

# The Unlimited Power of an Intimate Relationship With Christ

Dr. Sharon Mancha is well aware of the “distractions” and trials that can interrupt even the most devoted believer’s relationship with Christ. Dr. Mancha lost both her husband of 38 years and her father in the same two-week period earlier this year.

And then, along came the dreaded coronavirus. But, Dr. Mancha says, those are the times, more than ever, when Christians must press in to God and strengthen their intimacy with their Creator.

It is a principle Dr. Mancha teaches on her podcast, *The Power of Intimacy with Christ*, to empower believers to realize their life calling.

“What I’d like to share with people are the benefits of an intimate relationship with Christ,” Dr. Mancha told Dr. Steve Greene on a recent episode of *Greenelines* on the Charisma Podcast Network. “I think that it is so important for people to understand that this is not a duty or a task or a chore. This is actually a lifeline.

“It was a divine fulfillment of God’s plan when Christ came and wanted to reconcile man back into an intimate relationship with God. When Adam and Eve were in the garden, they lost some of those benefits like having a heart-to-heart conversation with God and having unlimited access to the Lord.

“Now, we can have those heart-to-heart conversations with God where we can get a revelation of self and the will of God for our lives. We know we’re on a divine path, and we get guidance from the Holy Spirit for successful living. These are all

benefits: God's presence in our lives and daily activities and its presence and protection. Anointing is formed and grown out of intimacy with God. Learning how to discern God's voice comes out of intimacy, and so much more. You can't trade what you get in the natural for what's available for you in the spiritual. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul or to be a Christian and live beneath your privilege?"

For more about Dr. Mancha's ministry, listen to this entire podcast and tune in to *The Power of Intimacy with Christ* on the Charisma Podcast Network.

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## **Why Not All Prophets' Ministries Are the Same—And Shouldn't Be**

I believe that just like there are different types of people, there are also different types of prophets. There are prophets of judgment, edification, exhortation, comfort and so on.

Jeremiah was referred to as the weeping prophet. John the Baptist was known for calling the people to repent. Anna the Prophetess was known as a worshipper (Luke 2:37). Nathan was a prophet of council, especially to those in authority (King David).

All were prophets, but their functionality and purpose were

not the same. Prophets are called to distinct areas that line up with their expertise and experience. I believe that they are groomed by God to walk in specific mandates. Where one is quick to confront, another may be called to pray. While a certain prophet may be led into the wilderness for ministry, another is placed in position within the king's council. They are all prophets, but they have different assignments and personalities.

## **Balance in Ministry**

We must always remember that just like there are different types of churches, there are different types of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. They all have distinct personalities and functions.

For example, some prophets are judgment-based ("Repent; the kingdom of God is at hand!" types). Others are encouragement-based ("Exhort, edify and comfort" types). Neither one is wrong—just different from one another, despite the fact that their calling is the same.

When we put forth our way of doing prophetic ministry on others as the "correct way," it reeks of arrogance and religion. To think that every prophet has to be hard, or every one encouraging, is a false assumption. I've seen prophets who are almost always angry, and I've seen others who are overwhelmingly encouraging. The key to both is balance.

Balance both in the office (gift) and the church. The problem is that many people don't want to hear the true gospel in churches. When it's preached in its full power, many will leave, saying that you're being too hard on them. Ask me how I know! The key to ministry is balance. There's a time for ministering repentance and such, but there's also a time for encouragement and blessings.

## **Be Balanced Personally**

Proverbs 11:1 talks about true and false balances. I had to learn this. When I first started, repentance was all I preached. I was consistently telling people that they were going to hell if they didn't get it right with God. "Repent!" was one of my most used words.

The result, surprisingly, was that sin increased in the church. People said I was being too hard and some left the church. I guess that I was expressing my prophetic side over my pastoral aspect. This taught me about balance and using uplifting words to get my points across concerning repentance.

Medicine goes down much more easily when sweetness is added. Just ask any kid that you know!

