

Does Verbally Praying With Your Wife Make You Uncomfortable?

I came from a religious background that taught and modeled for me that prayers consisted of reciting to God memorized words that have been passed down through the centuries. I vividly recall mindlessly reciting such prayers on many occasions. That was all I knew to do.

Then I trusted in Jesus Christ as my Savior during my college days and started my journey with the Lord. I remember attending the first Bible study of my life. When it came time to pray, the leader launched into spontaneously talking out loud to God! He seemed to know what to say.

Then a terrifying thing happened. Other people in the group, taking turns one by one, also started to talk out loud to God. They said creative words in prayers right off the top of their heads! I found myself thinking, with my heart pounding, "Oh no, what if they expect me to do this too?" But thankfully that did not happen.

Quickly I recognized that, as a Christian, I needed somehow to learn to do this. I needed to be ready, on the spot, at any time, to launch into a spontaneous and extemporaneous (and eloquent, I might add) prayer to God. I thought I had to impress everyone praying with me, and especially to remember that God is listening!

Perhaps these words and emotions from my past constitute your present situation. Maybe you and/or your wife are hesitant to pray out loud. If so, that is just fine. Honestly, it's all the more reason for suggesting that the Bible is the perfect guide to help you find the words to say in front of the Lord and each other. I promise: This will work for you.

On the other hand, maybe you are completely comfortable voicing extemporaneous prayers. Perhaps you have been doing it for years. Even so, I would suggest that “expository praying”—reading a paragraph of the Bible together and letting the text be the guide for what you pray—will bring a freshness and vitality to prayers with your wife. In fact, they may become more alive than ever.

Vicki and I started into this model of praying through books of the Bible and had a wonderful time together. We began to see some great things happen. We were intentionally connecting together spiritually more regularly than ever before. God was answering some special prayers. We were observing and learning some helpful truths from God’s Word.

Yet after we were praying together for a season, I began to sense a prompting from the Lord. God wanted me to use my personal failure in praying with my wife as a platform to call other Christian men out on this same issue.

So I started to do just that. Gradually, as God seemed to prompt my heart, I would grab lunch with one of my friends and share my story. Then I would ask him the “big question”—the one about how he was doing with his wife in the area of praying together.

I serve full-time in missions with e3 Partners Ministry, a group that mobilizes teams of North Americans in a short-term missions model. Our approach is to preach the gospel to help churches and pastors around the world strengthen and start new churches. Given my calling and career, most of the men in my immediate circle of contact are pastors, elders, missionaries, Christian leaders and businessmen who are strong Christians. Therefore, in most instances, I have been sharing this story and challenge with men who would be recognized as Christian leaders. They are godly men, intending to guide and influence others for Jesus Christ and for the growth of His church and the advancement of His kingdom.

I sit across the table from them and share my story. Then I turn the issue toward them, saying, "I want to ask you a personal question. You are my friend, but you can lie to me or tell me the truth—you can decide [they usually chuckle] But here is the question: Apart from prayers at meals, praying to put children to bed or praying at church or a meeting, how often do you and your wife pray together, just the two of you?"

What I suspected has proven true. Most every Christian man is living with some level of burden that he is not providing adequate spiritual leadership at home with his wife—particularly evident by the lack of prayer they share alone together as husband and wife. When I ask the "big question," I find that, just like me, they are bumping along, connecting spiritually in only a haphazard way. Invariably, they say something like, "Sam, I am exactly like you described it!"

Pay attention—this is important! I am not interested in heaping more guilt on you. If you are reading this, you obviously desire to be a spiritual leader for your wife and family. But the struggle simply boils now to one core issue: We men simply do not know what to do! We are trying to guide our families for Jesus Christ. We are seeking to do the "right things." But we somehow know and feel there is a linchpin missing.

You can step forward confidently and with growing success. I am excited to give you hope! You can enjoy increasing "wins" as a spiritual leader with your wife and family. Just let the Bible be the guide for your prayers.

This is the third and final part of this series of excerpts from Sam Ingrassia's book *Just Say the Word*. For part one, [click here](#). For part two, [click here](#).

This article is adapted from Just Say the Word: A Simple Way

to Increase Your Passion for God and Your Wife by Sam Ingrassia. For more information about creating spiritual intimacy by praying with your wife, please visit .

Act Your Age: 4 Keys to Living a Godly Life

My kids love collecting action figures.

We recently came across one that seemed irresistible. The toy is called Invisible Jim. The manufacturer behind Invisible Jim says it encourages children to use their imaginations. The box is decorated with cool slogans and colorful images. The packaging only cost the U.S. manufacturer pennies to make but sold for around \$9.

