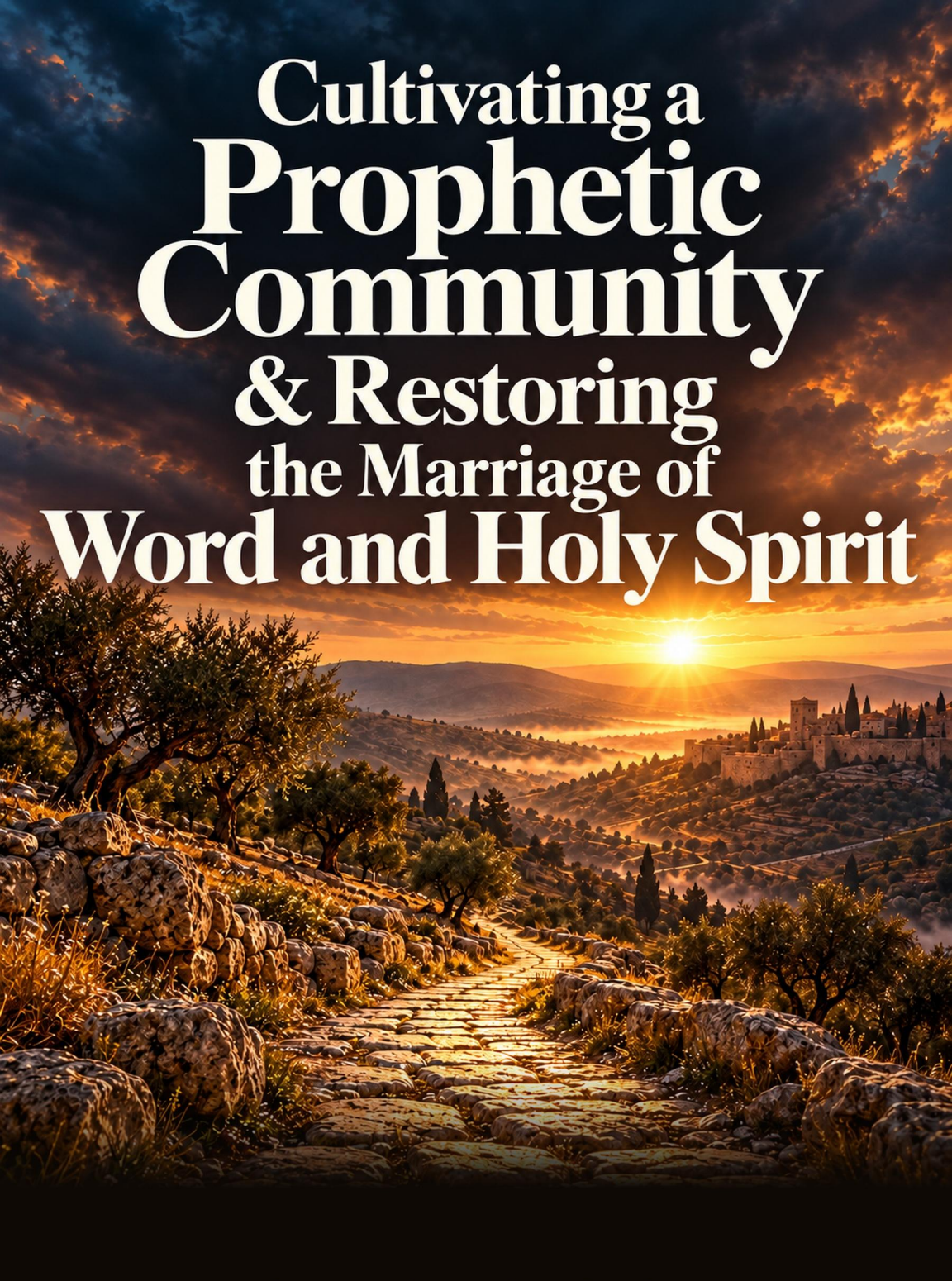
Cultivating a Prophetic Community & Restoring the Marriage of Word and Holy Spirit



The Boy Who Pushes the Plow

CHRONICLES OF A REFORMER

Cultivating a Prophetic Community

Restoring the Marriage of Word and Holy Spirit

The Boy Who Pushes the Plow

Chronicles of a Reformer

"I will cause a boy who drives the plow to know more of the Scriptures than you do."
— William Tyndale

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation (NLT). Other versions are marked where used.