### **Decreed Blessings**

Just because one decrees blessings over or above curses, doesn't mean that they are false. To say otherwise or speak negatively about prophets who are not always negative is arrogance. It is establishing their single voice as the one of the few or only true one that speaks on behalf of the Lord.

I seem to remember a prophet in the Bible thinking that he was the only one who hadn't bowed to a false god. The Lord quickly reminded him that he wasn't the only one who hadn't. Many others hadn't as well.

There are some prophets today who have a similar mindset. Prophets of God, you're not the only one. As prophets and prophetic people, we cannot afford to be divisive at the present moment. Yet some prophetic voices are causing division. They do this by demonizing others and their associations, while sanctifying themselves and their affiliations.

### **Different Parts of a Whole**

True prophetic ministries represent different parts of a

whole. In the Gospels, there are different accounts based on personal perspectives, but all are true. Scripture lets us know that we see in part.

Each prophet gives a different piece of the puzzle. When the puzzle is complete, it gives us a whole picture. While some saw COVID-19 and others didn't, it doesn't make them false. I, for one, still believe that God will cause His people to be fruitful in a land of affliction. For many of you, I believe He's already done this. I also believe that He will continue to.

### **Not the Only One**

"I'm the only one" prophets hide under a guise of humility, constantly pointing the finger at others, but never themselves. Their messages are full of self-centered jargon disguised as modesty. What I see is a desire for bigger platforms over a true love or concern for the people of God. Being overly critical of others is not a sign of humility, but conceit.

### **Prophets Have to Fight Being Consistently Negative**

A prophet's natural proclivity is to be negative. I had to learn how to encourage through words of knowledge, prophecy and wisdom. It was difficult, initially. I also had to learn balance when dealing with the prophetic. Even when things look terrible, I'm going to decree an end to the terror.

If someone is ill, I'm going to speak healing. I strongly believe that the Lord graciously honors my prophetic decrees and allows many of them to come to pass. So even in the greatest darkness, I'm going to see and speak light. Selah!  
{eoa}

*Dr. John Veal is the senior pastor/prophet of Enduring Faith Christian Center and the CEO of John Veal Ministries Inc. He is passionate about pursuing God's mandate to preach, teach,*

*impart and activate people within the prophetic. John is a regular contributor to Charisma Magazine online, The Elijah List, IMAG, Spirit Fuel, Reformation Today and others. John has been featured on various media outlets, including appearances on Sid Roth's It's Supernatural, Something More and Elijah Streams. Dr. Veal is a highly sought-after conference speaker due to his uncanny prophetic accuracy, humor, candor and unconventional preaching style. He has traveled the nations, presenting myriad prophetic training and ministry. John currently resides in Chicago, Illinois, with his wife, Elisa, and their three children. For more about Dr. Veal, visit .*

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## **Messianic Rabbi: How Yeshua Freed Israel From Quarantine**

Nearly every conversation I have had over the past two months or so has included a statement that incorporated the word "after," such as: "After the quarantine, what will you do first?" or "I can't wait until after the quarantine when I can get a haircut" or "I can't wait until after the quarantine when I can hug people again."

But the phrase spoken most often seems to be: "I can't wait until after the quarantine when things return to the way they were—normal."

During this time when we couldn't go out to eat, couldn't go to movies, couldn't visit with friends and couldn't gather all together for worship, I, like most of the people around the

globe, have had some time to think. This is mostly because thinking is one of the few things that the quarantine didn't place a limit upon.

As I thought about the statements listed above, I began to think about the word "after." This simple word is one of the most powerful words in the English language. It holds within its definition hope and promise.

Yet of the promises inherent is a promise that scares many of us. The word "after" carries within its two syllables the idea of change. You cannot have an *after* unless change is taking place. These thoughts brought me to a series of verses found in Leviticus 16:1-2 (TLV):

"Then Adonai spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they approached the presence of Adonai and died. Adonai said to Moses, 'Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holiest Place behind the curtain—before the atonement cover which is on the Ark—so that he would not die. For I will be appearing in the cloud over the atonement cover.'"