There's only one problem: Jim isn't in the box. In fact, there's nothing in the packaging. It turns out Invisible Jim is just a gag gift. The colorful, attractive box is empty.

That's the way **sin** is. We are lured in by the attractive packaging, only to discover it was an empty thrill. But no buzz that comes from this age will ever fill us. Because this age, as Peter wrote, is empty (1 Pet. 1:18). It is void of the Spirit's life. This is why Jesus sent the **Spirit** – to save us and redeem us from the empty pursuits of this failed age.

God's **grace** isn't just so we can get our tickets punched and escape hell. Grace teaches us to live a godly life in this present age (Titus 2:11-12). So how do we do this? Let me offer a few helpful suggestions.

1. Guard your soil.

During the Japanese nuclear meltdown of 2012, a high level of cesium contaminated the ground. Japan was paralyzed for months due to contaminated soil. You can't grow healthy crops in radioactive soil. In the same way, living a godly life starts with a pure thought life (Phil. 4:8). We must renew our minds in the **Word** (Rom. 12:1-2), and we must choose to dwell on the virtues of the kingdom instead of the vices of this failed age.

2. Exchange old cravings.

Before a newborn baby has any knowledge of food or understands the nature of sustenance, he knows instinctively what it means to be hungry. Likewise, I do not know that God exists because I have seen Him. I know that such a thing must exist because the deep, yawning emptiness in my spirit hungers for His life. Paul told the Galatians to replace the pangs of carnal desire with **spiritual hunger** (Gal. 5:16-18). We need to exchange the old cravings for the new.

3. Stay lit.

Years ago, while housesitting for some friends, I saw a little blue flame in their gas fireplace. I didn't know what it was, so I freaked out. I thought my friends had gone on vacation and left their fireplace on. I spent a comical hour huffing and puffing and blowing out the pilot flame. Later, when I called them, they told me that little flame is supposed to stay lit. In the same way, our **passion** for Jesus isn't always a roaring fire. But it is possible for us to stay "lit" so that the Spirit can flip the switch to raging hot through worship and spiritual disciplines (Eph. 5:19). As we give voice to our passion, the Spirit will move on us and fill us to overflowing.

4. Don't starve the dog.

Not too long ago, my wife traveled to Montana with my kids and left me with the family puppy. She also left a list on the

fridge of all the stuff I needed to do for this puppy.

I read the list. I understood the list. I even memorized the list. But I think you would agree that had I not applied the list, she would have returned to a very messy house and a starving dog. In the same way, we can't just know what to do. We must do it. No matter how much we know, if we fail to apply Jesus' teaching, we will starve spiritually. Jesus made it clear that the test of genuine **discipleship** was practicing and applying his teachings (Matt. 7:24).

The junkie, the food addict, the shopaholic, the sports fanatic and the sex fiend – they're all just trying to fill the empty box. But as believers, we cannot subsist on the watery swill and the pabulum of this empty age. We must begin to "act our age" – practicing the habits of passion and reflecting the **values** of the kingdom.

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2 Keys to Going Deeper in Your Walk With God

Experiencing the depths of Jesus Christ requires more than prayer and Scripture study; it calls for total abandonment to

Him.

There are several steps involved in coming to know the depths of Jesus Christ. The first two are quite simple: praying the Scriptures and just beholding the Lord in quietness and trust. After you have pursued this level of experience with the Lord for a considerable length of time, you then should be ready to go on to a deeper level of knowing Him.

But in this deeper encounter with the Lord, you must move outside the realm of prayer alone; or, to state it more clearly, you must move away from just the one or two times a day you set apart for prayer with the Lord.

At this point, there must enter into your heart whole new attitudes toward your entire life. If you are to branch out beyond just a time of prayer each day, other parts of your life—and even your whole viewpoint of life—will have to be altered. This new attitude must come for a very special reason: so that you may go on deeper, still deeper, into another level with your Lord.

To do this, you must have a fresh attitude toward yourself as well as toward the Lord; it is an attitude that must go much deeper than any you have known previously.

To help you develop this attitude, I introduce a new word to you. The word is *abandonment*.

To penetrate deeper in the experience of Jesus Christ, it is required that you begin to abandon your whole existence, giving it up to God.

Let us take the daily occurrences of life as an illustration.

You must utterly believe that the circumstances of your life—that is, every minute of your life, as well as the whole course of your life; anything, yes, everything that happens—have all come to you by His will and by His

permission. You must utterly believe that everything that has happened to you is from God and is exactly what you need.

One way you can be introduced to such a disposition is to learn to accept every time of prayer, whether it be a glorious time with Him or a time when your mind wanders, as being exactly what He desired for you. Then learn to broaden this perspective until it encompasses every second of your life!

