

How Leaders With Hidden Sin Can Fake It Until Revealed

Caution: Being spiritually gifted can be hazardous to your spiritual health. Why? Because your success might lead you to conclude you have God's approval.

The last thing you or I want is to become yesterday's man or woman. No one wants to be a has-been. No one needs to be that.

There are two kinds of yesterday's man or woman. The first is when the leader is openly put to one side and made to forfeit a ministry; this is when they have been found out and live with disgrace and embarrassment.

The second is when the leader is disapproved of by God but nevertheless continues in ministry. Often, the leader's followers do not have a clue the leader has lost the conscious approval of God, so they continue on as if nothing happened.

If the Holy Spirit were completely withdrawn from the church today, speaking generally, 90 percent of the work of the church would continue as if nothing happened. This can apply to an individual as well.

Yesterday's Man

King Saul was rejected by God but remained king of Israel for another 20 years. Only the prophet Samuel knew Saul lost God's approval.

"The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him from ruling over Israel?'" (1 Sam. 16:1a).

The anointing in this case may be defined as experiencing the conscious approval of God. That is what Saul once had but lost. And yet Saul remained king and in that sense was always

regarded as God's "anointed" (1 Sam. 24:6).

As I show in my book *The Anointing*, "anointing" is a tricky term and can be used in different ways.

Being yesterday's man or woman has nothing to do with age, being made redundant or retirement. You can be young and be yesterday's man; Saul was only 40. You can be old and be tomorrow's man; God did not use Moses until he was 80.

The scary thing about being spiritually gifted is that the gifts and calling of God are "without repentance" (b, KJV)—that is, "irrevocable" (ESV).

Strange as this may seem, it means that godliness will not earn God's gifting, nor lack of godliness forfeit it.

The gifts are bestowed by God's will; indeed by the Holy Spirit "to each one individually as he wills" (1 Cor. 12:11). And yet because one's giftedness or success may flourish, such a person might assume he or she still has God's approval.

One might easily conclude, "God must be pleased with me or He would not bless me as He has."

You may have heard this expression: "You can always tell a successful man, but you can't tell him much."

I once cautioned a spiritual leader about something that worried me. He replied, "Why should I listen to you, when you only reach hundreds in Westminster Chapel, but I reach thousands?"

That is why some people misunderstand God's ways. They assume success to be proof of God's blessing and approval.

I had two major shocks when I was young in ministry; both pertained to spiritual heroes that I almost worshipped. The first was a very powerful evangelist who came to my old church in Ashland, Kentucky, every year. I was enthralled by him. I

never witnessed such anointing, persuasiveness and sense of the fear of God as would fall on our congregation when he preached. It was extraordinary.

I learned later that the whole time he was at our church he lived a double life—namely, of adultery. A woman who was not his wife followed him wherever he went and was staying in the same hotel while he preached with such success. He was later found out and lost his credentials.

The other shock came when I had a vision of Jesus looking at my district superintendent who came to preach for me at my first pastorate in Palmer, Tennessee.

Months before, my baptism of the Holy Spirit was accompanied by a vision of Jesus. For several months afterward, a vision of the Lord's face looking at someone would appear, and I could tell the spiritual state of that person by the way the Lord looked at them. To my utter astonishment, the Lord looked at my district superintendent with intense anger and disapproval.

I was puzzled. How could this be? I regarded this man as one of the godliest men alive. I told no one about this. But 12 years later, I learned that this man was having an affair at that very time. He was later found out, lost his credentials and died in shame.

Here is what sometimes happens with those who fall but continue on in ministry. First, they give into temptation—usually regarding sex, money or truthfulness. With men, it is often connected to pornography.

They initially fear they will lose their power. But they notice that their anointing to preach, make money, heal or prophesy remains. They then say to themselves, "God must be pleased with me—making me an exception—or He would not continue to bless my gifting."

They take success as a sign that character is not what matters; it is the gift that matters. They therefore feel no conviction of sin or guilt for their double life. A compromising lifestyle becomes the norm.

Some get caught, some don't—that is, for a while. Numbers 32:23b (MEV) says, "Be sure your sin will find you out." It is only a matter of time until this haunting warning comes to pass.

Jesus goes a step further in Luke 12:2-3: "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light. And what you have whispered in the ear in private rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops."

After being rejected by God, Saul found out that he still had the gift of prophesying. This probably convinced him he could disregard Samuel's pronouncement.

Samuel told him that God rejected him (1 Sam. 13:13-14). But Saul was unteachable and unreachable. And yet the extraordinary gift to prophesy continued to flourish (1 Sam. 10:9-12).

Lo and behold, on his way to kill young David, Saul prophesied. And lest you think this was something he worked up on his own, it is written that the Spirit of God actually lay behind his prophesying.

"The Spirit of God came upon him also. And he went on and he also prophesied ... Therefore they say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'" (1 Sam. 19:23b-24).

How does one explain this? I answer: First, the gifts are irrevocable, and second, God's ways are higher than our ways (Isa. 55:9). There are things about God and His ways I have not been able to figure out. I have to accept what is written in His Word.

Giftng may come to us at two levels: common grace and the Holy Spirit.

First, our giftng may come by God's common grace—His special grace in nature. It is called "common" not because it is ordinary but because it is given commonly to all. It is a creation gift. It explains one's natural talent, charisma, I.Q.—the way God made us.

