rumors, and delight or deceive. Perhaps you can identify with my struggles and triumphs in the following instances.

Complaining. "Why don't they just get more tellers?" whined the woman standing in line behind me at the bank. In my desire to relate to her misery, I chimed in and agreed. What else was I supposed to do? Isn't commiserating how you instantly bond with people?

Was I going to risk alienating myself from her by disagreeing? Heaven's no!

This incident seems like eons ago. I now have a new strategy. When faced with a long wait, I pull out some reading material, intercede for the salvation of each person around me or try to get the complainer to see the bright side of the situation.

I have not forgotten that it was murmuring and complaining that caused most of the Israelites to die in the wilderness and miss the Promised Land.

I frequently challenge myself to note the number of times I am tempted to complain within a 24-hour period. My goal is to resist the temptation to express displeasure with any person or situation.

I once expanded the no-complaints challenge to seven days when I took an exciting trip to the Hawaiian island of Maui. Before I boarded the plane, I had to resist murmuring about the traffic at the airport, security procedures, the lack of meals on the plane, the length of the flight and a host of other unimportant issues—all before we arrived in Maui.

I am making every effort these days to “pour out my complaint before Him” alone (Ps. 142:2). Sure, it’s OK to solicit a friend’s input on a problem, but constant complaining is a contagious and God-dishonoring pastime. I’m trying to make gratitude a lifelong attitude.

Judging. Benjamin Franklin, one of America’s Founding Fathers, once said, “I will speak ill of no man, not even in the matter of truth, but rather excuse the faults I hear, and, upon proper occasions, speak all the good I know of everybody.”

His philosophy paralleled my grandmother’s age-old advice: “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.”

Easier said than done.

During my tongue fast, I went on a mission to stamp out my tendency to judge people who speak too loudly, overexpose their bodies—particularly when they are going to church—smack their lips while eating, and engage in a host of other behaviors that caused me to silently reject them.

Whatever happened to love covering a multitude of faults? For sure, I needed more love, and I knew the source of it. I also knew that to the extent and in the way I judged others, God would also judge me (see Matt. 7:1-2).

Gossiping. “Deborah, we have to pray. I hear that John, the music director, might be having an affair with the sexy soprano who just joined the choir.”

We all know that such statements are an invitation to gossip—cloaked in a prayer request. And rare is the person who has not been a bearer or eager hearer of information about someone else’s personal affairs.

Because I have been the subject of a few “newsy” conversations myself, I have an aversion to such nonproductive exchanges. I found that the best way for me to resist gossip is to catch myself before I start.

I engage in a little self-interrogation: Why am I willing to use the temple of God as a “trash receptacle” by being a receiver of gossip? Is this my way of establishing a rapport with someone?

Do I need to be the center of attention? Does it make me feel superior to know something negative about someone that the hearer doesn’t know?

Am I envious of the subject’s good fortune? What do I plan to do with the information a gossip shares with me? Am I bored with my life and in need of more meaningful pursuits?

Of course, my best anti-gossip strategy is to heed Solomon’s admonition in Proverbs 20:19 (NIV): “A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.” Wherever I am, I declare it to be a gossip-free zone.

Retaliating. I have little respect for wimpy people because they remind me of a few significant people in my life who have allowed others to treat them as doormats. It stands to reason that I am adamant about setting a better example in my own life.

However, I found that I often failed to make the distinction

between being assertive and setting healthy boundaries, and responding in kind to negative behavior directed my way. My motto was, "Whatever you say to me is what you're going to get back."

And then I stumbled upon 1 Peter 3:9, which states: "Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you.

"Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it" (NLT).

This is still the area that I have to commit the most to prayer. I know that I make God sad when I take His job in avenging the verbal wrongs; however, I feel 10 feet tall in my spirit when I "pay them back with a blessing." Often the best way to do that is to remain pleasantly silent.

Cursing. Cursing? Do you mean as in "profanity"? Christians? Yes, many of God's children use profanity.

