# CHARISMA

THE MAGAZINE ABOUT SPIRIT-LED LIVING

For unto us a Child is Born

HAPPY

unto us
a **Son** is given
and the government
shall be upon his shoulder

and his name Shall be called

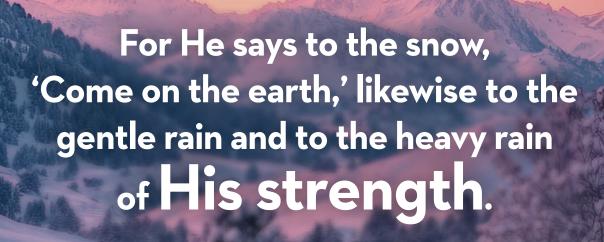
Wonderful Counsellor

THE MIGHTY GOD

The everlasting fathers

THE PRINCE OF PEACE

ISAIAH 9:6, MEV



-JOB 37:6, MEV

JOHN 21:24

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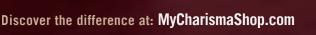
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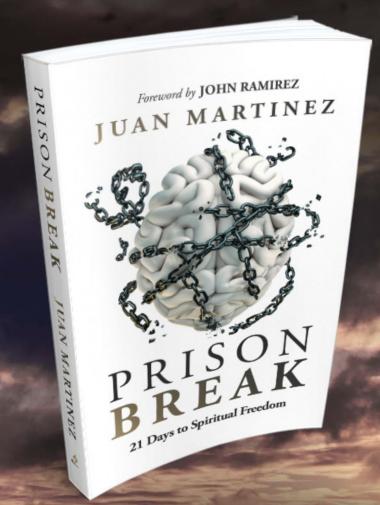


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CHARISMA 65hop



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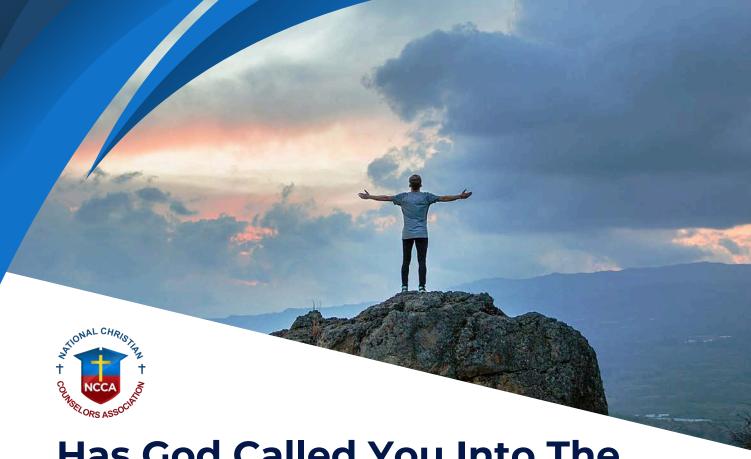
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## Start the New Year With Extraordinary Prayer

This year Christians will fast for 21 days to seek God for a personal renewal. Here's why you should join them

By Jentezen Franklin

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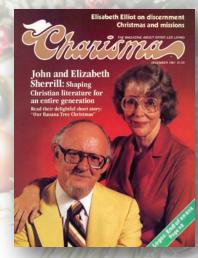
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# Our Banana Tree Christmas





**DECEMBER 1981** 

# Facing a 'different' Christmas while in Africa, our family discovered new meaning in the season

### BY JOHN & ELIZABETH SHERRILL

hristmas is the time when nothing ought to change." Our newly married daughter, Liz, put into words what all of us were feeling. We had come from our home in New York state to spend the holidays with her and her husband, Alan, in their new apartment in Tucson, Ariz. Outside, on Christmas Eve, cactus-wrens hopped about the mesquite bushes beneath a glorious desert sky, while indoors the four of us gulped iced tea and thought of pine woods and falling snowflakes.

"Home in Leicester," Alan recalled of his Massachusetts upbringing, "we'd generally go skating about now."

"And tonight there'd be the midnight service at St. Mark's!" Liz said. "Remember, Mom and Dad, how you can see your breath, walking in from the parking lot?"

We did remember. We wanted every time-hallowed tradition just as it always had been. No changes. Not at Christmas.

And yet ... we remembered one very different Christmas. A Christmas when we'd learned something important about change—whenever it comes. We doubted that Liz could recall many of the details, since it happened years ago. So for her and Alan we related the story of our Banana Tree Christmas.

We had been sent with our three children—Scott, 12; Donn, 9; and Liz, 6—on a year-long magazine assignment to Uganda. Except for one elderly German couple who lived a quarter-mile below us on a jungle hillside overlooking Lake Victoria, our neighbors were Baganda people, living in mud and thatch houses. Everyone in the family was reveling in the differentness of Africa.

That is, until December. As Christmas drew near we began to realize that this was the

time of year when we treasured tradition, not contrast. In his own way, each of us began to mourn. We became positively maudlin about the Christmases we had known, lamenting that here on the equator we could never hang our stockings by the chimney with care.

Above all, how could we have Christmas with no Christmas treethat beautiful evergreen symbol of the undying life that came to earth at Bethlehem? Stringing the lights, hanging the pants, Liz in a green dress and gray bowler hat. But ... what on earth was Scott carrying! Over his left shoulder was what looked for all the world like a freshly cut hemlock.

Faces bright with achievement, the children stopped in our front yard. "Don't look!" Liz called, seeing us in the doorway. While we closed our eyes Scott stood the tree on its sappy stump. "Open!" cried Donn, flourishing—yes, it was a machete, the long, heavy-bladed well-nigh-impossible achievement in this climate, probably the only stand of hemlock for a thousand miles? We closed our eyes again, willing the tree not to be there when we opened them.

But it was, and there was nothing for it but to set out, all five of us, down the red dirt road to the Hammerscheimers' house.

Down through the banana grove we went. The children, thoroughly subdued, trailed behind, the boys lugging the tree between them. Around a bend there it was: the Hammerscheimers' hedge, a 6-foot hemlock screen, trim and manicured and even ... except for an 18-inch stump and a gaping hole in the very center.

We had met the Hammerscheimers twice and knew only that he had been a railroad engineer under the British and had stayed on in retirement, devoting himself to gardening. Who knew what patience and expense it had taken to keep evergreens alive on the equator?

As we rapped on the front door, Liz began to cry. Mr. Hammerscheimer spoke English with difficulty, his wife not at all, and we spoke no German. But we had no trouble communicating, given the tree, the tears, and—when we led the couple to the scene of the crime—the vandalized hedge. The old German put both hands to his head and began to rock back and forth. We were afraid he might actually be having a heart attack there on the spot, but after the first shock his chief concern seemed to be for his age-stooped little wife.

He spoke to her long and earnestly in German, repeatedly drawing the boughs of the adjacent trees together across the gap as though to reassure her that in time the hedge would fill in.

Then he gestured toward the house; several times we caught the word Tannenbaum.

When at last he carried the tree inside the house both were smiling. They even insisted we come inside while Mrs. Hammerscheimer put on strong Kenya coffee and her husband showed us where in their living room their unexpectedly harvested Tannenbaum would stand. When we left we had two new friends.

But of course we still had no Christmas tree. On either side of us, as



stars, setting the Herald Angel on the topmost branch—every stage of this joyous family activity had been an occasion to talk about the coming of God's Son. But of course evergreen trees do not grow in the tropics.

At least, that's what we thought.

One hot, humid afternoon in mid-December we looked down the red-earth road that led up through the banana grove and saw the children returning from school. The boys were dressed in white shirts and short khaki

tool, halfway between a knife and an axe, which every Ugandan household boasts. "Mr. Muwanga loaned it to us," he explained, naming a neighbor at the foot of the hill.

"But—the tree!" we finally managed to get out. "Where in the world?"

'There!" Liz pointed beaming down the hill toward the German neighbors. Now that we thought of it, didn't they have an evergreen hedge around their property? A painstakingly tended, infinitely fussed-over and



we climbed back up the hill toward our house, nodded the long, tattered leaves of the banana jungle. These trees do not produce the yellow dessert banana we know in the States, but a small green fruit that looks like a "regular" banana before it ripens. No matter how long you wait, however, they never change color and never become soft.

These are matoke bananas: the Bagandans machete off the hard, green skin and cook the core like potatoes. Our neighbors consumed great quantities of them each day and, in what we took to be a grasshopper approach to the future, hacked down the entire tree to get at the fruit. Then with the everpresent machete they'd lop off the hand of bananas, leaving trunk and leaves on the ground to rot. The hillside on both sides of the dirt road was strewn with these fallen, unwanted trees.

"Maybe," Scott ventured, in the tentative tone of a leader whose previous plan had misfired, "we could use one of these instead."

Our hearts weren't in it, but nobody had a better idea, so we dragged one of the floppy-leafed plants into our living room and stood it in a corner. It did not even remotely look like a Christmas tree, but we set about decorating it anyhow. Our traditional ornaments were packed in boxes in our attic on the other side of the world. Nor did cranberries for cranberry chains grow in Uganda.