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved.

Chronicles of a Reformer is a series written alongside *The 9 Seasons of the Kingdom of God*: Refinement, Repentance, Revival, Reformation, Recalculate, Revolution, Release, Reward and Repeat.

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Introduction

The Boy Who Pushes the Plow

> *Then those who feared the LORD spoke with each other, and the LORD listened to what they said.*
>
> **Malachi 3:16**

In the 1500s it was against the law in England to own the Bible in English. The Scriptures were kept in Latin, which meant only the highly educated could read them. Everyone else had to take the word of the clergy for what God had said.

A young scholar named William Tyndale could not accept that. He believed ordinary people needed to know God for themselves. One day he got into an argument with a learned churchman who thought it was better for the common people to hear the Pope's interpretation than to read God's Word on their own. Tyndale's answer has been repeated for five hundred years:

> *"If God spare my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."*
>
> **William Tyndale**

He kept his word. Working in hiding, hunted by the authorities, he translated the New Testament into English and smuggled copies back into his own country in bales of cloth. It cost him his life. He was

strangled and burned at the stake in 1536. But the boy behind the plow got his Bible.

That is where the name on the cover of this book comes from. I write as the boy who pushes the plow. I don't put my face or my name on these pages, because I don't want you following a person. I want you to do what Tyndale gave his life for: open the Book, hear the Voice, and know God for yourself.

God never meant for His voice to be the private property of a few.

Why This Book

I grew up in a church tradition that taught God no longer speaks. I was sincere, baptized, and faithful in attendance, and I had no idea there was more. You'll read in these pages how God broke into that silence through a stranger in a café, through dreams, through movies, through injuries, and through mentors who walked with me for years. I played college football, went through the NFL Combine, and spent about twelve seasons in the NFL as a journeyman. Some of the hardest lessons of this book were learned in training rooms and on practice fields long before I ever taught them in a living room.

Along the way I noticed something. The Church I loved had split down the middle. On one side were people who loved the Bible and were suspicious of anything supernatural. On the other side were people who loved the presence and power of God and were often careless with the Bible. R. T. Kendall has called it a silent divorce between the Word and the Spirit. Each side kept some of the children, and neither side grew up whole.

Word without the Spirit dries up into religion. The Spirit without the Word blows up into chaos. But when the two come back together, you get

what the early Church had: ordinary people who had been with Jesus, who knew the Scriptures, and who heard His voice.

This book is about that marriage being restored. It is about cultivating a prophetic community, a family where every believer can hear God, test what they hear, carry it with character, and give it away in love.

What You'll Find Here

The book moves in six parts.

Part One, The Silent Divorce,

looks honestly at how we got here: numbers over hearts, stages over tables, and a Church that drifted into either dry religion or careless chaos.

Part Two, He Speaks,

lays the foundation that God still speaks, and that He speaks to everyone who belongs to Him, not just a gifted few. You'll learn the ways He speaks and how to recognize them.

Part Three, Testing the Fire,

is about discernment. Not every voice that sounds spiritual is the Holy Spirit. We'll learn how to test our own hearts, how to speak truth in love, how to recognize strange fire, and how to stand in faith instead of fear.

Part Four, Giftedness Is Not Godliness,

is the hardest part of the book to write and maybe the most important to read. God does not take back His gifts, which means a person can be powerfully anointed and still be falling apart inside. We'll honor some who fell, learn from them, and ask how to survive the anointing.

Part Five, The Refiner's Fire,

is about training. The prophetic path runs through rejection, reproach, small beginnings, and seasons that feel like a furnace. None of that is wasted.

Part Six, Cultivating the Community,

brings it home: how to steward a prophetic word, how fathers and mothers raise sons and daughters instead of building franchises, how the prophetic sets captives free, and what a consecrated Bride looks like.

At the end you'll find a field guide for dreams, because God is raising up a Joseph and Daniel generation that knows how to listen in the night.

