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FEBRUARY 2024

THE MAGAZINE ABOUT SPIRIT-LED LIVING

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LISTEN TO
GOD?
BUNNI POUNDS

CHRISTIAN
HERITAGE IN
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DOUG STRINGER

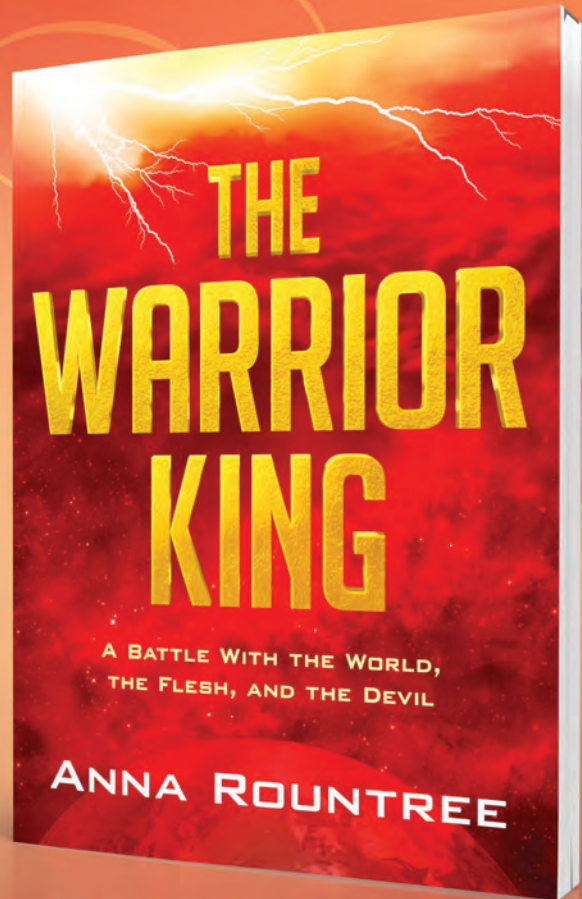
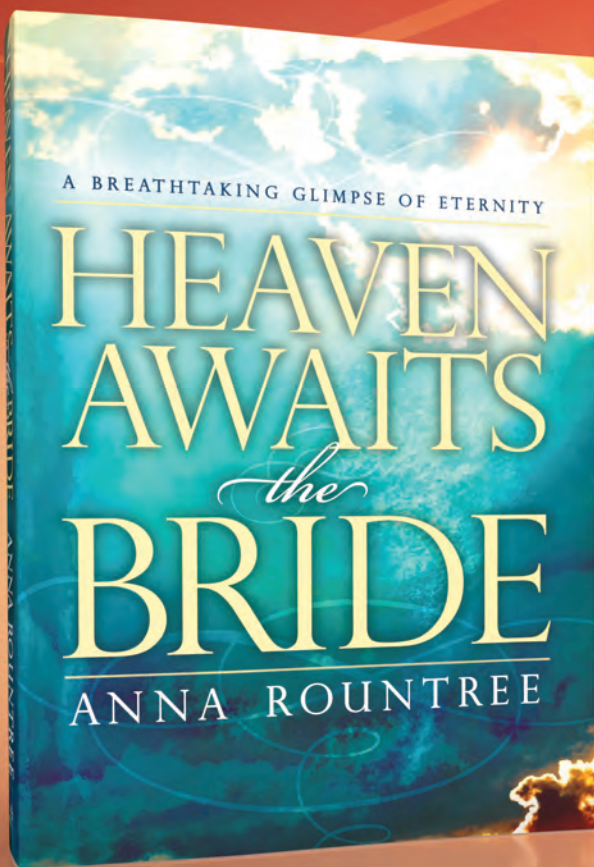
7 KEYS TO
PREPARE FOR
THE LAST DAYS
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PERRY STONE

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What if the most beautiful kind of **faith** is the type that has been tested and tried?



As the visionary and cofounder of Daystar Television Network, Joni Lamb has had a remarkable journey. In her new book, *Through the Storm*, Joni candidly opens up about the relentless challenges she's overcome of establishing and growing the network to the personal struggles she's faced. But even in the midst of each obstacle, she unwaveringly sought the Lord to find rest in His goodness and mercy.

Discover how you can have this same resilience and redemption present in your own life and testimony!



DEAR CHARISMA



"...reminded me that God's spiritual gifts are for all of us in building His kingdom."

*—Beatrice O'Malley,
Boulder, CO*

FASTING POWER

Next to Bible reading, I always thought that fasting was one of the least understood parts of living my faith. It seems so easy to ignore it, as if it's only for others. Jentezen Franklin's story about it ("Accessing the Power of Fasting and Transformation," Charisma Magazine Online, December 2023) was inspiring and enlightening at the same time, I can't wait to get a copy of his book.

Leonora Schnedel, Abacus, NJ

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas has always been my favorite time of year, the whole holiday season from before Thanksgiving through New Year's weekend. I enjoyed the description of Christmas and Christmas spirit ("What Is Christmas Spirit All About?" Charisma Magazine Online, December 2023). No matter how many times you hear it, it's always good to remember the holidays are about giving, not just getting.

Wallace Zeller, Althoma, ID

BREAKING THROUGH WITH HOTSENPILLER

Your article from Tammy Hotsenpiller was a big eye-opener for me ("Do You

Need Breakthrough?" Charisma Magazine Online, December 2023). It's easy to struggle trying to understand when God wants you to move, but her story broke it all down clearer than I've ever heard it.

Adelyne Marquando, Duluth, MN

DO I HAVE PROPHETIC ANOINTING?

Michelle McClain-Walters' story was impressive ("Take Hold of the Driving Force of Your Prophetic Anointing," Charisma Magazine Online, December 2023). It seems like the big-name TV pastors are the ones with the prophetic ability, but this story reminded me that God's spiritual gifts are for all of us in building His kingdom.

Beatrice O'Malley, Boulder, CO

WELLNESS BEFORE HEALING

Dr. Ben Rall's article confirmed something I've believed for several years now, that the future of the health care industry is about proactive wellness and prevention, instead of reactive illness treatment ("The Great Physician's Divine Design for Your Health," Charisma Magazine Online, December 2023).

Harold Phillips, Haggard, MI

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INTERPRET THE *Supernatural* ASPECTS OF YOUR *Dreams*

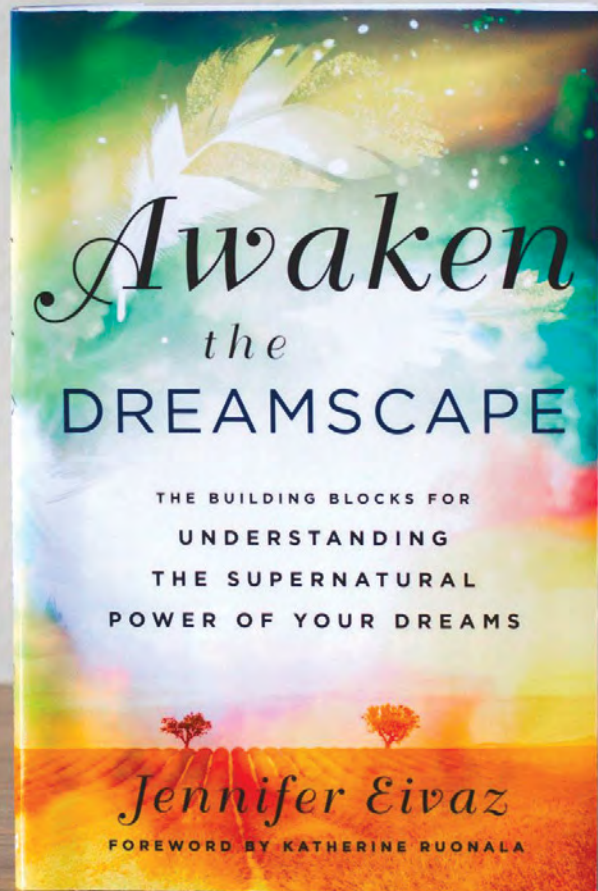
Throughout the Bible, **God often reveals His plans and purposes through dreams.** So why do many of us dismiss our dreams?

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- protect your sleep with night watch prayer

God's supernatural provision and communication never cease. Here is everything you need to live victoriously all day—and all night—long.



JENNIFER EIVAZ



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Preparing for Greater Things in Your Life

We must commit to doing only what the Spirit leads us to do if we are going to truly be Spirit led. Without Him, anything we do is what the Bible calls a work of the flesh. Instead of creating a problem by doing things in our own effort and then asking the Spirit to get us out of the mess we've made, we must wait upon Him and follow His leading.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian and anti-Nazi dissident, put it this way: "The Holy Spirit is the living God, not some inert concept. The church community has to trust the Holy Spirit in every decision and believe strongly that the Spirit continues to be present in the community and at work in it. The Spirit will not permit our community to grope about in darkness, if only we are willing to take the Holy Spirit seriously."

The Holy Spirit is very sensitive. He can be grieved, quenched and resisted. He will not force His way into our lives, and many people never invite Him in. But if history tells us anything, it is that He is more than willing to touch those who seek more of His power.

To understand more deeply what all this means, I look to a man whom I considered an expert in the things of the Spirit, both theologically and experientially: Derek Prince. In his important book *Foundational Truths*, he explains that God intends the baptism in the Holy Spirit to produce many great results in the believer's life. He points to Hebrews 6:4–5, which speaks of believers who "have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come."

Prince says of these verses, "The Baptism in the Holy Spirit gives the believer a foretaste of an altogether new kind of power—a supernatural power that belongs, in its fullness, to the next age."

Prince teaches that an alternate translation of the word *guarantee* is "down payment," and the Lord gives us—through

His Holy Spirit—a "down payment" of heavenly power and glory, a foretaste of the next age. He explains, "This down payment sets us aside as His purchased property, not to be offered to any other purchaser. It is His guarantee, too, that at the appointed time He will return with the balance of payment and take us to His home, to be with Him forever. That is why Paul calls it 'the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession,'" in Ephesians 1:14 (MEV).

Prince writes that when we are Spirit baptized, we gain new understanding of what Jesus meant when He said God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth. We are no longer satisfied with man-made worship, writes Prince, because we've been in the heavenly land and glimpsed its glories and God's holiness. No matter where circumstances

may take us, we now worship on holy ground. We worship in Spirit—the Holy Spirit—and in truth.

What is true in our worship as Spirit-filled Christians is equally true in every other aspect of our experience. The baptism in the Spirit serves as a gateway to a new kind of supernatural life. The supernatural has become natural.

Deep worship, singing in tongues and moaning under the anointing of the Holy Spirit are all part of the worship style we associate with Pentecostals. I have thought it is interesting that the

Pentecostal style of uplifted hands and the more worshipful music that came out of the charismatic movement have been adopted by many churches that probably don't consider themselves charismatic. This shows me they are open to the Holy Spirit and long for more of God. The good news is that those who seek more of Him will find Him if they search with all their hearts.

This desire for more of God is part of how the Holy Spirit draws us to God and leads us to a place where we can overcome condemnation, guilt and shame. The Holy Spirit delivers us from the snares of the enemy and helps us overcome the immoral culture we live in.

*No matter where
circumstances may take
us, we now worship on
holy ground. We worship
in Spirit—the Holy
Spirit—and in truth.*

Stephen Strang has seen major changes in the church, the culture and technology since he founded *Charisma* magazine in 1975. In addition to being CEO of Charisma Media, he hosts a Strang Report podcast live on YouTube and Rumble at 4 p.m. EST every Tuesday and Thursday. His important new book *Spirit-Led Living in an Upside-World* is available wherever fine Christian books are sold including online at mycharismashop.com.

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One Leader's Failure Isn't an Excuse to Leave the Faith

I started seriously following Jesus in the 1970s. From those early days until now, I've watched many leaders fail.

During the days of the Jesus movement, we learned that Lonnie Frisbee—the hippie evangelist portrayed in the movie *Jesus Revolution*—got divorced because of sexual immorality and had to break ties with Calvary Chapel pastor Chuck Smith. In the 1980s, evangelists Jimmy Swaggart and Marvin Gorman were on the evening news because of sex scandals. Then, after PTL founder Jim Bakker had an extramarital affair, he went to prison for misusing donor funds.

In the 1990s, when I became an editor at *Charisma*, I lost count of the scandals involving bishops, pastors, false prophets, gospel singers and charlatans who preyed on the faithful. I'm old enough to remember W.V. Grant, who was exposed on *Nightline* for faking healings; and Robert Tilton, who bilked donors and threw their prayer requests in the trash.

The failures continued into the next decade, four or five ministry failures happening at the same time involving high-profile pastors. Even in recent years we've seen scandals involving revivalist Todd Bentley, charismatic prophet Paul Cain, Nigerian pastor Sunday Adelaja, apologist Ravi Zacharias, Bishop Eddie Long of Atlanta, and Hillsong pastors Carl Lenz and Brian Houston. And now, the International House of Prayer movement is reeling because of Mike Bickle's confession on Dec. 12, 2023, of inappropriate conduct with a woman.

Here's a simple reminder: There's no problem with the gospel. There's nothing wrong with God. He's perfect, but since the beginning of time His followers have struggled with their flaws and sinful tendencies. Jesus gave us the power to avoid sin, but not every follower of Jesus fully embraces that power.

Years ago, a pastor in Australia asked me why I didn't have a sour attitude toward ministry leaders. "Lee, you've had to report on all these church scandals," he said. "How have you not become a cynic?"

My reply was honest: "Because I know I'm capable of doing the things they did." In other words, I know I'm standing today only because of the grace and mercy of God.

During the current Mike Bickle scandal, I've heard people say that many Christians will backslide because of Bickle's mistakes.

But I don't understand this reasoning. In all my years of watching ministry scandals, not once have I said, "I'm going to abandon my faith because of what that person did." Why would I give a person so much power over my life? Here are three truths that guide me when servants of God fail:

1) Church leaders don't belong on pedestals. Paul and Barnabas rebuked the people of Lystra when they called them gods (Acts 14:14). I respect anointed ministers, but I also know every Christian has feet of clay, including me. Only Jesus deserves worship. Some of the godliest pastors I know have shared with me their private struggles. The apostle Paul was a spiritual giant, but he was painfully aware of his weaknesses when he said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I am the worst of them all," (1 Tim. 1:15).