Such an outlook toward your circumstances and such a look of faith toward your Lord will make you content with everything. Once you believe this, you will then begin to take everything that comes into your life as being from the hand of God, not from the hand of man.

Do you truly, sincerely desire to give yourself up to God?

Then I must next remind you that once you have made the donation, you cannot take the gift back again. Once the gift has been presented, it no longer belongs to the giver.

You see, knowing the depths of Jesus Christ is not just a method. It is a lifelong attitude. It is a matter of being enveloped by God and possessed by Him.

We have spoken of abandonment. Abandonment is a matter of the greatest importance if you are to make progress in knowing your Lord. Abandonment is, in fact, the key to the inner court—the key to the fathomless depths. Abandonment is the key to the inward spiritual life.

The believer who knows how to abandon herself to the Lord will soon come into perfect concert with His will in all circumstances.

Let us say you reach this state of abandonment. Once you have reached it, you must continue, steadfast and immovable. Otherwise, to arrive there and remain only briefly is of little value. It is one thing to reach this state; it is

another thing to remain there.

Be careful; do not listen to the voice of your natural reasoning. You can expect just such reasoning to well up within you. Nonetheless, you must believe that you can abandon yourself utterly to the Lord for all your lifetime and that He will give you the grace to remain there. You must trust in God, hoping against hope (see Rom. 4:18).

Great faith produces great abandonment.

Abandonment Defined

Exactly what is abandonment? If we can understand what it is, perhaps we can better lay hold of it.

Abandonment is casting off all your cares. Abandonment is dropping all your needs. This includes spiritual needs. Let me repeat that, for it is not easily grasped. Abandonment is laying aside, forever, all your spiritual needs.

All Christians have spiritual needs; but the believer who has abandoned himself to the Lord no longer indulges in the luxury of being aware of spiritual needs. Rather, he gives himself over completely to the disposal of God.

Do you realize that all Christians have been exhorted to abandonment?

The Lord Himself has said, "Take no thought for tomorrow, for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things" (see Matt. 6:34). Again the Scripture says, "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:6). Again, "Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established" (Prov. 16:3). In the book of Psalms, it says, "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5).

True abandonment must cover two complete worlds, two complete

realms.

There must be an abandonment in your life concerning all outward, practical things. Secondly, there must also be an abandonment of all inward, spiritual things. You must come to the Lord and there engage in giving up all your concerns.

All your concerns go into the hand of God. You forget yourself, and from that moment on, you think only of Him.

By continuing to do this over a long period of time, your heart will remain unattached; your heart will be free and at peace!

How do you practice abandonment? You practice it daily, hourly and by the moment. Abandonment is practiced by continually losing your own will in the will of God—by plunging your will into the depths of His will, there to be lost forever!

And how do you begin? You must begin by refusing every personal desire that comes to you just as soon as it arises—no matter how good that personal desire is and no matter how helpful it might appear!

Abandonment must reach a point at which you stand in complete indifference to yourself. You can be sure that out of such a disposition, a wonderful result will come.

The result of this attitude will, in fact, bring you to the most wonderful point imaginable. It is the point at which your will breaks free of you completely and becomes free to be joined to the will of God. You will desire only what He desires—that is, what He has desired for all eternity.

Become abandoned by simply resigning yourself to what the Lord wants in all things, no matter what they are, where they come from or how they affect your life.

What is abandonment? It is forgetting your past; it is leaving the future in His hands; it is devoting the present fully and

completely to Him.

Abandonment is being satisfied with the present moment, no matter what that moment contains. You are satisfied because you know that whatever that moment has, it contains—in that instant—God's eternal plan for you.

You will always know that that moment is the absolute and total declaration of His will for your life.

Remember, you must never blame man for anything. No matter what happens, it was neither man nor circumstances that brought it. You must accept everything (except, of course, your own sinfulness) as having come from your Lord.

Surrender not only what the Lord does to you, but also your reaction to what He does.

Do you wish to go into the depths of Jesus Christ? If you wish to enter into this deeper state of knowing the Lord, you must seek to know not only a deeper prayer but also abandonment in all realms of your life. This means branching out until your new relationship includes living 24 hours a day utterly abandoned to Him.

Begin to surrender yourself to be led by God and to be dealt with by Him. Do so right now. Surrender yourself to allow Him to do with you exactly as He pleases—both in your inward life of experiencing Him and also in your outward life of accepting all circumstances as from Him.

Read a companion devotional.

Jeanne Guyon (1648-1717) was a French Quietist who had a tremendous impact on church history. She was a mystic who was imprisoned for her writings, which were considered heretical in her day.