Keep in mind, this is apart from conversion or spirituality. Unsavd people have this. If such people are converted and later fall into sin, the Holy Spirit could be withdrawn from them and they would continue as though nothing happened. How is that possible? Because they are so gifted.

The second giftng is what God imparts by the Holy Spirit: one's supernatural anointng or gifts of the Spirit. They are irrevocable. But God puts us on our honor to honor Him by obedience, gratitude and holy living. Sadly some abuse this privilege and become yesterday's man or woman.

Some get caught sooner than later. Others—like Saul—are found out openly later than sooner.

Warning Signs

How do we become yesterday's man or woman? Here are five ways:

By not being accountable. King Saul was supposedly accountable to Samuel. He owed everything to Samuel. But he foolishly thought he didn't need Samuel any longer, as if he had outgrown Samuel.

Here are the famous words of yesterday's man: "I'm accountable only to God."

I reply: No one is that spiritual. We *all* need to be accountable to those who know us well and are not afraid to warn us, ask us pointed questions, know where we are at any moment and lovingly but impartially warn us when we need it.

I warned a man who was supposed to be accountable to me. He stopped returning my phone calls and answering my letters. Once I eventually caught up with him, I told him, "You are going to become yesterday's man."

Like Saul, he was unteachable and unreachable. His gift flourished. That was several years ago. I'm sorry, but he clearly became yesterday's man.

By taking ourselves too seriously. People who take themselves very seriously are hard to reach. They are almost always self-centered, narcissistic, closed to criticism and convinced they are special to God: that God will let them off the hook should they err.

This was King Saul. In 1 Samuel 13:9b, he ordered, "Bring here to me the burnt offering." This was something only the priest should do (Num. 18), but Saul obviously reasoned, "I'm king, aren't I?"

He elevated himself to a level to which he was not called. People who take themselves too seriously reckon they can do anything and everything. Saul was king but not qualified to be a priest as well.

By finding an excuse to cover our wrongdoing. When caught offering the burnt offering, Samuel asked Saul: "What have you done?" (1 Sam. 13:11).

The king justified his mistake: "I saw that the people were scattered from me ... 'The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not yet appeased the face of the Lord'" (1 Sam. 13:11-12a). Saul sounded pious!

Some use a theological excuse to cover a moral failure. Some even develop a pious air and convince people of their sincerity.

By blaming others for our own folly. Saul blamed Samuel: "You

did not come to the appointed assembly days, and the Philistines are gathering themselves together at Mikdash" (1 Sam. 13:11b).

King Saul used this to excuse himself and blame Samuel. Not only that, but Saul claimed he didn't really want to do what he did: "So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering" (1 Sam. 13:12).

The NIV translates his excuse as "I felt compelled." Imagine this—being compelled to go against Scripture.

Beware of anyone who justifies their departure from Scripture by claiming to hear from God. The Holy Spirit—who wrote the Bible (2 Tim. 3:15, 2 Pet. 1:21)—will never lead anyone to go against what He has written.

By going against Holy Scripture. Here is how to get on the fast track to become yesterday's man or woman: underestimate God's Word and go against it.

What Saul did was to break the ceremonial Law. The Law is threefold: moral (the Ten Commandments), civil (the way the people of Israel should govern themselves) and ceremonial (how God wants to be worshipped). That bit of the ceremonial Law may seem insignificant.

But Jesus said, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not one dot or one mark will pass from the law until all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18).

Lest you think Saul's sin was a one-off incident that should be overlooked, King Uzziah committed the same sin and was afflicted with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:18-21).

Psalm 138:2b says, "You have exalted your word above all your name." This shows how important God's word is to Himself!

No one likes the taste or smell of spoiled fruit. But that is what we are if we justify an unholy walk with God. He will

find us out.

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When Believers Cease to Believe in the Supernatural

As the pastor of a Primitive Baptist church, my friend Charles Carrin was an ardent cessationist and entrenched five-point Calvinist for many years. He subscribed—as all cessationists do—to what I believe to be an unbiblical view: that God by His own will “ceased” long ago to deal with His people in a direct manner supernaturally. No more supernatural healings. No visions. No direct revelation. None of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in operation.

Cessationists do believe in the supernatural occurrences in Scripture, of course, but they have no expectation that God will intervene supernaturally today except, perhaps, through providence. But the notion of the gifts of the Spirit being in operation today, as in 1 Corinthians 12:10-12, is out of the

question.

Even so, one day my Baptist friend prayed something like this: "Lord, I want to be filled with Your Holy Spirit, but I have three conditions: I don't want to shout, I don't want to be spectacular and I don't want to speak in tongues. Now, with that in mind, You may proceed."

Nothing happened.

As it turns out, he was also a chaplain at the federal prison in Atlanta. He was assigned to a man who had been converted and filled with the Holy Spirit after being imprisoned. Whereas Charles went weekly to minister to this man, the prisoner began to minister to Charles. It is one of the most amazing reversals of role I have come across.

Little by little Charles became hungry for God in a fresh way. After a long while he became willing to ask this prisoner to lay hands on him—with the prison guards watching. He invited the Holy Spirit to fall on him without any preconditions. He was filled with the Holy Spirit that day and was never to be the same again. He was eventually forced to resign his church.

Let's Be Fair With Cessationists

One should never underestimate our cessationist friends' love for God, Scripture, sound teaching and holy living. They are the salt of the earth. Some of them are among the greatest vanguards of Christian orthodoxy.