The Season of Reformation

If you've read the other books in the *Chronicles of a Reformer*, you know I teach nine seasons of the Kingdom of God: Refinement, Repentance, Revival, Reformation, Recalculate, Revolution, Release, Reward, and Repeat. The last book went deep into the Reward season and what it costs to survive the call, the assignment, and the anointing.

This book lives in

Reformation

. Revival is when God pours out. Reformation is when God rebuilds the house so it can actually hold what He poured. Many of us have prayed for revival for years. I believe the Lord is asking us a different question now: if He answered that prayer tomorrow, would our churches be able to carry it? Or would the new wine burst the old wineskins?

Reformation doesn't mean tearing down the Church. It means returning her to her Bridegroom.

Revival fills the house. Reformation rebuilds it.

How to Read This Book

You can read this book alone, but it was written to be read together. The prophetic was never meant to be a solo sport. In the days of Malachi, when religion had grown cold and cynical, the people who feared the Lord began talking with one another, and the Lord leaned in to listen. He even wrote their names in a scroll of remembrance (Malachi 3:16). I believe He still leans in when hungry people gather around His Word.

So find a few friends. Read a chapter a week. Every chapter ends with a section called

For the Road

: three questions and one line to carry with you. Don't rush past them. Talk about them over a meal. Pray about them. Write down what you sense the Lord saying, and then test it together with the Scriptures.

As you read, eat the chicken and throw away the bone. I am a son still learning, a prophetic voice still being formed. Some of what I share comes from Scripture, some from my own story, and some from the teachers who have shaped me. Hold everything up to the light of God's Word. That's exactly what the Bereans did with the apostle Paul himself, and Scripture calls them noble for it (Acts 17:11).

I'm praying for you as you read. I'm praying that the boy behind the plow, the mom at the kitchen table, the student in the dorm, and the businessman in the car will all discover the same thing I did: He speaks. He speaks to you. And He wants a family that listens.

The plow is in your hands. Let's get to work.

Part One

The Silent Divorce

What happened when we separated the Word from the Spirit?

Chapter 1

Numbers or Hearts?

What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God.

Luke 16:15

There is a story that has been passed around among pastors for years, and I have never been able to shake it.

An American pastor was invited to lead a three-day conference for believers in China. Early on he learned that eighteen of the people in the room had already served time in prison for their faith. He wanted to understand what he had walked into, so he asked them plainly, "If we get caught here, what happens to us?"

They answered just as plainly. "You will be deported in twenty-four hours. We will go to prison for three years."

As the meetings went on, he realized he had not brought enough Bibles. He told everyone to turn to 2 Peter 1, and he noticed a woman quietly hand her Bible to the person next to her. At the break he found out why. She had recited the whole chapter from memory. In fact, she had memorized the entire book of 2 Peter. When he told her how amazed he was, she shrugged. "In prison, you have a lot of time to read."

"Don't they take your Bible away?" he asked.

She explained that printed Scriptures are seized, so believers smuggle verses in on scraps of paper and memorize them as fast as they can.

“They can take the paper away,” she said, “but not what’s hidden in your heart.”

On the last day, one of the Chinese believers came up to him with a request. “You can gather like this anytime you want in America. Would you pray that one day we will be just like you?”

The pastor paused. Then he said, “I will not pray for that.”

He went on. “You rode a train thirteen hours to get here. In my country, if people have to drive more than an hour, they won’t come. You sat on a wooden floor for three days. In my country, if there are no padded seats and air conditioning, people leave after forty minutes. You have almost no Bibles, so you memorize Scripture from pieces of paper. We have an average of two Bibles in every home, and we don’t read them.”

Then he said the line I can’t get out of my spirit.

“I will not pray that you become like us. I will pray that we become like you.”

We are drawing numbers, but are we transforming hearts?

That question is where this book begins. I am not asking it as a critic standing outside the Church throwing rocks at the windows. I love the Bride of Christ. I have sat in her pews and been healed at her altars. I am asking it as a son who wants his Father’s house to look like his Father again.