Signs of a Heart That's Far From God

The prodigal son didn't end up among the pigs the day he left his father's house; he went through a gradual process of decline (see Luke 15:11-15). So it is with us. If the enemy presented the end with the first temptation, it would be easy to resist! But usually the departure from grace is so subtle that even leaders take the bait.

The warning signs are visible long before we fully embrace sin. One of the first is that we allow other people or things to take the place in our hearts that belongs only to God.

Preferring any earthly thing over God is a clear sign that our hearts have wandered. Even the spiritually mature are in danger of allowing what is visible to usurp the place of the eternal, invisible God.

The result is that we become lukewarm in our pursuit of God. Complacency sets in. We compare ourselves to the standard of others rather than to the standard of the Word and justify what we know is compromise.

We begin to live "a form of godliness," being outwardly religious but having no power in our lives (2 Tim. 3:5, KJV). Self then takes the throne (see vv. 2-4). We are no longer able to express the pure love God desires and are often judgmental and critical of others. Ultimately, like the prodigal son squandering his inheritance, we end up on the path to sin and spiritual death.

If your heart has wandered, recognizing your condition and crying out for God's help is the first step back into His

empowering grace. Even your failure can be a stepping stone to a higher place spiritually if you come to see that your flesh can't be trusted. Understanding your own weakness is a key to releasing God's power on your behalf.

The next step is to get right with God and others. Even if you have been wronged, you must forgive. This may seem difficult, but it is essential to maintaining communication with God—and it is worth the price. As one saint wrote: “When the soul seeks nothing in the universe but the smile of God and fears nothing but offending Him, it will gladly consent to pay any price to get perfectly right with Him.”

Third, look to God and His Word as your standard rather than to those around you. Jesus said, “‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'” (Matt. 5:48). This is an impossible standard for us to attain on our own, but with God we can do all things (see Phil. 4:13).

Finally, learn to walk in the Spirit, keeping your mind on God and His kingdom by praying continually. In this manner the Holy Spirit will become a filter for your thoughts. Daily pray Psalm 139:23-24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (NIV). God will be faithful to answer this prayer and to keep your heart stayed on Him. *

Why I Believe in Miracles

I was raised in a very conservative religious home and witnessed a plethora of miracles as I grew into adulthood. My parents, Euel and Esther Nordin, are the most authentic Christians I know, and they not only ingrained into my two

sisters and I the belief in the miraculous, but they also placed us in a position to see the **miraculous**.

The following story took place when I was 4 years old. Our family was in a personal crisis and would cease to exist in the way we knew it without a miracle from God.

To my parents, my older sister and myself, the memories of a fateful day in July 1963 are as vivid today as when they happened 50 years ago. At age 31, Dad was working with his brother-in-law, cutting timber for a lumber company in the mountains northeast of Meyers Flat, Calif. My dad's work was physically taxing and very dangerous.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon, Dad cut down a tree and could not escape its path as it crashed to the ground. The flailing tree trunk had chopped into his midsection and hammered him into the ground, then bounced up and made ready to crash upon him one final time. He was watching this scene play out like a bad movie in slow motion, but his body was broken and unable to move. He was as limp as a rag doll, left vulnerable and powerless against whatever came next.

Then, with the trunk of the 60-foot fir driving down toward him one more time, another **miracle** happened. "Something moved me," he says now, through tears. "It was supernatural. I was not able to move at all, but when the trunk of that tree crushed me and for a split second bounced into the air, I felt a hand drag me in an instant out from beneath the path of the tree. I wasn't pulled sideways; I was snatched headfirst out of the path of the descending tree."

This all happened in a blur—an unseen, inexplicable hand moved him head first in one motion more than six feet, until his entire body was miraculously removed from the path of the descending tree.

The other loggers heard my dad's cries for help, then loaded him into the back of a Jeep and drove him to the nearest

hospital in Garberville. Dad was crushed so badly that the hospital staff did not believe he would live. The local surgeon was on vacation, so, consequently, apart from administering pain medication, he underwent no medical procedures for one week. By the time the surgeon returned, gangrene had set in, and life was slipping away.

Anyone who knows anything about medicine would readily agree that an untreated internal injury that has breached the intestines and colon and gone untreated for a week is almost always fatal. The infection from the leaking intestines and breached colon had spread throughout Dad's abdomen, and the only way a person can possibly recover from such a condition is to experience a miracle.

Despite being mangled and torn, waiting seven days for surgery as gangrene took over his abdomen, and laying on a broken hip that went unset, Dad found new energy after the operation. Three weeks after the near fatal accident and two weeks after major surgery, Dad walked out of the hospital with the help of a set of crutches. He was grateful to be out in the sunshine that August day and glad to be alive.