I repeat: They certainly do accept the miraculous in the Bible. They simply do not believe that God reveals Himself immediately and directly by revelation anymore. God, of course, could do it, they argue; He has simply and sovereignly chosen not to show His power as He did in the earliest church.

The absence of power, therefore, to the cessationist is not owing to our unbelief, lack of faith or expectancy. God

Himself decided that kind of power was for the earliest church. Any amount of praying, fasting, intercession and waiting on God will not bring about His power. You cannot twist God's arm to do what He decreed isn't going to happen.

Cessationists do not want to appear smug or unreachable; they simply don't believe the claims of charismatics and Pentecostals who have reportedly seen the miraculous. They are not questioning our honesty; they feel we have been either too optimistic, perhaps gullible, if not actually deceived.

Furthermore, cessationists understandably get turned off by flamboyant healing evangelists who make their extravagant claims. What causes some cessationists to dig in their heels is not only the lack of hard evidence, but also that the claims to healing miracles are so often surrounded with Hollywood-style showmanship and questionable teaching. These television evangelists sometimes appear like movie stars who love the attention.

What's more, those people who are said to be slain in the Spirit and fall backward are also supposedly healed. That is certainly the impression that is given. But when honest skeptics who want to get to the bottom of the claims go back to these same people to interview them, the results are often rather sobering. It often turns out that very few, if any, were actually healed. This scenario has been repeated again and again.

I can truly sympathize with cessationism. It seems to me the extravagant claims and lifestyles of many healing evangelists are far removed from the humility of the early apostles. I also find it disquieting when prominent healing evangelists absolutely forbid people in wheelchairs from being pushed to the front of the auditorium before the services. Ushers are positively told not to let people in wheelchairs be positioned near the stage; it draws attention to them, especially when the handicapped people are not called out to be prayed for.

It wasn't always this way. In the years between 1949 to 1951, it was very different. I have good reason to believe that healings of crippled people actually took place then. People in wheelchairs were welcomed—and often healed. They often carried their own wheelchairs back to their cars. And they stayed healed.

I will tell you why I believe this. I have personally talked with three men (and others who knew them well) who were very prominent in the healing ministry in the 1950s. They have shown me photographs, letters and testimonies of people who wrote to them. I got close enough to some of these men to know they were not making things up.

What convinced me further is when they also admitted that the healings came to a halt. They were vulnerable to admit to this. It made me feel that the photographs and letters were genuine. But for some reason the miraculous healings diminished in the 1950s, although some of the evangelists did their best to keep praying for people as they had previously done—but with fewer results.

It's a Hypothesis, Not Dogma

Here is the ultimate truth about all this: Cessationism is a hypothesis. It is not a teaching grounded in Holy Scripture—like the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the resurrection of Jesus and salvation by the blood of God's Son. Cessationists have *chosen* to believe God does not reveal Himself directly and immediately today.

I do think, however, that many cessationists would sincerely welcome supernatural healing if they actually saw a person healed or if they themselves were healed (should they become willing to be prayed for) and remained healed. Most cessationists would be thrilled with a miracle, if indeed it was genuine and they had the undisputed facts before the healing and after the healing.

I know some cessationists become open to the miraculous when one of their own loved ones becomes seriously ill. God sometimes uses a critical illness to get our attention. I don't mean to be unfair, but there is nothing that changes the mindset of a cessationist like one's own fatal illness or the serious sickness of a loved one. That often makes them open in a way they would not have been before. General Douglas MacArthur used to say, "There are no atheists in foxholes." So, too, desperation is something God may use to give us a wake-up call.

But what would worry me is this: if cessationists would be disappointed if the irrefutable evidence of genuine healings came forth. It is surely not good if they turned the hypothesis of cessationism into a dogma and then would resent it if a person were miraculously healed. If only such people would uphold cessationism as plan B in the event God might intervene and show His undoubted power.

Perhaps It's for Our Good

Sometimes it actually happens—a cessationist is convinced of a miracle and changes his or her views. But not often. Why? I cannot be sure.

But I have my own hypothesis: to test the faith of those who actually see the miraculous but have to enjoy it in relative solitude without their friends being convinced. That solitude can become downright painful—when one's integrity is questioned and yet one knows for a fact what God did. It's like the earliest church being convinced of Jesus' resurrection, whether they saw the resurrected Christ or because of the immediate and direct witness of the Spirit. It was so real to them and so foreign to others.

But what if God in some cases keeps some skeptics from seeing the miraculous even though it actually takes place? What if miracles are largely for those believers in God's family who

have accepted the stigma of being “outside the camp” (Heb. 13:13)?

After all, why didn't the resurrected Christ appear to everybody on Easter Sunday? One might choose to argue that this would have been a reasonable thing to do if God truly wanted everybody to believe in His Son. Why did Jesus reveal Himself only to a few? Why didn't Jesus knock on Pontius Pilate's door on Easter morning and say, “Surprise!”? Why didn't Jesus go straight from the empty tomb to Herod's palace and say, “Bet you weren't expecting Me!” He appeared only to a few—those who were His faithful followers.

I also suspect that God sometimes allows just a little bit of doubt when it comes to the objective proof of the miraculous. This keeps us humbled. And sobered. Pastor Colin Dye of London's Kensington Temple has put it like this: “Miracles always leave room for doubt, as they were not intended to replace faith, only to reveal the heart. Also, the fact that Jesus' miracles in Galilee were not believed shows that the very best of them were not knock-down proofs for those who are hard of heart and unbelieving, and to reject their testimony is to bring greater judgment on those who witness them. Perhaps it is out of God's mercy that God is pleased sometimes to withhold them, at least until the time is right to bring to light the true state of people's hearts—to bring in the elect and to reveal the apostates.”

