

Rev. Sam Rodriguez: How a Prophetic Word Launched a Major Miracle Film

Rev. Samuel Rodriguez may be the busiest man in Pentecostalism. Rodriguez is the senior pastor of New Season Christian Worship Center in Sacramento, California, which has four additional campuses across California and Nevada. He also founded and serves as president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, the world's largest Hispanic evangelical organization, which represents over 100 million people in over 450,000 churches.

That's enough to test any pastor's schedule, but it's only the beginning for Rodriguez. He is a best-selling author with a new book, *You Are Next*, releasing May 7. He has served as an evangelical adviser for Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump. In 2017, he became the first Assemblies of God minister and Latino evangelical to participate in a presidential inauguration. And in 2018, he became the first Latino evangelical executive producer in Hollywood history while working on two films—including *Breakthrough*, which hit theaters nationwide April 17.

For his hard work, Rodriguez has been honored in both spiritual and secular circles. In 2013, *Time* magazine hailed him as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. *Latino Leaders* magazine named him among its 101 most influential leaders in back-to-back years (2015 and 2016). Last year, *Newsmax* called him one of the top 100 Christian leaders in America. He's given keynote speeches at Yale, Princeton and even the White House.

One could easily expect a man as busy as Rodriguez to be exhausted. Yet in talking with *Charisma*, Rodriguez sounded not

merely at peace but more energized than ever. He says the key is declaring God's truth over yourself every day and making sure your life's work is adhering to God's will. He even applies a snappy rubric to every decision he makes.

"Live a holy, healed, healthy, happy, humble, hungry, honoring life, and God will take care of the rest," Rodriguez says. "So every single day, that's my outlook."

He says he received that spiritual download from God early in his ministry and explains each of the seven H's.

"Live a holy life—integrity is everything," Rodriguez says. "Live a life above reproach. Do not do or say anything to tarnish the gospel."

"Healed—make sure you're healed in mind, body, soul and spirit."

"Healthy—3 John 1:2 [means] physical, spiritual and financial health in every single aspect."

"Happy—that's John 15:11. That small stuff? Shake it off. And what you can't shake off, Jesus washes off. That happiness component is critical."

"Humble—know that it's all Christ. First Corinthians 15:10 says, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' Period."

"Hungry—always hunger for righteousness. Hunger to do the right thing, [like] Matthew 5:6."

"Honoring—Ephesians 6:1-4 says make sure you honor your parents and your spiritual parents, those who came before you, those who open doors for you, those no one has ever heard of. These individuals were critical in placing you where you are today by the grace of God. Those are the seven principles that guide me every single day."

But Rodriguez says he is still growing and maturing into the

man God wants him to be. He made his biggest step yet into the political realm early this year. He's counseling the next generation of leaders in his church and ministries. And through it all, he's learning how to set aside the to-do list and seek God in Sabbath rest. Rodriguez shared with *Charisma* what he sees God doing in America, the Hispanic church and his own walk with Christ.

Pursue Righteousness

Rodriguez seeks to pursue God in every aspect of his life. One of the newest ways he's doing that is through Hollywood producing. Now in theaters, *Breakthrough* tells the true story of Joyce Smith and her son, John, who was miraculously resurrected after his mother prayed for the Holy Spirit to save him. Rodriguez says *Breakthrough* is the "first time a secular movie studio has produced a movie where the main character is, in a de facto way, the Holy Spirit." And he's honored to have been the motivating force behind bringing the Smiths' story to the silver screen.

After receiving a prophetic word from Cindy Jacobs—one of the "seven elders" Rodriguez turns to for guidance—he saw a news story pop up on his phone's RSS feed: "Mom Prays Loudly, Dead Son Comes Back to Life." The story stuck with him, and he mentioned it during a sermon—paving the way for a miraculous meeting with Joyce Smith herself. She told him the full story, and he was amazed.

"I really felt the Holy Spirit tell me, 'Samuel, you're making this into the movie,'" Rodriguez says. "'It has to be a movie—not just a book, but a movie.' So I was full of the Holy Spirit, driven to make this into a movie."

He roped in his friend DeVon Franklin as producer. The trailer's debut in December 2018 broke records, garnering over 30 million views in 48 hours.

"A major motion picture focusing on the miraculous power of

God?" Rodriguez says. "Here it is, my friends. Dorothy, we're not in Kansas anymore."

Hollywood's not the only area where Rodriguez has experienced breakthrough. He has developed a reputation in Washington, D.C., as a strong advocate for Christian values who is willing to cross the aisle to accomplish what he calls "the Lamb's agenda."

"As a Christian, I am called not to political advocacy but prophetic activism," Rodriguez says. "My pro-life stance guides me in everything I do as a prophetic activist. That's life from womb to the tomb. I find the current melees regarding the sanctity of life disgusting, horrific and tragic. It comes from the pit of hell, and Christians must rise up and address this. I'm also committed to religious liberty, to protecting the ability to preach the gospel of Jesus without censure ... across the board. And [I'm committed] to doing biblical justice—not social justice, but doing biblical justice in the name of Jesus—which includes racial reconciliation and prison reform."