The Stage and the Stable

Francis Chan once told a story about a season when he pastored a large church in Southern California. He said a thought came to him one night and he shared it with his wife:

> *"Honey, I feel like if the Apostle Paul or Jesus had a church in Simi Valley, mine would be bigger, and that is bothering me. I would have a bigger church than Jesus, because I know how to keep a crowd. They didn't."*
>
> **Francis Chan**

That kind of honesty should stop all of us. Jesus did not know how to keep a crowd, because He was never trying to. When the crowds came for bread, He gave them a hard teaching about His flesh and blood, and many walked away (John 6:66). He was not building an audience. He was building a family.

The early Church gathered around dinner tables, not stages. There were no fog machines, only the smell of shared meals. There were no professional worship teams, only fishermen and tax collectors singing psalms, probably off-key. Jesus needed no spotlight, because He Himself was the Light. His pulpit was a mountainside, a fishing boat, and the living room of a tax collector named Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5–6). He turned ordinary places into revival places, and He turned prayer into all-night devotion (Luke 6:12).

Somewhere along the way we swapped dinner tables for stadium seating and candlelit prayer for services built around the consumer. We have shows with stages, popular playlists, and fifteen-minute sermons that get everyone out in time for the early game. We call it excellence. Heaven may call it something else.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were not short on Bible knowledge or polished services. What amazed them about the apostles was something they could not produce:

> *The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus.*
>
> **Acts 4:13**

Ordinary men who had been with Jesus. That is the whole résumé of the early Church.

I once heard about a teenager, brand new to the faith, who asked his pastor after a Sunday service, "Why does church feel like a concert? Like a club for the elite instead of a family for the broken?" The pastor stumbled for an answer. That morning's sermon had been on Acts 2, where believers sold what they had to care for one another and prayed until heaven answered. "Maybe we've lost our way," the young man said.

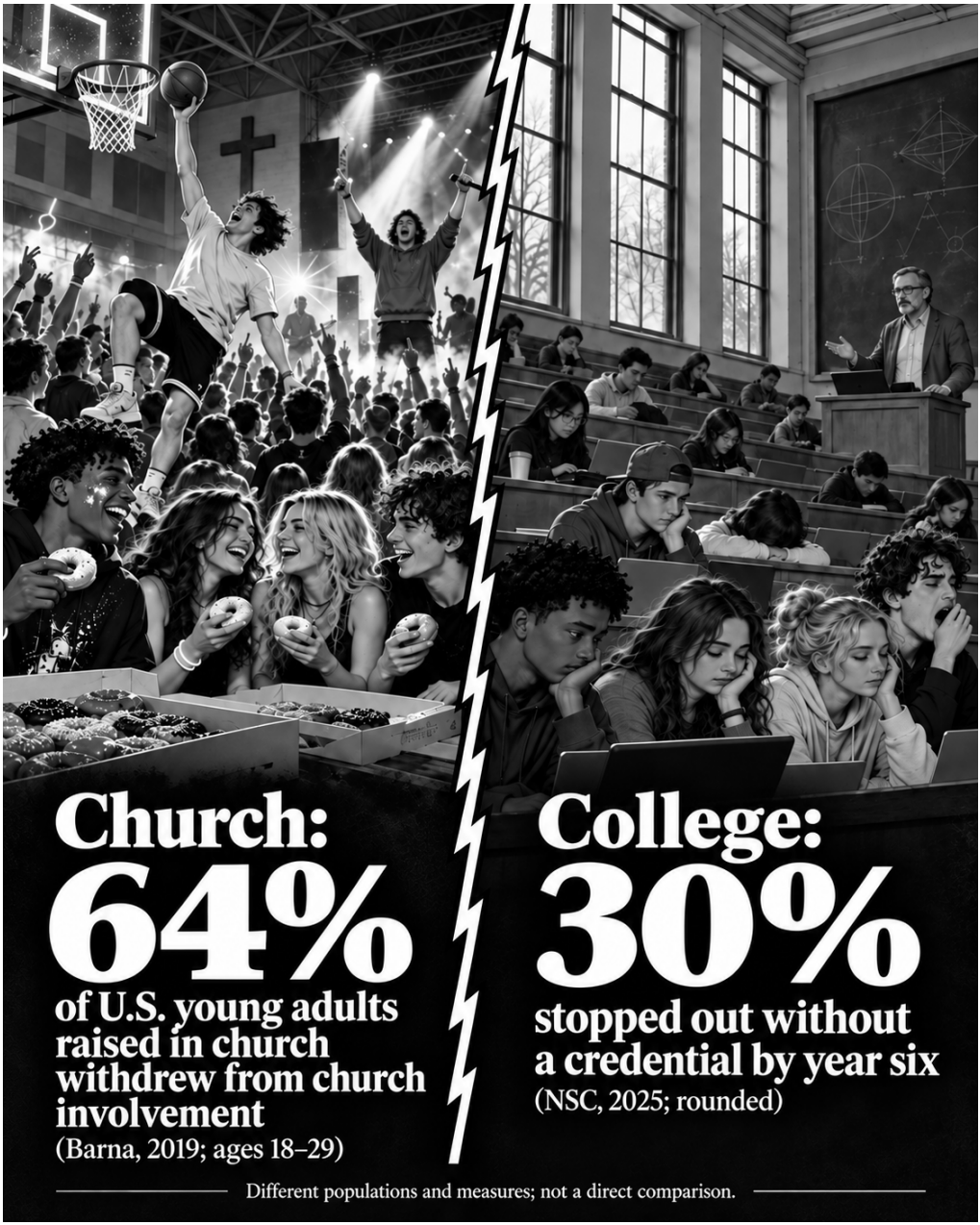
Maybe we have. But the ancient path has not moved. Jesus promised, "For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20). No production is needed. Only His presence is required.