Perhaps you and I need patience while our friends or loved ones are totally convinced “there's nothing to it” when it comes to the miraculous. After all, how could Peter prove that Jesus had ascended to the right hand of God on the Day of Pentecost? He couldn't. But he believed it. And all the rest could do was to believe his word—or reject it.

Let the Spirit Vindicate Us

Jesus was “vindicated by the Spirit” (1 Tim. 3:16, NIV) in the

days of His earthly ministry. This meant He got His approval through the Holy Spirit from the Father alone—not from people’s approval. It also referred to His followers who were drawn to Him in faith by the Holy Spirit.

Faith is a gift of God (Acts 13:48; Eph. 2:8-9). This means those who believed in Jesus had been drawn to Him by the Spirit (John 6:44). And Jesus’ vindication by the Holy Spirit continues to this day. Even though He is at the right hand of God and is highly exalted in heaven, the only ones who believe this are those whose hearts have been drawn to Him by the Holy Spirit.

My hypothesis, then, is that the principle of vindication by the Spirit is at stake when it comes to the miraculous. Vindication by the Spirit is an internal vindication. The Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts.

Furthermore, those who are faithful believers in Jesus’ power today are more likely to see His healing miracles than those who say, “I will believe it when I see it.” In other words, as Jesus appeared to those who were previously drawn to Him, it may be that God shows His manifest power to those who have previously believed He is willing to show His glory.

Could it be, then, that God withholds the lack of hard evidence to skeptical people for *our* sakes? If so, it becomes a rather huge testing for us. The issue is this: Will you and I still be faithful if our cessationist friends never see God’s manifest power for themselves? Many of us would so love to be openly vindicated. But what if God is behind the withholding of His manifest power to our critics in order that we get our vindication not from people’s approval but from the Father alone? This would mean that we, too, are vindicated by the Spirit—His internal witness—and not by the external, visible and tangible proofs of His power.

God could show His healing power at any moment. For instance,

a few years ago I received a curt letter from a very close friend. He lovingly chided me for my associations with Pentecostals and charismatics. But since he wrote me that letter, his own daughter became critically ill and was expected to die. The very charismatics he would not normally turn to prayed for his beloved daughter. She was gloriously healed. And stayed healed. My friend made a 180-degree turn. He announced to his friends, "I am a Baptist charismatic."

But why doesn't God do that all the time? You tell me.

My point is simply this. Let us not live for the vindication of our theological views. God wants us to receive the praise that comes from Him alone (John 5:44). If we became openly vindicated of our position that God manifests His power and glory today through the gifts of the Spirit, we might succumb to the praise of people. We could. We all have fragile egos. God forbid that this should happen to us—that we would start saying, "I told you so."

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A Letter to John MacArthur

Dear Dr. MacArthur,

I have admired you as an able writer and speaker for years. I

have not only read your book *Strange Fire* but have listened to your talks as well as the panel discussions at your recent conference. I am as Reformed theologically as you are and can say we are on the same page when it comes to many issues you address.

I was not prepared, however, for some of the things you said. I had to reread some parts to be sure you said what I thought you said. First, if your book purports the danger of offending the Holy Spirit with counterfeit worship, I fear you are in greater danger of offending the Holy Spirit by attributing His work to Satan. Does this not worry you? You are risking an awful lot by counting on cessationism to be totally true. You have tried to turn the hypothetical teaching of cessationism into dogma.

Second, surprisingly, you imply that my predecessor, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, would agree with you. A major portion of my own book *Holy Fire* is devoted to what he believed regarding the gifts, the baptism and the immediate witness of the Holy Spirit. He was no cessationist; he loathed cessationism. Nearly every Pentecostal and charismatic in Britain knew he was their friend. Not only that, but he has turned more of them into Reformed thinkers than anybody in the 20th century. He would be horrified that you dismiss as demonic all contemporary testimonies of experiencing the direct work of the Spirit. According to you, my own baptism with the Spirit was demonic even though it led me to Reformed theology without reading a single word of John Calvin.

Third, to be consistent, if you have got it right, we should counsel new Christians to disregard many Scriptures—for example, those that encourage us to believe Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8); that He shows us when we are on the wrong track (Phil. 3:15); that the Holy Spirit can speak today as He did to Philip (Acts 8:29); or that we should covet earnestly the best gifts (1 Cor. 12:31).

I hope you will consider reading my book *Holy Fire*. It will do you no harm and, just maybe, you might hear God speak to you in a way you never thought possible. I only pray with all my heart that you have not gone too far already. In the second panel discussion at your conference, you actually said, "I know I am wrong somewhere." If so, who would you listen to? Would you not want to know as soon as possible if you have got it wrong on those matters you are so dogmatic about?

If I knew for sure it would be honoring to God, for the sake of sincere Christians who are fence-straddling on cessationism, I would ask that you and I have a civil debate, presidential style, on the issue of cessationism. Could we pray about this? *-R.T. Kendall*

Will You Forgive God?

It's an unthinkable concept—forgiving the One who grants you life—yet countless believers feel betrayed by God. Instead of harboring bitterness toward him, you can learn the truth about walking in total forgiveness.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went. ... [And yet God] gave him no inheritance [there], not even a foot of ground" (Heb. 11:8; Acts 7:5, NIV). God's Word states clearly that the land of Canaan was to be Abraham's inheritance, his possession. But according to Acts 7:5, Abraham did not get it, not even a foot of ground.