These verses tell of one of the saddest moments in the Torah. To understand what is taking place, you would have to turn a few pages back in your Bible to Leviticus 10 where Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu enter the Holy Place and offer strange fire. The result of their actions of disobedience is fire coming from the presence of G-D and consuming them instantly. Six chapters later, we find that their actions had a further consequence.

Up until that time, Aaron could enter the Holy of Holies anytime he wanted to spend time with G-D. But, after the death of Nadab and Abihu, that changed and now Aaron could only enter into the Holy Place when the cloud of G-D's presence appeared upon the ark, or atonement cover.

Just imagine for a moment what a tragic "after" this was to

Aaron. Not only had his sons died because of their disobedience, but after their death, Aaron was quarantined from the Holy of Holies. From that moment on, things were different. There was a significant and overwhelmingly sad change that had taken place.

Aaron's freedom to enter into G-D's presence for fellowship had been removed. This is one of the most significant and difficult "afters" in the Bible. This "after" remains the "new normal" for nearly 1,500 years.

However, about 1,500 years after Aaron experienced his "after," Israel experienced a new "after" that we read about in the book of Hebrews 10:19-20:

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have boldness to enter into the Holies by the blood of Yeshua. He inaugurated a new and living way for us through the curtain—that is, His flesh."

You see, because of Aaron's son's disobedience, Aaron and all the other priests of Israel experienced their "after" and were quarantined from the Holy of Holies. This horrible "after" was reversed because of the obedience of Yeshua, G-D's Son. After His death, G-D restored our freedom to enter boldly into the Holies. While Aaron's "after" was one of the saddest in history, our "after" was the most glorious. Yeshua's "after" set you and I free to enter into the very presence of G-D 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

This is confirmed in 1 Peter 2:9:

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

And the restoring of the promise made in Exodus 19:

"So as for you, you will be to Me a kingdom of kohanim and a

holy nation.’ These are the words which you are to speak to Bnei-Yisrael.” {eoa}

**Eric Tokajer** is author of *With Me in Paradise, Transient Singularity, OY! How Did I Get Here?: Thirty-One Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before Entering Ministry, #ManWisdom: With Eric Tokajer, Jesus Is to Christianity as Pasta Is to Italians and Galatians in Context.*

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## **Prophecy: The Lord Says, ‘Push Down the Gates of Hell’**

The Spirit of the Lord would say to you this day, “Church, you are loosed from the bondage of this world. I did not bind your hands or gag your mouth. You have allowed the enemy to do that. But I say, ‘No more!’

“I created you to win every battle that confronts you. I say, ‘I back you every step of the way.’ You are not the tail, but the head on this earth. Trust Me; lean not onto your own understanding. Step forward and take the step of faith needed in these last days.

“Though the enemy kicks and screams against you, what is that to you? Have I not told you in My Word that he is the accuser of the brethren, falsely accusing night and day? But I have given you all of My authority over that serpent of old.

“I say, rise up, be not afraid, be bold and do not allow your hands to be tied on this earth. Break out in the power of My

might; be the mighty warriors I destined you to be.

“Open up your mouth and tell them around you that I love them, and I am coming soon. And they have a decision to make—either they are for Me, or they are against Me.

“Keep My praise on your lips morning, noon and night. I say to you, ‘Truly you do not understand the hour that you are in.’

“Don’t hold back. Push the gates of hell down, and release as many as you can from the strongholds on this earth. Do not question the authority that I have given to you on this earth to fulfill the Great Commission.

“So little time is left to gather them in. Bring as many to Me that will come.

“Don’t prejudge their decision—just give out the invitation to them in love.” {eoa}

**Becky Dvorak**, *Destiny Image* author of *DARE to Believe*, *Greater Than Magic*, *The Healing Creed*, *The Prophetic and Healing Power of Your Words* and *Conquering the Spirit of Death*, content partner with *Charisma*, and guest on Sid Roth’s “It’s Supernatural!” TV show, and on Today With Marilyn & Sarah TV show (*Marilyn Hickey Ministries*), is a prophetess and healing evangelist, conducting healing services, seminars and conferences globally.