2) Just because one leader messed up doesn't mean everyone is failing. I know hundreds of pastors and ministry leaders who have walked with the Lord for decades. God's grace has kept them on the narrow path. Their exemplary lives show me it's possible to finish well. Instead of focusing on the negatives, identify the true heroes who are steady and stable. They may not be the loudest or the flashiest preachers, and they may not have the biggest social media followings, but they have track records of faithfulness.

3) It's better to pray than to criticize. The longer I live, the more I realize that a wise man is quick to hear and slow to speak. I have said little until now about the Mike Bickle situation because I care about him, regardless of what he's done. I'm praying for him, as well as for all the people in the House of Prayer movement who have been affected by this tragedy. God will bring correction as well as healing in this situation. And if they hurt other people, pray for them, too.

Having a merciful and prayerful attitude doesn't mean we avoid confrontation, or that we compromise with sin. But when I confront, I want my heart to be bathed in grace. Pray for all leaders who fail—and ask God to extend the same mercy to them that you need every day.

The devil wants to use other people's failures to discourage us. Resist the enemy's manipulation.

Keep your eyes on Jesus, and trust in His amazing grace. He is able to keep you from stumbling.

Just because a Christian leader falls into sin doesn't mean the gospel doesn't work.

J. Lee Grady was editor of *Charisma* for 11 years and now serves as senior contributing editor. He directs [The Mordecai Project](#) an international ministry that protects women and girls from gender-based violence. His latest books are *Follow Me* and *Let's Go Deeper* (Charisma House).

Simply Christ

Gospel Insight

with Keith Surface

“...But I Believe!”

One night in a dream I saw myself standing on top of one of many open-top boxcars on a train speeding down a railroad track. The boxcars were field with people, some of which I knew. It had the appearance of a social gathering where people had glasses in their hands and snacked on “party foods.” In retrospect, I have often considered these boxcars were churches or groups of church people. I got the attention of a man I recognized, who reached up and shook my hand. I grabbed his hand and spoke these words: “Jesus is coming! We've got to be real!” The man agreed with what I spoke but seemed embarrassed that I was speaking it at that moment. I knew he did not understand the urgency, so I held to his hand and repeated the statement. “Jesus is coming! We've got to be real!” This time the man tried to ignore my grip on his hand and continued his socializing with others in the boxcar.

At this point Jesus appeared in the sky accompanied by a host of angels and an innumerable company of saints. I was still holding on to the man's hand when I began to feel myself lifted up to meet Christ in the air. I loved the man and did not want to turn loose of his hand but very soon my grip broke as I was lifted away. The man's attention was turned upward, and I saw the disbelief in his eyes as he spoke these words: “No ...but I believe!” He spoke the same words again, but the disbelief was turning to horror. “No ...but I believe!”

As I was lifted higher and higher away from the train, others in the boxcars began to notice what was happening. They all cried out with the same words: “No ...but I believe!” I watched as the train sped down the track until the track and land ended and the train began to tumble into the abyss. Almost in unison, everyone on the train was screaming, “No ...but I believe!”

This dream ended in great horror for those who thought their “believing” would save them. Somehow, faith in Jesus Christ had been substituted for an empty mental assent. There is no doubt that we are saved “*by grace ...through faith*” Ephesians 2:8, and we also “stand by faith.” Romans 11:20. “Saving faith,” however, is always based upon belief of the truth of the gospel. **If just believing “anything” constitutes “faith,” then believing a lie would also be faith.** Yet Paul warned of those who received “...*strong delusion, that they*

should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” II Thessalonians 2:10-12. A suicide bomber may believe his death will guarantee himself Heaven, but his firm belief is not faith. He is only believing a lie. Believing a lie never brings you into the promises of God.

True “saving faith” brings such a response from God unto the believer that the existence of such faith is evident for all to see. The Apostle John told us “*He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness (evidence) in himself...*” I John 5:10. The Biblical evidence of “saving faith” is as a city set on a hill. It cannot be hidden. Let's look closer at the biblical witness of “saving faith.”

“God ...bare them witness ...purifying their hearts by faith.” Acts 15:8-9. Saving faith brings a clean heart to the believer. God said, “*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you:*” Ezekiel 36:26. The Apostle told us “*the blood of Christ*” would “*purge your conscience (inner thoughts and feelings) from dead works to serve the living God*” Hebrews 9:14.

“...sanctified by faith that is in me.” Acts 26:18. Jesus went to the cross to “*that he might sanctify the people with his own blood...*” Hebrews 13:12. Through faith in Jesus Christ, sin is washed from our heart and nature by his precious blood. Remember, Jesus “*...loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.*” Revelation 1:5.

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness...” Romans 10:10. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are transformed from one born a sinner into one who has been made righteous by the work of Christ. The Bible tells us “*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*” Romans 5:19.

Paul told us to “*examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith...*” II Corinthians 13:5. If our “faith” has not brought us what the Bible says saving “faith” brings, then we should examine whether we are in the faith. Your eternity depends upon it!

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Loving Prickly People

Have you ever had that one person in your life? You know, that one person who seems to be able to push all your buttons at all the wrong times? We've all been there. And in our world today, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. So, what should we do?

Fortunately, people who have flaws and faults are nothing new. All you need to do is read Genesis to realize that. One of the earliest recorded stories in Genesis is about Cain, who killed his brother, Abel, because he was jealous of him. And yet, the people involved in these situations are people God used for His plans and purpose—so this means there's hope for us, too.

It seems like if we're going to love anyone, then no matter who they are, they'll have flaws. We must learn to live in peace and walk in love. And we absolutely need to learn to love people who are hard to love, which includes most of us, at least at times.

Love is so much more than a feeling; it's how we treat people, and it changes everything. Just imagine how different our world would be today if people truly loved one another. I have decided that I am going to love people, which includes those who are hard to love. I am asking you to make the same decision, and I believe if enough of us do it, we will impact the world in a very positive way.

In the animal kingdom, probably the most difficult animal to get close to is the porcupine. Porcupines are not usually considered lovable. Every one of them has about 30,000 sharp quills that can stick you and be very painful—but it's their way of protecting themselves.

People also often develop ways of protecting themselves, especially if they have been hurt in the past. I like to use the saying, "Hurting people hurt people." For example, a person who has been hurt may be extremely defensive and think they are being rejected when that is not the case at all. Or, they may argue all the time, striving to be right in every situation because that is the only way they can feel good about themselves.

I happen to know a few people like this, and you probably know some, too. I call them "porcupine people." They are dangerous to be around because you are likely to get hurt. It would be so nice if we could just place an order for the kind of people we would like to have

in our life, but people come "as is" and we either take them as they are or end up alone.

God takes us the way we are and helps us become all that we should be. The question is: Are we willing to do this for other people? My husband, Dave, did it for me, and had he not loved me unconditionally, I probably wouldn't be in ministry today.

You see, when Dave prayed for a wife, he asked God to give him someone who needed help, and God certainly answered his prayer because I needed a lot of help. Growing up, I experienced terrible physical and sexual abuse from my father. And because of that past abuse, I ended up becoming a porcupine person. Dave said he knew the first night he met me that I was the girl for him. As it's turned out, he was right, but he had to be willing to love someone who was very hard to love for a very long time before he had a wife who was somewhat normal.

Now I pray regularly to be good to people and make them feel good when they are around me. I'm sure I don't always succeed, but I don't always fail either. I still stick out my quills occasionally, but God is working with me, and I always want to be willing to work with the porcupine people He puts in my life, too. We may sustain little wounds as we walk through life with others, but we are much better off in relationships than in isolation.

Despite their prickles, I don't believe there is a person on the planet who doesn't want to be loved. As a matter of fact, most people who are hard to love are the way they are because they have never experienced real love. They are dissatisfied and looking for something to fill the emptiness they feel, but often they don't know what they are looking for, so they search in all the wrong places.

But we can make a difference. When we have God's love in our hearts, we can let it flow through us to other people—even porcupine people. Everything God gives us should flow through us to others—His love, peace, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, joy and many other blessings. Loving people who are hard to love will be difficult on most days and seemingly impossible on others, but God never asks us to do something that we cannot do with His help. You can do it because God is in you, and He will do it through you. So, let me ask: Are you willing to say yes to God?

When we have God's love in our hearts, we can let it flow through us to other people—even porcupine people.

Joyce Meyer is a *New York Times* bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries Inc. She has authored 130 books, including *Battlefield of the Mind* and her newest devotional, *Quiet Times With God* (FaithWords). She hosts the *Enjoying Everyday Life* radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit joycemeyer.org.

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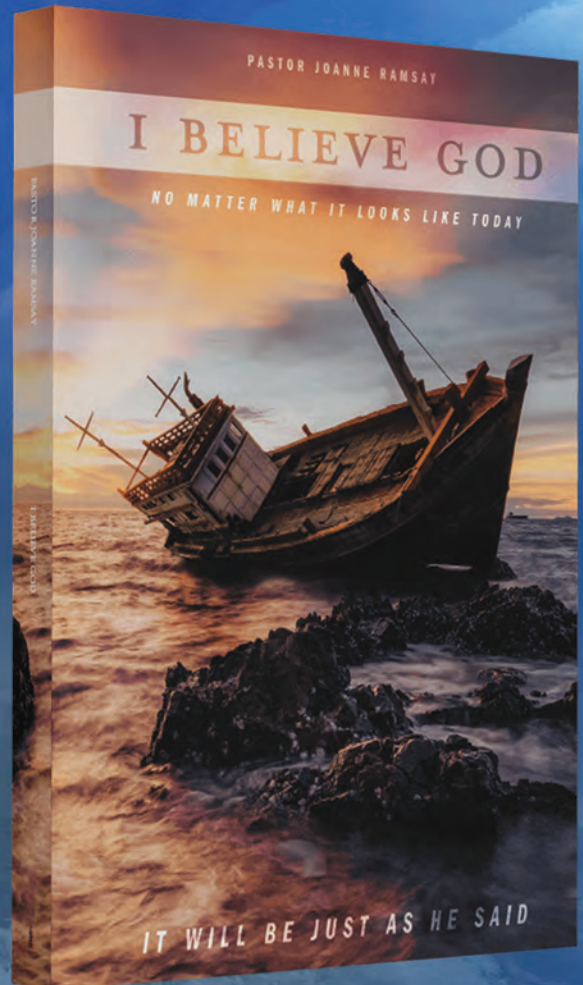
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Prophetic Timelines and Hebrew Calendar Year 5784

The Bible is full of timelines and calendars. It makes God happy to set dates and make appointments, called “moedims” by the Jews. There are Hebrew holidays with great prophetic meaning and then of course there is the simplicity of the calendar.

The Bible also presents warnings about the sobering responsibility of knowing God’s timing. Jesus preached on the accountability of prophetic timing more than any other Bible figure. Examples of Jesus’ warning about prophetic timing include:

- » The parable of the five foolish virgins. (Matt. 25 1:13)
- » The thief in the night announcement. (Matt. 24:43)
- » He scolded the religious leaders for not knowing the sign of the times. (Matt. 16:3)
- » He predicted and mourned the destruction of Jerusalem

because they “missed their day of visitation.” (Luke 19:44)

» The coming of the Son of man would be like the days of Noah and they would be planning other events not knowing the timing of the flood. (Matt. 24:39)

Since God spoke all things into existence, He has trusted His children to steward His kingdom in the created realms of time, space and matter. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning (time) God created the heavens (space) and the Earth (matter).” Now the 31,101 verses that follow in your Bible, can be learned, lived and demonstrated within those three different playgrounds. They are in perfect continuum together and you can’t have one without the existence of the other two. Moses wrote this on an animal-skin canvas at least 3,300 years before Einstein’s general theory of relativity was published. It can be summed up in just 14 words: “Space-time tells matter how to move—matter tells space-time how to curve.” Key above all else, is that it is heaven’s timing that tells us how to move.

In Hebrew, every letter is a number and every number is actually a prophetic symbol. As a guy who loves numbers and the voice of God through His mathematical lingo, I can tell you the prophetic word for the new year 5784 on the Hebrew calendar blows my mind. 5784 carries an emphasis on the eight and the

four. This 84th year is still in the decade of the Pey which is the symbol of the mouth.

It will be a decade of the breath of God and our words being full of powerful declarations. As soon as we entered this supernatural decade, you will remember the entire world was told to mask up and cover our mouths. Cities burned and rioters looted to the chant of “I can’t breathe.” This is the decade of the breath and the mouth.

The four is the Hebrew letter/number “dalet.” Symbolic of a door, dalet represents choice. The first mention of a door in Scripture is in Genesis, you guessed it, chapter four: “If you do well, shall you not be accepted? But if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must rule over it,” (Gen. 4:7).

Cain closed the door and killed his brother. This is a year God will have you choose. This is a year of decisive action and the demand of extreme loyalty to Jesus and His kingdom. The Lord told me that this is the year of “*altered state*.” As things change quickly, we have to push into the fear of the Lord and a greater place of severe loyalty and obedience. We can’t say we belong to Jesus if we run to eat at the table of the enemy. God will receive your place at the altar like never

before. Your prayers, your declarations, your quick obedience to lay down your life will come before the Lord immediately this year. This prophetic hour is all about quick obedience and loyalty to sticking with the Lord and His plan.

If you’re brave enough, come look at the 84th verse of the New Testament: “They immediately left their nets and followed Him,” (Matt. 4:20). Boom! They immediately dropped everything, all of the things they knew, everything that made sense to them and had always worked on, to go and follow Jesus—*immediately*—into a new place.

I think that this is a perfect prophetic picture of the timing of this season. As Jesus invites us to follow Him into new and uncharted territory, we must leave our nets and follow Him, period. For if we fight for what we have always done before, we will fight for what no longer matters.

As Jesus invites us to follow Him into new and uncharted territory, we must leave our nets and follow Him, period.

Troy Brewer is the founding and senior Pastor of OpenDoor Church in Burleson, Texas. He is known for his relevant and authentic teachings, amazing insights and studies on the wonders of God. A sixth-generation Texan, he also has a passion for all things Texas. Troy and his wife, Leanna, have four grown children and two grandchildren.

ARE YOU PRAYING AND NOT HEARING FROM GOD?