Everywhere he went, he heard the same thing: "You're a **miracle**. You are lucky to be alive."

"No one had to tell me, of course," Dad says, "but every time I heard it from a doctor, I understood what a miracle God had done for me." Today my dad and mom pastor a church in Russellville, Ark. Not too bad for an 81-year-old man who was expected to die in 1963! Only **God** can do a thing like that. It is called a miracle.

Don Nordin is pastor of CT Church Houston, a congregation with more than 2,000 people in weekly attendance. With a focus on training leaders, he travels extensively as a speaker in revivals, camp meetings and conferences. His book, *The Audacity of Prayer*, released Feb. 4. Purchase a copy [here](#).

Spice Up Your Health With Seasonings That Fight Diseases

Common herbs and spices not only add flavor to your favorite dishes, but the right ones can also help fight cancer, diabetes and heart disease. How do we incorporate them into our everyday lives?

Many of us have lots of little bottles of herbs and spices in our kitchens. But too often they're just collecting dust. Sadly, we only use them for special occasions, like Thanksgiving.

Now it's time to open the right ones more often for better-tasting dishes and an even healthier lifestyle.

1. A pinch of cinnamon. Herbs and spices come from plants. The difference is herbs, like basil, rosemary and oregano, come from the leaves, whereas spices come from the other parts.

For instance, cinnamon comes from the bark; ginger comes from the root.

Celebrity chef Christina Ferrare shares cooking tips and recipes on her popular television show, *Home and Family*, on the Hallmark Channel. She says people would be surprised to know about the amazing health benefits of common herbs and spices, such as cinnamon.

"It can lower blood sugar and your triglycerides," she says. "And your triglycerides are a type of fat that are in your blood. And with people with Type 2 diabetes, this is also very

good for them as well.”

Just a teaspoon of cinnamon packs a powerful punch. Ferrare suggests adding cinnamon and a little brown sugar to plain yogurt to make a healthy fruit dip.

2. Paprika and turmeric. Another spice Ferrare loves to use is paprika.

“I put it on popcorn. I use it on rubs—rubs on chicken,” she says. “It contains capsaicin, and it is an anti-inflammatory and has antioxidant effects that may lower the risk of cancer. It also lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease to help with that.”

“It’s great for arthritis,” she adds. “I like to use it on most everything. Believe it or not, when I have pains in my joints, I will use that, and it really does help.”

Turmeric is one of the healthiest spices around. In fact, it was actually used as medicine in ancient cultures.

Ferrare explains what makes it so powerful.

“Turmeric contains curcumin, which can inhibit the growth of cancer cells,” she says. “It reduces inflammation. It supports your immune system, it’s great for your liver function, and, as you know, it’s used in Indian cooking.”

Turmeric is a beautiful yellow color and has a rich, smoky flavor. Ferrare simply adds a little to water when making rice.

3. Garlic and oregano. The great thing about using herbs and spices to flavor food is that we rely less on sugar and salt for taste.

Garlic, for example, is a versatile food that fits a variety of needs. To get the greatest health benefit, let it sit for 15 minutes after chopping. If you do cook it, make sure to

keep the temperature low.

Ferrare uses lots of garlic in her recipes.

“Garlic is a superfood,” she says. “It destroys cancer cells. It disrupts metabolism of tumor cells as well, so they won’t develop. It reduces cholesterol and triglycerides. It’s anti-inflammatory and is a great source of vitamin B, vitamin C and iron.”

Add raw garlic to salad dressing, or cook it in pasta sauce.

Speaking of Italian cuisine, oregano, common in Italian food, is gram-for-gram the highest in antioxidants of all the herbs.

“It is an excellent source of fiber,” Ferrare says. “It’s rich in vitamin K, and vitamin K promotes bone growth. I use it on tomatoes, sauces, soups, and put it on pizza.”

Ferrare even takes her love of oregano one step further.

“I love oil of oregano or oregano oil,” she says. “You can get it at any health food store. It comes in a little bottle, and I use it for whenever I’m getting sick or whenever I don’t feel well. It’s like a miracle oil.”

4. Ginger and rosemary. Ginger is a healthy addition to tea, desserts, side dishes and main dishes.

“Ginger decreases motion sickness and nausea, and it may relieve the pain and swelling associated with arthritis,” Ferrare says. “It can also hinder blood clotting.”

Ferrare adds ginger to cooked carrots with a little butter and brown sugar. She also enjoys crystallized ginger on its own as a snack. Delicious!

Rounding out Ferrare’s list of healthiest herbs and spices is rosemary.