We have elevated the stage and abandoned the stable.

Jesus had hard words for people who protected their way of doing things at the expense of what God had actually said:

> *And so you cancel the word of God in order to hand down your own tradition. And this is only one example among many others.*
>
> **Mark 7:13**

How do we cancel the Word of God? Usually not by attacking it. We do it by elevating our preferences and our good ideas over His principles for how His house should run.


Church:
64%
of U.S. young adults raised in church withdrew from church involvement
(Barna, 2019; ages 18–29)
College:
30%
stopped out without a credential by year six
(NSC, 2025; rounded)
Different populations and measures; not a direct comparison.

The Party and the Lecture Hall

Free or Expensive: Why Young People Stay

Picture two rooms.

The first is a church youth night. Stage lights sweep across the crowd, the music is loud, someone throws down a dunk on a hoop under the cross, and there are boxes of donuts everywhere. Everyone is laughing. It costs nothing to walk in.

The second is a college lecture hall. The lights are dim, a professor is working through equations on a chalkboard, and half the room is propped up on their elbows, fighting sleep. A four-year college education can carry a total price tag of hundreds of thousands of dollars before financial aid, including tuition and living expenses. Church attendance is free.

The contrast raises a question: what helps young people remain committed when the initial excitement fades?

Barna reported in 2019 that 64% of U.S. young adults ages 18–29 who grew up in church had withdrawn from church involvement. The National Student Clearinghouse's 2025 report found that about 30% of the fall 2019 college-entry cohort had stopped out without a credential by year six. Another 9% were still enrolled, and 61.1% had earned a credential.

I am not saying college is holier than church, and Barna's number does not mean every one of those young adults has abandoned their faith. Some return. These studies concern different populations and measure different outcomes; they are not a direct comparison and do not establish why people leave. Yet the higher reported percentage withdrawing from church involvement is

deeply concerning. Young people can persevere through an expensive college education while others walk away from a church they can attend freely. Cost alone does not explain commitment. Are we helping young people make faith their own?

Personal investment can deepen commitment.

The college student enrolled. They chose a major, signed the loans and have skin in the game. Many of our church kids were carried in by their parents and never made the faith their own. They rode on someone else's oil, and when they left home, the oil left with it.

College also has a finish line. There is a degree at the end and a future it points toward. Many young people sat in church for eighteen years and were never shown what discipleship is for. They knew how church felt, but not where it was taking them.

College also has expectations, with deadlines, grades and standards to meet. Too often church asks young people for nothing but attendance, and what asks nothing of you is easy to leave.

And college students are participants, not spectators. Many of our young people were given a seat at the show, but never a role in the Kingdom.

What you win them with, you win them to.

If we win young people with donuts, dunks and stage lights, we have won them to donuts, dunks and stage lights. And the world will always throw a bigger party than the church can. Entertainment can draw a crowd, but it cannot hold one.