For the original article, visit .

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# Spirit-Led Prayer Movement Creates Firestorm Among Hospital Workers

A prayer movement has begun in the Norfolk/Virginia Beach community. A group of friends I am privileged to be part of and a founding member of Firestorm United are equipping people to do what Jesus did.

And I recently wrote an article on how I saw COVID-19 furious at the prayers of the saints on the first day my great friend, Scott Gilbert, led the team to pray at a local hospital.

I am excited to report that God is moving! One of the nurses we prayed and prophesied over is praying over patients. She is telling many people about what God did for her that day in an act of love through prayer and words of knowledge. Many other people are joining with the team praying and worshipping in the hospital parking lots, in a traveling circuit of the Hampton Roads hospitals.

One hospital plays "Don't Stop Believing" by Journey every time a COVID-19 patient is discharged. And the team was captured on video in what I believe is a prophetic act when a patient was being released.

Jessica Brezina shared with me, "While we were at a hospital worshipping a lady pulled up and parked a few spots away from us. She just sat in her car but immediately I felt the Holy Spirit highlighting her to me and wanted me to talk to her. As I went over to her I saw her car door was ajar and she had her palms up and was worshipping. I carefully walked over to her and asked if I can pray for her and that I noticed she was crying. She said that the Holy Spirit led her there to pray for the doctors, nurses and patients. And when she pulled up she saw us there praying and worshipping. And she was

overwhelmed by the love of God. She at first questioned why God was leading her to go to the hospital to pray. One of her first questions was to ask what church our group was from, but I explained to her that we are from many churches and are there to represent Jesus as the body of Christ.”

Victoria Pevarnik said, “During intercession I was praying for the hospital workers to be bold and filled with the Holy Spirit in sharing their faith and walking in power. Then one of the workers came out and shared how she tries to be the light and wants to encourage all the other workers to do the same.” She continued saying, “We had the opportunity to pray for a few workers and EMT, and others came to us asking to receive prayer.”

And Scott Gilbert, who goes daily to the hospitals to pray and lead teams, has testified to seeing God heal a security guard’s knee. Word is spreading as numerous news outlets are reaching out to share what God is doing.

The Firestorm United group he leads keeps growing locally, and there are many other groups around the nation doing the same, which the Holy Spirit started spontaneously. There is a firestorm prayer movement here in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, but also around the world.

Listen to true stories of God healing people from COVID-19 on my *Adventures in the Spirit* podcast. {eoa}

**Jared Laskey**, ., M.A. Christian ministry, is the founder of *Fireborn Ministries* and host of the *Adventures in the Spirit* podcast. He lives to see Jesus awaken this generation to the power of the Holy Spirit. Jared loves teaching people how to hear God. He has recently published the *Spirit Empowered Journal*, available on Amazon, and a mini e-course, *Fellowship with the Holy Spirit*. His testimony of how God supernaturally healed him of PTSD is in Joan Hunter’s new book, *Miracles for Veterans*.

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# What COVID-19 Restrictions Could Mean Legally for the Church's Future

As a pastor, Sam Rohrer, without question, believes in the authority of Scripture. And because of that, he says, he believes God's Word holds all the answers for the cultural needs of this nation.

As president of the American Pastors Network, Rohrer is using his God-given biblical authority to help Christians and church leaders understand their rights and the rights of the church, especially as related to governmental restrictions set down during the COVID-19 pandemic.

He asks the question, "What truth should we seek when we are told we cannot meet as a church body because of these restrictions?"

"People are being put in positions of having to decide on things that have never confronted them before," Rohrer tells Dr. Steve Greene on a recent episode of *Greenelines* on the Charisma Podcast Network. "We, as a people, don't know how to go about making good decisions. And I believe there are two parts to it.

"There's God's moral law, and there is that which is universally established, the law that governs the people. Our rights come from God, our Creator—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That's private property," he says. "All of those things are found in the Constitution, and they are founded in biblical truth and biblical precedent. So, in making a decision, we have to first say, 'What does the Bible

say by command or by principle?’ And then, as it affects us in the culture, now we’re stepping into the realm of civil authority. We have to look to the highest law in that area, and that happens to be our Constitution. ...