“I put it on chicken, on potatoes. I chop it into my pasta as

well,” she says. “Rosemary stops gene mutations that can lead to cancer. It also helps prevent damage to the blood vessels that raise the risk of heart disease. I just love the aroma, and it’s an excellent source of vitamins as well.”

The wonderful flavor from herbs and spices translates into eating less because we tend to feel satisfied sooner than when we eat bland foods, according to research.

The active compounds in herbs and spices degrade over time, so purchase the brands with the “best by” dates on them.

Also store them in airtight containers away from heat, moisture and direct sunlight.

While dried is great, fresh is even better! You just need to use twice as much fresh than dried. You can find fresh herbs and spices in the produce department of your grocery store. You can also grow many at home—even inside!

So step out of your comfort zone and start using herbs and spices in your everyday cooking—for better taste and better health.

For the original article, visit .

The Key to Walking in the Spirit Every Day

The longer we walk with the Lord, the more adept we become at knowing His voice and obeying Him.

In Psalm 18, there is one verse that says it all: “As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a

shield to all who trust in Him" (v. 30, NKJV). To walk through this life with God's success, we must walk in His ways, live by His Word and trust in Him.

A successful person in God's view is one who walks daily in God's Spirit and obeys His Word. The only work we do on this earth that will remain eternally are those things done not by our own self-effort but by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God.

The key to walking daily in the Spirit is to trust God with all of our hearts and lean not on our own understanding (Prov. 3:5-6). As we trust God with all of our hearts, He will prove His Word to be true in this life.

Every day we trust what we are hearing from the Lord through His Word and through the promptings of the Holy Spirit. When we act in faith upon His Word and His guidance, God will work through us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). We believe and trust, and He accomplishes His will through our lives.

The perfect illustration of this was an experience Arthur Burt had when he was on a bus in England. Arthur is an evangelist from Wales, and God uses him mightily even now when he is in his 90s.

He shares a story about riding a bus when it was pouring down rain outside. Suddenly he heard the following instruction: "Get off the bus at the next stop."

He argued with this still quiet voice and said, "But it is pouring down rain outside, and I have not arrived at my destination." Thus ensued a battle Arthur describes as a battle between "the fanatic in the attic" and "the fellow in the cellar."

Sometimes the Holy Spirit asks us to do things that are not reasonable in the natural. The Holy Spirit was asking Arthur

to do something past his human logic. The fellow in the cellar that was Arthur's flesh was saying, "It's pouring outside, and besides, the next stop is not my stop." The fanatic in the attic won the war, and Arthur got off the bus.

As he ran for shelter he saw a car approaching him. Then the car stopped right in front of him, and he recognized a lady he had met at some of his meetings. She yelled past the rolling thunder, "Arthur Burt, is that you?"

He replied, "Yes," and then she offered him a lift.

He gladly got in her car, and then she asked, "If you don't have anything to do in the next two hours, would you like to accompany me to a prayer meeting?" He didn't have anything pressing, so he answered in the affirmative.

That prayer meeting where he ended up sharing from the Scriptures turned out to be one of the most powerful meetings Arthur had ever led. Since that experience Arthur tries to obey quickly that still quiet voice of the Holy Spirit, even when it seems illogical.

God's ways are higher than ours. Therefore, we must trust him and lean not to our own understanding.

**Can You Hear the Sirens?
Experiencing the Spirit's
Conviction in a Shameless**

World

I don't know why my wife and I did this.

The first year we owned our home, we made no effort to change the batteries in our smoke alarms. After a few months, the alarm in the kitchen gave off a little chirp, reminding us to change the battery. We spent about a month just ignoring the occasional chirp. But after a while, it started to beep every two minutes.

So I tried everything to get rid of the annoying chirp. I hid the alarm in the basement. That didn't work. I buried the alarm in a box in the garage and covered it with some old guitar magazines. That didn't work either. Finally I came to my senses and just replaced the old battery with a new one (voila!).

In the same way, the role of the Spirit is to dredge up all the sin that we've buried and hidden away. Only when we come to our senses and listen to the alarms of the Spirit's conviction can we experience new life.

Jesus told the disciples that when the Spirit comes, He would convict the world of "righteousness, sin, and judgment" (John 16:8)—righteousness and sin because we can't know we've missed the mark until we know what the mark of righteousness is. Jesus is that mark and nothing else. And the Spirit convicts us of judgment because we must know that without repentance, we are headed for a Christ-less eternity.

But we don't just experience conviction when we come to faith in Jesus. We also experience ongoing conviction of sin as believers (John 1:7-9). The barriers to a life of Spirit conviction are:

1. Self-Righteousness. This is the universal delusion of humanity. Both religious and nonreligious people are convinced

they can just be good enough for God. Like the Pharisee in Jesus's parable (Luke 18:9-14), the super-religious are convinced they are better than the riffraff. Likewise, the unbeliever thinks he is better than all those really bad people like murders and sex-traffickers. But we all have the wrong standard. Jesus saves us from self-right-ness.