Jesus never hid the cost of following Him. He told the crowds to count it before they ever took the first step.

> *But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it?*
>
> *Luke 14:28*

Salvation is a free gift, but it was never meant to feel cheap. When we strip the cost out of following Jesus to keep young people comfortable, we strip out the very thing that would have anchored them. Our sons and daughters do not need a better show. They need to be handed the cross, a calling and their own lamp, and to be trusted to carry them.

> *A generation that is never asked to sacrifice will never learn what is worth sacrificing for.*

Sources: Barna, "Church Dropouts Have Risen to 64%" (2019); National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Yearly Progress and Completion (2025). The college figure rounds 29.9% to 30%; credentials include certificates and degrees. College costs: College Board, Trends in College Pricing 2025; published costs before aid differ from what students actually pay.

It's Not About You

I learned this lesson in a very small way before I learned it in a big one.

I went to a friend's birthday party already irritated, because it was not at the restaurant I would have picked. I spent the first part of the night grumbling inside. Right in the middle of my complaining, I heard the Lord speak to my heart: "It's not about you."

Then He showed me something. My irritation over a restaurant was a small picture of a much bigger problem in cultural Christianity. We have built churches around personal preference and convenience instead of the Father's heart. People choose a church the way they choose a place to eat: what's the menu, how's the parking, is the music my style, will I be out on time?

The Lord reminded me of my years in football. I never once expected a coach to cater his principles to my preferences. On the field I submitted to authority for the sake of the team, and I did it gladly because I wanted to win. I ran the plays I was given. I showed up when I was told. I did not ask the coaching staff to change the practice schedule because it didn't suit me.

So why would I give less devotion for an eternal reward than I gave for a temporary one?

That question stung. I left the party with a quieter heart and a fresh resolve to choose the Father's priorities over my comfort.

Preference builds a crowd. Principle builds a family.

A Family or a Franchise

When Jesus walked into the Temple and found it full of buying and selling, He did not offer a few suggestions about improving the guest experience. He turned the tables over.

> *He said to them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!"*
>
> **Matthew 21:13**

The religious leaders of that day had turned God's house into a business. They exchanged the presence of God for self-seeking power. And that is a very old temptation. When the prophet Ezekiel describes the fall of the one who was once a guardian cherub, he names the root of it: "Your rich commerce led you to violence, and you sinned" (Ezekiel 28:16). Too much buying and selling. A greedy obsession with gain. Pride did not begin in a palace. It began in the presence of God, when a created being decided worship should be pointed at him.

There is a simple truth here that every leader needs to hear.

You can't run a healthy family like a business, and you can't run a healthy business like a family.

Both have their place. A business needs metrics, systems, and customers. A family needs fathers, mothers, patience, and covenant. The question is which blueprint Jesus handed His disciples. He did not give them a franchise model. He gave them a table, a towel, and a cross. He called them friends and told them to love one another the way He had loved them.

This is also the difference between a career and a calling. A career is something you can choose for yourself. A calling is something only God can give.

You can commission yourself to a career, but you cannot commission yourself to a prophetic calling.

A ministry career will birth competition and burnout. A ministry calling will birth consecration and a burning heart for His house. When ministry

becomes a career, other churches become competitors, other leaders become threats, and people become numbers on a growth chart. When ministry is a calling, the people in front of you become sons and daughters, and the only audience that matters is One.

D. L. Moody put it this way:

> *"Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter."*
>
> **D. L. Moody**

Why Revival Tarries

People often ask why revival seems to tarry. We pray for it, we sing about it, we hold conferences about it. So why does it seem so slow to come?

I don't believe God is holding back. I believe we have built houses that could not hold what we are asking for. I have watched us make a series of trades, one small compromise at a time. This is how we got here:

- Programs over prayer
- Prioritizing methods and marketing for the "wow factor"
- Talent over character
- Attendance over commitment
- Business over family
- Personal preference over biblical principles
- Quantity over quality
- Targeting the wealthy and influential instead of the broken and forgotten
- Stewarding finances over purity
- Personal brand over personal brokenness
- Control over consecration
- The pursuit of happiness over the pursuit of righteousness

- Entertainment over encounter

I could write a sermon on every line of that list, and some of them will come back later in this book. But look at the pattern. In every case we chose something we could measure over something only God can produce. You can count attendance. You can't count commitment. You can measure a brand. You can't measure brokenness. You can plan a program. You can't schedule a move of the Spirit.