“The Constitution is 100% consistent in every way with biblical truth. Those two walk together—the highest moral law and the highest constitutional law. Take God out of the Constitution, and it cannot stand. You throw out the Constitution, and you have thrown out God. You’ve got those in office saying, ‘Church, you cannot meet physically.’ As church leaders, we have to walk through and say, ‘What do we do about this? Is it right? Is it constitutional? Is it biblical?’

“They’re saying, ‘You cannot meet as a church anymore because there’s a health factor risk. But we’re going to let the tavern open down the street or a movie theater.’ When that happens, it becomes unconstitutional.”

For more about the church’s constitutional rights with Sam Rohrer, listen to the entire podcast.

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## **How Christian Marriages Can Thrive Through COVID-19**

Have you seen the jokes or humorous remarks on television or in social media about the possibility of an American baby boom nine months from now?

A missionary friend, who is serving Jesus in Japan, has written to her supporters about a surprising new phrase that has been coined there: “Corona Divorce.” It seems that due to

the COVID-19 quarantines, couples who are usually too busy working to spend consistent time together are now “safer-at-home” 24/7 and it is causing a lot of marital and family stress.

She says, “Marital counseling is practically nonexistent here, but churches are one of the few places where couples can receive help and advice.” She asks for prayer that Christian pastors and mature believers can help Japanese marriages “to be healed and restored.”

### **Corona Marriages**

Unfortunately, this social liability is not just affecting marriages in Japan. The human propensity for selfishness and sin makes this a universal problem as well. Some spouses may feel smothered in their newly found togetherness. Others may be leaders at work, but at home, their roles and expectations don't mix or match well with the spouse's.

The Wuhan coronavirus is actually only the latest of many, in a family of viruses that has a similar, microscopic appearance of a crown, with spikes surrounding its edge. The word “corona” means *crown* in Latin and modern romance languages, and gives this virus its name.

Perhaps we can let that crown imagery prompt us to consider what King Jesus would have believers think, say and do in this time of “Corona Marriages,” with its extended personal proximity with our spouses and family members.

### **Christian Marriages**

Christian believers are to found their marriages on mutual submission, “out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21, NIV). This is to be expressed by Christlike “love” and “respect” (v. 33). We'll explore those thoughts and themes next time, in part two. For now, let's focus on marital insights from the “Great Love Chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13.

Love is both a noun and a verb. It can express an emotion or describe an action or attitude. The lack of love can make otherwise commendable things to be without real value or virtue (13:1-3). Theologians teach, "Love always works for the highest good of the object of its affection."

The apostle Paul describes love as something that can be demonstrated with words or deeds:

"Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone, you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him" (1 Cor. 13:4-7, TLB).

### **Loving With Words**

Our manner of speech is as important as the words themselves. Proverbs 15:1 guides us to avoid quarrels and harsh words by using gentle, loving responses. Verses 3-5 of the "Love Chapter" describe more than a dozen positive factors of communication that are motivated by "hardly even notic[ing] when others do [us] wrong."

Learning to compliment our spouse (especially in front of others) and keeping our private conversations current, never bringing up old issues or "keeping score," can demonstrate our love and acceptance for "the object of our affections" with our words.

### **Loving With Deeds**

Verse 5 of the "Love Chapter" speaks of "kindness," which can relate to our manner of speech as well as specific actions or deeds. Kindness can be one of love's strongest voices!

Likewise, courteous or “court-like” actions toward our spouses can visually demonstrate our love to them and to others, even our children. Treat your spouse as your king or queen!

Finally, in this brief review, loving and unselfish actions can demonstrate our true affection for our spouse. Verse 7 speaks of showing our love by believing in our spouse and being loyal and unselfishly willing to defend them. When others might tear them down, we can lift them up with our loving affirmations and actions.