But we tore the leaves from another banana tree into strips, made bananaring chains and wound them around the pithy yellow trunk. We'd bought some long, dangling, bead earrings from a Masai tribesman; we hung these from the leaves and tucked small gifts in the leaf axils.

We stood back to admire the effect. It still didn't look like a Christmas tree. but it was-well ... festive!

What was there after all, we began asking ourselves, that was so sacrosanct about an evergreen tree? Part of a pagan tradition from the forests of northern Europe, it had become a Christmas symbol only because Christians looked for, and found, meaning of their own in it. Originally it had no more connection with shepherds and wise men than this funny-looking tree of ours-in fact the

banana tree was probably more familiar to the men and women who took part in that first Christmas.

We decided to make a family project, in the week remaining before Christmas, of finding out everything we could about banana plants—maybe a Christmas message was hiding here too? Scott discovered from his science teacher why local people cut down the whole tree to harvest the fruit.

"Each banana tree reproduces only once," he told us. "No mater how long it lives, it won't flower again." What a wonderful symbol for God's only-begotten Son!

"The matoke banana is the staple food of central Africa," Donn read from a book he found in the library. "For some tribes it constitutes the sole food source." Matoke, in this part of the world was what bread was to Palestine ... and Jesus said, "I am the bread of heaven."

Liz's first grade class was studying the invention of writing. "In olden days banana leaves were used for paper." Then the great flat leaves of our tree could stand for the Bible, where the Christmas story was preserved.

Questioning our neighbors, we learned that there is no way to increase the banana's yield by human effort. The tree requires no pruning, no fertilizing. Its fruit is a gift—like Jesus.

By Christmas Eve we had become excited about our tree as a symbol for the season we were celebrating. We had invited neighborhood children in for a Christmas Eve party; to the pile of brightly wrapped packages that had been growing all week beneath the tree, now were added the Africans' gifts. And each came wrapped not in paper and ribbon, but in a banana leaf.

"It's traditional," explained Mr. Muwanga's daughter, Nnasuubi. "The leaf is what says, 'This is for you." Once more, a token of God's gift

But it was the Hammerscheimers who added the best insight of all. They'd brought a platter of Mrs. Hammerscheimer's Pfeffernüsse for the party, and seemed as delighted as the children as we shared the various ways the tree was speaking to us about Jesus.

"The best you have missed, I think," said Mr. Hammerscheimer. He pointed to the base of the tree. "Where this tree grew, next year a new one comes!" Like the fruit, it occurs without man contributing or knowing how. But, for the new to be born, the old must die.

This was the best of the gifts we received from our banana tree that Christmas: a reminder of the whole Christian story. The joy of Christ's birth is balanced in the Christian year by the agony of His death. But in that very death, our tree told us, was the promise of resurrection.

How full of meaning our tree had become—once we stopped trying to shape it to some earlier model. Why do we resist change so strongly? Why do we cling to the way "it used to be?" It's as though change automatically meant diminishment—the robbing of something precious.

But is that what "change" has to mean? Was it true of the mold-shattering changes Jesus brought? Since He is God of the ever-new, perhaps we could make a lifelong game of looking for Him in the change itself.

There have been other Christmases full of adjustments since that one. Christmas following death ... separation ... career change. And each time, following a bout of nostalgia, we've found new meaning in the season through the altered circumstances themselves.

"And we can find it here in Arizona," we told Alan and Liz as we finished the story. That afternoon the four of us squeezed into the cab of their truck and headed out into the brown-and-gold desert.

"I wonder," Liz mused, "how a cactus would look as a Christmas tree?"

### JOHN & ELIZABETH SHERRILL

co-founded Chosen Books and worked for Guideposts magazine for many years. In the 1960s they wrote what became a classic on the Holy Spirit, They Speak With Other Tongues. They are the authors of Corrie ten Boom's The Hiding Place, David Wilkerson's The Cross and the Switchblade and many other books. "Our Banana Tree Christmas" was an original article penned for Charisma by the couple.

# **Simply Christ**

Gospel Insight

with Keith Surface

# When Something is Very Wrong

Many years ago, a guest minister at our annual Campmeeting shared an incident where he stumbled upon a pornographic magazine on the side of the highway. He told of picking up the magazine, and being compelled within, he began look through it to gaze upon the naked women in their erotic poses. Finally, he became fixated upon the naked woman laid out in the "centerfold." After a bit, he forced himself to discard the magazine and continued on his way. He then followed this account with this statement: "If any man tells you he is not tempted by a beautiful woman, he is lying to you." I knew then that this minister was struggling with lusts in his own heart. The depth of this struggle would later bring this man's life and ministry into great shame and reproach.

I believed this man to be a man of God, but knew that he was in a snare. It was evident that something was wrong, and if he did not find an answer, this thing which was "wrong" would destroy him. The problem was that he did not view anything to be wrong. Instead, he took his struggle with lusts and declared it to be normal for everyone. In doing so, he lifted up his

personal experience as being "more true" than the word of God.

It was Jesus who said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Matthew 5:27-28. The use of pornography is adultery before God. The Apostle Peter also warned us of those who would have "eyes full of adultery." II Peter 2:14. If your eyes are full of adultery, your heart is full of adultery, and, according to Jesus, you are an adulterer.

It is not my purpose to condemn this preacher. He was in a snare and needed an answer. Yet, because he could not admit that something was very wrong, he could not

accept an answer. His solution was to justify it as something everyone struggles with. Those who cannot admit that sin in their heart is both destructive and damnable will never find an answer for the things which destroy them from within.

If almost everyone in your community was infected with a deadly disease would the fact that so many were dying make you consider the sickness normal? Would you be one who would seek the cure and want to discover what was causing so many to be infected? Or, would you say, "It's OK! Everyone is dying. This is just normal around here." In this strange way, the fact that pornography, fornication, deception, and covetousness are rampant in the modern church is often presented as proof that this is just normal for the Christian walk. No one is willing to stand up and say, "Something is very, very wrong!"

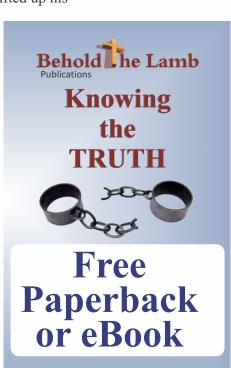
Jesus Christ did not come to condemn sinners, but to save us from sin. John 3:17. Yet, many are "condemned already" though their unbelief. John 3:18. Jesus gave us the basis of this condemnation when he said, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19. The darkness which some men love is their sin. The darkness which other men love are the doctrines which justify or excuse their sin. As long as you love either, Jesus Christ can do nothing for you.

The word of God is clear that the blood of Christ will

"...purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

Hebrews 9:2. The "conscience" spoken of in this passage is your "innermost thoughts and feelings." When this is washed, the worshiper has "...no more conscience of sins." Hebrews 10:2. This means the works of sin are washed from your heart and you are made free.

You can spend your life struggling, believing those who constantly tell you, "Don't worry! We all struggle with sin in our hearts." Or, you can believe God's word and recognize that such things are both destructive and damnable to you and your eternal soul. Until you realize that something is wrong, you will never find the answer in Jesus Christ which will make things right.



Behold the Lamb PO Box 750 Porter, TX 77365



How families can ensure the Grinch doesn't steal their focus—or their faith

### BY MARTI PIEPER

ver the internet/Through cyberspace/To Nana's condo we Skype/Netflix tells us the way/To spend Christmas Day/Or else the kids will gripe.

These words may not look or sound much like the

These words may not look or sound much like the traditional Christmas carol, but in 2017, neither does the holiday itself. As the world changes, families change with it.

So what's a God-fearing, Jesus-loving family to do? How can we celebrate the true reason for the season while the world embraces "Happy Holidays"? And how can we use the wonders of Christmas to share Christ's love with a world that often fails to recognize His birth? *Charisma* spoke with five family experts to get their take on how we can keep Christ in Christmas—or perhaps put Him there for the very first time.

# **Family Ties**

Leadership expert, family coach and author Terence Chatmon (*doyourchildrenbelieve.com*) says keeping Christ at the center of Christmas has become increasingly difficult in a society that places less and less emphasis on God.

"We're in an age when moral and spiritual decay are at an all-time high," Chatmon says. "Not only have we basically taken God out of schools and government and so many other things,

but we've removed Him from the home as well."

In addition to dedicated family time at Christmas, Chatmon emphasizes making connections year-round. Every other Sunday, via conference call, his family (Terence, his wife and their three adult children with spouses) share an hourlong devotional time. For them, Christmas is "more than just gifts and great fellowship and food and so forth," he says. "The way we keep Christ in the center of our Christmas is we have our planning session to set up the devotionals for the following year."

The Chatmons' homestyle celebration includes a pound cake recipe passed on for generations and prepared by the men in the family, who receive an official certificate once they complete training in how to prepare it. But the best times, Chatmon says, are when "one of my children shares the Christ story ... and we have them share how they've been blessed this year or maybe how they've blessed someone else."