There is a line in my notes that I keep coming back to.

You build businesses with customers, but you build the Kingdom of God with the spirit of conviction.

None of this means big churches are bad or small churches are holy. There are small churches that are nothing more than a pastor's private kingdom, and large churches full of genuine love and prayer. The size of the room is not the issue. The question is what we are building it on.

When Peter and the apostles were ordered by the authorities to stop preaching in Jesus' name, they answered with a sentence that should be over the door of every church: "We must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29). They were not chasing permission or approval. They were chasing obedience.

The Bus and the Motorcycle

A friend of mine once had a dream that has helped me understand what God is doing in this hour.

In the dream, my friend was standing in a quiet neighborhood where big buses used to come and pick people up. Everyone got on, sat down, and went wherever the one driver took them. Over time the buses stopped coming. In their place came groups of people riding motorcycles together, almost like a gang. Each rider was fully able to move on his own, but they

chose to ride together. They weren't bound by codependence. They were bound by love and covenant.

As I've prayed about that dream, I believe the Lord is showing us two seasons of the Church.

The bus is the old wineskin. It is a structured unity that depends on one leader's revelation. Everyone rides, few drive, and most people never learn to hear God for themselves. It reflects institutions that have learned to favor human tradition over a Spirit-led Church.

The motorcycles are the new wineskin. They are a remnant of Christ-empowered believers who each keep personal obedience to the Holy Spirit and still choose covenant unity with one another. Each one is a living stone (1 Peter 2:5) with oil in their own lamp. They are united by love and by a fire for the Bridegroom, so that the Lamb receives the reward of His suffering. I see in those motorcycles a picture of agility, authority, and power to advance the Kingdom: a consecrated Bride rising in holiness, unity, and love.

> *And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine is stored in new wineskins so that both are preserved.*
>
> **Matthew 9:17**

I don't share this dream to say buses were evil. God used them for a season, and many of us met Jesus on one. But in the series of books I've been writing, I talk about the nine seasons of the Kingdom of God: Refinement, Repentance, Revival, Reformation, Recalculate, Revolution, Release, Reward, and Repeat. This book lives in the season of Reformation. Reformation is what happens after revival, when God starts rebuilding the house so it can actually hold what He poured out. And in Reformation, God is not only filling people. He is changing the wineskin.

That is what this book is about. It is about a Church where every believer hears God's voice, tests what they hear by the Word, carries it with character, and stewards it inside a family instead of on a stage. It is about the Word and the Spirit coming back together after a long and silent divorce. It is about cultivating a prophetic community.

And it starts with a confession. Like that pastor in China, we need to stop praying that the world's persecuted believers become like us. We need to start praying that we become like them.

For the Road

1. If your church disappeared tomorrow, what would your neighborhood actually miss? What would you miss?
2. Look at the "Why Revival Tarries" list. Which trade have you made in your own walk with God, not just in your church?
3. In my friend's dream, are you riding the bus or riding a motorcycle? What would it take for you to hear God for yourself while staying in covenant with others?

The stage can gather a crowd, but only His presence can build a family.

Chapter 2

The Silent Divorce

> *Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.*
>
> **1 Thessalonians 5:19–21**

I grew up in a church tradition that taught God no longer speaks.

I am thankful for that church. It gave me a foundation in the fear of the Lord that I still stand on today. But if I'm honest, most Sundays were fairly boring. If you had asked me to sum up what I learned there, I would have said: God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Bible. The Holy Spirit was a name we said, not a Person we expected to meet.

My dad often made fun of charismatic Christians and told me to be wary of them. To be fair, most of my early encounters with charismatics seemed to prove his point. I saw more chaos and feeling-led theology than anything rooted in biblical truth.

The problem was that God kept speaking to me anyway.

The first time, He led me to be baptized in water. The second time came after an injury that was supposed to end my playing days. With my future in question, I heard the Lord say, "You are not done yet." Over the years other words came too, quiet and clear: "I am your protector and defender." "You will play football again." "You will be a Joseph."