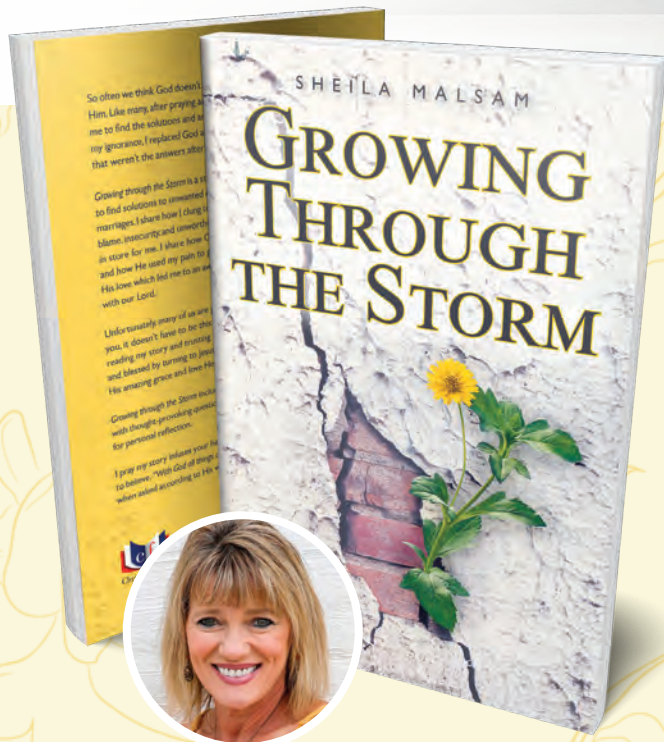
God, Are You Listening To My Prayers?

So often we think God doesn't hear us during our struggles when we cry out to Him. Like many, after praying and not getting a response, I thought it was up to me to find the solutions and answers to the struggles I encountered. Because of my ignorance, I replaced God and His power with what I thought were answers.

Is God whispering something within your spirit? Do you have a dream that you believe God has placed in your heart? If so, have you surrendered it to God? Or perhaps, like me, you believed you were in control and said "Yes" to that which God already responded "No," and now you're desperate for a second chance.

Growing Through The Storm is a story of triumphs and lessons learned while searching to find solutions to unwanted circumstances during not one, but two troubled marriages. I share how I clung to attachments such as doubt, fear, worry, self-pity, blame, insecurity, and unworthiness that kept me from receiving what God had in store for me. I share how God revealed Himself to me through the storm and how He used my pain to grow me stronger, wiser, and more confident of His love, which led me to an awakening in my spirit and a personal relationship with our Lord.

» Learn more at www.sheilamalsam.com/about-the-book



***"Growing Through The Storm* by Sheila Malsam is a heartfelt and inspiring memoir that delves into the author's personal journey through the storms of life. This book is a testament to the power of faith, resilience, and the unwavering love of God."**

– Jithendra Jithu

***"Growing Through The Storm* – For those that feel the pain of society's expectations and judgment instead of looking to God. Very inspiring and real."**

– Private

***"Growing Through The Storm* – Through this book, the author wants us to learn that we shouldn't control everything by ourselves. Sometimes, if things don't happen, we should leave them in God's hands as God knows the best for us. This book is an eye-opener for me. It made me realize how I question my faith sometimes. I am glad to get my hands on this book at the right time. Thanks to the author for sharing her story with us. It's a book worth reading."**

– Passionduniya



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Free Chapter Download

Southeastern University



Association of Related Churches Announces Partnership With Southeastern University

Biblical Studies Series will offer theological opportunities

The Association of Related Churches recently announced a new partnership with Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida, through which SEU will offer a learning series for ARC church pastors. SEU will provide the classes online, enabling pastors to work through the series on their own time and at their own pace.

The goal of the Biblical Studies Series is to help pastors build a stronger theological foundation that will expand their understanding of God's Word and thus

improve their preaching. In addition, both the BSS and the partnership are designed to help church leaders grow in their ability to serve their greater communities.

The BSS will provide both seminary-trained and non-seminary trained pastors with an accessible opportunity to boost their knowledge of theology. It will allow students to engage with various theological disciplines, enhance their effectiveness as church planters and leaders, and receive in-depth training in interpreting Scripture.

Red Truck Men Creates a Culture of Honor

What started as a small-group discussion led by a young businessman in his North Carolina home has grown to a disciple-making army. Red Truck Men, named because of men's mutual respect and honor for heroes, desires to unite a band of brothers who build deep bonds of friendship as they serve God, family and community with honor and humility.

"There is a massive problem in our culture today, and it's that men are being shamed for being men," says Grant Giesler, executive director for the group. "Men are being discouraged for living out what God has called men to be. If we're going to take back our culture and we're going to see great things happen in our world, men have to live up to their full calling."

Red Truck Men, which pulls men from all walks of life, has a fivefold strategy for making a significant investment into men's lives: a monthly men's breakfast, which includes Bible study and discussion; a weekly word of encouragement; quarterly service opportunities; semi-annual retreats; and an annual men's conference.



Red Truck Men fellowship event

Believe for It

Coach's Prophetic Declarations End in Championship for Teen Challenge Football Team

When Pastor Jason Barnes interviewed to teach at The Cross Christian Academy, which serves Teen Challenge of Oklahoma, he didn't expect a position as head football coach. Would he lead this team of at-risk teens? He said yes, and the Crusaders took home the state championship.



Cross Christian Academy

When Barnes accepted his job offer, administrator Michael Lokey didn't expect what he got either: a request based on Romans 4:17: "When we win state, I want you to commit that you will buy us state championship rings," Barnes told his new boss. Lokey readily accepted, secretly passing off Barnes' faith declaration as a rookie dream.

Despite inexperience, the Crusaders won their first game. Barnes had more prophetic declarations for his team, saying, "You showed me what you have inside of you, and my job is to pull that champion inside of you out."

The team continued to walk in truth. Six victories later, they went on to win the state championship on Nov. 10.

"We're never too old to learn," Lokey says. "I think that was God telling me, 'Hey, don't ever say, 'impossible.'"

Man With a Plan

Former NBA Owner George Shinn buys iconic Christian bookstore

When George Shinn has a plan, he and God have a way of making it happen. The entrepreneur rose from a poor background to run the nation's largest chain of business schools, later becoming owner of the Charlotte Hornets of , North Carolina (now New Orleans Pelicans) NBA team. Shinn, 82, has now embarked on his latest venture by acquiring Cornerstone Bookstore in Boone, North Carolina. But the purchase of the iconic Christian bookstore is only a part of his strategy, which includes opening similar stores across the country.

"Did you know that last

year, more than 400 Christian bookstores had to close shop?" he asked in an interview with *Decision* magazine. "And since COVID hit, more than 1,000 Christian-owned bookstores had to cease operating.

"I'd like to take the model we have here in Boone and expand into every city where those stores were closed and into other areas where they really need them," Shinn continued. "I think if we can find retired people who love God and want to serve Him and let them operate the stores, and get the community involved, it can be very successful."



Pharmacist Under Fire for Pro-Life Stand

George Badeaux could not fill a prescription for “emergency contraception,” and landed in court

The U.S. Supreme Court recognizes that health-care professionals should not be required to perform acts that violate their conscience. But George Badeaux, a Minnesota pharmacist, has learned that in his state, rights of conscience are threatened.

Badeaux, a Christian who considers every life precious to God, cannot dispense drugs that may end human life, including “emergency contraception.” The Minnesota Board of Pharmacy makes provision for pharmacists with similar beliefs. Those who object to filling such prescriptions must have “alternatives ... immediately available.”

When a nurse sent a prescription for the drug Ella—which can inhibit a fertilized egg’s implantation in the uterus—to Aitkin Pharmacy, where he worked as head pharmacist, Badeaux arranged for a colleague to fill the prescription when the drug arrived the next day. However, the weather forecast included a snowstorm which he knew might keep the other pharmacist at home.

When he contacted the customer to refer her to another pharmacy, she became verbally abusive. Not only did she transfer her prescription, but she contacted multiple pro-abortion activist groups and, 10 months later, filed suit against Badeaux and Aitkin Pharmacy in the Aitkin District Court for discrimination based on sex. The jury ruled against her, and her initial appeal was denied. She is now appealing those decisions to the Minnesota Court of Appeals, and the Alliance Defending Freedom is defending Badeaux.

Teen Violinist Raises \$6,700 for Anti-Trafficking Initiative



Elaina Haroldson

Elaina Haroldson obeyed God—and saw Him move in abundance

A Wyoming teen heard the Holy Spirit speak and responded in obedience, blessing victims of human trafficking in the process. When Elaina Haroldson, 15, of Impact Ministries AG Church in Wheatland, asked God about how much to raise for Speed the Light (a student-initiated, volunteer charitable program), she says the \$5,000 figure that came to mind “shocked and overwhelmed” her.

But her father, senior pastor of Impact Ministries, gave her the idea of using her violin talents to present her first-ever solo concert. She solicited pledges per minute of music practice during one week in July. That Saturday, 150 people attended her concert at the local high school.

After the show, Haroldson received additional funds from online viewers, easily exceeding her goal. In all, she raised over \$6,700 to support the purchase of a mobile tattoo parlor that removes or covers slavery-branded tattoos for formerly trafficked women, a service offered by FREE International, an anti-human trafficking ministry.

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This book is about my personal testimony of how God taught me to surrender to Him through the instruction from the Bible. It told me to be anxious for nothing by casting all of my care on Him. *Hidden Treasure* shares my insights on Biblical spirituality and how to walk in the Spirit.

Visit HiddenTreasure.website for a **FREE** download of *Hidden Treasure*

Peter Aiello

IS IT Ignorance OR DID WE JUST GET LAZY?

The reason Bible study and literacy are
at an all-time low and HOW TO FIX IT

BY PERRY STONE

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis described vague religion as being so attractive because it is all thrills and no work, much like watching the waves from the beach. He noted that you will not get to Newfoundland by studying the Atlantic that way, nor will you get there by looking at maps and never going to sea, or by going to sea without a map.

If we embark on a journey and expect to arrive on time with as little misdirection as possible, we'll need a map. It helps to understand the plan to reach our destination before we leave home.

We'll want to know that the directions are correct. Before the days of map apps and global positioning systems, we used foldout maps, memory or intuition. Even when we wandered off course, we thought that driving in circles would get us back on track. After being harangued by a frustrated passenger, we would stop at a gas station, albeit reluctantly, to ask

directions. Do this a few times and you realize that other people might not get you to where you're going, either.

Get Eternal Wisdom

What about our journey to eternity? Think of the stubborn people you have known who refused every opportunity to hear the Gospel, accept Christ and repent of their sins. One day they found themselves with a short time to live, and having lived a life without direction, they realized they were facing an unknown eternal future. When they breathe their final breath, will they arrive at a destination they will regret for eternity?

We all need an accurate roadmap to get us to where we're going. It turns out that we have the number one map, the global positioning system that beats all others—the Word of God. The Bible is our primary source for gaining the wisdom and understanding that, when obeyed,



helps us follow the correct path to our preferred eternal destination. It shows us how to overcome the unexpected roadblocks, hindrances and battles along the way.

Our responsibility is to read those directions and follow them. How many people self-identify as Christians but have no fruit to prove it? How many have perfected the art of telling others where to go and what to do, but their wrong directions are leading people off a rocky cliff?

How many are being led astray through deception? In most of the New Testament, the word *deceive* comes from the Greek word *planoo*, which means to lead astray, to be deluded, to wander, to be led off course in the wrong direction. Sadly, many deceived people don't realize they are being deceived, and in fact, they will often claim to be hearing from the Holy Spirit.

Early in our salvation journey, we must begin to learn the truth. If we

from the faith by listening to doctrines of demons and deceitful spirits that are operating through people.

In John chapter 14 when Jesus said, "You know where I go and you know the way," Thomas questioned, "We don't know where you're going, and we don't know the way." Jesus replied, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Jesus was not only saying, *follow me if you want to have life and know the way and the truth*; He was also saying, I am the truth.

John 1:1 and 1:14 reveal that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus Christ, Yeshua, the Son of the Living God, is the Word, and the Word is truth. The Bible itself equates the Word of God to Jesus. He was the Word in

righteousness, so that God's people may be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible is not just a book of stories and religious doctrine; it is the inspired Word of God. We cannot place a monetary value on the Bible because it was inspired by God Himself, and the Word of God became flesh and lived among us. Through Jesus, the Word, we have a pathway to salvation and eternal life, along with a perfectly accurate roadmap for life.

In the United States, many people take the Bible for granted. In countries where Christianity is outlawed and the church is underground, believers are desperate for the things we consider common. They are thrilled to receive a Bible, or even a small portion of a Bible. They also live with an awareness that if they are caught, they can be imprisoned, tortured or executed for their faith.

Western nations should thank God every day that we can go online or walk into a bookstore and find rows of Bibles of various translations, along with hundreds of Christian books from just as many authors. We should be thankful that we are free to attend church, and that in some areas, we can choose from hundreds of churches. We have easy access to Christian radio and television.

The Problem Hiding In Plain Sight

So, why is the level of deception and biblical ignorance off the charts in the United States and other free western nations? It is pathetic to see the church that has religious freedom become so lukewarm. Believers who should know better are listening to lies, liars, deceivers and doctrines of demons. Every person with access to the internet can create their own theology and confuse people about the truth.

Equally as frustrating are the alleged Christians who read the Bible with the intent to argue theology that has no impact on salvation or eternity, and then beat people over the head with their "knowledge." Some of these people seem to know more about the occult and New Age beliefs than they know about the Bible, yet they



The Bible should be your foundation.

don't know the truth, how will we know when we're being lied to and deceived? You will not recognize the truth if you have no foundation for truth. Born-again believers should be willing to learn truth and endure the sound doctrine of the Bible, and not wander off into the craziness that is so readily found on social media and the internet. We cannot allow ourselves to fall away

the beginning, and when He returns to rule the earth, He will be called Faithful and True, and His name is called The Word of God (Rev. 19:11, 13).

Reason and Purpose in God's Wisdom

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in

Believers who should know better are listening to lies, liars, deceivers and doctrines of demons.



using the words of the same God who spoke the universe into existence.

The Bible and prayer are critical for our spiritual growth, our relationship with God, and our relationships with every person we encounter. We even need wisdom to stay alive after that driver forces us to slam our brakes on the highway. When the Word transforms us, we learn to walk the walk and not just talk the talk.