The most meaningful Christmas gift, of course, involves sharing the true reason for the season. Holiday worship services, Chatmon explains, provide natural opportunities to introduce unsaved friends and family to the Savior. And each year, members of his family "adopt" a lost family member and pray for them throughout the year. Christmas, he says, makes an ideal time to give this individual a personalized Bible and explain the importance of the one whose story it tells.

Chatmon also offers special encouragement to husbands and fathers. "Many times, it is difficult for people to come into relationship with God the Father because their earthly father has been such a disappointment. ... I just want to encourage us all, especially dads, that we have to love well."

But how? He challenges men to "develop a spiritual plan for the family," a topic on which he speaks across the world. "We have to be more intentional if we're going to move this generation and this whole nation with some more practical, biblical principles that apply to everyday life," he says. "Dads, we've got to step up."

# **Cultural Changes**

Deven Wallace, co-pastor with her husband of Redemption to the Nations Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and author of Warrior Mom (Charisma House, 2017) agrees that cultural changes have had a big impact on family times at Christmas.

"The 'selfieness' of our society right now has really taken a holiday that's supposed to be about giving and about giving glory to God for what He gave to us ... [and made it] very much a consumer-related holiday," Wallace says.

But she also sees a direct connection between this excess and Satan's tactics: "It's always an assignment against the children. The enemy is always trying to fight the next generation ... getting them off-focus and distracting them from the lesson they're supposed to learn so that they can perpetuate the faith."

Wallace says she and her husband, who have four children ages 9-15, are "huge Christmas fans" who work hard to make sure their celebration exalts Christ. In a culture that de-emphasizes God, she says, they want to keep their



family's eyes on Him. "Even in our decorating, we try to make sure there are focal points that point to Christ continually."

These focal points, Wallace explains, "are unspoken messages to our children, who love the glitter and the lights. When they wake up every morning in our house, they may see a sign that says, "Jesus is the reason for the season," or a nativity scene in the center of our dinner table."

This focus carries over into gift-giving too. In giving to one another, the Wallace family emphasizes God's extravagant gift of Jesus. Since their children were small, she says, "We have made it a point to read the Christmas story before we open presents." And to lessen the culture's materialistic influence, she and her husband create opportunities for their children to give.

"They're allowed to pick one person, family or project," Wallace says, and spend a set amount of money. The young Wallaces have given to children in Guatemala, where their church funds a project; to inner-city kids who ride the church bus; and to others, she explains.

In fact, she believes God has wired human beings to give, pointing to the last part of Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

"We may think our children enjoy receiving more [than giving], but I would challenge that. ... It's just many times, we don't give [them] the opportunity."

Wallace encourages Christian families to "hold their ground" and "shine the light," refusing to compromise their Christ-centered emphasis even in the presence of unsaved family members.

"We don't change what we do, how we do it or the message we present, even if it's not what they embrace," she says. "And somehow in the gentle, loving consistency, people are impacted."

### **New Traditions**

Christmas brings unique challenges for blended families, author, speaker and "smart stepmom" Laura Petherbridge



"Talk through the holiday calendar before it arrives. Most people in stepfamilies wait too late to start discussing the holidays."—Laura Petherbridge

(laurapetherbridge.com) says.

"The holidays are particularly hard because you're dealing with so many more people than you would in a first-time marriage ...," she says. "It's not just going to Grandma and Grandpa's house [anymore]."

To deal with the tensions of getting the blended family together at Christmas, Petherbridge suggests a key strategy: "Talk through the holiday calendar before it arrives. Most people in stepfamilies wait too late to start discussing the holidays. And it creates tremendous stress for the children if they don't know where they're going to be."

Christmas traditions also take on a different role in blended families, she explains, recounting her stepchildren's lack of interest in the "big, fancy" traditions passed down by her own Italian family.

"You have to recognize that those traditions that were important for you may very likely not be [meaningful] for them," Petherbridge says.

She cautions parents in blended families against trying to recreate past celebrations too.

"So often, we try to recreate the family's former Christmas ... when the children were in a different home,"

Petherbridge says. So one of the important things to remember is to create new traditions. And don't be surprised if it takes a few years before [the stepchildren] embrace those new traditions."

Petherbridge also speaks to the unique perspective—and opportunity—of the Christian blended family that faces opposition from the child's other parent. For those in this situation, she asks: "How would Christ react to that person, to that other family member?"

The most important thing parents in that circumstance can do, she says, is to use it as a teaching tool. Throughout the children's lives, she says, "they're going to be encountering people who are opposed to the gospel. ... How do we love the person who is antagonistic toward Christ? What are the things we can do to show the love of Christ, even when that love is unwelcome?" This might be as simple as buying a gift for an unsaved parent or as extensive as driving the entire distance (rather than halfway) to pick up a faraway child. Especially in the case of a high-conflict former spouse, Petherbridge also recommends the use of an Advent calendar as a reminder to "pray a new thing for them every day."

Blended families who want to



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"Often in society, we don't say the things we should be saying to people: 'I value you. I treasure you. I see this strength in you."-Pam Farrel

keep Christ in Christmas, she says, should not "expect instant perfection and peace."

"Understand that new traditions in stepfamilies take time to form ... and that you're not a bad stepfamily if the first few years are complicated. Know that this is normal—and don't beat yourself up if something doesn't work. Each stepfamily is unique."

# **Christmas Blessings**

Bill and Pam Farrel (love-wise.com), best-selling authors, speakers and family experts, also recognize the obstacles today's families face at Christmastime. But despite changes that can pull families away from a Christ-centered Christmas, Bill points out that technological advancements have both positive and negative aspects.

"The big upside is it has never been easier to be connected than it is right now," Bill says. But technology "doesn't take the place of real human contact ... so the downside is we're going to see more lonely family members going forward. We need to have a strategy as a family to make them feel like they're a

part of everything."

Pam adds an important caution: "There's nothing lonelier than to drive hours and hours or fly in to visit family, only to have everybody stare at their cellphones and not talk to each other." She suggests providing a basket for phones so family meals remain

The Farrels, whose family includes three sons, their wives and four grandchildren, try to accommodate in-laws' gatherings by holding their family Christmas celebration "anytime between Thanksgiving and Jan. 6." They check the other families' plans first and, when possible, include them in their celebration.

Perhaps their favorite family tradition this time of year, however, is the Christmas blessing. During their annual Christmas dinner, they share the Christmas story in small segments. "Everybody gets a card with a verse on it, and each person reads, and then we light the Advent wreath in the center of the table," Pam says.

Bill and Pam then go around the table to bless each guest. Bill blesses the men and boys, and Pam, the women and girls.

"We just put our hand on their shoulder, and we compliment them, point out something we're thankful for about the way God created them ... and then we pray a blessing over them and light the candle in front of them," Pam says.

People look forward to coming to their home for Christmas because of this tradition, she adds.

"Often in society, we don't say the things we should be saying to people: 'I value you. I treasure you. I see this strength in you. I am so glad God brought you into my life," she says.

The Farrels highlight another tradition our experts all share: attending church together.

"We always go as a family to Christmas Eve services. ... Sometimes we vacation, and we take everybody to a new city, so we will look for a way to worship together," Pam says.

But she had the Christmas experience of a lifetime when God asked her to write a blessing for her alcoholic dad.

"I wrote it, I framed it, I read it to my dad," Pam says. "He cried. He'd never read any of my books, and he had never gone to hear me speak."

For years, her father had put off asking Christ into his life.

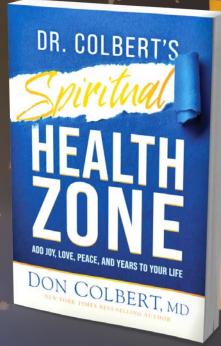
"But when I wrote that blessing, it was like something clicked in his heart, and he understood that God loved him. ... He started asking a lot more spiritual questions and calling just to talk about Jesus," she says.

As it turned out, that was Pam's final Christmas with her dad—and her final gift to him. As she went through his belongings after his sudden death, she realized he had spent his last moments with a host of gospel-centered materials, including her blessing plaque. She speaks from heartfelt experience when she says, "I think Christmas is a good time to try and make amends, to give forgiveness, to lavish the heart with love. Christmas is a good time to make relationships whole again."

◀

MARTI PIEPER is copy editor and assistant online editor for Charisma Media.

# Mew Gents



Mark Rutland
Keep On
Keeping

How
TO DIE
YOUNG...

As
POSSIBLE

The BOOK of
REVELATION
DECODED

REVISED EDITION

YOUR GUIDE to UNDERSTANDING the END TIMES
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# End-time Prophetic Signs Repealed in the Christmas Story

The living Word of God reveals the truth about the supernatural signs that pointed to Jesus' birth-and now, to His return

## BY CALEB COOPER

his Christmas season will involve such traditions as decorating homes with lights, filling stockings, decorating trees, exchanging gifts and enjoying great food with family at the dinner table as people celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As our Christmas traditions unfold, we must remember in the midst of all the festivities that the Word of God is alive. The Christmas story is not just a launchpad for family fun and traditions but is the living Word, revealing end-time prophetic signs for the last days. Allow me to use the living Word of God to bring the Christmas story to life this Christmas season as we rapidly approach the end of days.