"Oh, that just slipped out," some say. The truth is that it slipped out of the heart, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34, NKJV).

Though I was not given to a profane tongue, when I would stub my toe, break something, upset a stack of papers, spill a drink, have an encounter with an extremely difficult person or find myself in any other frustrating situation, I would silently use profanity. When I saw that this behavior was becoming the norm, I ran to God.

I prayed: "Lord, I understand according to Luke 6:45 that 'a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good'; and I also understand that 'an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.'

"Would you please take the four-letter words out of my heart

and replace them with Your expressions? I thank You in advance for purging me of profanity and for allowing the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart to be acceptable in Your sight.”

Every day presents us with an opportunity to respond or to speak in a manner that would dishonor or glorify our heavenly Father. Is it spiritual naiveté to think that we can *always* say the right thing, at the right time and in the right way?

How was the woman described in Proverbs 31 able to set a communication standard that raised the bar so high? “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness” (Prov. 31:26). Looks as if she was able to tame *her* tongue.

One of my spiritual mentors, Marlene Talley, held the secret. More than 25 years ago when she observed my tendency to speak without much forethought, she cautioned, “Stop, think and pray before you speak.”

When we stop, think and pray before we speak, we find ourselves blessing rather than blasting others, exhibiting patience rather than pushiness, sharing good rather than gossip and choosing caring rather than cutting words.

Otherwise, we find our tongue in drive while our brain is in neutral. It is then that our words become verbal shrapnel that lodges in another person’s emotions with disastrous results.

Here’s what I have concluded. Words are verbalized thoughts that emanate from our hearts. If we turn to Scripture and use Philippians 4:8 as our thought sifter, our communication will always go from negative to positive:

“Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these

things.”

I find that memorizing “tongue” Scriptures such as this is essential to transforming my speech.

I store them in my spiritual war chest for use whenever a situation arises.

King David declared, ” ‘I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle’ ” (Ps. 39:1). Do you share his desire to honor God in your speech?

Then why not try a day-to-day tongue fast to get started? And don’t forget that the Holy Spirit, your Helper, is standing at attention ready to give you all the grace you need to succeed.

Deborah Smith Pegues is a popular speaker and best-selling author of *30 Days to Taming Your Tongue*. A certified behavioral consultant and certified public accountant, she has also written *Financial Survival in Uncertain Times and Emergency Prayers*. For more information, go to .

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

Find Scriptures to help you tame your tongue here.

5 Keys to Knowing God’s Will

A farmer in North Carolina lived on a beautiful farm that his family owned for many decades. When he died, his property—after being in the family for more than 200 years—was sold to one of the neighbors.

As the new owner was walking in the field, he saw a large, unusual-looking rock just barely sticking out of the dirt. He took it home, washed it and took it to a jewelry store. The jeweler confirmed what the owner already suspected: The old stone that had been in the field for thousands of years was a large, uncut emerald that has since proved to be worth several million dollars!

This gemstone was in that field all along just waiting for someone to come along and “discover” it. Undoubtedly, the emerald had been seen thousands of times before, but it was overlooked because it appeared to be nothing more than an ordinary rock.

When we “discover” something, we are finding something that already exists, though we were unaware of it previously. And while many people are desperately seeking God’s will for their lives, the reality is that often what they are looking for is right under their nose—but they continue to look for it because they don’t recognize it.

To recognize a precious stone, one would need to be familiar with its characteristics and know what it should look like. In the same way, if we desire to discover God’s will for our lives, we must learn to recognize the following characteristics of His will.

1. God has a standard will and a specific will.

As we begin the journey of discovering God’s will for our lives, it may seem like the potential options are endless. This can often feel overwhelming. The good news is that God has already gone to great lengths to reveal to us in His Word what His will is for everyone. I call this the “standard will of God.”