Believers must not cherry-pick the verses to obey. Some Christians brag that they have their flesh under control, but they ignore their gossiping tongue that is so long they could wrap it around a telephone pole six times.

If you try to read the Bible but cannot understand it, ask God to open your mind to understand (Luke 24:45). Books, teachings and sermons

should not serve as a substitute for reading the Bible for yourself. The Bible should be your foundation, and other things added will serve to amplify your understanding of things you've already read in the Bible. Reading for yourself will also help you discern deception.

Get Back to the Place You Should Not Have Left

I encourage you to increase your prayer and Bible reading, and to make this a daily discipline. Start by reading a couple of chapters in a Bible translation you can understand. Soon you will discover that the more you read it, the more you will *want* to read it. The more times you read through the Bible, the more things you will learn that you didn't catch the previous time you read it. Let God's roadmap change your life until you become more like Christ. The journey isn't always easy, but the directions were given long ago.

The longing of every believer should be to one day hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." The Bible is given to help us achieve that if we will obey. ◀

PERRY STONE is a fourth-generation minister of the Gospel. He directs the Voice of Evangelism in Cleveland, Tennessee, and has birthed other ministries including Omega Center International (OCI) and International School of the Word (ISOW).

successfully confuse some Christians who listen to these deceivers and then complain that they don't know what to believe! The purveyors of lies, deception, false doctrine and vain babblings are forever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7). Don't be the person who is guilty of filling your head with knowledge, yet still having no knowledge of truth.

When Christians are confused about truth, when they question the promises of God found in His Word, when they believe or spread deception, and when they become a false witness or spread false doctrine, we can know two things about those Christians. First, they have no prayer life. And second, they are not reading or obeying the Word.

When Christians have a prayer life, God reveals truth to them. My siblings and I will always remember how our dad would fervently pray, and if we were even *thinking* of doing something we shouldn't do, God would show him. Dad could discern when a person wasn't being truthful. The Holy Spirit might show him a person who appeared as an apple that looked good on the outside, but the inside was rotten to the core. Dad wasn't more special than other believers; he simply prayed a lot, and he especially prayed in the Spirit.

If Christians will read their Bible

and develop a prayer life, God will show them the truth. The Spirit of truth will guide you to all truth (John 16:13). 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). Then you must obey the Word. Be doers of the Word and not hearers only; otherwise, you deceive yourselves (James 1:22). Those who do the Word will be blessed in their deeds (James 1:25).

The Bible itself tells us the many benefits of the Word. If you hear the Word and follow it, you will be like the man who builds a house on the rock, so that when the storm comes, his house remains standing (Matt. 7:24-25). God doesn't say we won't experience storms; He tells us that if we follow His Word, we will remain standing through the storm.

We live by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). When we interpret and live our lives according to the Word, we will renew our minds (Rom. 12:2). God's Word is our pathway to deliverance. It is our sword for battle as we fight by speaking the promises of God over situations. We cannot speak it and fight with it unless we have read it and hidden it in our hearts. We cannot deny our circumstances and problems, but we can fight



ADOBESTOCK

DOES God Speak TO Politicians?

Christians must engage in politics,
disciplining the nation one heart at a time

BY **BUNNI POUNDS**

Entering the turbulent election of 2024, we wonder—is God moving in our nation?

Most citizens are either firmly on the side of a presidential candidate or completely disenfranchised with all of them from both major political parties. Frustration is sky high with Congress as their approval ratings are at an all-time low of 15%.

We see the Psalm 2 reality of infighting in our nation's capital and wonder whether God can reach our leaders: "Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed," (Ps. 2:1–2, MEV). Are they stuck in the echo chamber of Washington D.C. or our state houses and

unable to hear any wisdom from ordinary citizens or even God Himself? What hope do we have that God is on the move and that He can reach our national leaders, even across party lines?

After spending 16 years in the political movements, working as a campaign manager, political consultant for members of Congress, state senators and representatives, I can tell story after story of how God reaches our leaders through normal people just like you and me. Sincere Christ followers who are going deep in the Word of God each day and attempting to be led by the Holy Spirit are being used by God in places of influence. Whether they are working on specific legislation—promoting biblical values, volunteering for a campaign, participating as a

party activist or election judge, working full time as a staffer or consultant, facilitating Bible studies with the members, or simply going to the Capitol as intercessors—elected officials are being met in simple and unique ways week after week by the people of God.

Let me tell you, God is moving—and He can move through you and me.

Christians Need to Get Engaged

Our ministry, Christians Engaged, took 50 people to Washington D.C. last summer thinking we were going to educate everyone on our main tenets, but it turned into a mission trip to elected officials. We heard their faith stories and prayed over many members on Capitol Hill, including 10 members of the House and two senators.

We had two members confess to our whole group that they needed to be revived and come back to Jesus. We saw another member trying to do everything she could to clean off her schedule while we were there, so she could get to our group for ministry.

Hunger for God is growing all over Washington D.C., and I have seen it dramatically in our state legislatures as well, from Little Rock to Austin to Harrisburg.

We attempt to activate the body of Christ each day to pray, vote and engage regularly through our weekly prayer alerts, voter mobilization system for all 50 states, online curriculum packages on civics and biblical worldview topics, and church programs. Individual citizens are taking on issues like the sanctity of human life, homeschooling, school choice and fiscal conservatism, and becoming leaders in their communities. They are finding their voices, the simple education and connections to get the job done.

One Simple Conversation Can Shift Everything

Years ago, I had a simple conversation as a staffer that impacted the life of one member of Congress. I had no idea until years later how deeply impactful it was.

During my 10 years of working as the campaign manager for Congressman Jeb Hensarling (R-Texas), who served in the U.S. House from 2002 to 2018, I rarely traveled with him, though every now and then we had an event that did require travel.

The year was 2012, an election year, when Congressman Hensarling and I went to San Antonio for a rare out-of-town fundraiser. Sitting on a Southwest Airlines flight next to my boss, I was reading my Bible where I had left off the day before, the story of the faithful servant in Luke: “The Lord said, ‘Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his

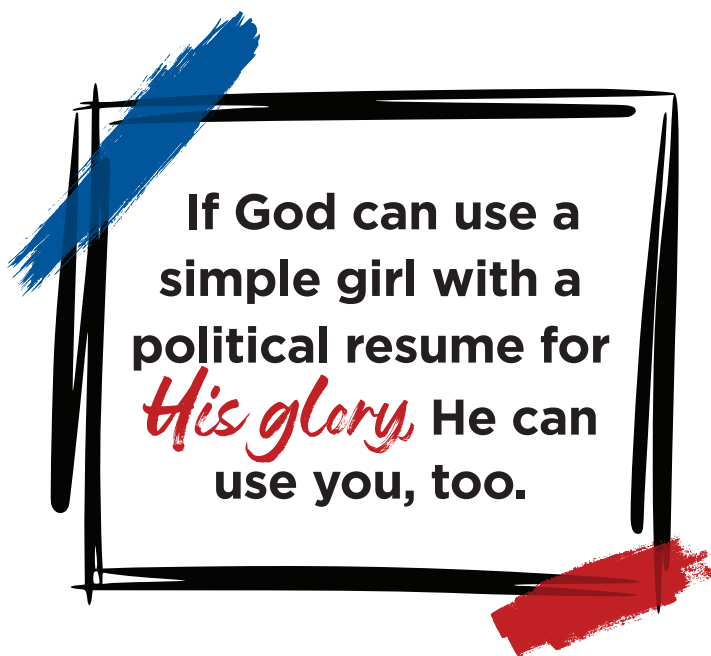
to laughingly tell his constituents that it was the most powerful position in the House that didn’t get a security detail.) Being the head congressman responsible for the GOP caucus’s communications, talking points and media strategies was an extremely demanding job. He not only needed to grow his own campaign’s war chest, but was also responsible for raising more money for House Republicans. It was also his job to counsel the members who couldn’t help themselves and went off script from the messaging his team generated.

It was exhausting, and the stress lines on Hensarling’s face had started to show.

One advantage of his leadership post was that he was one of four leaders who met together every week to hammer out plans and tactics for the other GOP members. Hensarling was known around the Hill as a solid conservative leader who wasn’t afraid to express his convictions to the Speaker, but he did it behind closed doors. He didn’t air anyone’s dirty laundry in front of the media. He was measured and thoughtful, and did everything with purpose and tact.

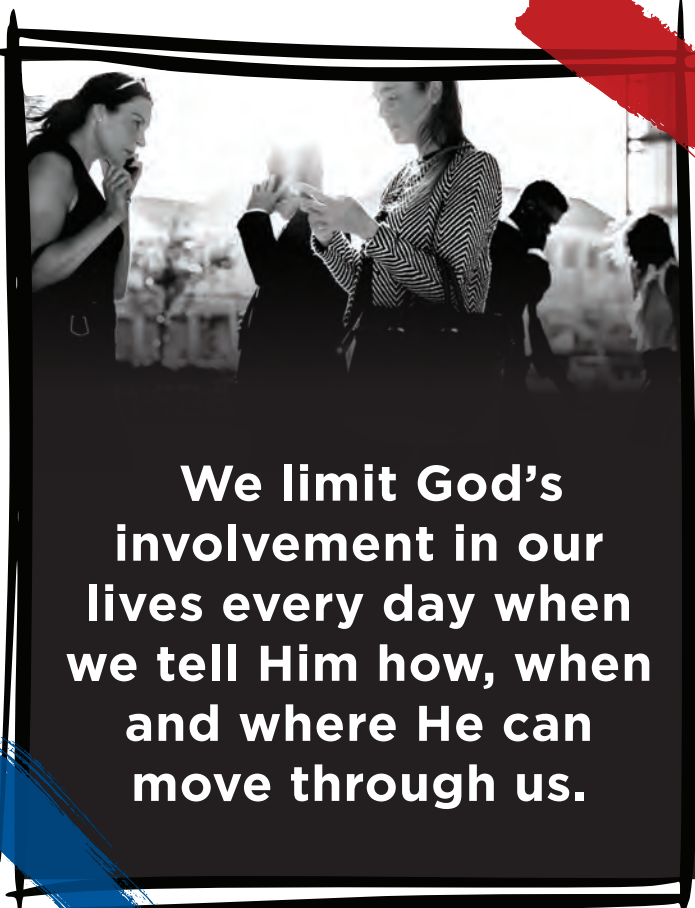
That day on the airplane he was struggling. Being the most conservative member at the leadership table, Hensarling was continually hearing the frustrations from the rest of the conservative sections of the conference. He wasn’t personally frustrated about policy; for the most part everyone at the leadership table agreed on those issues. Rather, he was frustrated with Speaker Boehner’s tactics. I could see the weariness on his face.

As he shared his heart, I just listened. I gave him plenty of space to say his peace. When he finished, he seemed resigned to the fact that he didn’t know where he wanted to go in leadership next, whether to stay as the conference chairman for the next term, potentially work his way up the food chain to be Speaker, or to simply



master will make ruler over his house servants, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will appoint him over all his possessions,” (Luke 12:42–44). The Congressman, in an unusually chatty fashion, started a conversation with me. Staffers’ rule of thumb is to leave an elected official alone if he or she is working, resting or deep in thought, but to go with it if he or she strikes up a conversation.

At that time, as the House Republican Conference chairman under Speaker John Boehner, Hensarling was the fourth most powerful Republican in the House of Representatives, an assignment he began in 2011. (He used



We limit God's involvement in our lives every day when we tell Him how, when and where He can move through us.

get out of leadership altogether.

Looking down at my Bible, I was reminded of the verses I had read just a few minutes before. But now they took on a whole new meaning. Without fanfare these words came out of my mouth: "Sir, I was just reading the passage about the faithful and wise steward, and I know God sees your faithfulness to the Speaker. What you are doing is right for what God has called you to. Just keep honoring Boehner in public and speaking your convictions behind closed doors. You are being faithful to watch over His field well, but soon God is going to give you your own field to take care of."

As soon as I said it, I knew it was a word from God. I couldn't have thought that last statement up on my own.

That was September 2012. I will never forget it. I had never had a conversation with Congressman Hensarling on his desires or potential plans for the future. I didn't even know what his real options were. It is one thing to be a Christian hearing from God in a church setting, but it is another great adventure to have

God show up on the job.

A few months later, on Jan. 3, 2013, Rep. Jeb Hensarling was elected by his peers to take over as chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, which oversees the nation's housing and financial services sectors, including banking, insurance, real estate and more. As chair of this powerful committee, he could make his own agenda and work on his own policy incentives.

The man got his own "field." He served faithfully in that field for six years (three terms) until his retirement from Congress at the end of 2018.

How Do We Let God Speak Through Us?

We have this backward idea that what happens in church is sacred but what happens in the rest of our lives is secular. This division of our hearts and minds is what hinders us from being free to walk with God wherever we go. We minimize His power in the places that we don't consider sacred.

Does God reside only within the

four walls of a church? Can His precious written words not spring to life for us in the midst of our mundane lives—in our careers, around a water cooler or even on an airplane with a member of Congress? Can He use ordinary citizens full of the Spirit of God to impact candidates and elected officials with His glory?

We limit God's involvement in our lives every day when we tell Him how, when and where He can move through us. By not inquiring of Him in every circumstance, we hinder the partnership that we were created for from the beginning. The prayer that Jesus taught us to pray says, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," (Luke 11:2). When we live out biblical Christianity, heaven impacts earth through our lives as we walk with God.

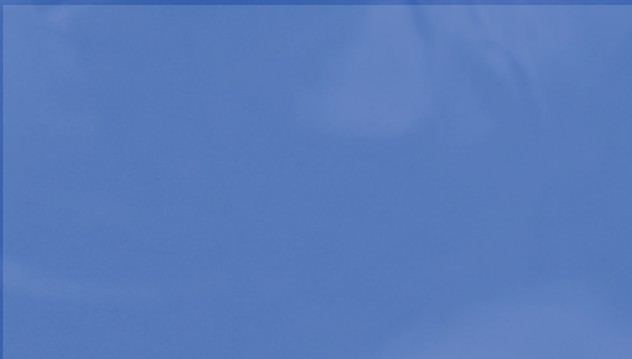
This is the answer for Washington D.C., our state houses, our county seats and our city governments—Christians discipling the nation one heart at a time, one elected official at a time.