2. Blame-Shifting. Once we acknowledge wrongdoing, then someone must take the fall. It is human nature to transfer the blame to everyone around us. Adam said to God, "This woman you put in the garden with me ..." It's everybody else's fault but his. And the woman responded, "This sneaky servant deceived me ..." See the pattern here? It's difficult to hear the Spirit's conviction when we fail to own our stuff. We have an old saying in the South: "When it's everybody else—it's you." We need to resist the temptation to blame-shift to others.

3. Downplaying. Sometimes in ministry, I hear people admit wrongdoing but then they try to soften the ugliness of it. Sure, they blew it, but was it really that bad? We recently had a good friend who was caught in a grave pattern of sin and deception against his leaders. His initial response was to take ownership. But when he realized he needed to confess it to the church, he began to modulate and downplay the gravity of it. Unfortunately, it resulted in some very destructive things in the life of the church. We felt crushed by his betrayal. But we were more hurt by the fact that he blew it off and thought it was "no biggie."

4. False Prophets. In the Old Testament, the prophets constantly warned Israel not to listen to lying prophets. These false prophets had Israel convinced God wasn't going to judge them for their idolatry. But God's true prophets warned that Babylonian exile was coming. Listen, the Holy Spirit can't bless stupid. Let's surround ourselves with wise people who will speak the truth into our lives. If you've got lying well-wishers in your inner circle who keep giving you bad advice, then it's time to get some new prophets.

The Spirit means to bring our sin scratching and yowling into the light of the cross. Only when we embrace His cleansing power can we be saved. And it's only when we demolish those barriers to conviction that we begin to grow in the Christian life. The question is, can you hear the sirens?

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6 Questions Your Teenager Has About Being a Christian

Recently I began a Bible study with my oldest daughter and a few of her friends. At our first meeting, all I had were Bibles and notebooks for the girls but no Bible study book or even a topic.

My prayer going into this study was that God would reveal what these girls most need to build their faith, to understand that they are daughters of the King and what it means to have God as their heavenly Father.

After our breakfast of pancakes, we took our PJ-clad selves to the sofa. I began by saying, "I'd like this study to be more than just about the length of your skirts and dealing with boys. I'd like to really grapple with Scripture together. I'd

like to grow in our faith together. So what do y'all want to study?"

Their answers blessed me. They said they wanted to understand:

- Trust because they struggle with it
- What it means to be a quiet and gentle spirit
- Modesty—not clothing, but how it relates to their heart
- Respect for themselves and others
- Words and how we handle our mouths being a reflection of what is in our hearts
- Value—how to measure it, because weren't they worth something?

Yes! Aren't we all trying to determine our worth?

As I begin to ponder our value in God's eyes, I'm astounded how loved we are. I know I shouldn't be, really, because I know the God I serve and love, but I am nonetheless taken aback by His tremendous love for me.

Today I kept thinking about the fact that God knows my name. The Creator of the universe, the Maker of all things, knows my name by heart. It is written on the palm of His hand.

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (Is. 49:15-16, ESV).

Not only does He know my name, but He also knows the number of hairs on my head—even as they collect on my shower floor.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you

are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:29-31).

He knows everything, absolutely everything, about me and loves me still.

The amazing fact that Jesus was willing to die for me while I was still a lost sinner is enough to confirm to me I'm valuable. Worth enough to die for.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8).

The conversations I've had with these precious girls has revealed a deep need in their hearts for real answers—for the ability to ask deep questions and seek difficult but honest answers. Each girl comes from a different life experience and situation. Each girl is different in her personality, her approach and her needs. I'm ready for that. God has softened my heart through adversity. I understand more what it means to suffer, what it means to doubt and what it means to struggle. I also understand the beauty of peace in the midst of challenges, joy in the midst of suffering, and hope in the midst of heartbreak.

My prayer is that God will speak through me, that He will open their hearts to the healing and hope that only Christ can offer. I'm so flawed—my poor daughter knows that intimately—and such a mess. Yesterday was our third meeting, and my youngest daughters were just plain awful. I ended up dealing with them upstairs while the teenage girls waited downstairs. I was in tears, mostly frustrated and sad that my hopes for the morning were quickly deteriorating into a mess. But as is always the case, God redeemed the time.

They were gracious as I tried to pull things together.

Again, I was reminded that, no matter what, God has the situation under His control. It might look terribly chaotic and hopeless to me, but some way or another He always makes delicious lemonade out of my lemons. Maybe that will be what I offer for drinks next time—lemonade, to remind me to share that God does indeed always make good out of the difficult.