In addition to His standard will, God has something tailor-made for each of our lives. I call this the “specific will of God.” It is important, however, to understand that the

specific will of God for your life will never go against His standard will—what He has already revealed to us in His Word. This understanding will quickly help us to sort through the plethora of options and instantly eliminate confusion.

There are, in fact, many people who have done appalling things in the name of God. Many of them sincerely believed they were doing God's will. But there is no need for this confusion because God has clearly revealed His standard will for everyone in His Word if we would only make it our compass and our guide.

Discovering God's specific will for your life is something that is unique to you as an individual and something that you must discover for yourself. But our quest to discover God's will for our lives must begin with the Word of God.

By following principles from the Scriptures, we will be able to navigate the ocean of options and opportunities without a shipwreck. Whatever you do in life, it must line up with God's Word, and He will *never* call you to do something that is contrary to it.

2. God has a “good will” but also a “perfect will.”

God has a wonderful plan for our lives. But since He has given us the ability to choose whether we are going to follow His will, it seems that there are actually four possibilities:

We can remain ignorant of God's will. This is not you; if it were, you wouldn't be reading this right now. You obviously have a deep desire in your heart to discover God's will for your life, and you will make that discovery.

We can know what God wants but still disobey. This is disobedience, and the head-on collision of God's will and the stubborn rebellion of human flesh.

We can know God's will but settle for less. It would've been

far better if we had only been willing to obey. Settling for less than God's best is often the easy road.

We can contend for nothing less than God's best. This is the big challenge, because impatience to get what we want is a powerful force. But if we really believe God's will is always better than ours, we will be willing to wait for it and fight for it if necessary.

There is a perpetual conflict in the Christian life between what is "good" and what is "God." His perfect will, and the blessings that accompany it, are reserved for those who are willing to be radically obedient and to wait when necessary.

There are moments when God's way will seem so difficult, so prolonged and so unrewarding, while our idea seems much easier, much quicker and so much more enjoyable. But you will always find that God's plan is better than yours. There will never be an exception to this rule, so you might as well just decide from now on to yield to God's will, do it God's way and wait for God's best.

3. God calls us to do what we *can't* accomplish on our own.

There are many books on the market today about self-improvement and personal success. Many of the principles they teach are actually universal spiritual truths taken from the Word of God and then adapted to fit a wide variety of applications. They are like cheerleaders standing on the sidelines, crying: "You can do it! You can do it!"

If the "You Can Do It" philosophy were true, we wouldn't need God, would we? This mindset needs to be replaced with another, which essentially says: "I *can't* do it on my own, *but* I can do all things *through Christ*. With His help and blessing, anything is possible."

Finding the will of God always requires faith for the

impossible and a childlike dependence on Him. The Bible is filled with the accounts of men and women who found their destiny in the perfect will of God by doing things that were impossible for them to do on their own. Think about:

Noah and his impossible project: Noah was commissioned to build a ship the size of an aircraft carrier by hand! Yet he did it with God's help and grace.

Abraham and his impossible promise: At an advanced age, God told Abraham that he would have as many descendents as the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea. He did become the "father of many nations" just as the Lord said, even though, from a purely natural biological standpoint, it was impossible.

Moses and his impossible passage: Moses was 80 years old when God instructed him to bring approximately 2 million people out of Egypt and take them to a land that He had promised Abraham more than 700 years earlier. Moses had plenty of reasons why he was unfit for the job. Yet despite these enormous obstacles, Moses submitted to his destiny, obeyed to the best of his ability, and God did the rest!

Mary and her impossible pregnancy: A young girl named Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel and told that she had found great favor with God and had been chosen to give birth to the Messiah of Israel. Mary submitted to the will of God, even though she didn't fully understand it. As a result, she fulfilled her destiny by giving birth to and raising God's Son.

God has always chosen ordinary people to do extraordinary things. He has used men, women, young, old, educated, illiterate. But they all had something in common: Every one of them was called to be part of something much bigger than themselves. Because of their willingness to yield themselves to the One who had created them and allow His purposes to be

revealed in and through them, God used them in phenomenal ways. Kathryn Kuhlman once said: "God is not looking for golden vessels or silver vessels. But He is looking for yielded vessels."