2024 is going to be a challenging year for America, but it can also be one of the greatest opportunities for awakening Christians to step-up, walk in obedience and allow God to speak through us. God loves to speak to politicians, but the question is, are we listening and willing to be used as His "hands and feet" in these places of influence?

This is my story. If God can use a simple girl with a political resume for His glory, He can use you, too. ◀

BUNNI POUNDS is the founder and president of *Christians Engaged*, a nonprofit organization that seeks to awaken, educate and empower Christians to pray, vote and engage regularly in efforts to improve the nation's wellbeing. She was a political consultant for 16 years, and in 2018 ran for Congress herself, the only woman to make the Republican runoff ballot in Texas and the only person endorsed by Vice President Mike Pence that primary season. A graduate of *Christ for the Nations* and Dallas Baptist University, Pounds loves Jesus and sharing the gospel with anyone who will listen—from the halls of Congress to her own hometown. She and her husband, Tim, have been married since 1996 and have two grown sons, who are both married, and two grandchildren.

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A silhouette of a samurai in traditional attire, including a topknot and a patterned kimono, stands on a boat. He is holding a katana across his back and a scroll in his hands. The background is a sunset over a body of water, with cherry blossom trees on the right. A large, glowing white cross is superimposed over the sky, with light rays emanating from it.

TOWARD THE
LAND
of the
RISEN
SON

Explore the *Christian roots*
deep inside *Japanese Samurai culture*



BY DOUG STRINGER

As Christians, we need to exemplify the characteristics of the kingdom that emanate from the character of our King (Jesus). To do this, we need to have a right perspective, perception and attitude so we can advance the kingdom of God. As the late Dr. Edwin Louis Cole said, “The characteristics of any kingdom emanate from the character of its king.”

Samurai for Jesus

I remember when Daniel Gil began competing on American Ninja Warrior a reality television program that spotlighted men and women encouraging one another and cheering each other on as they tackle daunting obstacles designed to challenge even the most skilled and agile

athletes. This was in direct contrast to so many other shows that capitalized on depravity and self-seeking.

With his long curls and ever-present smile, Daniel quickly became a fan favorite. Wearing a shirt with the word “Kingdom” in large letters, he became known as the “Kingdom Ninja.” It’s a reminder, he says, of his first priority in life from Matthew 6:33, “Seek first the Kingdom of God.” Daniel has been a finalist with American Ninja Warrior seven times and was grand champion in 2020.

With both of us being from Houston, Daniel and I had been connected over the years. In fact, he is one of the worship leaders at a church where I am often invited to minister, and we have both traveled with his church to Japan. He considers me a mentor and even quotes me in his recently released book, *Kingdom Ninja: A Warrior’s Guide to Spiritual, Mental, and Physical Health*: “My friend Doug Stringer reminds me that each life experience can become a

life lesson that becomes part of our life story. These are very true words that stick with me when I'm competing."

Daniel developed a system of values as the foundation for a "Kingdom Ninja": Glory, Honor, Alive, Legacy, Sacrifice and Hope. He undoubtedly understands the principles of God's kingdom and is committed to using the platform God has given him to reflect the Good News to a world in need.

Heritage of Honor

As an American of Japanese descent, I have always been intrigued by Japanese history, culture and values. The "Kingdom Ninja" values Daniel developed remind me of the Bushido code, a set of virtues the samurai of Japan and ancient warriors of China and Korea lived and died by. While known throughout Asia, this title is mostly used in Japan and thought to be of Japanese origin. It can also be translated as "The Way of the Warrior" or "The Warrior's Code."

Although there are Shinto and Zen connections, these are all values found in Scripture:

» Rectitude (Eph. 6:14; Isa. 26:7; Prov. 14:34)

» Courage (Deut. 31:6; 1 Cor. 16:13)

» Benevolence (Prov. 28:27; Eph. 4:32; Heb. 13:16)

» Respect (1 Peter. 2:17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13)

» Honor (Prov. 16:11; 12:22)

» Honesty (Prov. 16:11; 12:22)

» Loyalty (John 15:13; Prov. 24:21; 17:17)

The Bushido code came hundreds of years after Christ, so could it be possible these values came from a Christian and biblical influence? While we may not know the answer to that question, we do know there were Christian samurai. They were Japanese warriors who converted to Christianity after Jesuit missionaries from Portugal arrived in the 16th century and shared their faith and beliefs with the people of Japan.

According to an article in War History Online, "Christianity was not common in feudal Japan. As a foreign religion, it was



There were *Christian samurai*... Japanese warriors who converted to Christianity...in the 16th century.

embraced by a small minority of people including some samurai who were the social and military elite."

It is no surprise that samurai would be drawn to Christianity as a faith expressing moral values that aligned with the Bushido code. Craig Shimahari, writer/director of *Good Soil*, a 2007 movie about the first Christian samurai, explains: "The priests were effective and exemplified many of the bushido traits of self-sacrifice and serving a master, their master being Christ. The Portuguese were passionate people able to make an arduous journey, and were focused and dedicated, traits that inspired the samurai."

Christian samurai were often torn between their loyalty to their overlords and their loyalty to God. Knighton tells of one of the most recognized Christian samurai, Takayama Ukon. When Ukon's direct overlord died, Ukon refused to light incense at the altar during the Buddhist funeral ceremony.

"It was a moment that could have caused offense, but Ukon's good character carried him through. His allies saw that his honor as a samurai was more important than any religious divisions," Knighton writes.

About 100 years after the arrival of Christian missionaries, the Shogun began to fear Christianity would usher in European imperialism. The

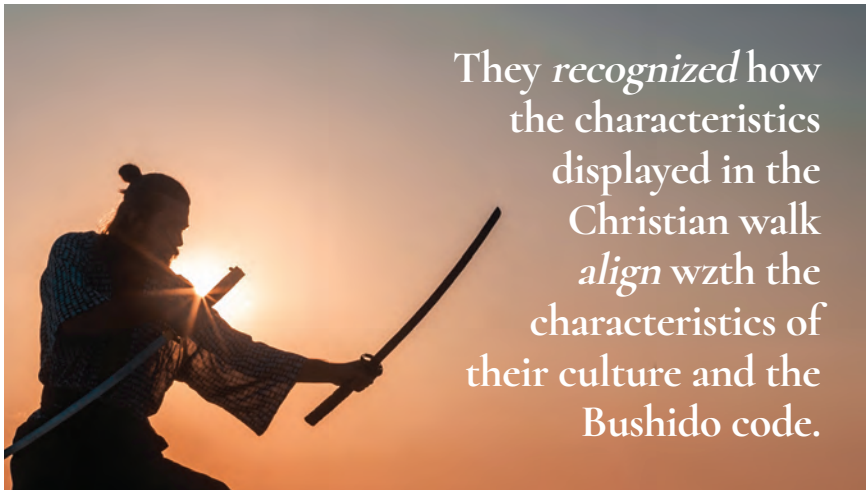
War History Online article continues: "They instituted a sort of Buddhist Inquisition, ferreting out Christians and making them renounce their faith by having them step on the cross or defile other Christian iconography. If they refused to renounce their faith, they were tortured or killed. This went on until 1637, when a rebellion of 37,000 Christians led by the most famous Christian in Japanese history, the samurai swordsman turned ronin [a samurai without a master], Amakusa Shiro, took on the Shogun's army at Harajo castle."

All of the rebels were killed, and Christianity was forced underground. Today, although it is no longer illegal, *Operation World* says only 1.5% of the population are Christian.

Alignment of Values

My heart holds a special place for Japan because I was not only born there, but my mother was Japanese. We moved to the U.S. with my dad, who was in the Navy, when I was almost three. Later, after my parents had divorced and my mom married my stepfather (who was also in the Navy), we moved back to Japan, where I attended an American high school.

It's interesting how much the values expressed in the Bushido code are embedded into Japanese culture even



They recognized how the characteristics displayed in the Christian walk align with the characteristics of their culture and the Bushido code.

today. I learned early on that honor, especially, is still a way of life in Japan, especially when it comes to honoring previous generations. It is not considered unusual for parents and grandparents to be cared for in their latter years in the homes of their children and grandchildren. Instead of the elderly being a burden, they are viewed as a blessing, a vast resource of wisdom and knowledge.

I had not been to Japan for decades, but when the Kobe earthquake occurred in 1995, I had the privilege of going back to see how our ministry could help. One evening, I went up to my room and began to weep uncontrollably. I was so overwhelmed by the needs of the Japanese people. Not only were there great material needs because of the earthquake, there were also vast spiritual needs. I was burdened by the brokenness of the people and I began to once again hear the cries of the multitudes in the valley of decision. The Lord was allowing me to feel a small part of His heartache for the lost.

Since that time, God has taken me back many times, including in the aftermath of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. I've had the privilege of praying for people in the Japanese Diet (parliament), and I've prayed privately with many other people in their government. Even though they were not Christians, they were willing to receive from me because they recognized how the characteristics displayed in the Christian walk align with the characteristics of their culture and the Bushido code.

Likewise, many people from Asian

culture here in America were impacted by watching my life while I spent many years honoring my widowed mother by caring for her in my home. This act alone—common in that culture—opened the door for many conversations about my faith.

Samurai for Revival

In 2019, I visited Japan and met with leaders who were praying for the 2020 Olympics, not knowing it would be delayed by a worldwide pandemic until 2021. When I was asked to provide prayer points and devotional con-

My prayer for the people of Japan ... is for God's love to tap into these biblical virtues that are an inherent part of the Japanese culture.

tent for many of the groups that would be on-site to pray and share the gospel with guests from around the world, my thoughts went to the Baylor University Revival of 1945.

Much like last year's outpouring at Asbury University, this revival began with a group of students—unproven in ministry and unproven in life—when

the Holy Spirit laid it on their hearts to begin holding revival meetings. The meetings caught fire.

These “unlikely revivalists” carried a passion to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. I was privileged to know one of these unlikely heroes of the faith—perhaps the most unlikely of them all. Reiji (Ray) Hoshizaki was a true “Samurai for Jesus.” At a time when many Japanese Americans were being interned at camps across the nation, Ray had been allowed to remain a student at Baylor, where he chose to be bold in his faith.

The final verses of Hebrews 10, verses 38 and 39, leading into the great Heroes of the Faith chapter (Hebrews 11), describe him very well: “... ‘But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.’ But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.”

Many of these students, including Ray, were asked to come to other cities across Texas and in neighboring states to lead more revival meetings. At a time of great uncertainty in our nation, especially for those of Japanese descent, Ray did not shrink back. Soon, the movement was spreading throughout Texas and across the South.

Like believers of old whose stories we find in Hebrews 11, Ray's story became one for the history books, featured along with his fellow students in publications such as *Riding the Wind of God: A Personal History of the Youth Revival Movement*.

I believe there is new generation of Ray Hoshizakis today, samurais for Jesus, who will not shrink back from the challenges they face—be it their race, economic status or whatever the case may be—answering the call of the Holy Spirit to usher in a new revival with boldness and courage.

Just as in the mid-1940s, our world is facing uncertain and tumultuous times. But the harvest fields are ripe! So many people are searching for answers, peace and hope that can be found only in one place—the cross of Christ.

Land of the Risen Son

David Livingstone, the great missionary to southern Africa, used to say,

My heart's desire is to see the *Land of the Rising Sun* become known as the *Land of the Risen Son*.

“Why is it when an earthly king commissions us, we consider it an honor, but when the heavenly King commissions us, we call it a sacrifice?”

The Japanese samurai understood this. In fact, the word *samurai* simply means “servant.” The entire duty of a samurai was to serve the emperor and defend his honor. As Christians, our loyalty—as Daniel Gil shares through his Kingdom Ninja message—is first to our heavenly King and His kingdom, “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,”

(Matt. 6:33, MEV).

During the COVID shutdowns of 2020, it was reported that more people in Japan died from suicide than from the disease. In a culture with such a strong value system, how could that happen? We find the answer in Scripture. Jesus said in John 18:36: “My kingdom is not of this world...”

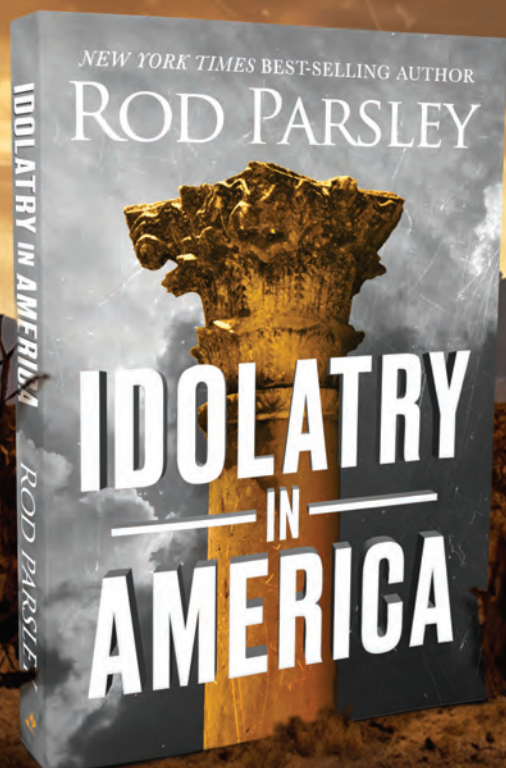
When we try to carry out a code of honor without the power of the Holy Spirit, much like we see in Scripture when so many tried to keep the Law before the time of Christ, we set ourselves up for a life of legalism and despair. It is only through a relationship with Jesus and keeping our eyes fixed on eternity that we can live out the virtues and values of the kingdom while also walking in freedom. As the samurai were devoted to their Emperor, so we, too, must be devoted to our King.

My heart's desire is to see the Land of the Rising Sun become known as the Land of the Risen Son. My prayer for the people of Japan, the land of

my birth, is for God's love to tap into these biblical virtues that are an inherent part of the Japanese culture, for the gift of His grace to be revealed, and for God to reveal His redemptive plan and purpose for the people of Japan and beyond.

The brightness of our light is dependent on what and who we are reflecting. Are we reflecting the ideologies of men or the ideology of our King? Let us be samurai for Jesus, letting His light shine before men! ♦

DOUG STRINGER is founder and president of *Somebody Cares America/International*. As an American of Asian descent, Doug is considered a bridge-builder of reconciliation amongst various ethnic and religious groups. He is a sought-after international speaker, addressing topics such as persevering leadership, reconciliation, community transformation, revival and more. He is host of *A Word in Season with Doug Stringer & Friends*, posted weekly on the *Charisma Podcast Network*.