Loving in words or deeds requires a conscious and determined effort. It doesn't come naturally to selfish humans. But, we can do it through the power of the Holy Spirit, who is given to reside within us, to transform our thoughts, words and deeds. Romans 5:5 says, “We know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love.”

### **Too Much Togetherness?**

Struggling “Corona Marriages” exist where one or both partners selfishly think and act in ways that are something less than the marriage vows they made before God and “these witnesses,” to “love, honor and cherish” each other.

Growing Christian marriages survive and can thrive by following Paul's advice to the Philippians:

“Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about” (Phil. 4:8). {eoa}

*Ordained to the ministry in 1969, Gary Curtis is a graduate of LIFE Bible College at Los Angeles (soon to become Life Pacific University at San Dimas, California). He has taken graduate courses at Trinity College in Deerfield, Illinois, and Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. Gary served as part of the*

*pastoral staff of The Church on The Way, the First Foursquare Church of Van Nuys, California, for 27 years (1988-2015); and served for the last 13 years as the vice president of Life on The Way Communications Inc., the church's not-for-profit media outreach. Now retired, Gary and his wife have been married for 50 years and live in Southern California. They have two married daughters and five grandchildren.*

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## **Why COVID-19 Will Spark a 'Great Awakening of Repentance'**

Curt Landry is aware of the toll COVID-19 has taken on churches in America and worldwide. Not being able to meet for services and have fellowship with others has been difficult, to say the least.

And Landry, like others, has observed the social distancing restrictions with honor. But through it all, God has shown the founder of Curt Landry Ministries what this challenging time will mean for believers. When it's all over, God's glory will shine through, and the church will be much better for it.

"We need to put God first because it's the Blood of Jesus and the names of God in the courts of heaven that are going to cancel this virus," Landry told Dr. Steve Greene on a recent episode of *Greenelines* on the Charisma Podcast Network. "And that's going to come from the church. I want to decree this, that your church and house of David, that we are an essential

business. We're like the hospital. You may have to go into a hospital for medical treatment, but you can get healed supernaturally in the house of God.

"And it starts with repentance. I believe we are going to have a great awakening of repentance that's going to start when churches open. A lot of pastors are like me, saying, "I'm not exactly sure how we are going to do this." But I think you're going to see more people wearing masks lying on the floor of your church crying out to God, being transformed and being healed. And they're going to say, 'Who would have ever known I had to lie on the floor with a mask to find the Holy Ghost? ...

"You are in one of three zones. You're either in the fear zone and you're reacting; you're in the learning zone and you're reflecting; or you're in the growth zone and you're ready to repent and change. Identify your zone and say these words: 'Father God, I am coming out of fear and I'm coming out of anxiety, and I am teachable. Lord, reveal to me my purpose. Let the passion and the fire of the Holy Spirit come and ignite me out of anxiety and fear. Lord, I will learn Your principles and I will practice them, and I will put people and their value ahead of mine. I will align with You as the true leader. I will be calm, confident. I will have clarity and competence, and I will reflect the excellence of the Lord. I decree and declare, let it be recorded in the courts of heaven, that the coronavirus did not ground me with fear, but the Lord crowned me with His glory. The best in my life is yet to come.'"

For more of Curt Landry's thoughts about what will happen in the church post-coronavirus, listen to the entire podcast.

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# Anne Graham Lotz: How to Find God's Glory in the COVID-19 Battle

The coronavirus pandemic this spring has put everyone in a hard place.

Many of us have been either locked down in our homes, quarantined or even hospitalized. Businesses, restaurants and beaches have closed; schools and churches have moved online; even legislators are contemplating voting from home, as we are all urged to keep a social distance from each other in order to protect ourselves from this highly contagious, deadly disease.

The hosts for my upcoming speaking engagements have canceled their events; my doctors have canceled my appointments; and I find that I too am isolated. I've been reminded of a dramatic scene in the Old Testament. When Moses asked God to show him His glory, God agreed, but specified that Moses would only be allowed to see the back side. In other words, Moses would only see God's glory as he looked back. He placed Moses in the cleft of a rock ... in a hard place ... as He covered Moses with His hand, to reassure him of His presence. Then God removed His hand, and Moses must have felt abandoned. Forsaken. Isolated. Alone.