Jesus Christ was and is the Word made flesh who came to earth wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Though many know that Dec. 25 is more than likely not the exact day of His birth, we have set it aside as a day of celebration. But more important than knowing our Lord's exact birthday is remembering the truth that there was never a time when Jesus did not or will not exist. He was the Word made flesh in the earth.

Allow the following verses to stir your heart as we look at end-time prophetic signs in the Christmas story:

- » "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:1-5, NKJV).
- » "Then the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM'" (John 8:57-58).
- » "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him" (Col. 1:15-16).
- » "For the word of God is *alive* and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12, NIV, author's emphasis).

Understanding that the Christmas story is alive and that it is not the beginning of Jesus Christ because He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, gives us a better view of the end-time prophetic signs revealed in the Christmas story. The Bible does not waste words; every portion of Scripture is alive to every generation. This will only be a small snapshot of how the Christmas story is prophetically alive in our generation. continued »

Every person who played a role in the Christmas story brought end-time prophetic insight of the heart of God into our generation. Let's look at only a few of these God-ordained signs.

# Mary: Purity Unlocks Prophetic Destiny

"Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!' But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus" (Luke 1:26-31, NKJV).

We often find it easy to read this passage and others and conclude that Mary gave birth to Jesus, losing sight of the end-time prophetic signs revealed through her life. But imagine the power that lies within the Christmas story. Imagine the God of the universe sending an angel out of heaven to the city of Nazareth to have a conversation with Mary. This one conversation with God would shift her life into her prophetic destiny, unlocked through a life of purity.

The Bible says Mary was a virgin, meaning she had never experienced sexual intercourse with a man. Those of us who long step into our prophetic destiny in the last days and prepare the way for the return of Jesus Christ must never lose sight of the power of purity. Second Timothy 2:19-21 says, "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work."

If we desire to step into our prophetic

destiny and be used for the Master, we must make purity a nonnegotiable. Purity positions our lives to prepare the way for the return of Jesus Christ. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Purity also set the stage for the prophetic promise that our Savior Jesus Christ would be conceived in the womb of Mary by the power of the Holy Ghost. Mary did not know such a powerful thing would come to pass, but she positioned her life in a place of purity, and the Holy Spirit came upon her. The Word of God spoken over her life through the angel immediately came to pass when she declared, "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38b).

Positioning our lives for the prophetic through purity carries a power we must not underestimate. Mary's position of purity would become instrumental in the fulfillment of prophecies of the coming Messiah in the Word of God:

- **»** "And the angel answered and said to her, '*The* Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God'" (Luke 1:35).
- **»** "Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her" (Luke 1:38).

Just as He proclaimed a call for purity during the birth of Christ, God will put forth a call for purity during the return of Christ. When I consider the readiness of a generation who will be eyewitnesses to the return of Jesus Christ, my heart turns to the following verses, which parallel the call to purity Mary walked in at Jesus' first coming:

- **»** "Blessed *are* the pure in heart, For they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).
- » "That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).
- » "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore,

since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?" (2 Pet. 3:10-12).

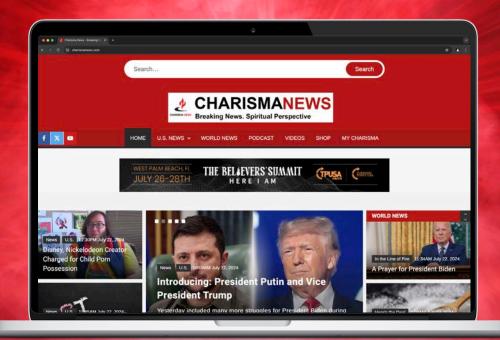
# Joseph: The Dream Realm Holds Prophetic Power

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.' Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus" (Matt. 1:18-25).

Let's now consider Joseph in the Christmas story and how we can gain prophetic insight from his story for our lives in the last days. The Word of God reveals that during the time of Christ's arrival in the earth, the prophetic dream realm played a powerful role in empowering Joseph not to abort what he did not understand. Joseph had made up his mind to put Mary away secretly but God's power moved through a dream, which kept him from giving up on his relationship with Mary just because he didn't understand what had miraculously occurred.

In the last days, we must realize God will use the prophetic dream realm to

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help prepare us before the return of Jesus Christ. His body must be careful in the last days not to do away with things we do not understand. God will call us to do things our natural minds cannot wrap themselves around, but we must remember that God's supernatural power will empower us! We must press in to God and allow Him to speak to our hearts through dreams and visions.

One of the prophetic signs during the time of Joseph was the dream realm. The Word of God also reveals that the dream realm will also be one of the endtime signs. Just as there were prophetic dreams during the birth of Christ, there will be prophetic dreams during the return of Christ. Here are four biblical insights about the dream realm to remember as we prepare for the return of Jesus Christ in the last days.

- 1) God promised to speak to us through dreams in the Old Testament. "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream" (Num. 12:6).
- 2) God told us He would speak to us through dreams in the New Testament. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams" (Acts 2:17).
- 3) God counsels us at night through dreams. "I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons" (Ps. 16:7).
- 4) God protects us and warns us through dreams. "For God may speak in one way, or in another, Yet man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, When deep sleep falls upon men, While slumbering on their beds, Then He opens the ears of men, And seals their instruction. In order to turn man from his deed, And conceal pride from man, He keeps back his soul from the Pit, And his life from perishing by the sword" (Job 33:14-18).

Joseph and Mary were prophetic forerunners who prepared the way for Jesus Christ to come and save our souls from the fiery flames of hell. In the last days,

God will raise up additional prophetic forerunners who will prepare the way for the return of Jesus Christ.

# Sun, Moon and Stars: Revealing Signs of the Times

Finally, we examine the cosmic signs in the earth during the time of the birth of Jesus Christ, recognizing that there will also be cosmic signs at His return. Scripture affirms these signs:

- "Then God said, 'Let there be lights" in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth'; and it was so" (Gen. 1:14-15, author's emphasis).
- » "When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy" (Matt. 2:9-10, author's emphasis).

The wise men followed a star, a cosmic sign that led them to the birth of Jesus Christ. The star of Bethlehem, which would have been considered a sign of the time for the wise men, propelled them into their prophetic destiny of bringing gifts to King Jesus.

This same prophetic strategy became a pattern in which the believer will follow the signs of the times in the last days that will reveal the return of Jesus Christ. "And there will be *signs* in the *sun*, in the *moon*, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:25-29, author's emphasis).

Time will not allow the unfolding of many more of the end-time prophetic signs that have been revealed in our generation to mark the return of Christ, but please consider this prophetic parallel.

During the birth of Christ, the star of Bethlehem guided the way for the wise men. The year 2020 came to a close with a global event that forever changed what we know as normal. We must not forget the presence of a sign in the stars.

On Dec. 21, 2020, this generation witnessed a repeated sign that happened during the birth of Christ. The star called the Christmas star had not been seen in 800 years. But Jupiter and Saturn aligned as we prepare for the return of Jesus Christ.

History reveals that this had not occurred since 1623 and we would have to go back even further, to near March 4, 1226, to find a date when everyone could see the Christmas star. This alignment is not expected again until March 15, 2080.

Most agree that everything changed globally in 2020. The spirit of the Antichrist agenda is being revealed as the government tramples upon our freedoms and restricts the ability to buy and sell based upon mask and vaccinations mandates. Revelation 13:16-17 says, "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."

What has happened since 2020 is a precursor to the arrival of the Antichrist. If the signs of the coming of the Antichrist are here, then the return of Jesus Christ is even closer. The visible sign of the Christmas star, along with the global shift of normalcy of 2020 and into 2021 and beyond, work together to make things prophetically clear that Jesus Christ is coming soon.