Rodriguez's passion for prison reform is actually directly responsible for the First Step Act, a bipartisan prison reform bill signed into law by President Trump in January. On May 3, 2017—the day before the National Day of Prayer—Rodriguez and Johnnie Moore (who confirms Rodriguez's account) were having dinner with Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump in the Blue Room of the White House.

Kushner asked Rodriguez, "Reverend, what's on your heart?"

Rodriguez says his response was truly Holy Spirit-inspired.

"What came out of my mouth is now the First Step Act," Rodriguez says. "I talked about racial disparities in the sentencing process, prison reform, judicial reform and steps to take. ... Praise be to God that a Holy Spirit moment can lead to a law in the land, signed by the president of the United

States, that brings races together.”

Measures in the First Step Act help nonviolent offenders prepare for life after being released from prison, make it easier for prisoners to get early release to halfway houses and protect first-time nonviolent offenders from harsh mandatory minimum sentences.

“Doing biblical justice includes racial reconciliation, justice reform, immigration reform, ending human sex trafficking and elevating the image of God in every single human being,” Rodriguez says. “I’m going to have people upset with me on occasion, because I support pieces of legislation that I believe line up to the outline I just mentioned. As long as I’m doing it led by the Spirit and biblically substantiated, I have no qualms going to sleep at night with a smile on my face.”

Rodriguez’s passion for racial reconciliation and unity doesn’t stop with politics. He’s made it an integral part of his church, New Season Christian Worship Center.

“I pastor, by the grace of God, a multiethnic church,” Rodriguez says. “It’s 40 percent white, 40 percent African-American and 20 percent Latino and Asian with five different campuses. I enjoy going to church every Sunday because my church looks like heaven. You can’t tell the majority crew, and I love it.”

Rodriguez preaches in every venue, from completely white Southern Baptist churches to African-American conferences to crusades in Latin America. But the NHCLC president says something special is taking place among Hispanic believers. Rodriguez, when asked about how the Holy Spirit’s moving in the Hispanic church today, says, “There are three main words to describe it: Wow, wow and wow!”

“Go tell me there’s a [Holy Spirit] fire starting somewhere, and there’s a 99.9 percent probability that Hispanics are

involved,” Rodriguez says. “Wherever there’s a wildfire emerging, there’s a Hispanic presence. The Latino community is a passionate community—culturally that’s horizontally, but vertically, God is really moving through the Hispanic church by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

A 2014 Pew study found that approximately 43 percent of all U.S. Hispanics identify as Pentecostal or charismatic (including 52 percent of Catholic Latinos and 67 percent of Protestant Latinos). Rodriguez says those numbers are even higher, especially among Catholic populations, worldwide.

“We are people of the Holy Spirit,” Rodriguez says. “I mean, this group is the most Holy Spirit-centered community—arguably based on sheer numbers—on planet Earth. So if you’re a Latino, in all probability, you’ve had an encounter with the power of the Holy Spirit. That’s pretty crazy.”

He believes there are some cultural reasons for the correlation between charismatic theology and Hispanic culture. He says Latinos have a heritage of faith—thanks to the long history of Catholicism in the community—but also a natural passion and openness to the supernatural. As a result, Rodriguez believes the rising Hispanic population in the U.S. is great for charismatics.

“Without any ambiguity, 107 percent, no question—the charismatic movement is in great shape in America because of the Hispanic community,” Rodriguez says. “Period.”

Finally, on top of all these projects and responsibilities, Rodriguez is working hard to prepare and equip the next generation to do even greater things. He has a philosophy of legacy: “God conquers. We possess. Our children inherit.”

And he has powerful truths he wants to declare to every young minister.

“If you want to see God’s favor in your life, live a righteous

life and live a life above reproach,” Rodriguez says. “Make Christ the center of it all. Know that it’s Christ above all. Live a 1 Corinthians 15:10 life—‘by the grace of God we are what we are’—and favor will find you. Understand that we are what we tolerate. Today’s complacency is tomorrow’s captivity. Truth must never be sacrificed on the altar of political culture or sexual expediency. There is no such thing as comfortable Christianity. And while we are waiting for Jesus to come down, Jesus is waiting for His church to stand up.”

Declare Truth

Young leaders aren’t the only ones who need truth declared over their lives, however. Rodriguez says he can only be the man God has called him to be when he declares truth over his own life.

“The first person I declare truth over is myself—not in some sort of egocentric, self-absorbed way,” Rodriguez says. “In order for Samuel Rodriguez to lead his family, to lead his children, to lead the church, the No. 1 issue I have to overcome is me. In order to overcome me, I have to speak God over myself.”

He’s declared that truth every day since he was young. Rodriguez was reared in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, to God-fearing parents. When he was 14, he fully committed his life to Christ after a man from Teen Challenge delivered a measurable prophetic word to him. After that, he believed God had a purpose for his life—but he still had to overcome the stereotypes pushed upon him by his neighborhood.