It seems that one of the common characteristics of God's will for our lives is that it is always impossible for us to fulfill in our own strength. But as we yield our lives to Him, He causes His divine plans and dreams to become a reality! God takes great pleasure in doing things through us that only He can do, so that in the end He receives all the glory, honor and praise.

4. There are times and seasons in God's will.

We can easily become frustrated if we don't understand that, just as there are times and seasons in nature, there are also times and seasons in our lives and in the process of fulfilling God's will for our lives. This is what Paul was referring to when he said, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart"(Gal. 6:9).

Years ago a group of senior missionaries came together to discuss life principles they had discovered from several decades of combined ministry experience. Their purpose was to be able to share this wealth of experience with succeeding generations.

As these seasoned leaders talked and shared their life stories, a familiar pattern began to emerge: They all had encountered common stages of transition in their ministries, so they collectively identified a fascinating five-step cyclical process God had taken them through. Here is a brief summary of the stages they identified, steps they all had taken in their journey to know and find God's will:

Stage 1: Birth of the Vision. Before anything tangible existed, each leader had a vision that was imparted by the

Holy Spirit. In its infancy, the vision might have been general—but also very real—and brought an excitement and abiding awareness that were from the Lord.

Stage 2: Preparation. Following the impartation came a time of being prepared to pursue the vision. This is the stage where most of God's dreams for people are aborted because they refuse to do the necessary work. When God gives a vision, there must be some kind of action from us or that vision will never amount to anything more than a passing daydream.

Stage 3: The Wilderness and Struggle. One of the biggest misconceptions about discovering the will of God is that if something is God's will, there will be no struggle involved. That is a myth! You can almost be guaranteed a significant amount of struggle will be required. This stage is the proving ground of faithfulness and has no substitute.

Stage 4: Realization of the Vision. With this stage, they attained the vision. This is the place we all are looking forward to, where we can finally enjoy the fruits of our diligent preparation and God's faithfulness to us.

Stage 5: New Beginnings and Vision. They found themselves being challenged once more with fresh vision from the Holy Spirit, and they concluded that their lives had been a continual cycle of ever-expanding vision. As God entrusted them with more, greater amounts of preparation were required and the intensity of the battles they faced always increased.

5. God is interested in our journey *and* our destination.

Why are we still here? Jesus died on the cross 2,000 years ago and completed the work of salvation "once for all." So why doesn't He just rapture all of us so that we can be with Him? It seems clear that God is interested not only in our final destination but also in our journey, because along the way He does a work in our lives that has eternal value.

Many of us are impatient when it comes to God's will for our lives. We just want to get there. But in most cases, there is a great deal of time that elapses between when God calls us and when we have fulfilled His will for our lives. We need to understand that the journey is an important process that matters very much to God. The process of following Him in obedience—through many unknowns, trials and difficulties—is a significant part of our development and preparation.

God uses the journey to teach us faith, refine our character and equip us for the greater challenges that lie ahead and require more strength than we previously had. Even if you're in the process of seeking God's will right now, you are already fulfilling a part of it for your life: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go" (Ps. 32:8) is His will.

My friend, don't make the mistake of thinking even for a moment that because you don't know today what God's will is for your life you are not making any progress. Something is happening *right now*. Your faith is being stretched, your patience tried and your doubts confronted.

That struggle is part of the birthing process. God *always* prepares us in advance for all He has prepared for us. Though uncomfortable, it is necessary nonetheless. So get ready: Good things are coming for you!

Daniel Kolenda, a missionary evangelist, has led more than 10 million people to Christ face-to-face through massive, open-air evangelistic campaigns in some of the most dangerous and remote locations on earth. He is president and CEO of Christ for all Nations and hosts an internationally syndicated television program.