As you celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ this Christmas season, be certain to live your life washed in the blood of Jesus Christ and ready for His return. Now is the time to walk in purity, be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading through prophetic dreams and visions and discern the end-time signs God has revealed in the sun, moon and stars. •

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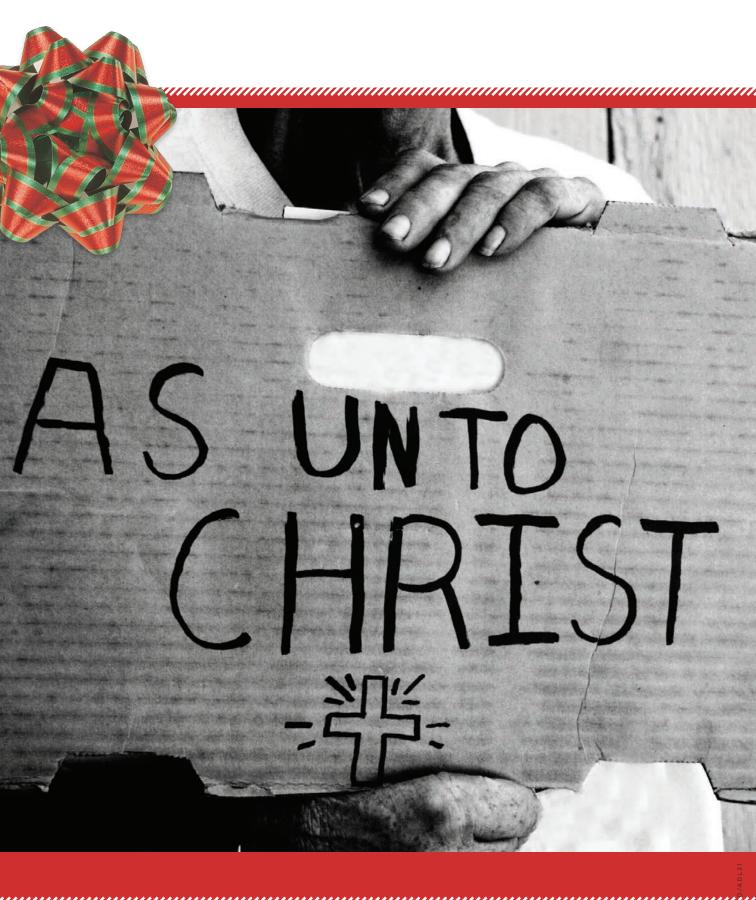
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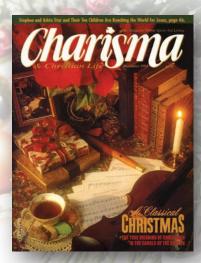


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A pastor shares how his congregation takes the true meaning of Christmas to their community every December



**DECEMBER 1994** 

# Change Your World at Christmas

### BY STEVE SJOGREN

hristmas is a loaded word for most of us. For followers of Jesus, of course, the deepest sense of the word has to do with God coming to earth in the form of a baby: "Immanuel," as the prophet Isaiah put it, "God with us." Many other pleasant images also come to mind when we say Christmas. A word-association quiz might come up with such thoughts as family dinners, candlelit services, firesides or carols. But let's face it: Christmas does have its other moments.



A second quiz might call to mind different images—things like crowded malls, traffic gridlock or irritating relatives.

Despite all the glorious aspects of the celebration of Christ's birth, there also is a tension in most of our lives about the Christmas season. Many of us suffer with a sense of guilt—brought on, I believe, by the selfish focus that has been built around the holiday season.

I'm not just talking about all the attention that's given to greed, gifts and gorging. There's also the less obvious inclination we have to think the Christmas story is just "for us."

The church's pure and joyous call: "Rejoice! Christ has come to us!"—while it is wonderful news to be celebrated is only part of the message of Christmas. Immanuel, "God

> with us," means God also wants to be "with them"—through us.

# **GIVING LOVE AT CHRISTMAS**

During the holiday season, people in neighborhoods, stores, malls and elsewhere can get a taste of God's love through "giving" outreaches. At little cost, your church group can plan to stock up and give away items such as:

- Christmas cards, candy canes, poinsettias or wreaths
- Hot chocolate or cookies
- Firewood, kindling or pinecone fire starters
- Gift boxes, bows, transparent tape or tissue paper
- Large shopping bags with handles
- Photo prints
- Christmas tree disposal bags
- Batteries for smoke detectors, remote controls and toys

## A New Tradition

For several years, people from the Vineyard Community Church in Cincinnati, which I pastor, have built a new tradition into their hearts. They have explored creative ways to take small deeds of love to the people in our city during the holidays.

We have continued to seek creative ways to gain an audience with the unchurched by serving our way into their lives year-round. We call this approach to sharing Christ servant evangelism.

At Christmastime, when people seem to be particularly vulnerable to thinking about spiritual issues, much can be done to build bridges to the unchurched. We stared when one of our members, a housewife, got the idea that everybody needs their gifts wrapped at Christmas. "We could go to the mall and wrap presents for free!" she challenged.

We approached mall management about our gift-wrap "outreach." At first they were skeptical. "Tell us again," they asked, "why do you want to do this for free?" We had several meetings before they finally gave us the nod. We invested about \$3,000 in paper, tape, scissors and bows and were enthusiastically on our way.

To the management's surprise, the project was a smashing success. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, we wrapped presents for more than 10,000 customers. The mall received good publicity, and we were able to talk to a lot of people about why we were wrapping for free: to show God's love in a practical way!

For six holiday seasons, we have wrapped presents at that mall. Our credibility with the management has slowly risen each year.

Last Christmas season, when we wrapped 25,000 presents, the mall insisted on paying for the wrapping supplies. Now it pays for the materials—and we share with shoppers about God's love for them. What a deal!

## The Power of Incarnation

When we talk about God sending His Son to the earth at Christmas, we are talking theologically about the Incarnation: God becoming man, God coming among us. Through the Incarnation, God was conveying three simple truths, I believe.

First, He has come to us. In His wisdom, God knew that we would never "get it" spiritually until He personally brought the message of the kingdom. Simply sending the message wouldn't do. God came from heaven to earth to bring His very presence to us.

Second, He wants to come through us to the community where we live. To receive the gift of God and keep it to ourselves is totally antithetical to "God among us." He desires to fill the entire earth with the knowledge of Himself.

God's intention is to have a people who would see themselves as vessels of His life, not only restored by His love but willing to allow His restoring life to flow through them to the world. The psalmist captures it well: "God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him" (Ps. 67:7).

Third, simple acts done with great love will change the world. Who would have thought that God would come in the form of a baby, of all things? Perhaps as a conquering king, a warrior or at least a prophet but a *baby*?

Apparently God's plan was to underwhelm the earth with His first coming. After all, He was building a kingdom that would be entirely different from any human

kingdom—His would go forward on the basis of small things.

I have been a Christian for about 20 years. Most of that time, I didn't understand this idea of small things. In fact, I was convinced that God had called me to do big things.

But the harder I tried to do big things, the more stressed I became and, tragically, the less God's love flowed through me to others. The story of God coming to earth as a man tells us clearly that small things done in love are the most effective approaches to bring the kingdom to earth. It's so simple!

There are hundreds of simple acts of kindness that you and a few friends could do with little preparation to make a strong impression on the unchurched in your community.

In addition to a big undertaking like gift wrapping, our church has ventured into many other smaller projects. Through the process, we've identified some of the most common questions Christians ask before taking on an outreach:

What if people don't respond to our offer? Some won't respond—and that's OK. There is great power in the simple offer to help or give aid, whether people allow you to serve them or not. Many are touched by your willingness to give, even though you may not see a response on their faces. Believe that your small seed will be nurtured by the Holy Spirit as He continues to show His love to them.

What do we say when we interact with people? Simply respond: "We are doing a free community service project to show you God's love in a practical way." That's enough of a statement to get a conversation going if someone is ready to talk.

Will we see immediate results from these projects? Realize that your act of kindness may seem small to you, but the Holy Spirit is fully capable of taking that small seed and making it grow in a hungry heart. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:6 that evangelism is a process that involves planting and watering before harvesting.

Be at peace that you have done

your part, which most of the time probably will be either planting or watering. God will bring about a harvest as the Holy Spirit begins to draw the people to Himself.

Are these projects best done alone or by a group? There is a strength in numbers—and encouragement, too. All of the servant evangelism projects listed with this article are done best by groups, such as Bible study groups, home groups or even families.

# Registering God's Love

What happens to people when they are served? As they are touched in a practical way, their hearts register that God is real and that He loves them.

As I was served at a local restaurant, I had a brief conversation with the waiter. He asked what I did for a living. When I told him I was the pastor of the Vineyard Community Church, he responded: "Oh, that's what it's called. I though it was called the 'Grapevine Church.' I know all about you guys."

"Really?" I asked. "What do you know about us?"

"You're the ones who wrap presents to show God's love in a practical way. I know all about you. You wrapped a present for me a couple of Christmases ago."

When I heard those words, I was stunned. I thought, This guy remembers a small encounter we had with him—just a minute or two—a few years ago!

That little deed of kindness had registered deeply in his heart. He had our name wrong, but he remembered a simple act done with great love. A small seed of the kingdom had been planted, and I have faith to believe God is nurturing and growing that seed right now.

Christmas is all about Immanuel-"God with us." I am thankful He is also Immanuel—"God with them," too. ◀

**STEVE SJOGREN** *launched the Vineyard* Community Church in Cincinnati in 1985. He offers more ideas on servant evangelism in his book Conspiracy of Kindness (Vine Books) or at servantevangelism.com.

# Start the New Year With Extraordinary Prayer

This year Christians will fast for 21 days to seek God for a personal renewal. Here's why you should join them.

BY JENTEZEN FRANKLIN



very year our entire congregation at Free Chapel participates in a 21-day fast. The reason we fast corporately at the beginning of the year is based on principles that have been adapted from Bob Rogers' book 101 Reasons to Fast.

There are three reasons starting the year with a fast is a good practice. First, by doing so, you set the course for the rest

of the year. Just as beginning your day with prayer sets the course for the rest of the day and covers anything that may happen, the same is true of beginning

the year with a fast.

You set the course for the entire year by what you do with those first few days of each new year. You can carry that even further to give God the first part of every day, the first day of every week, the first portion of every dollar and the first consideration in every decision.