But it was just then that God caused His glory to pass by Moses. God's glory was not a shining cloud, but a fresh revelation of His character: "The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in goodness and truth,

keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin'" (Ex. 34:6-7).

In the past four years, I, too, have been placed in the "cleft of a rock." A hard place. My husband's sudden, unexpected death; my father's death three years later; my diagnosis of cancer and the subsequent surgery and follow-up treatments have been personally and equally as hard as the place in which we now find ourselves as a nation. But ...

As I have looked back, I have seen God's glory. I have experienced God's faithfulness to meet my needs, His grace to pour out His blessings through family and friends, His strength to enable me to endure triumphantly and His goodness to bring me through one day at a time. The vision of His glory enabled me to maintain my joy, my inner peace and the steadfast hope that God was in control and would work out all things for my good.

In what hard place has God placed you? Do you find yourself today in "the cleft of a rock"? Your situation may be directly related to the coronavirus, or it may have nothing at all to do with it. But do you feel isolated from others, lonely, abandoned as you wonder where God is?

If you are in a hard place, ask God to show you His glory. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you in a fresh, personal way. He promises that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. So "Let us draw near [to God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22).

Who knows? As you look back on the hard place in which you find yourself, you may discover that it actually has been the place of your greatest blessing because it was there that you experienced a fresh encounter with the living God. {eoa}

*Called "the best preacher in the family" by her father, Billy Graham, Anne Graham Lotz speaks around the globe with the wisdom and authority of years spent studying God's Word. The*

New York Times *named Anne one of the five most influential evangelists of her generation. She's been profiled on 60 Minutes and has appeared on TV programs such as Larry King Live, The Today Show and Hannity Live. Her Just Give Me Jesus revivals have been held in more than 30 cities in 12 different countries, to hundreds of thousands of attendees.*

*For the original article, visit .*

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## 5 Ways You Should Not Approach Reading the Bible

I've been reading the Bible almost every day for decades. I firmly believe that *any* listening and reading of Scripture is better than none at all, but I do think that some of the ways I've read the Bible have ended up restricting my own spiritual growth.

How can that be? Across those decades, I've also learned some of the ways *not* to approach the Bible. Hopefully, what I share with you here can help you avoid some of the same pitfalls.

This list isn't exhaustive, but perhaps it can serve as a catalyst for you to explore the way you think about your own Bible reading. If you find you've fallen into one of the same traps I have, just tell God that you're sorry, ask Him to help you to make the necessary adjustments and then keep reading!

1. **Feeling guilty:** I always felt like "good Christians" read the Bible, so I probably should too. I wanted God

to like me, so I would read the Bible out of trying to please God, out of a kind of guilt. I tended to see God as either punitive (“If I don’t read, God will be mad at me”) or almost like He was a “lucky charm” (“If I read, God will reward me”). Neither of these approaches really helped me grow closer to God and grow spiritually.

At its core, engaging Scripture is a relational process. We come to a loving God through the Scriptures because we want to know Him, to understand what is true and to be changed into the person He created us to be. Approaching anybody out of a sense of trying to win them over or because of guilt really limits the depth that relationship can reach. The same is true of approaching God. If we’re trying to win Him over through reading the Bible or if we read simply because we feel guilty, we won’t be drawing closer to God.

Guilt in my life is a poor motivator—the results don’t last or give me life. Of course, real guilt is important because guilt forces us to see that we’re sinners who need God’s forgiveness. However, if you approach the Bible only out of a sense of guilt, you will not be prepared to fully engage the God who loves you so much that He sent His Son to die for you. Love of God is the motivator that keeps me coming to the Bible each day. I love Him and want to spend time with Him. Reading the Bible has become a “must” and not just an “ought.” It helps me to remember that I’m not doing God a favor by spending time in the Bible; instead, He has done me a favor by giving the Bible as the gracious means of knowing Him.