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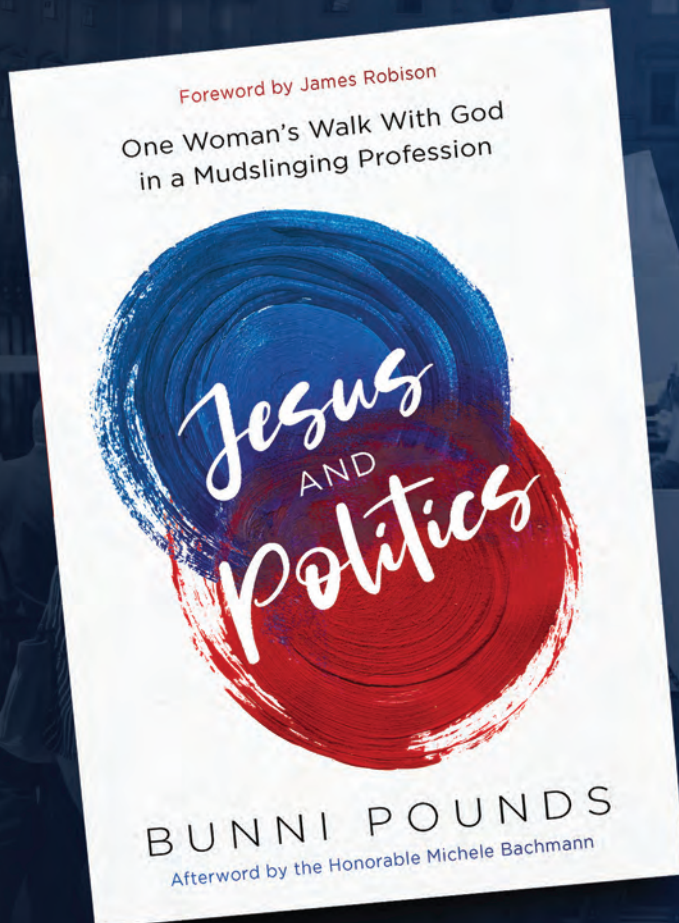
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FAITH, LIFE AND
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GOD'S
KINGDOM

7 KEYS TO BEING
PREPARED BEFORE
THE LAST DAYS

I really believe that the Lord is preparing us to benefit from 2024 and beyond. Prophecy is for our benefit, not just for prognosticating but to point God's people to areas where they need to be aware of what's coming. So even if it's bad news, it can actually be useful because we have the heads-up of things the Lord is guiding us to address and bring to Him. The Lord has begun speaking to me about seven prophetic things to really prepare God's people for 2024. Scripture says the eyes of the Lord are running to and fro about the Earth, looking for those whose hearts are perfect to show Himself strong on their behalf. And so that means that right now, the Spirit of God is looking at hearts. He's measuring a heart's posture and alignment, like when he was looking for a candidate to be king over Israel and He found David, who He said was a man after His heart. This is particularly important for 2024 going forward.

1) Be Blameless

Living blamelessly before God is a foundational aspiration for all Christians, guided by the teachings of Scripture. In the Bible, the concept of blamelessness is not synonymous with perfection but rather reflects a heart and lifestyle surrendered to God's will and grace.

Philippians 2:14-15 encourages believers, stating, "Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may be blameless and harmless, sons of God, without fault, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine as lights in the world." This writing of Paul's emphasizes the importance of maintaining a positive and Christ-like attitude in a world filled with challenges and moral complexities.

Blamelessness also involves integrity and sincerity in one's faith. Psalm 15:1-2 highlights this, stating, "Lord, who will abide in Your tabernacle? Who will dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and does righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart." Here, blamelessness is linked to a life of righteousness and truthfulness.

In practical terms, Christians can pursue blamelessness by cultivating a consistent prayer life, studying the Word of God and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, engaging in acts of kindness, practicing forgiveness and maintaining humility contribute to a blameless and Christ-centered lifestyle. Ultimately, blamelessness is a journey of faith, trusting in God's grace and allowing His transformative power to mold hearts and lives.

2) Release the Gathering Anointing

As communities strive to reconnect in the aftermath of the pandemic, the significance of coming back together is deeply rooted in biblical principles emphasizing the importance of fellowship and community. The Bible teaches that God did not design humans to journey through life in isolation but are designed for

interconnectedness and mutual support.

In Galatians 6:2, the biblical principle of bearing one another's burdens is highlighted: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." This verse emphasizes the mutual responsibility within a community to support and uplift each other during challenging times.

The concept of community extends beyond a mere physical presence. Romans 12:4-5 states, "For just as we have many parts in one body, and not all parts have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and all are parts of one another." This metaphorical representation of the body of Christ underscores the interdependence of believers within the Christian community.

As churches across the world aim to rebuild and reconnect post-pandemic, these biblical principles serve as a foundation for fostering unity, support and shared purpose. The act of coming back together not only fulfills a societal need but aligns with the timeless wisdom found in Scripture, emphasizing the strength and significance of communal bonds in navigating life's journey.

3) AI-Proof Your Income

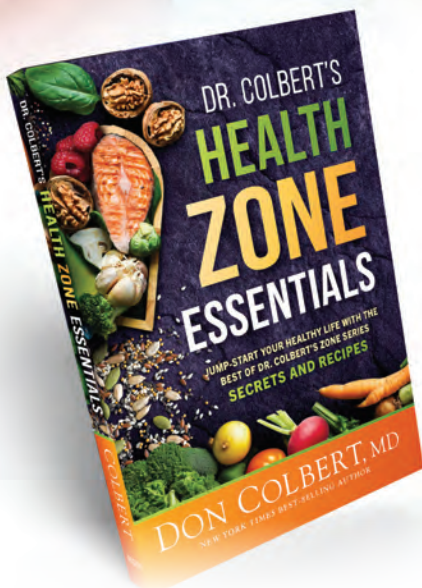
In the fast-evolving landscape of the professional world, Christians are faced with the challenge of integrating their faith into their careers while navigating the demands of an ever-changing job market. It's essential for believers to seek a path that not only aligns with their skills and interests but also fulfills the higher calling God has placed on their lives. Crafting an exit strategy from a current job to pursue a purpose-aligned income stream is not merely a career move; it's an act of obedience to God's calling.

The Bible reminds us in Proverbs 3:6, "In all ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths." As Christians, we are encouraged to rely on God's guidance in every aspect of our lives, including our careers. Taking the leap to AI-proof our income streams is an acknowledgment that our ultimate security lies in God, and we trust Him to direct our steps.

One key aspect of this transition is understanding that Christians are meant to be active participants in society's advancement, not detached observers. In Jeremiah 29:7, God instructs His people to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it because if it prospers, you too will prosper." This demonstrates that Christians are called to contribute positively to the societies they inhabit, using their skills and talents to make a meaningful impact.

By embracing AI-proof income streams, Christians position themselves to be influential forces in the ever-evolving job market. Rather than isolating themselves on the fringe of technological advancements, believers can actively engage with emerging opportunities,

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4) **Shrewd Investing & Stewardship**

In a world that often prioritizes the pursuit of wealth, Christians are called to adopt a different perspective on finances, heeding God's guidance on responsible stewardship. Instead of chasing after money, believers are encouraged to invest in the timeless asset of land, aligning their lives with biblical principles that emphasize the significance of the earth.

Throughout the Bible, God places great importance on land. In Genesis 13:15, God promises Abraham, "All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever." This covenant underscores the enduring value of land as an asset that transcends generations. The Promised Land, a recurring theme in the Scriptures, symbolizes God's provision and abundance for His people.

Furthermore, the Bible cautions against the love of money in 1 Timothy 6:10, stating, "For the love of money is a

BUILDING A PERSONAL GOSHEN IS NOT ABOUT ISOLATION BUT RATHER ABOUT CREATING A SPIRITUAL STRONGHOLD WHERE BELIEVERS CAN THRIVE AMIDST THE UNCERTAINTIES OF LIFE.

root of all evil." Investing in land aligns with God's wisdom, steering believers away from the pitfalls associated with the relentless pursuit of wealth. Land, as a tangible and lasting asset, provides a foundation for financial security that transcends the volatility of cash-based investments.

I am urging Christians to shift their focus from the pursuit of money to the investment in land, following the biblical examples of God's provision and wisdom. By heeding these principles, believers can escape the snare of the love of money and build wealth in a way that aligns with God's timeless guidance.

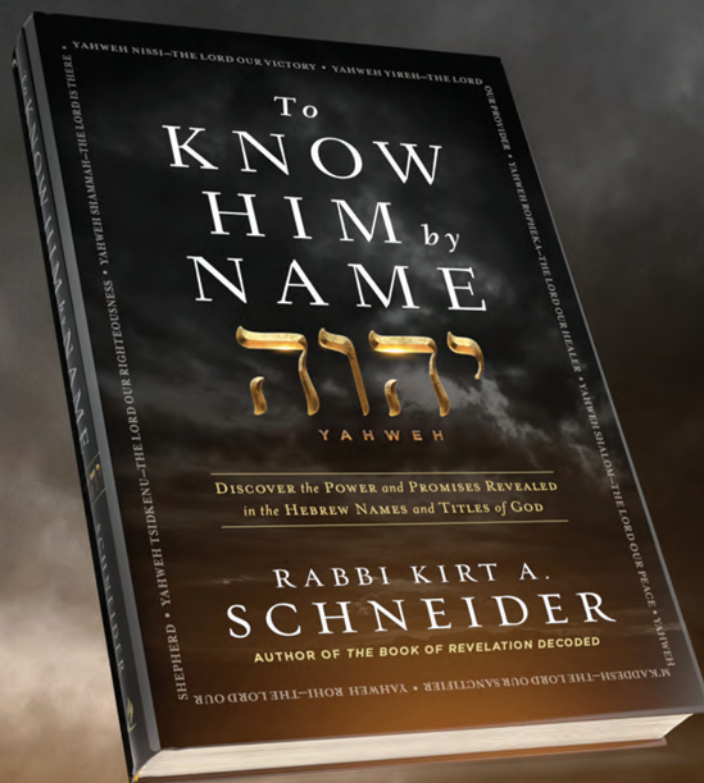
5) **2024 Will Bring Economic Shaking**

As we step into 2024, Christians

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When You Know *WHAT* Name to Call On,
You Know More of *WHOSE* You Are.



are called to embrace financial wisdom rooted in biblical principles, especially when it comes to buying, selling and managing debts. The current economic landscape suggests an impending shake-up, making it crucial for believers to seek guidance from the Word of God on these matters.

The Bible provides profound insights on economic stewardship, emphasizing the importance of buying and selling with wisdom. Proverbs 23:23 encourages believers to “Buy the truth and do not sell it— wisdom, instruction, and insight as well.” This verse highlights the significance of making transactions with discernment, aligning our financial decisions with God’s truth.

Furthermore, 2024 is anticipated to bring about wealth transfers for the righteous. Proverbs 13:22 declares, “A good person leaves an inheritance for their children’s children.” As stewards of God’s blessings, Christians are encouraged to engage in strategic financial planning, considering how their actions today can impact future generations positively.

Paying off debts is a crucial aspect of financial responsibility according to biblical principles. Romans 13:8 advises, “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.” This underscores the importance of honoring financial commitments, reflecting God’s call for believers to live with integrity in all areas of life.

As Christians navigate the economic uncertainties of 2024, it is imperative to approach financial decisions with a biblical perspective. Buying and selling with discernment, paying off debts and embracing financial responsibility are not merely practical tips but align with God’s principles for wise stewardship. By seeking His guidance in these matters, believers can navigate the economic landscape with confidence and trust in His provision.

6) Don't Wait for World War III, Prepare Now

In a world rife with conflicts and rumors of wars, the imperative for spiritual preparedness echoes louder than ever. The cautionary words, “Beat plows into swords,” resound as a rallying cry for Christians to arm themselves not only for the geopolitical

What if a name was more than an identifier?

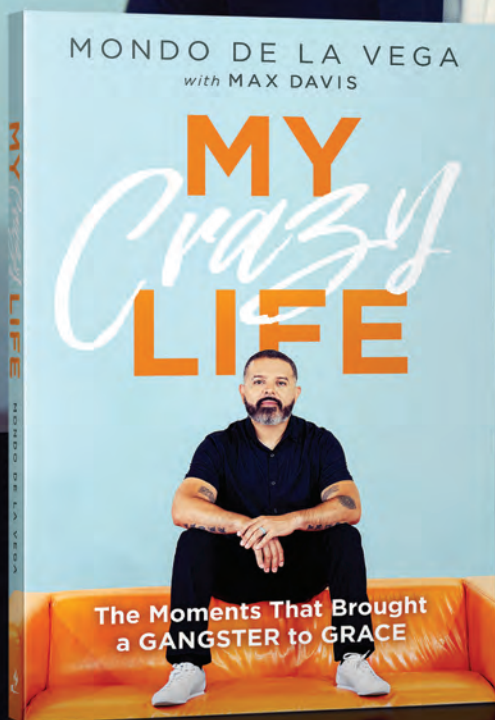
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unrest but also for the spiritual battles foretold in the Bible.

The contemporary landscape is marked by various conflicts, underscoring the relevance of Jesus' warning in Matthew 24:6-7, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come." The prevalence of strife globally serves as a poignant reminder of the need for believers to be spiritually equipped, understanding that the battles extend beyond the physical realm.

The phrase "Beat plows into swords" draws inspiration from the biblical call to spiritual warfare found in Joel 3:10, "Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, 'I am strong!'" This emphasizes the urgency for believers to be prepared, not just defensively, but to actively engage in spiritual battle with the strength and conviction purchased by the blood of Jesus on the cross.

Ephesians 6:12 elucidates the spiritual dimension of the battles Christians face: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Armed with this understanding, believers are called to put on the full armor of God to stand firm against the schemes of the enemy.

As Christians navigate the tumultuous currents of a world marred by conflicts, the imperative is clear—prepare for both physical and spiritual warfare. The call to "Beat plows into swords" beckons believers to be spiritually equipped, understanding that their strength lies in the Lord and the armor He provides. Through prayer, discernment and unwavering faith, Christians can navigate the wars and rumors of wars with the assurance that they are fortified for both the seen and unseen battles.