Second, blessings will happen for you and your family throughout the year because you fasted in January. Even in April, June and August and into November when you have Thanksgiving goodies on your mind, blessings will still be finding their way to you because of your sacrifice to the Lord at the beginning of the year.

In fact, around Thanksgiving one year I got a call to go to the bank. When I arrived, a man and his wife met me and said, "Here is \$1 million for the building program."

I had forgotten about the fast we had done 10 months before, but God hadn't. He sent us not only someone with a \$1 million gift but also people with a \$500,000 gift, a \$250,000 gift and a \$50,000 gift, as well as cumulative millions that came in regular gifts all in that same year.

This third point is so powerful. When you fast at the beginning of the year and pray, you release the principle found in Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (NKJV, emphasis added). If you seek Him first in the year, get ready for all these "things" to be added to your life throughout the rest of the year!

# with those first few days.

# What Is Fasting?

You set the course for the year by what you do

In addition to knowing why you should fast, you must know what the practice is. Because there are so many misconceptions about fasting, I first want to clarify what biblical fasting is not. Fasting is not merely going without food for a period of time. That is dieting—maybe even starving—but fasting it is not.

Nor is fasting something done only by fanatics. I really want to drive that point home. Fasting is not to be done only by

religious monks alone in a cave somewhere. The practice of fasting is not limited to ministers or for special occasions.

Stated simply, biblical fasting is refraining from food for a spiritual purpose. Fasting has always been a normal part of a relationship with God. As expressed by the impassioned plea of David in Psalm 42, fasting brings one into a deeper, more intimate and powerful relationship with God.

When you eliminate food from your diet for a number of days, your spirit becomes uncluttered by the things of this world and amazingly sensitive to the things of God. As David stated, "Deep calls unto deep" (Ps. 42:7).

David was fasting. His hunger and thirst for God were greater than his natural desire for food. As a result, he reached a point at which he could cry out from the depths of his spirit to the depths of God, even in his trial.

After you've experienced even a glimpse of that kind of intimacy with our God—our Father, the holy creator of the universe—and the countless rewards and blessings that follow, your whole perspective will change. You will soon realize that fasting is a secret source of power that is overlooked by many.

# Why Fast?

During the years that Jesus walked this earth, He devoted time to teaching His disciples the principles of the kingdom of God, principles that conflict with those of this world. In the Beatitudes, specifically in Matthew 6, Jesus provided the pattern by which each of us is to live as a child of God. That pattern addressed three specific duties of a Christian: giving, praying and fasting.

Jesus said, "When you give" and "When you pray" and "When you fast." He made it clear that fasting, like giving and praying, was a normal part of Christian life. As much attention should be given to fasting as is devoted to giving and to praying.

Solomon, when writing the books of wisdom for Israel, made the point that a cord, or rope, braided with three strands is not easily broken (see Eccl. 4:12). Likewise, when giving, praying and fasting are practiced together by a believer, they combine to create a

type of threefold cord that is not easily

In fact, as I'll show you in a moment, Jesus took it even further by saying, "Nothing will be impossible" (Matt. 17:20).

Could we be missing our greatest breakthroughs because we fail to fast? Remember the thirtyfold, sixtyfold and hundredfold return Jesus spoke of? (See Mark 4:8,20.)

Look at it this way: When you pray, you can release that thirtyfold return, but when both prayer and giving are part of your life, I believe that releases the sixtyfold blessing. But when all three—giving, praying and fasting—are part of your life, that hundredfold return can be released!

If that's the case, you have to wonder what blessings are not being released. What answers to prayer are not getting through? What bondages are not being broken because we fail to fast?

Matthew tells the story of a father who had a demon-possessed son. For years he watched helplessly while his son suffered with severe convulsions.

As the boy grew older, the attacks became so severe that he would often throw himself into an open fire or a trench of water. A suicidal spirit tormented him constantly, and his situation became life-threatening.

Having exhausted every attempt to cure the boy—even taking him to the disciples with no avail—the father almost gave up. Then he heard that Jesus was

Going to the Master, he cried, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him" (Matt. 17:15-16).

When the boy was brought to Jesus, He "rebuked the demon; and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour" (v. 18).

But what made the difference? After all, Matthew 10:1 records that Jesus had already given the disciples power to cast out evil spirits and to heal every disease. So why couldn't the disciples cast out the demon and cure the boy?

That's what they wanted to know, too, so later that night, when they were alone with Jesus, they asked Him. Jesus replied,

"Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:20-21).

Each time I've read that passage, I've focused on the statement "and nothing will be impossible for you." I think a lot of people stop right there, but Jesus didn't because He knew there was more—much

See, that one little word "however" is the connection—it's the key that unlocks the power in the statement "nothing will be impossible for you." Jesus told the disciples they needed faith, even faith as small as a tiny seed.

But that wasn't all. Long before this incident, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, where He spent 40 days and 40 nights and ate nothing. "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." For Jesus, casting out that stubborn demon wasn't impossible.

If Jesus could have accomplished all He came to do without fasting, then why did He fast? The Son of God knew there were supernatural things that could only be released through fasting. How much more should fasting be a common practice in our lives.

# Fasting Is for Everyone

Perhaps you're thinking, I still don't know how fasting can really be for me. According to the words of Jesus, it is the duty of every disciple and every believer to fast.

When addressing the Pharisees regarding why His disciples did not fast, Jesus replied, "'Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?

'But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days" (Luke 5:34-35).

Then they will fast. Jesus didn't expect His disciples to do something He hadn't done as well. Jesus fasted, and according to the words of Peter, Jesus is our example in all things (see 1 Pet. 2:21).

The apostle Luke confirms this truth:

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

There's another vital point that I want you to see in Matthew 6: God delights in giving rewards. Not only that, but He says that when giving, praying and fasting are practiced in your life, He will "reward you openly."

A good example of such open reward can be found in the book of Daniel. While in Babylonian captivity, Daniel's fasting—even partial fasting of certain foods—brought about the open reward of God, who blessed Daniel with wisdom beyond that of anyone else in the empire.

In Chapter 10 Daniel records that he was grieved and burdened with the revelation he had received for Israel. He ate no choice breads or meats and drank no wine for three weeks.

Then he describes the angel that was sent to him-which had been delayed by the prince of Persia for 21 days with the answers Daniel sought. His fast broke the power of the delayer and released the angels of God so that God's purposes could be revealed and served.

This is just one example of how powerful fasting is. As part of the threefold cord, it can impact every area of your life.

Do you desire to know God's will for your life, whom you should marry or what you should do in a critical situation? Fasting can bring you to a place of being able to clearly hear God's will.

Fasting also causes God to target your children. In addition, it brings health and healing to your body, as well as financial prosperity and the blessings of God. You would be amazed at all the testimonies we have heard about fasting!

Whether you desire to be closer to God or are in need of great breakthroughs in your life, remember that nothing shall be impossible to you. Fasting is truly a secret source of power.

JENTEZEN FRANKLIN is the pastor of Free Chapel in Gainesville, Georgia, and Orange County, California. He also hosts a weekly TV program Kingdom Connection, and has written several books, including Fasting and Believe That You Can (both Charisma House).

# 21 Days of Consecration

# America's greatest need is a spiritual awakening, 21st century style.

BY BILLY WILSON

America's greatest need is spiritual revival. The United States has seen an awakening in every century of its existence—except this one.

In the 18th century, the First Great Awakening swept thousands of colonists into the kingdom of God, and the courage to break free from Great Britain germinated in the soil of awakened hearts.

The 19th century witnessed the Second Great Awakening, which shook the American frontier with dramatic results. Entire denominations doubled their memberships in just

In the 20th century, the Pentecostal-charismatic movement had a global impact. During the last 100 years, nations of the world have been touched, and more than 640 million people now claim to be Spirit-filled.

America's history has been informed consistently by significant spiritual renewal. However, we are now one-tenth of the way through the 21st century and, as far as we know, the U.S. has yet to experience a fresh awakening.

The ineffectiveness of the American church pushes us to ask some hard questions of God and ourselves:

Have we allowed ourselves to be preoccupied with political, social and peripheral issues more than with the nation's greatest need? Have we spent billions fighting political and social battles while losing the spiritual battle for the souls of a new generation? Have we chosen the easier way of carnal

weaponry while neglecting God's more challenging way of spiritual intensity?

Have we picketed more than prayed, fought more than fasted and lashed out more than loved? Have we been duped into hoping that righteousness would be installed from the top down rather than recognizing that true awakening comes from the bottom up?

Does the church in America need to experience a fresh grace through repentance? Do we need a deep cleansing and renewal?

I believe that the answer to these questions is a painful and convicting yes.

Today's church is desperate for a deep and transformational revival that will change the spiritual landscape of our country again.

The question is, what would an awakening in 21st century America look like? What would happen if God shook this nation during the next decade? How would we know if revival and awakening were occurring?