The same can be said for all those people of faith described in Hebrews 11. They all were commended for their faith, yet *none of them* received what had been promised (Heb. 11:39).

What? They didn't receive what God promised them? That is what it says.

It must surely have occurred to Abraham that he had been deceived by God. After all, where was the inheritance he had hoped for? Yet it was the outstanding virtue of Abraham that he withstood this temptation to believe God had let him down—a fact that came from faith alone.

Abraham succeeded in breaking the “betrayal barrier”—something each of us must do if we feel God has let us down. I will explain this later in the article.

Still, the fact that Abraham (and others in the Bible) did not receive what had been promised to them begs the question: Does God (at times) betray us? My belief is: No. God does not betray us—ever. It has never happened. It never will happen.

But for some of us, our perception is that we are betrayed. In other words, some of us *feel* betrayed. And, as strange as it may sound, we must forgive God if we feel that He has betrayed us.

It must have been how Abraham felt, having been promised the land of Canaan but getting not even a foot of its ground. Perhaps *disappointed* is the better word. Or, simply, *let down*. I do know that Jeremiah said, “O Lord, you *deceived* me, and I was deceived” (Jer. 20:7, emphasis added).

Why I Felt Betrayed

In my own experience, I have been absolutely certain I heard from God—and can only conclude that, if I did, I was surely betrayed. And yet I do not believe I was betrayed. I repeat: God never betrays us. I do not believe God truly lets us down; we only feel let down. Here's my story:

Many years ago, while I was a pastor in Palmer, Tenn., and attending Trevecca Nazarene University, I began to have

visions. These visions—a dozen or more—came passively and unexpectedly during a period that lasted roughly six months, beginning in late 1955—shortly after when Jesus Christ was made so real to me.

One of my first visions was of my dad sitting in the front row of a large tent in which I was doing the preaching. He was smiling and clearly approving of my ministry. This greatly encouraged me, as I feared he would be unhappy with my recent theological change and different denominational direction that was at hand.

He had named me after his favorite preacher, Dr. R.T. Williams, general superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene; so my dad had great plans for me in that denomination. I knew from that vision, however, that he would be happy with me.

But when I returned home from Trevecca in June 1956, having resigned my church in Palmer, he was displeased and even accused me of breaking with God.

As it happened, that same summer I was part of an evangelistic campaign near my hometown of Ashland, Ky. We purchased a huge tent that seated 2,000.

I also thought this fit the vision. But my dad never came near that tent meeting, and he continued in his outspoken opposition to my new direction.

The tent meeting closed down within a month. We never had more than 30 people or so attend. It was a total failure and a massive embarrassment to me.

I felt betrayed. I had not asked for that vision. It was so real. I was convinced it was from the Holy Spirit. Could it have been?

There were other visions. Some of them were fulfilled; others

were not. They all came to me unsought and seemed credible.

These were not dreams. If they weren't of God, you could have fooled me! They were absolutely real. And yet some were literally fulfilled; others were not. Why?

But I didn't give up. I was determined to break through the betrayal barrier.

If you feel that God betrayed you or grossly let you down, I urge you to achieve the greatest challenge a believer can accept: to break the betrayal barrier. It means to not give up; to keep trusting the same God who promised certain things even though you feel He has not kept His word in some areas. It requires persistent faith (the faith that achieves what God envisages for you)—the faith exemplified in those men and women of Hebrews 11.

Breaking the betrayal barrier is a spiritual achievement. I don't mean to be unfair, but my pastoral experience suggests that not very many people actually break the barrier. Sadly, most never—ever—discover what their inheritance would have been.

It is not that they all reject God. Many keep going to church. Some keep busy doing religious things. Some have important positions in the church, often in leadership. But in their hearts, they are dismayed that God let them down.

Others simply wander back and forth from the church to the world. Some stop praying and reading their Bibles.

But not Abraham. Or Isaac. Or Jacob. Or Moses. Not any of those described in Hebrews 11. What about you? Will you break the betrayal barrier? You can. If you need to, I suggest you do the following:

1. Know that it's God's idea for you to break the betrayal barrier. It is what God Himself very much wants of you. God

often plays hard-to-get. It is said of Hezekiah that the Lord left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart (2 Chron. 32:31). Like it or not, it is one of God's characteristics that His way of drawing you closer to Him is often to do the very thing that puts you off Him.

The next time things go terribly wrong and God hides His face from you, press on all the more. Don't give up. The breakthrough will come and is worth waiting for.

2. Accept this greatest opportunity of all to know Him intimately. Strange as it may seem, the Lord plays hard-to-get because He loves you so much. He wants to know how much you truly want Him; whether or not you will be rebuffed, put off or angry by His keeping a painful distance from you. It has been my experience, however, that any increase of anointing I have had in my 76 years has come through great hardship, extraordinary hurts—and feeling betrayed by the very One I have sought to please. As far as I can tell, whatever anointing I have has come chiefly by my saying, "Yes, Lord," and persisting in faith.

3. Don't complain (God hates it) and do be grateful (God loves it). This is something that cannot be overemphasized. God hates murmuring, grumbling and complaining. It doesn't work if you are trying to get God's attention! Persistent faith must be laced with gratitude. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil. 4:6).