“I would speak these declarations to myself and say, ‘Samuel, God spoke to you,’” Rodriguez says. “‘You’re destined to be a conduit for His glory. You’re destined, you’re on this planet to preach the gospel and change the world. Let not your heart be troubled.’ So I would speak into myself and repudiate every message of paralysis.”

As he declared God's promises over his life, he began to see them come to fruition—beyond his wildest dreams.

"As God opened doors, I received my first credentials to our denomination at a very early age—and I mean very early age: between 16 to 18," Rodriguez says. "God accelerated the process, and then by the time I was 30-31, we had the privilege to start the NHCLC, which is now the world's largest Hispanic evangelical Christian organization."

But without that underpinning of truth, Rodriguez says, he could have just become paralyzed by what he believed about himself. He dove deep into studying spiritual paralysis while writing *You Are Next*.

"Each and every one of us has been paralyzed," Rodriguez says. "We've all been through paralysis, even for a minute per day, emotionally, spiritually, financially, relationally. We've all been through a circumstance where there is a lack of measurable mobility, and the declaration 'You are next' is a beautiful Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered, biblically substantiated declaration to push back on that."

Rest in God

But even the busiest man in Pentecostalism can't work all the time. So how does Samuel Rodriguez relax? Two words: *Star Trek*.

"I am an evangelical, charismatic, Spirit-empowered Trekkie," Rodriguez says. "So if I ever really want to go and relax, guess what? I have the episodes downloaded on my iPhone, and I'll put on one of the *Star Trek* series and enjoy the journey indeed."

Rodriguez says he's come to appreciate the value of God-ordained Sabbath rest. He says Pastor Robert Morris—another one of Rodriguez's seven spiritual elders—constantly reminds him to rest in the Lord. That's not just a Christianese term

for “giving God your worries.” Sometimes that means literally resting on the couch, watching *Star Trek*, and letting God speak through television.

“God speaks to you in your language, right?” Rodriguez says. “That’s why we have parables that are related to wineskins and wine, because that’s what would have been served in Jesus’ age in the Middle East. ... God speaks to me in the language of mathematics, science and *Star Trek*. Maybe that’s weird for some of *Charisma*’s readers, but God uses *Star Trek* to speak to Sammy Rodriguez. He’ll speak to you in your own language.”

And though Rodriguez’s love of *Star Trek* runs deep—“I may preach like William Shatner, but I think like Leonard Nimoy,” he quips—that’s far from the only way he rests. He says he’s started taking quiet time with his wife, walking around town in prayer and devotion.

“My quiet time is usually with my partner in grace, which is my wife, and we will celebrate 30 years married this September,” Rodriguez says. “It’s a love fest. I’m just obsessed with this wonderful woman whom I’ve known since I was 11 years of age, and quiet time is walking, holding hands and strolling down our neighborhood.”

As he leans into Sabbath rest, he says he’s developing a new appreciation for God and His creation.

“I’ve been going driving with windows down,” Rodriguez says. “I’m enjoying literally smelling the roses or the smell of my backyard after it rains. The smells of life, the delights of life. ... We bought a telescope, so I’ve been looking at stars and having big conversations about eternity, having big conversations about life on this planet. I’m thinking about the great queries in life with people that I love. And that’s my quiet time.”

Maybe for some believers that sounds like an excuse to slack off, as opposed to “real” quiet time. But Rodriguez—a self-

proclaimed “math nerd”—says he’s learned life is meant to be a balanced equation. And if your life equation gets imbalanced, God may forcibly correct your work.

“At the end of the day, if you are not careful—[even if] you’re truly in the will of God but you’re not restful—God loves you so much that He may intervene and intentionally prevent growth to make sure that you do have your Sabbath,” Rodriguez says. “So we have to be careful.”

Rodriguez says Sabbath rest doesn’t drain his time. If anything, it renews his time, passion and energy so he can be more effective for the kingdom.

“It’s the green tea,” he says. “It’s the detox. That quiet time detoxing clears your mind. It digs away the unimportant issues. Sometimes in life, we focus on stuff [that should be in the background], and we get fixated on it, and we lose track and we lose focus. So that quiet time is critical.”

With renewed energy, Rodriguez says his true passion right now is about being holy, being one and being light: God wants His church to be holy, God wants to do away with fragmentation and division, and God wants His gospel spread far and wide. And no matter how many projects, ministries and causes fill his plate, Rodriguez says he remains excited for whatever God has in store for him next.

“It’s always about the next, because your now is not your next,” Rodriguez says. “It is a message about the next generation, it’s about the next chapter in each of our respective lives, the next day for the church in America and around the world. It’s about knowing with no ambiguity whatsoever that God has called us to be next. Tag, you’re it!”

Taylor Berglund is the associate editor of Charisma magazine and host of several podcasts on the Charisma Podcast Network.

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