Answers to these questions were discussed several months ago in Northampton, Massachusetts, during a gathering of more than 75 Christian leaders in the city once known as an epicenter of the First Great Awakening. These leaders identified 20 significant indicators of a contemporary awakening—10 in the church and 10 in the culture. You can read their conclusions online at awakeningamerica.us/docs/general/SummitSummary\_Final.pdf.

The leaders, who represented a broad spectrum of evangelical denominations and ministries, also banded with several hundred ministries in the Awakening America Alliance to seek God for a new Christ-awakening in the United States.

Now, as a way to pursue the spiritual renewal we need, we have an opportunity to unite at the start of this second decade of the century to humble ourselves through fasting and

The Awakening America Alliance has designated January 1-21 as "21 Days for a New Awakening" to answer God's call through the prophet Joel to "declare a holy fast" (see Joel

Fasting from a pure heart with proper motives will help lead us into the brokenness required to receive God's next move in our nation. Fasting brings spiritual benefits because it helps us humble ourselves, presses us toward personal cleansing, focuses our hearts and weans us off earthly distractions.

It allows for heightened sensitivity to God's voice and positions us to bring deliverance to the captives. Fasting and prayer facilitate a personal renewal of our connection and intimacy with Jesus. His presence and pleasure become our reward.

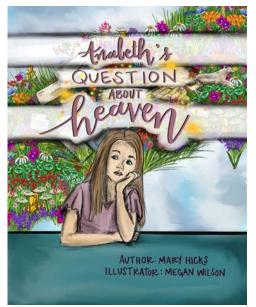
Ultimately, the renewal of the church and of the nation will depend on people who respond to His call. True spiritual awakening in this century will be a grass-roots movement in which intimacy with Jesus is restored one heart at a time, producing the fruitfulness and freshness we all desire.

Why not let the 21st century awakening start in your church. More importantly, why not let it start in your heart?

BILLY WILSON is executive director of the International Center for Spiritual Renewal and executive officer for Empowered 21: Global Congress on Holy Spirit Empowerment (empowered21.com).







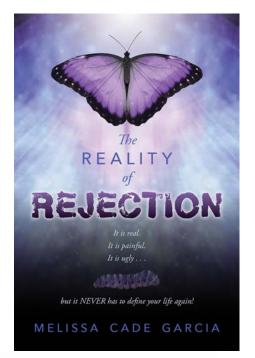
# **Anabeth's Question About Heaven**

Anabeth's Question About Heaven offers a heartfelt glimpse into what heaven might be like for our cherished pets. Anabeth deeply misses her dog, Goldie, and wonders what her life in heaven is like. She prays, asking God this very question, and receives a beautiful and unexpected answer!

A recent top Amazon review from K-Mac82 describes it as "an excellent book for kids of all ages," saying, "Everyone who has a special family pet needs this book. It's a beautiful story of a beloved dog, Goldie, and her heavenly experience. This book provides so much comfort, and the illustrations are beautiful. It captivated the attention of both my 4- and 9-year-old boys."

With a hidden dog paw to find on each page, this story brings comfort and joy to anyone who has ever lost a pet. A perfect gift for the holiday season!

**PURCHASE Your Copy Here** 



# Transform Your Pain into Purpose with The Reality of Rejection

Rejection can leave deep scars that shape every aspect of our lives. In *The Reality of Rejection*, author Melissa Cade Garcia uncovers how hidden wounds can hold us back and offers a powerful path to healing and freedom. Through personal insights and spiritual wisdom, she helps readers recognize the effects of past rejections and find their true worth in God.

This transformative book guides you through understanding rejection, identifying toxic patterns, and stepping into the fullness of who you were created to be. With relatable stories and practical advice, you'll learn how to overcome emotional wounds, build healthier relationships, and embrace a renewed sense of purpose.

For anyone struggling with the weight of rejection or wanting to support others on their healing journey, *The Reality of Rejection* is an essential read. Ready to reclaim your peace and live free? Join the countless others who have found hope and healing. Order your copy today and start your journey toward freedom!

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# Crown & Nails

Crown & Nails is a Contemporary Christian Clothing and Jewelry Brand inspired by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and designed to share the message of the Gospel.

All of our clothing and jewelry designs are modern, trendy, and carry a powerful scriptural message.

Crown & Nails was birth out of my love for Jesus Christ and remembering the sacrifice He made for us.

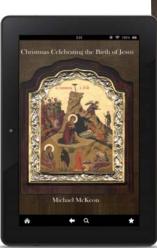
"Jesus, I say thank you, just like you wore a crown of thorns and nails to set me free I will always remember that heavy price you paid for me." – Aneesa

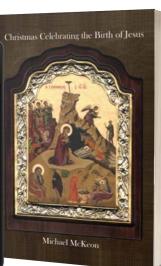
Crown & Nails offer an array of uniquely custom-designed items for the whole family that will be sure to be the most special Christmas presents ever. Please visit our website for more information.

www.crownandnails.com









# Christmas Celebrating the Birth of Jesus

Christmas Celebrating the Birth of Jesus is a reflection on scripture explaining why Jesus, King of heaven, was born into the world as one of us, fully God and fully human to restore humankind's broken relationship with God.

Jesus paid the ransom for our lives. Only He could pay the spiritual debt of our sin through His death and by His blood to redeem people from every tribe, people, and nation into a right relationship with the Father, Himself and the Holy Spirit forever.

e-Books by Michael McKeon Available on Amazon Kindle

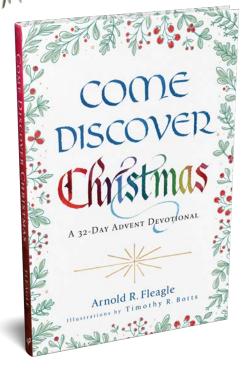
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# Rediscover the Joy and Hope of Christmas

This year, breathe fresh wonder and purpose back into the celebration of the Advent. Designed as a road map back to Bethlehem, this captivating devotional takes you on an unforgettable journey through the season.

This season, infuse peace and joy back into your celebrations—and come discover Christmas.

**CLICK HERE to Purchase from Baker Book House** 



# Thrive Devotional Bible for Women

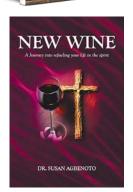
Our Savior paid too high a price on the cross for us to live powerless lives. *Thrive* was created for woman who desire to know God more deeply and follow Him more closely. Daily devotionals and daily prayers for the reader focus on her identity in Christ; God's purpose and plan for her life; and how to flourish in a faith that is pure, genuine, and life-giving.

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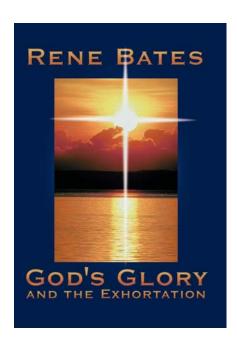
# A Gift of Restoration

Whether you are in need of personal restoration or looking for that perfect gift to give, Dr. Susan Agbenoto's *Restore Me!* and *New Wine* are unique reads. *Restore Me! But Privately, Please* is an uplifting book about finding restoration in God through mending the brokenness in the soul. Through these dynamic pages, Dr. Agbenoto has one-on-one sessions with you in the privacy of your home, urging you to take off the mask and release all brokenness to the Lord.

New Wine will provoke you and stir up an insatiable hunger for the extraordinary. Dr. Agbenoto compares phases of life we go through to that of a grape. There are seasons you feel buried, pressed, crushed and even left to 'age.' The end result however is the New Wine the Lord is creating in each of us. Interwoven with brief snippets of church history, New Wine places you in the midst of what God is doing with the assurance that the best is yet to come!



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# THE FINAL TESTAMENT

A Warning from God to the Saved and Lost.

To the Lost: Receive Jesus Now.

To the Saved: Get Rid of Your "Traditions of Men" Before the Soon Coming of Christ.

God's Glory and the Exhortation is an astute and provocative point of view on the ways and follies of the modern church.

Brother Rene speaks God's truth, refusing to bow to the weight of misguided tradition. His work is in line with the great but opposed prophets of the Old Testament as well as the hard-pressed apostles of the New. His writings bear the same weight of divine wisdom to both bless and course-correct the faithful few.

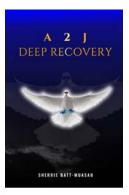
84% of book owners are giving a 5-STAR RATING on the content of the book.

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# A 2 J Deep Recovery

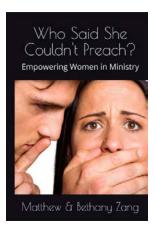
Whether you're struggling with addiction yourself, supporting a loved one through it, or simply seeking transformation in your own life, this book will offer valuable insights and encouragement. Sherrie shares her powerful journey, overcoming sexual abuse, drug addiction, prison, and mental illness to find true freedom and deliverance.

In this book, you'll learn to:

- · Break the chains of addiction
- Forgive those who have hurt you
- Deepen your relationship with Jesus
- Build a life-transforming friendship with the Holy Spirit

Discover how to live in grace, peace, forgiveness, and freedom.

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# Who Said She Couldn't Preach?