To hear the unique way Kolenda describes the power of the Holy Spirit [click here](#).

The Behind-the-Scenes Faith That Inspired ‘Unbroken’

On Christmas Day 2014 moviegoers around the nation watched the extraordinary yet true story of Olympian and war hero Louis “Louie” Zamperini in *Unbroken*. The film, directed and produced by Academy Award winner Angelina Jolie, is adapted from the best-selling book by Laura Hillenbrand. But it’s the story of Zamperini’s faith in God that is inspiring many believers even more.

In a recent interview with *Charisma*, Zamperini’s son and frequent companion, Luke, reflected on his father, who passed away on July 2, 2014, at age 97. “It’s just been fantastic sharing his story. I’ve seen the effect it has on people,” Luke said. “He was a wonderful dad and a good friend.”

The young son of Italian immigrants, Louie Zamperini (played by British actor Jack O’Connell in the film) discovered his passion for track and field while growing up in California in the 1920s. He became one of the fastest runners in the world and left his mark on the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. This should have been his warm-up for the 1940 Olympics, but those games were canceled due to World War II.

While serving his country in the Army Air Corps, Zamperini’s plane crashed into the Pacific Ocean. He survived, drifting on a raft for 47 days before being captured and imprisoned by the

Japanese navy. As a prisoner of war, Zamperini endured unimaginable cruelty, and the horrifying memories of his experience followed him home.

He turned to the bottle for relief and, with his marriage falling apart, might have unraveled completely, but he instead found faith in Christ at one of Billy Graham's evangelistic crusades. With this came personal freedom, restoration of his marriage and the courage to not only face his captors but truly forgive them. Beginning in 1950, Zamperini visited many of them who were in prison for war crimes, embraced them with forgiveness and shared the love of Jesus with them (many gave their lives to Christ).

Today Luke Zamperini understands why his father's story has such tremendous power to move an audience. "It's about the indomitable human spirit, coupled with the power of God. It can change lives."

A Child Will Lead the Way ... to the Mission Field

Despite more than 2,700 missionaries sent from the United States at the time, the Assemblies of God never had anyone in a single Eastern European state until a couple's then-6-year-old son came home from a Boys and Girls Missionary Challenge (BGMC) meeting with exciting news.

"I just felt this tugging at my heart, and I heard a voice inside say, 'That's it; that's where you're going,' " the young boy told them.

"If it weren't for BGMC highlighting this country in its

curriculum, we might not be here today,” says the missionary, whose name can’t be disclosed because of the sensitive location in which they now work. “God spoke to us through the words of a child.”

Marking its 65th anniversary this year, BGMC is the AG’s missions education program for children 12 and under. And since its launch in October 1949, it continues to instill a missionary vision in children around the country.

In fact, Mark Entzminger, senior director of children’s ministries, thinks this initiative deserves credit for the Pentecostal group’s status as one of the few denominations still expanding (3.1 million U.S. members and almost 68 million in other nations.)

“I would tie our worldwide growth to our forefathers ensuring that taking the gospel to the ends of the earth was part of our [children’s] lives throughout their lives,” Entzminger says.

Children and parents contribute \$6 million annually to missions through Buddy Barrels—named for the BGMC mascot—and other offerings. When they mature into teens, many continue in the AG’s Speed the Light program, where offerings total \$9 million a year.

The teen program includes Ambassadors in Missions (AIM), which last year dispatched 1,865 students on short-term mission trips. This summer AIM led trips to Bogota, Colombia, and Vienna, Austria, with its current mission in Columbus, Ohio, wrapping up Aug. 1.

Entzminger says the most inspiring element of BGMC is how its teaching helps children recognize material blessings aren’t for buying things to amuse themselves, but instead to help spread the gospel and bless less-fortunate peoples.

“In some situations people need to have their needs met before

they can hear the gospel," he says. "It's about meeting felt needs and spiritual needs."

-Ken Walker