**2. Looking to find just a devotional thought:** I’ve also spent a fair amount of time approaching the Bible for a “devotional thought” for the day. I’d come to Scripture for a quick, happy thought that would be an encouragement for my day—maybe something tied to a nice moral story to make me a better person—but hopefully nothing too intrusive on my comfortable life.

But the Bible never presents itself as warm and fuzzy. Hebrews 4:12 tells us, "For the word of God is alive, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart." Treating God's Word like a warm and cuddly toy when it is really a double-edged sword (or a fire and a hammer, as in Jeremiah 23:29) is condescending, perhaps even dangerous.

So now I try to come to the Bible ready to be challenged, to be asked to change and to be brought to my knees. Perhaps what God is often doing for us in the Bible is coaching us, calling us to His kingdom work. He is the type of coach we can love and trust, who knows us better than we know ourselves. He believes in us, pushing us wisely, developing us into the kind of person we only hoped we could be. For sure, I still often find a wonderful thought to brighten my day when I read Scripture, but I'm looking for much more than that—I'm looking to be deeply changed from within.

**3. Reading only for content or information:** I naturally like information; I'm always trying to learn something new. The Bible is a rich place for gathering information; it is full of all kinds of content. It's a window into a number of ancient worlds, as well as a window into the spiritual world. I've spent a lot of time reading the Bible to just gather information.

While all of the information in the Bible is fascinating, I've discovered that knowing facts from the Bible is not the same as having a relationship with God Himself. The person who knows the most Bible facts is not necessarily the person who knows God the most. If we elevate facts above meeting God, then we've lost the most important facet of the Bible. If we read primarily to learn content, it can lead to treating the Bible like an object for us to control or as a problem to be solved.

I do believe knowing the content of the Bible is critically important because it is through those real-life realities that God makes Himself known. But I try to no longer come to the Bible like I'm trying to pass a Bible trivia exam; I try to come to the Bible ready to meet my Creator. I now try to read the Bible out of a desire for a relationship and out of love for God—not just to learn facts.

- 4. Focusing only on self:** Have you ever overheard a conversation that you thought was about you but really turned out to be about someone else? I have, and it always is embarrassing and has even led to some deep misunderstandings. At times, I've read the Bible thinking that it is a story primarily about me. When I do that, I'm reading to understand myself and not God. Not every word in the Bible is a direct instruction of how I should live. In reality, the Bible is *God's story*. Yes, we learn a great deal about ourselves in the Bible, but to think that every word is all about me leads me to misunderstanding the message of Scripture.

The Bible is a sweeping story about God. It is only as we grow in our understanding of God, His character and His plan that we will really start to understand our place in His story. Perhaps the best question we can ask after reading a passage of Scripture is, "What does this tell me about God/Jesus?"

- 5. Thinking it's only about rules:** I have a friend who told me he didn't like to read the Bible because it felt like a book of rules. I've felt the same way at times, as if God wanted to control all of my actions by giving me a lot of directions about what not to do. When I start to think this way, I tend to avoid the Bible altogether—who would read a book of rules on their own?

The truth is that the Bible is about God and His loving actions of redeeming us and making us into His people. To view the Bible as a bunch of rules is similar to viewing marriage

vows as a list of rules. My marriage vows were about the love and promises my wife and I made to enhance and protect our relationship. I wanted to make them! The Bible is about love also. To view it as a set of rules is to miss the whole point and to ruin the loving relationship it is designed to protect.

So now I try to come to the Bible understanding that God did, indeed, give His people rules, but they're not rules that I have to follow in order to *earn* a relationship with Him; instead, they're rules to *enhance* my relationship with Him.

## **Conclusion**

So, my encouragement to you today is to come to the Bible often—not out of guilt, not to get a verse to make you happy, not merely to learn facts, not just to focus on yourself and not out of fear. Come to the Bible to build a relationship with the God who loves you, asking Him to meet you in His Word. When you do this, you'll experience what we read about in Psalm 1:2—you'll experience "delight" in God's Word. There is nothing more motivating to continue in my Bible reading than when I find that I am delighting in God through His Word!

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