The longstanding debate over women in ministry has often restricted those who feel called to serve. This book opens with Pastor Bethany sharing her personal journey and challenges of being called to ministry without being empowered to pursue it fully. Pastor Matthew then provides clarity and historical insight into the Scriptures commonly referenced in this discussion, including the passage where Paul seems to instruct women to remain silent in church. Readers will gain a deeper understanding of scriptural context, history, and biblical interpretation—presented in an accessible way that doesn't require a theological background.

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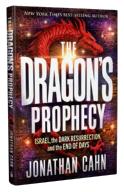


# Garden to Garden 30 Days Through the Bible

Garden to Garden is a 30-day devotional journey from the Garden of Eden in Genesis to the Eternal Garden Paradise revealed in Revelation. In just 30 days, readers will discover the full redemption story, learn how all the Bible characters and stories flow together, and how each book of the Bible points to Jesus Christ.

Scripture is God-breathed; by reading it, we discover who we are, why we are here, what happened to us, and our eternal destiny. In *Garden to Garden*, Marian Jordan Ellis walks alongside readers as they experience the Bible through short devotional readings and explains the story arc of God's great redemptive plan. *Garden to Garden* is the perfect gift for mature Believers and seekers.

Purchase your copy on Amazon



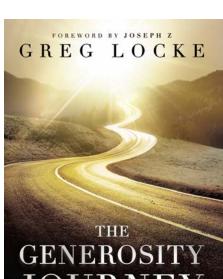
# The Dragon's Prophecy by Jonathan Cahn

Is there more to the world than we see with our eyes, unseen forces and ancient prophecies playing out to the *End of Days? New York Times* best-selling author Jonathan Cahn is back with another spiritual bomb to drop in *THE DRAGON'S PROPHECY: Israel, the Dark Resurrection, and the End of Days*. In this mind-blowing book, your readers will reveal the ancient forces at work transforming our world, the mysteries of the future, and the ancient secrets given to overcome and prevail in view of what lies ahead! Your readers will never be the same after reading this mind-bending revelation!

BooksByJonathanCahn.com







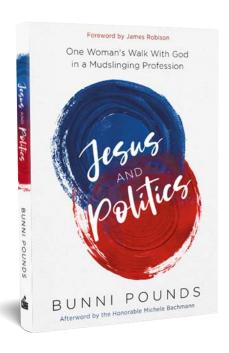
WHEN GOD CAN TRUST YOU

HE WILL BLESS YOU

# The Generosity Journey by Greg Locke

Nothing will change a believer's life more than biblical giving. Greg Locke's *The Generosity Journey* shows that generosity is the remedy for materialism and the ultimate game-changer for walking in the abundance and favor of God. Generosity is not just a gift to others but also a weapon in spiritual warfare against the negative influences of the enemy. Through generosity, you *can* and *will* experience spiritual breakthrough! After reading this book, you will not only discover the joy of giving, but you will also receive the extraordinary rewards that comes when you align yourself with God's generous plan for your life. Additionally, you will walk away with the confidence that God will take what you give and do exceedingly and abundantly more with it than you could ever have imagined.

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# Jesus and Politics by Bunni Pounds

The Christian life isn't about doing things the easy way—it's about living as Christ even in a hostile environment. With Bunni Pounds' Jesus and Politics, you will gain insight from Pounds' sixteen-year career in the political atmosphere on how you can disciple a nation one heart at a time. Christians don't have to sit on the sidelines while we see a crumbling world around us, even in the political realm—we can be a light in the darkness to all people, in all situations.

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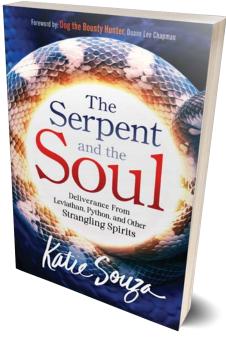




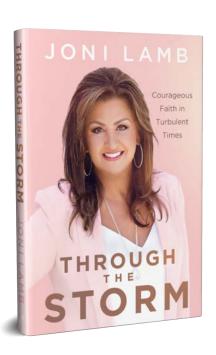


# The Serpent and the Soul by Katie Souza

Deadly serpent spirits are seeking to destroy your soul! Katie Souza's *The Serpent and the Soul* reveals the sly strategies of Python, Leviathan, and other demonic spirits, as they attempt to attack you at all levels: *financially, physically*, and *spiritually*. Working against our relationships, our faith, and our future, these serpent spirits want to constrict you so that you suffer like they will in eternity. But have no fear! In Luke 10:19, Jesus gave us the power to trample serpents and have authority over the enemy. Although the serpent spirits may seem intimidating at first, they will run away as soon as you take back what they have stolen from you. Using the powerful prayers and spiritual tools inside this practical guide, you will be able to break free from the serpents' deadly grip and restore peace in your life! Likewise, you will be able to see that your life was created for *wholeness*, not *brokenness*.



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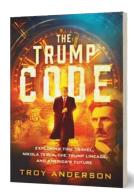
# Through the Storm by Joni Lamb

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's journey has been incredibly remarkable. In her new book, *Through the Storm*, you'll learn what it means to overcome trials, and experience triumphs even after immense loss. Join Joni as she candidly opens up about the relentless challenges, she's overcome of establishing and growing the network, and the dire personal struggles she's also faced. *Through the Storm* doesn't just recount the moments of struggle—it shows you how to navigate and overcome these moments to experience true victory.

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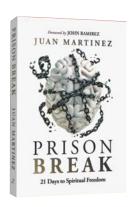




# The Trump Code by Troy Anderson

Could the Trump family's connections to time travel theories, esoteric knowledge, and secret societies hold clues to unlocking the mysteries of our past and future? Troy Anderson's *The Trump Code* delves into the connections between the Baron Trump novels and the enigmatic Trump family legacy, asking whether this nineteenth-century novelist foresaw the future of Trump, America, and the world. It also uncovers a web of historical events and divine providence. While reading this book, your readers will have to confront questions that defy easy answers such as: Is there a divine hand guiding the course of human events?

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# Prison Breαk by Juan Martinez

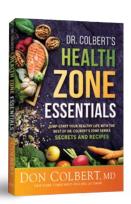
A life with Christ is about unshackling your chains of bondage to embrace a life of freedom. Juan Martinez's twenty-one-day devotional, *Prison Break*, encourages life change through practical steps such as challenging negative thinking patterns with positive affirmations and setting realistic goals. It also serves as a poignant reminder that freedom is possible and shows you that with the right mindset, you can overcome past mistakes, forgive others, be renewed by the transformation of your minds, and lead a fulfilling life. By reading this book, your readers will recognize the root causes of the psychological chains breaking them so they can reach greater personal growth.

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# Rungs of Disclosure by L.A. Marzulli

Is this the coming Great Deception? In *Rungs of Disclosure*, what once was fringe is now reality! While reading, you'll meet regular people—just like you—who have encountered something beyond their ability to explain. You'll also hear from people of great faith and religious belief who continue to have these strange and deeply unsettling encounters. L. A. Marzulli explores these ongoing incidents to discover the answers to these questions: Who are "they"? What do they want? And why are they here? If your readers can handle the truth, they should read this book—if they dare.



# Dr. Colbert's Health Zone Essentials by Don Colbert

So many people are looking to take their health goals to the next level, but have no idea how. With *Dr. Colbert's Health Zone Essentials*, you will gain a treasure trove of wisdom and practical advice to restore your body's health at its foundation. Discover what it means to optimize your health with powerful dietary tools and techniques utilizing the Mediterranean and keto diets along with healing solutions for both your body and brain. Now is the time to discover how to enhance and experience brain and physical restoration.

DrColbertBooks.com



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Let your clothing reflect your beliefs.
Boldly share your faith to connect with those lost and hungry for Jesus.

All 4 designs are crafted with premium quality materials. The T-shirts' timeless designs and soft fabrics combine faith and fashion to reach the world.



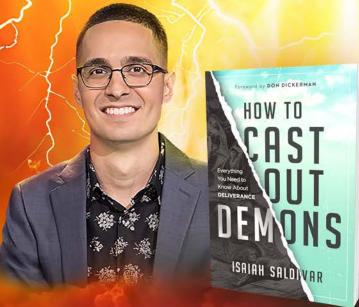




Is it possible that what we see taking place at the end of the age is the answer to ancient revelation—and that we are now seeing it unfold? For the first time ever, Jonathan Cahn opens up end-time prophecy to reveal the ancient forces at work transforming our world, the mysteries of the future, and the ancient secrets given to overcome and prevail in view of what lies ahead!

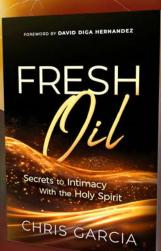


# Embrace the Spirit This Fall Season



Stop sitting on the sidelines and confront the evil plaguing our world today! With practical steps, you will be empowered to do the works of Jesus from casting out demons to healing the sick.





We are severely lacking fresh oil in our personal fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Be drawn into a greater awareness of God's presence, transforming our churches from famine into abundance.





Every martyr had surrendered long before their ultimate sacrifice, death. Embark on an epic journey, following the lives of brave and selfless martyrs, who left their marks on the world.

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