7) Build Your Goshen

In times of uncertainty and upheaval, the concept of building a personal Goshen resonates with profound biblical significance. Goshen, a place of refuge and prosperity, holds a special place in the Bible as a haven granted by God to His people. Today, Christians are encouraged

to draw inspiration from biblical examples and embark on the journey of constructing their own Goshen amidst the challenges of the modern world.

The biblical narrative in Genesis unfolds the story of Goshen as a fertile land in Egypt, set apart for the descendants of Jacob during a time of famine. Similarly, Christians are called to establish their own Goshen, a spiritual and emotional sanctuary amid life's trials. In Genesis 47:27, we witness the flourishing of the Israelites in Goshen, highlighting the tangible blessings that come with seeking God's refuge.

Proverbs 3:5-6 offers further guidance on building a Goshen: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." By entrusting every aspect of their lives to God, Christians can build a Goshen that transcends the challenges of the world.

Building a personal Goshen is not about isolation but rather about creating a spiritual stronghold where believers can thrive amidst the uncertainties of life. Through prayer, faith and obedience to God's Word, Christians can construct their own Goshen of peace, prosperity and divine presence amid the world's turmoil.

Going Forward In 2024

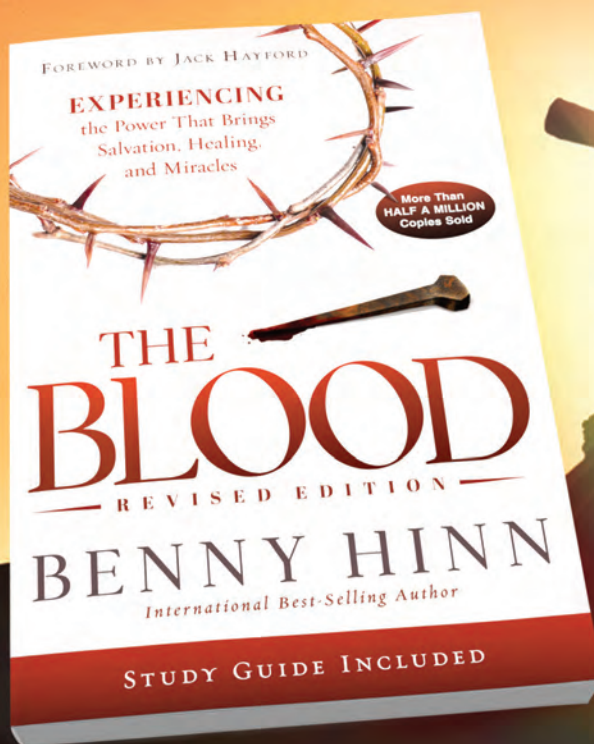
The Lord is always looking for a candidate, somebody He can exalt, lift up and promote in the land. And I really believe 2024 is going to be that year, where you're going to start to see unknowns becoming known, and knowns becoming unknown. This is the season of the beginning of the shift for those who have been hidden in obscurity to rise bringing the light of truth to every darkening corner of the earth. ◀

TOMI ARAYOMI is an internationally recognized prophet with more than 20 years experience in prophetic ministry. His desire is to bring forth the authenticity and integrity of the prophetic and its power to change lives all over the world. Tomi has been featured on mainstream media including Charisma News, BBC, Revelation TV, the Times Malawi and TBN.

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IN THE WORLD,
NOT "OF" THE
WORLD

THE TIME IS *NOW* TO BE SET APART
IN THE *Holiness* OF God's summons



BY KEN FISH

I have been fascinated with the supernatural acts of God since childhood. I remember hearing stories from the Bible from my grandmother and grandfather and thinking, “I want to do that!” Whenever I would ask my grandparents about such things, they would say, “Oh, those things don’t happen anymore”—but my hunger persisted.

As time went on, I learned that the accounts of miraculous acts of God in the Bible were, in fact, true because I saw them happening around me, and later through my own ministry. Beginning in 2010, the Lord opened a new chapter in my journey with Him. I left my 25-year career as an executive at Fortune 500 companies and began traveling and teaching the things that I had learned and experienced of God throughout my life. These travels took me to more than 45 nations, where I experienced all manner of miracles and healings (which, by the way, are not always the same). As a result, I can now say I have seen nearly every miracle described in the Bible with my own eyes.

Reality of Holiness

The word *holiness* conjures up stale images of revival meetings, gospel trios and old-time religion, along with stern prohibitions against drinking, dancing, cussing and playing cards. Despite a declining number of people who grew up in such settings, the images persist, and many are happy to leave these notions of holiness in the past. Yet while it seems we’ve cast off the old, legalistic dogmas regarding holiness, often we’ve merely replaced them. In our era of techno-savvy megachurches and postmodern emerging churches, holiness (when it is discussed at all) is commonly reduced to moral behavior: sexual purity, financial honesty, no drinking, no drugs, commitment to private Bible study and prayer, and so on. When this occurs, it is all too easy for believers to relegate holiness to a small, albeit hopefully important, part of our private lives. This scenario, though common, is far from biblical.


Religion has become internal and subjective rather than external and objective. This is, in part, behind the rise of the new mysticism; in a world where we divorce our practice of religion from external benchmarks and specific behaviors, all that remains is internal visions, hearing voices and supernatural transportation. It’s not that these things are wrong; it is that they are not enough for a robust Christian spirituality, which should include accountability to one another for Christlike character. Additionally, internal and subjective religion will never change a culture.

continued »

Said another way, we have favored personal standards over biblical standards of holiness in our quest for “cultural relevance.” This is defended in the name of winning others to Christ. “If we talk about holiness with unbelievers,” so the argument goes, “won’t that just present another hurdle for them to overcome on their way to Christ?” For this and other reasons, we are rapidly forsaking our historic commitment to the pursuit of biblical holiness. Recent polls indicate that many self-described Evangelicals and Charismatics march in moral lock-step with mainstream Western culture in practices of divorce, spousal abuse, extramarital sex, pornography consumption, materialism, self-importance (pride) and racism, to name just a few. To this list, we can also add that we have essentially conceded on the matter of homosexuality. While we are busy tipping our hats to the importance of cultural relevance, however, our culture no longer views us as different in any meaningful way, except for those who see us as hypocrites failing to live what we supposedly believe. That is a shame.

Bible Literacy Is More Important Than Ever

I believe this overall situation has a single underlying cause: as with so many biblical concepts, “holiness” is no longer understood to mean what it originally meant in biblical thought. To be sure, the biblical terms translated “holy” or “holiness” (*qadosh* in Hebrew and *hagios* in Greek) carry a strong connotation of moral purity. But moral purity is not,



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primarily, the essence of biblical holiness, though it does carry great importance. I’ll say that again: Moral purity is not, primarily, the essence of holiness. Rather, to be holy is to be set apart.

Holiness, as it pertains to God, is the quality by which God is set apart unto Himself. He is utterly unlike any other thing or person or being or experience in the universe. The beauty of His holiness is that He is so unique and incomparable. We may say that He is “like” this or that, but the truth is that He is really “unlike” this or that. He may be love, but He is unlike flawed human love. He may be our Father, but He is unlike our fallen earthly fathers. He has no beginning, yet even the universe had a beginning. He has no end, yet all other things we have ever known will come to an end. He cannot be corrupted, yet all we have ever known is eminently corruptible humanity. I could go on, but you get the idea.

Holiness, as it pertains to humans, speaks to the fact that we are called to be “set apart” or “dedicated” to God. “I will be your God, and you will be my people,” says Yahweh. (See

Leviticus 26:12 and Hebrews 8:10.) We belong to God. We are not to be like the nations around us. We are to live differently.

In the World, Not “Of” the World

Prior to any consideration of morality, biblical holiness describes a unique relationship that God desires to have with His people. Because this covenant relationship is unique among all other relationships that He has with His creation, and because God Himself (not

humans) has established it, He has the right to ask, require, yes, even to demand certain standards of behavior from His people (i.e., from us) because He can, because He is God. We don’t attain righteousness in following these commandments, but neither can we legitimately say that we are His if we do not follow them.

Holiness begins with a relationship with God, but it also has definite moral ramifications. These may require—even in the New Testament era—that we not live or look like the people in our surrounding culture. Christian behaviors and practices should flow from the fact that Christians are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God’s] own possession, that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light,” (1 Pet. 2:9).

So what kinds of behaviors are forbidden to Christians?

» Idolatry (or the worship of other gods alongside of God, on any level)

» adopting the “customs” of the people around us (which includes a wide range of behaviors variously listed

throughout the Scriptures)

» Intermarrying (because of the risk of syncretism, the blending of two or more religious systems; this is why Paul prohibits Christians from marrying non-believers in 2 Corinthians 6:14)

» Killing (or aborting) our children

» Engaging in the black arts, a subset of a wider class of New Age and pagan religious practices.

This is not an exhaustive list, but it does represent some of the behaviors that commonly ensnare Christians. Perhaps reading this list will stir thoughts of others.

At times, this can seem confusing when, in the modern context, many Christians have been told to be as much like the people around them as possible in order to “win the lost.” The meager harvest tells a different story. While Christians should be approachable and affable, holiness may ultimately be more attractive than assimilation. After all, if Christians act like nonbelievers, what is the point of becoming a Christian?

A look at biblical holiness through the lens of Jesus as the unique revelation of

found in Him. “Goodness” flows from holiness, not the other way around.

Christianity therefore is a living, organic relationship. God Himself, in the Person of the indwelling Holy Spirit, motivates everything. In Christ we participate in the very life and holiness of God. Unless we rightly understand and affirm the primacy of this relationship, we fall into the inevitable trap of reducing holiness to mere morality and legalism. With these thoughts in mind, however, we begin to see how much more God is asking of us. As long as our notions of holiness are limited to doing certain things and not doing other things, we can go through our entire lives obeying the rules (or at least maintaining the appearance of doing so) without dealing with the more fundamental questions: To whom do we belong? To whom do we give our first love and loyalty? Are we prepared to make our lives like He would have them look, irrespective of our own customs, habits and preferences?

We First Belong to Him Who Called Us

In the end, God’s call to be holy is an all-encompassing claim on our lives, our loves and our identities. It is a reaffirmation of discipleship that may require us to stop doing certain things that we like to do, to refrain from doing things we have considered, or to start doing things that we would rather not do. It means that everything a Christian is and has belongs to God, and every aspect of life is to be shaped and directed toward God. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ requires nothing less than death to our fallen self-focus in order to live in and for Him.

Holiness is primarily about union with God in Christ and sharing in Christ’s holiness. It is secondarily about living life as God requires. Out of these two, service to God and to others will naturally and abundantly flow. Only a biblical, Christ-centered holiness will safeguard Evangelicals and Charismatics from the twin traps of legalistic moralism and lawlessness. This is how the church can recover its spiritual footing in today’s world and win the lost.

As I travel in cultures very different from my own, I am struck by how pressing and relevant these matters are to

Christians, who live as a distinct minority with beliefs and customs that are decidedly different from their neighbors. The same “separateness” should be the

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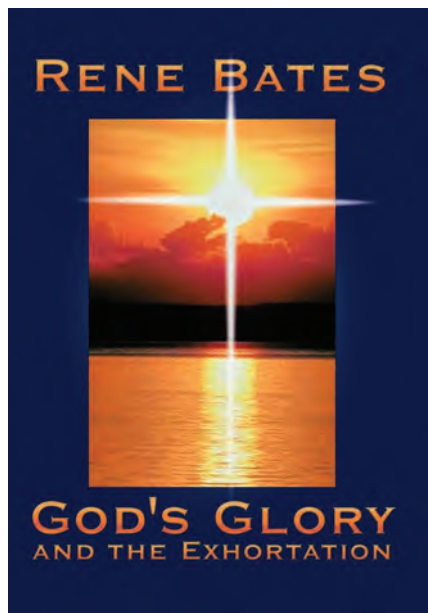
“Goodness”
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God brings the common emphasis on morals into a more proper balance. Think of it: those who have responded in faith to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ have been united with Him through the Holy Spirit. In other words, in Christ we are already holy because we have been joined to God’s holiness. Before we are ever called to be good or to refrain from any specific behaviors, we are called to be

experience of every Christian, whether American or Australian, English or Canadian, German or Israeli, Chinese or Sri Lankan, Mexican or Costa Rican. Holiness is a summons that God issues to all Christians everywhere, and it will be a hallmark of the coming visitation. “Be holy [different], for I am holy [different],” says the Lord,” (1 Pet. 1:16, MEV). ◀

KEN FISH is the founder of Orbis Ministries and is an expert in prophecy, healing and deliverance. He worked for John Wimber in the early years of the Vineyard movement. Fish graduated from Princeton University with degrees in history and philosophy of religion before earning a Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary. He also holds an MBA in finance and strategy from UCLA’s Anderson Graduate School of Management. Since 2010, Fish’s work has included vision-casting for spiritual awakening and equipping people to embrace their life’s calling as Christians. He and his wife Beth have three adult children and live in the Los Angeles area.