We are commanded to give thanks in all circumstances; not necessarily being thankful *for* them but *in* them (1 Thess. 5:18). Learn to set your heart on replacing grumbling with things you are thankful for. Nothing will change your life like maintaining a spirit of gratitude.

4. Pray and read your Bible more than ever. How much do you pray? You show your esteem of a person by how much time you

give him or her. Be assured, God likes your company. Spend time with Him—the more, the better. It is also how you get to know God's ways, assuming too that you aspire to know His Word—the Bible.

When you feel let down by God, seek Him in His Word. Spend as much time in the Word as you possibly can—any part of it. Keep praying; keep reading your Bible. It is how you get to know God and discover His plan for your life. When you feel let down, pray more than ever. When you feel betrayed, read the Bible more than ever.

5. Walk in the light God gives you. “If we walk in the light ... we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). If you are faithful in what I have suggested, here is what you will discover: God will show you things. For example, He will show you sin you didn't know you had. He will show you ways forward you had not thought about. He will show you new obedience that perhaps is long overdue. Persistent faith will be accompanied with a sense of duty that, when embraced, will put you on the road to breaking the betrayal barrier.

What I Learned About God

I can't predict what it will be like in everyone's situation, but I can testify to what breaking the betrayal barrier has meant to me. In a word: God showed up in a way that was unmistakable. He became absolutely real to me.

This has happened more than once. I can only say that when I feel betrayed—which also has happened more than once—yet don't give up, God has a way of revealing Himself never too late, never too early, but always just on time. The breakthrough leaves me with the feeling I could never truly doubt Him again.

What God has done for me, He will do for you. He is not a respecter of persons; He does not show favoritism (Acts

10:34). I pray that you—if you have felt betrayed by God—will also experience this internal breakthrough.

I stated earlier in this article that not many experience this breakthrough. Why? My opinion is, they give up too soon. Only a few find it, Jesus said (Matt. 7:14); but it need not be the case with you.

God does care how you feel. He knows your frame and mine, remembering always that we are dust (Ps. 103:14). God knows you backward and forward—your past hurts, present aspirations, feelings and dilemmas. He remembers details of your past you have forgotten. He knows exactly what will satisfy you. He knows what will comfort you. He knows what will convince you, what will give you peace. That is the way He is and the way He works.

You will see in the end—when the light breaks through—that He did not betray you after all. He did not desert you. Your feeling let down was part of His plan to get your attention.

If you need more time before you can totally forgive God, He is OK about this. He loves you like you are. He will be there waiting for you. He is not rushing you. He will come through for you. I guarantee it—that is, if you persist in faith. Never, never, never, never give up.

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To hear what Charles Stanley says about being angry with God

[click here.](#)

The Value of Loneliness

In May 1984 Billy Graham spoke at Westminster Chapel. His subject was “loneliness.” He took his text from a strange verse; Psalm 102:6, in the King James Version, in which the psalmist likens himself to an owl in the desert. Graham definitely hit a nerve! There are so many people today who are lonely.

Loneliness is a painful condition, a dreaded state that, given the choice, most people would do anything to avoid. It is enforced solitude.

There is obviously a significant difference between enforced solitude and chosen solitude. Some of us appreciate the bliss of solitude.

Jesus needed to get away from the crowds, and there are some who, by nature, are loners; they love it that way. My friend Robert Amess calls himself “the complete loner,” but he is not lonely.

Discipline: The Path to Joy

☒ *Often we despise the thing that is designed to take us to the next level of blessing and anointing—the chastening of the Lord.*

I remember exactly where I was when the meaning of James 1:2-3 dawned on me. I wasn't at an all-night prayer meeting. I wasn't at the end of a 40-day fast. No, I was at a pizzeria in Kissimmee, Fla., in the summer of 1979, and I had just lost my temper.

I had been looking forward to enjoying a pizza from this particular place. But everything went wrong. First, the pizzas took 45 minutes to prepare. Then, as I carried them to my motel room through the pouring rain, they fell out of their wet paper bag into a puddle of water.

When You Can't Have It Your Way

*DOES GOD EVER ASK HIS SERVANTS
TO WALK WITH HIM IN PLACES THAT ARE UNCOMFORTABLE AND EVEN
UNDESIRABLE?
THE SCRIPTURES AND HISTORY TELL US, YES.*

One

of the most stunning comments I ever heard, almost a throwaway remark,

came from one of the most famous ministers in the world. He said to me,

“R.T., the more God uses me, the less I am able to enjoy it.”

This

may be incomprehensible to some, but I know exactly what he meant. God

has many ways of ensuring that while we enjoy His blessing, we do not

become conceited.

What If I Don't Forgive?

Unforgiveness says three things to God (hint: none of them good).

☒ God

is no fan of an unforgiving spirit—at all. Jesus was clear about it:

“If you do not forgive men their trespasses, your Father will not

forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:15, NKJV). Why does He so hate an

unwillingness to forgive?

·1. It shows an indifference to the greatest thing God did.

This

“greatest thing” was God sending His Son to die on the cross for our

sins. To be forgiven is the most wonderful thing in the world.

But in order to forgive us, God paid a severe price.

I predict that when we get to heaven we will be able to see, little by little, what it meant for God to send His Son to die on a cross. We now see only the tip of the iceberg. We see waves of glory, and these overcome us, but we've seen little.

God did for us what we did not deserve. He therefore wants us to pass this on to others who don't deserve it.

2. We interrupt God's purpose in the world: reconciliation.

God loves reconciliation. He has given the ministry of reconciliation to us, and He wants it to continue.