I'm honored to be able to go on this journey with these girls. How blessed to know that the waters run deep in their hearts. That they desire deeper knowledge and deeper faith. I'm excited to dive deep into the Word and into their worlds. I pray God will speak through me. That these girls will understand that they are worth far more than any costly jewel, that they are precious and the apple of their Father's eye.

"Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand. Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings" (Ps. 17:7-8).

And I'm thankful that as I seek out answers to their questions, God will be revealing Himself to me as my Husband and Father as well.

"For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called" (Is. 54:5).

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If Satan Is Defeated, Why Do We Still Have to Do Spiritual Warfare?

The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds in our minds. But the weapons of Satan are carnal, mighty in our flesh for the erecting of strongholds in our minds—and we're the ones arming him.

Jesus “disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them” (Col. 2:15). Many who oppose **spiritual warfare** practices point to that Scripture and say we don't have to fight because the devil is already defeated. Yes, the devil is already defeated, but Paul nevertheless told Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12) and told the Ephesians we “wrestle against ... principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of the age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

If Jesus disarmed principalities and powers, why are we still wrestling them? We still wrestle, in part, because we are arming the enemy with the words of our mouth, handing him our God-given authority to use against us. Satan has no authority over us unless we give it to him, just like the serpent had no authority in the garden until Adam gave it to him.

Speaking Supernatural Words

As I was meditating on 2 Corinthians 10:4, I got a revelation about our words as weapons. This is not a positive confession revelation, although I believe in confessing what the **Word of God** says rather than confessing negative thoughts and feelings—and that's totally scriptural. No, this is not a new twist on a good confession. This is a **spiritual warfare**

strategy that will send the devil fleeing as we submit our words to God and resist the temptation to allow our mouths to issue weapons Satan uses against us.

When discussing the whole armor of God, Paul instructs us to take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). When we speak the **Word of God** out of our mouths, it serves as a weapon that cuts through every evil plot of the enemy. No devil in hell can come against the Word of God because it's not carnal but mighty—supernatural—in God.

When we find ourselves in the midst of the battle, though, we too often make one of these three common mistakes: (1) We fail to wield the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the Word of God; (2) we speak the enemy's fearful lies out of our mouths; or (3) we are double-minded, speaking the **Word of God** one moment and the enemy's fear-laced lies the next. The only sure way enforce Jesus' victory in our lives is to consistently wield the **sword of the Spirit**.

Let's look at each option and how it works. First, when we wield the **sword of the Spirit**, we are packing a powerful weapon. The writer of Hebrews says, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

The **sword of the Spirit** is sharper than any natural sword. It has supernatural power, but we have to speak out the living power it contains with our tongues. Inspired by the life-giving Holy Spirit, the wisest man on the earth once wrote, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21).

Whose Side Are Your Words On?

Our words are weapons. When we speak God's Word out of our mouth, it casts out death and opens the door to life in our situations. When we make the mistake of speaking the enemy's

fearful lies out of our mouth—which may sound like worry, doubt, unbelief or something other than the pure truth—we are allowing the enemy to use our own words as weapons against us.

Again, the devil's weapons are carnal in the sense that he works through our carnal nature to oppress us by successfully tempting us to speak death with our powerful tongues. We essentially arm the enemy with weapons of death and give him some ammunition to oppress us when we speak words that are out of alignment with God's truth.

When we are double-minded, speaking the Word of God one moment and the enemy's fearful lies the next, we allow the enemy to take ground in our lives. Have you ever felt like you were taking one step forward and two steps back? This is often the result of double-mindedness. We speak life out of our mouths, penetrating the enemy's plans with the **sword of the Spirit** in the morning, but as soon as we see a circumstance that doesn't go our way, we once again arm the enemy with carnal weapons through our words.

The Bible says a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8). If you are feeling unstable, like the enemy is tossing you around a wrestling ring and about to capture you in a figure 4, it may be because you are not speaking words of faith and life—you may be arming the enemy with words of fear, doubt, unbelief and death.

Here's the **revelation** in summary: Your words are weapons in **spiritual warfare**. When you speak the Word of God, you are wielding a sword that will cut the enemy's evil plans to bits. It may take more than one swing, but if you keep swinging your **supernatural** sword, you will see natural results. When you speak out words based on thoughts and fears the enemy sows in your soul, you are essentially arming the enemy with carnal words that breed death. You give life to what you speak. Will you give life to God's plan or to the enemy's plan? It's up to you.

You can download a sample chapter of Jennifer's new book, *The Making of a Prophet*, by clicking [here](#).

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