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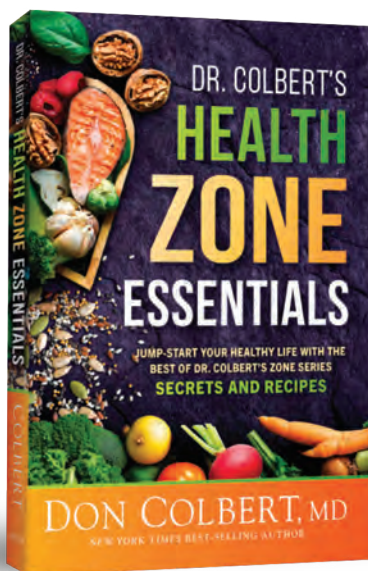
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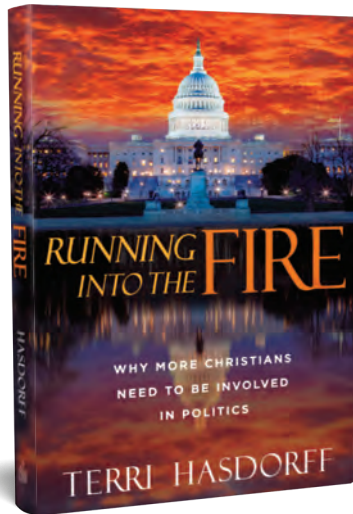


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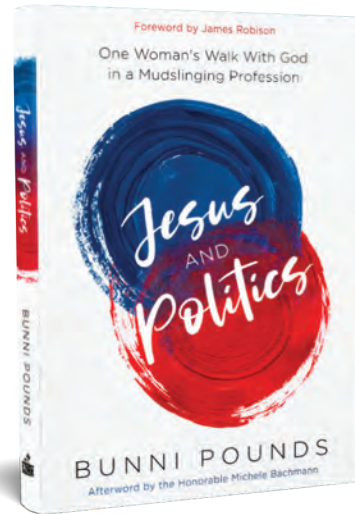
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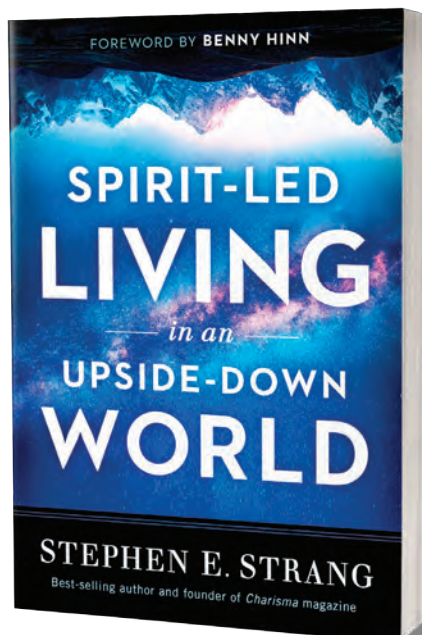
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Spirit-Led Living in an Upside-Down World by Stephen E. Strang

Best-selling author and founder of *Charisma* magazine, Stephen Strang's latest book will guide you to walk confidently in the power of the Holy Spirit for a life of abundance and joy. You'll discover how important walking with the Holy Spirit is during these critical times as we draw nearer to the Christ's return. As you go through *Spirit-Led Living in an Upside-Down World*, you'll uncover new and fresh ways to connect with God so you can be a light in the darkness for the glory of God. Regardless of what's happening in the world around us, you can be assured that God wants to perfect His will in your life far abundantly more than all you could've ever asked for or imagined.

SteveStrangBooks.com



Peace In Israel (June 1989)

The night before I left Jerusalem there was a riot on the Temple Mount. Fifteen thousand Moslems had gathered inside the 40-acre area surrounding the Mosque of Omar, the huge golden dome which dominates the Jerusalem skyline.

The mufti, or Moslem priest, had just finished a hate-filled sermon, calling on all Arab Palestinians to join the intifada (Arab word for uprising) and drive the Jews out of the “occupied territories.”

Most of the Palestinians who attended the service were not interested in fighting the Israelis. Despite hardships, they know they are thousands of times better off than they were under Arab rule. They returned to their homes peacefully. However, a group of about 300 young people, ranging in age from 10 to 20, stayed behind, chanting Palestine Liberation Organization slogans. As darkness fell over the Holy City, they picked up rocks—some as big as grapefruits—and began throwing them over the Western Wall, the Wailing Wall, at peaceful Jewish worshippers.

While all this was going on, American and European TV cameramen—who had been notified earlier of the planned demonstration—filmed merrily away. When the 30-second stories hit the morning news the next day, they showed Israeli policemen shooting Arab children and hitting them with clubs. No mention was made of the PLO instigators, the mufti’s sermon or the fact that the policemen were not Jews but Arabs.

Nor was any mention made that the PLO had forced the Arab merchants in Jerusalem and in Bethlehem to close their shops every afternoon to protest Jewish rule of Israel. Since most Jews do not shop in Arab stores, preferring the kosher Jewish shops, the only ones hurt by the strike were the Arabs.

I visited an Arab shop in Jerusalem that I had been to many times before. The night before, it had been burned out by the PLO in retaliation for the owner’s having sold merchandise to tourists on a strike day. The problem in Israel is not between Jew and Arab. It is between freedom-lovers (Arabs, Jews and Christians) and the PLO, which is backed by Moslem fanatics.

Yet while these isolated instances do occur, the rest of the nation is at peace—another item never reported by the media. Only in the eyes of the press is Israel a war zone. TV sound bites of Israeli soldiers beating Arabs have turned world opinion, including the opinion of many American Jews, against Israel.

There is no easy solution. Arabs in Bethlehem, which is virtually shut down, blame the Jews that there are 15,000 Arab college graduates in the area working at menial jobs. What they do not point out is that 20 years ago—under Arab rule—there was no problem. Why? Because there were no colleges. The Israelis there built a number of universities for Arabs. However, Moslem fanatics have prevented the Arabs from building industry to provide jobs. Instead, the PLO is constantly calling strikes, intimidating Arab merchants and pulling Arab children out of school to teach them to hate. If only half the Arab oil money spent to supply guns to the PLO was used to build industry in the West Bank, Israeli Arabs would be the most prosperous people on earth.

It’s a crazy mentality.

I traveled more than 2,500 miles during my 16-day stay—covering the nation. At no time did I sense danger. The nation, except for the few hot spots (which are “contained” by the Israeli army), is peaceful and prospering.

I was there for two reasons. First, to tape more than 50 on-location video devotionals. My nine-member camera crew accompanied me in a minibus. Second, I was checking out the sites I would walk in September to lead a hiking/teaching tour to out-of-the-way places.

Israel remains the land of promise, but only God can bring peace.

One afternoon I prayed at the Wailing Wall. The cracks between the stones were filled with slips of paper where people had stuffed written prayers. I removed one and read it. “May the wonderful people of this troubled land, Jew and Arab, find the Messiah—Jesus.”

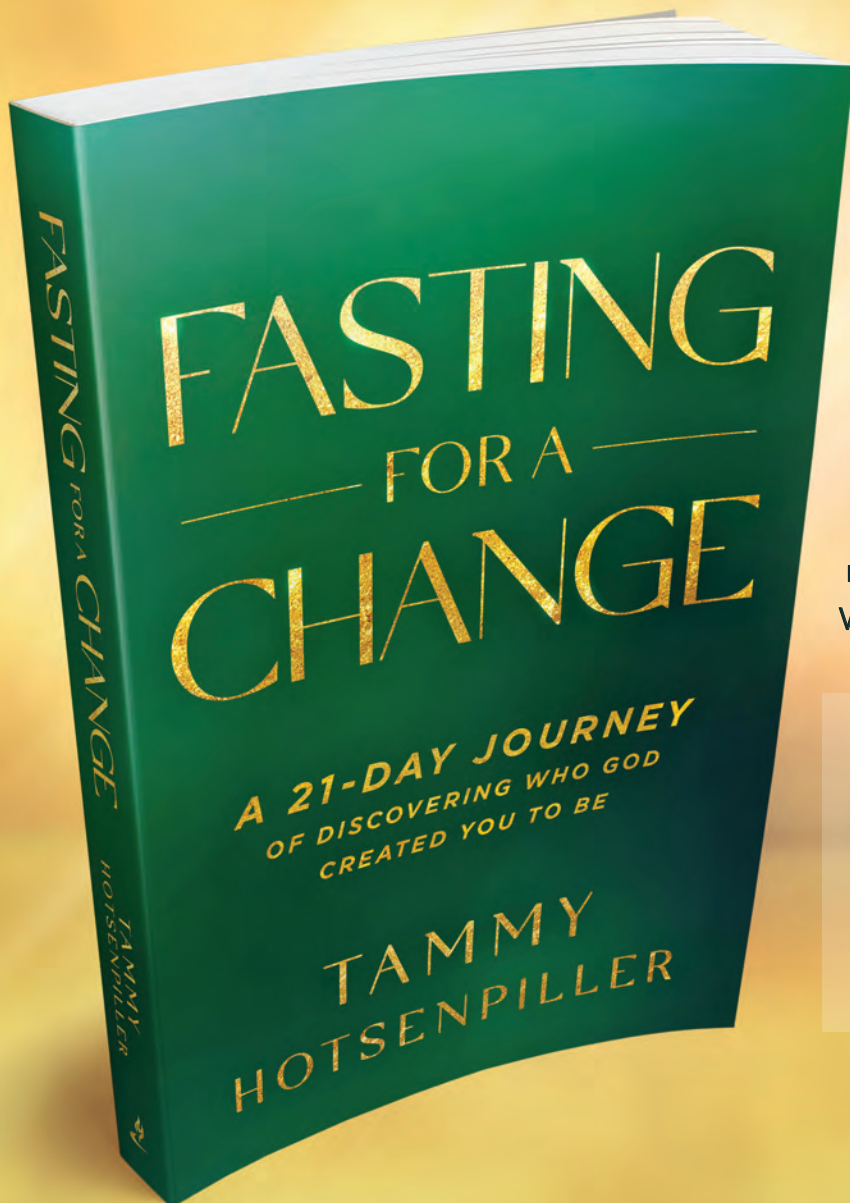
I returned it to its place with an “Amen.”

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels,” (Ps. 122:6-7).

*Israel remains the land
of promise, but only
God can bring peace.*

Jamie Buckingham wrote 153 columns for *Charisma* over 13 years, first known as “Dry Bones” but later as its most recognized “Last Word.” His singular voice was animated by a heart for Jesus baptized in the power of the Holy Spirit in 1967 at a Full Gospel Businessmen’s convention. Buckingham provided a steadying force during the scandals of the 1980s, penning the seminal article on the PTL scandal, “God Is Shaking His Church” in May 1986.

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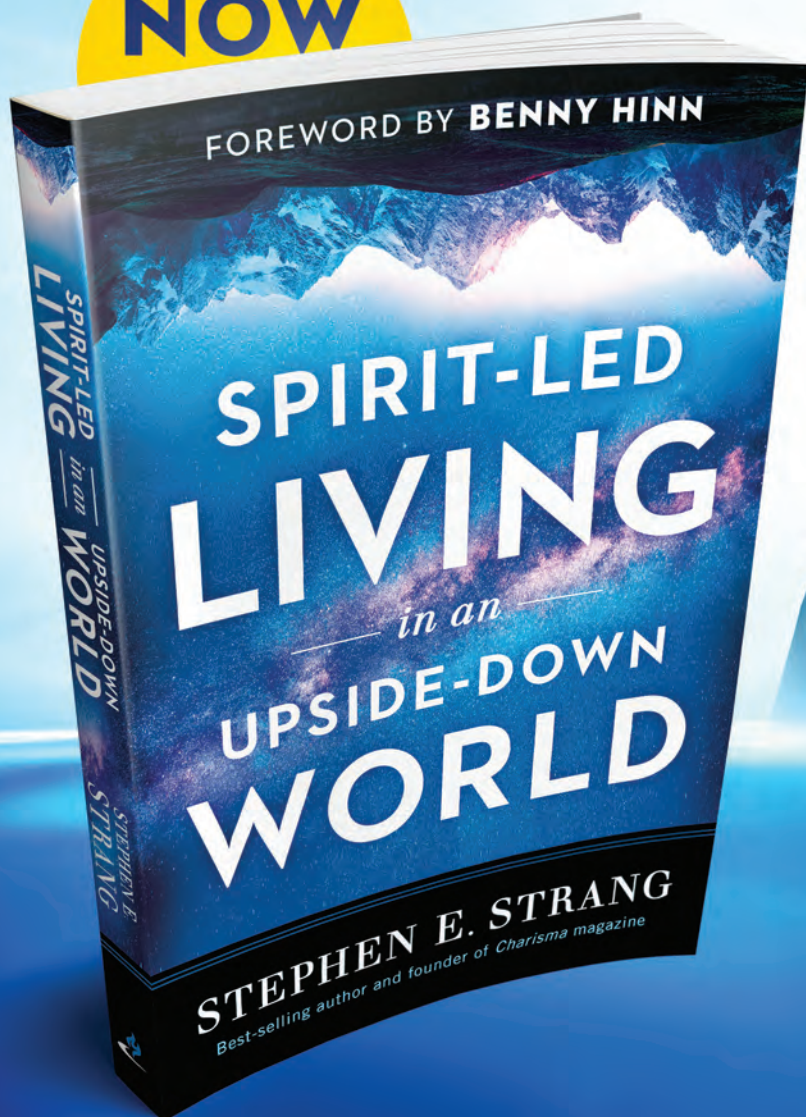
“The Lord has appeared to him from afar, saying: ‘Indeed, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.’” —Jeremiah 31:3

FEBRUARY

Feb. 1	Exod. 30-32; Acts 8
Feb. 2	Exod. 33-34; Ps. 16; Acts 9
Feb. 3	Exod. 35-36; Acts 10
Feb. 4	Exod. 37-38; Ps. 19; Acts 11
Feb. 5	Exod. 39-40; Ps. 15; Acts 12
Feb. 6	Lev. 1-3; Acts 13
Feb. 7	Lev. 4-6; Acts 14
Feb. 8	Lev. 7-9; Acts 15
Feb. 9	Lev. 10-12; Acts 16
Feb. 10	Lev. 13-14; Acts 17
Feb. 11	Lev. 15-17; Acts 18
Feb. 12	Lev. 18-19; Ps. 13; Acts 19
Feb. 13	Lev. 20-22; Acts 20
Feb. 14	Lev. 23-24; Ps. 24; Acts 21
Feb. 15	Lev. 25; Ps. 25-26; Acts 22
Feb. 16	Lev. 26-27; Acts 23
Feb. 17	Num. 1-2; Acts 24
Feb. 18	Num. 3-4; Acts 25
Feb. 19	Num. 5-6; Ps. 22; Acts 26
Feb. 20	Num. 7; Ps. 23; Acts 27
Feb. 21	Num. 8-9; Acts 28
Feb. 22	Num. 10-11; Ps. 27; Mark 1
Feb. 23	Num. 12-13; Ps. 90; Mark 2
Feb. 24	Num. 14-16; Mark 3
Feb. 25	Num. 17-18; Ps. 29; Mark 4
Feb. 26	Num. 19-20; Ps. 28; Mark 5
Feb. 27	Num. 21-23; Mark 6
Feb. 28	Num. 24-27; 1 Cor. 13
Feb. 29	Num. 28-29; Mark 8

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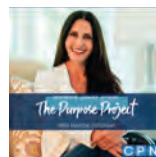
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