When we are forgiven, He wants us to pass it on. When we interrupt that, He doesn't like it at all. He sent His Son to die on a cross, effectually calling us by His grace and giving us total forgiveness. But we interrupt that flow by not passing it on.

•3. God hates ingratitude. •

God knows the sins for which He has forgiven us, and He loves a grateful response. Matthew 18 relates the story of a servant who owed a great debt. He fell on his knees before his creditor, his master,

and said,

“Have patience with me, and I will pay you all” (v. 26). The master took pity on him, canceling the debt and letting him go. The master knew the things for which he had forgiven his servant.

But

then that same servant went out and found one of his own servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He grabbed the man and began to choke him, saying, “Pay me what you owe!” (v. 28).

The

fellow servant did exactly what he himself had done; he fell on his knees and said, “Please forgive me. I will pay you back.”

But

the one who had been forgiven a much greater debt refused to extend forgiveness, and he threw his servant into prison. To think there could be such ingratitude!

Word eventually reached the original master, and the unforgiving servant was also thrown into debtor’s prison.

Jesus

then added, “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” (Matt. 18:35).

God

knows what we have done. He knows the sins for which He has forgiven

us, the things that no one else will ever hear about. If we turn around and say, “I can’t forgive that person for what he has done,” God doesn’t like that at all. He hates ingratitude.

His Faith and Our Faith

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” **–Romans 1:17**

It is one thing for us to believe it once and be electrified and be thrilled, to have our world turned upside down, but quite another to keep believing it. The devil will come alongside and tell you that it can’t be true, and he appeals to our natural reasoning. He appeals to what we know to be true about ourselves, that we are sinners. If he can, he will bring us right back to our bondage.

Keep No Record of Wrongs

Though seemingly impossible, you can forgive—completely—and finally let go of the past

I received a heartrending letter from a couple who had heard me teach on the subject of total forgiveness a few years ago. They told me what their son-in-law had done to their daughter and grandchildren. It was an awful story. "Are you saying we must totally forgive our son-in-law?" they asked.

That was a hard question to answer. But I had to tell them the truth: Yes, they must learn to forgive. My heart went out to them. I can only imagine the pain they have experienced. But total forgiveness is the only way they will ever find freedom and release from the offense.

I have received many other letters that describe everything from infidelity to incest to rape to lying and slander. It is enough to make me consider very carefully indeed what I preach and write. People experience real pain when they or someone they love is hurt by another person. It is often harder to forgive when the one who has been hurt is someone you love deeply, especially your child. I find it much easier to forgive what people have said or done to me personally than what they say or do to my children.

It is not unlike Corrie ten Boom's having to forgive the prison guard who was so cruel to her sister Betsie. Corrie saw this man viciously abuse her sister—who died shortly afterward—when both of them were in prison for protecting Jews in Holland during World War II. Years later, Corrie was seated on the platform of a church, preparing to speak in a service, when she spotted this very man in the audience. She struggled in her heart. She prayed in desperation for God to fill her heart with the love of Jesus. He did, but forgiveness became even more of a challenge when, after the service, this guard rather glibly said, in so many words, how good God is to forgive all of us. She wondered how sorry he was.

It is often easier, then, it seems to me, to forgive what is done to us personally than what is done to those we love. But it is still very hard to forgive those who have hurt us

directly, especially when they do not feel the slightest twinge of conscience. If our offender would put on at least some symbolic show of repentance, it would be much easier for us to forgive them.

Love Doesn't Keep Score

Love is a choice. It is an act of the will. The great love chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, is a perfect demonstration of the cause and effect of total forgiveness. The apex of this wonderful passage is the phrase found in verse 5: Love "keeps no record of wrongs" (NIV). The Greek word that is translated as "no record" is *logizomai*, which means to not reckon or impute. Keeping a record of wrongs is also an act of the will—a choice not to love—and it is the more natural, easy choice.

A key to letting go of the record of wrongs and achieving total forgiveness lies in the control of the tongue. The words we say can cause the catastrophe to which James refers: "Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell" (James 3:5-6, NKJV).

The irony is that our words, instead of helping us "get something off our chest," can cause an uncontrollable fire to erupt and incinerate what remains inside us. And instead of that fire subsiding, it doubles, intensifies and gets a thousand times worse in the end. It is a satanic victory, ultimately traceable to our keeping a record of wrongs.

How, then, do we deal with our tongue? Two things, I believe, will help:

- When a person does wrong, refuse to point it out to the person.

- When a person does wrong, refuse to point it out to others.

If this were to become a more popular lifestyle, the number of records kept would plummet! By refusing to continually bring up the hurt in conversations, the record of that hurt would eventually disappear.

This principle also applies to imaginary conversations—those internal dialogues with yourself in which you can't get what they did off your mind. You may fantasize what you will say or do to them, or what you might tell other people about them. This conversation may go on and on—and hours and days may pass when you neither accomplish anything nor feel any better!

One day at about 11 p.m., as I was going to bed, I found myself having a conversation in my head about someone. I imagined I had the opportunity to spill the beans about this person. I pictured the scenario in great detail. I made myself look good and the other person look bad. But the Holy Spirit—miraculously—got into the matter. I heard Him say to me, “You can get a victory right now if you refuse to think about clearing your name.”

Even though the conversation existed only in my mind, I realized that I had an opportunity to triumph—in my spirit! It was a pivotal moment because it was as if we were real and I was refusing to say anything at all about the person.

By doing that I achieved victory. A peace entered my heart, and I knew then and there that I must never again enter into those imaginary conversations—unless I refused to vindicate myself.

For those who find such conversations therapeutic, I would only remind you to let your thoughts be positive and wholesome. Keep no record of wrongs in your thoughts, and you will be less likely to expose such records by your words.

When I am tempted to say something negative and I refuse to speak, I can often feel the release of the Holy Spirit in my heart. It is as if God says to me, "Well done." It is a very good feeling! After all, Jesus is touched with our weaknesses (see Heb. 4:15), and He also lets us feel His joy when we overcome them! He rewards us with an incredible peace and the witness of the Spirit in our hearts.

Don't Forget Yourself

It's one thing to have the breakthrough regarding others—totally forgiving them and destroying the record of their wrongs. It is quite another to experience the greater breakthrough—total forgiveness of ourselves.

Forgiving yourself means to experience the love that keeps no record of your own wrongs. This form of love is a choice, as we have seen, and to cross over to the place where we choose to forgive ourselves is no small step.

So many Christians say: "I can forgive others, but how can I ever forget what I have done? I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself."

We must remember that forgiving ourselves is also a lifelong commitment. In precisely the same way that I must forgive others every single day—which is why I read Luke 6:37 daily—I must also forgive myself.

Forgiving ourselves is also a daily process. We may wake up each day with the awareness of past mistakes and failures—and fervently wish that we could turn the clock back and start all over. We may have feelings of guilt—or pseudoguilt if our sins have been placed under the blood of Christ. But our enemy, the devil, loves to move in and take advantage of our thoughts. That's why forgiving ourselves is as important as forgiving an enemy.

Forgiving yourself may bring about the breakthrough you have been looking for. It could set you free in ways you've never before experienced.

This is because we have been afraid to forgive ourselves. We cling to fear as if it were a thing of value. The truth is, this kind of fear is no friend but rather a fierce enemy. The very breath of Satan is behind the fear of forgiving ourselves.

Jesus knows that many of us have this problem. This is a further reason He turned up unexpectedly after His resurrection where, behind closed doors, the disciples were assembled both in terror and in guilt. Jesus not only wanted them to know they were totally forgiven, but He also wanted them to forgive themselves.

Instead of reminding them of what they had done, He spoke to them as if nothing had happened. He said, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21).

This gave them dignity. It showed them that nothing had occurred that would change Jesus' plans and strategy for them. He had already sent a signal to Peter, who had denied knowing Jesus, through the angel who said, "But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you" (Mark 16:7).

And yet all of them had "forsook Him and fled" (Matt. 26:56). After His crucifixion, they felt utterly unworthy. And then the risen Lord showed up and assured them of a future ministry!

I have often thought that one of the reasons Peter was so effective on Pentecost was that he was keenly aware of having been forgiven. He knew full well that, just a few weeks before, he had denied Jesus to a little servant girl! He would never forget the look on Jesus' face when the rooster crowed and that he "went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62). It

was real antidote to self-righteousness!

When Peter preached to his fellow Jews on Pentecost, there was no trace of smugness or condescension. Knowing he was a forgiven sinner kept him from usurping God's glory on that day. God alone received the glory for those 3,000 conversions.

I remember one Sunday morning just before I was to preach at the 11 o'clock service. I had an argument with my wife, Louise. I should never have done it, but I stormed out, slamming the door in her face. Before I knew it, I was bowing my head on the upper platform at Westminster Chapel before several hundred people.

I don't know what they were thinking, but I know what I was thinking: I should not be here. I have no right to be here. Lord, how on earth could You use me today? I am not fit to be in this pulpit.

It was too late to send a note to Louise saying, "I'm sorry." There was no way to resolve the situation at that time. I could only ask God for mercy and try my best to forgive myself. I assumed I was about to deliver the biggest flop of a sermon in the history of Westminster Chapel. Never in my life had I felt so unworthy.

But when I stood up to preach, I was not prepared for the help I received. God simply undergirded me and enabled me to preach as well as I ever had!

That is partly why I think Peter was so successful on Pentecost. When we are emptied of all self-righteousness and pride we enable God to move in and through us.

Let the Past Be ... the Past

The sweet consequence of not keeping a record of all wrongs is that we let go of the past and its effect on the present. We

cast our care on God and rely on Him to restore the wasted years and to cause everything to turn out for good.

We find ourselves, almost miraculously, accepting ourselves as we are (just as God does) with all our failures (just as God does), while knowing our potential to make more mistakes. God never becomes disillusioned with us; He loves us and knows us inside out.

Moses had a past. He was a murderer (see Ex. 2:11–12). But years later he would proclaim the eighth commandment: “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13). David had a past, but he also had a future after his shame: “Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You,” he wrote (Ps. 51:13). Jonah deliberately ran from God, but he was still used in an astonishing revival (see Jon. 3).

Peter’s disgrace—denying Jesus—did not abort God’s plans for him. But all these men had to forgive themselves before they could move into the ministry God had planned for them.

Can you do that? Having forgiven others, it is time to forgive yourself. That is exactly what God wants of you and me.

It is long overdue: Let the past be past—at last.

R.T. Kendall was the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London for 25 years and is the author of more than 40 books, including his latest release, Jealousy: The Sin No One Talks About. For more information, visit his website at .

Watch R.T. Kendall share how to totally forgive someone who has offended you at