But it is hard to cultivate an ear for God's voice when godly leaders you respect have told you He doesn't talk anymore. So I became what I now

call an unbelieving believer. I was baptized and polite, kind and faithful in church attendance. I prayed like I was reading a script and read verses like homework. I kept a safe distance from the risks of spiritual gifts. My high school and college years were marked by a Christianity of morality, but I knew almost nothing about being led by the Holy Spirit, because I barely knew there was a Holy Spirit.

Looking back, I can say it plainly. If I had known God could speak directly to me, I would have saved myself a lot of trouble.

It's hard to be holy without the Holy Spirit.

Convenient Theology

There is a name for what I was taught. It is called cessationism: the belief that the "sign gifts" of the Holy Spirit, such as tongues, prophecy, and healing, were temporary and ceased after the age of the apostles. The opposite view, continuationism, teaches that the God of the Scriptures never retired, and that the gifts described in the New Testament are still active today.

I have my own name for cessationism. I call it convenient theology. It is faith for moral thinking and moral living, but with no expectation of the miraculous and no belief that God would actually speak to you. It's convenient because you never have to trust God to do the impossible.

This kind of safe faith may look biblical, but very often it is comfort masked as sound theology, and it will stunt your spiritual growth. Safe faith would never have provoked Noah to build an ark or Abraham to leave his father's house. It will never give you the courage to fulfill your purpose in your generation.

There is a trade hidden inside it. If you never pray for the sick, you will never feel the disappointment of praying and not seeing a miracle. But you will also miss the joy of watching God work through you when you

step out in faith as a willing vessel. You live in a reality you created for yourself, where faith only operates when things are visible and certain.

Think about it this way. If I were the devil, my cunning strategy would be to convince the Church that the gifts of the Spirit are outdated and irrelevant. With that one seed of doubt, I could cripple believers' ability to hear their Heavenly Father's voice and experience the Holy Spirit's power. A church that denies the gifts may look discerning on the outside, but it is missing the life-changing joy of intimately knowing the Good Shepherd's voice.

Here is one of the things I have grown to love about the God of the Scriptures.

You are always one encounter away from your theology changing.

A Prayer in the Locker Room

My first real encounter came in a locker room.

In my last year of college, I played in an all-star game and suffered a high ankle sprain. I was devastated. Then another player came into the locker room in tears. "I tore my ACL," he said. "My draft status is toast."

I asked if I could pray for him. He said, "Please."

My words felt clumsy and inadequate, but I lifted my voice, and for the first time in my life I asked God to do the impossible. There were no fireworks. I only felt the peace of doing what I believed God had asked me to do.

A month and a half later, I saw him at the NFL Combine. When he saw me, his eyes went wide. "My ACL is healed," he said.

He looked at me in shock, but I was the one who was truly in disbelief. I felt the Holy Spirit whispering, inviting me into much more. That

moment opened my eyes. I had been swimming in the shallow end of biblical Christianity.

He Speaks

The next encounter came over a plate of food in a small café.

After years of dysfunction, I had finally ended a long, on-and-off relationship from my college years. My mentor challenged me to start praying for my future wife. I was determined to stop the cycle of compromise and start living a life that reflected biblical Christianity.

We often think we know what we need to become a catalyst for change, but only God does. One day, right before a workout, I stopped to grab a bite to eat. A woman saw me pray over my food and came over to ask if I was a Christian. Then she asked if she could pray for me. I said, "Of course."

She put her hands on me and started praying in tongues, and I thought, Oh no. One of those Christians my dad warned me about.

While she prayed, she said, "I see you worshiping God with tears streaming down your face. Praise God."

I froze. How could she know that?

Then she said, "You've been praying for a wife."

I was stunned again and asked how she could possibly know. She went on to describe what my future wife would look like, and then she told me I was at a crossroads. I absolutely was. Would I keep living in the wilderness of disobedience, or would I break the cycle and walk into the promised land of purpose?

Then she said the last thing, and I thought, This has to be fake. "You will be a successful businessman." I almost laughed at how ridiculous it

sounded. She looked at me as if she had heard my thoughts and said, “No. If you want to be, you will be a successful businessman.”

I walked away from that encounter both joyful and upset. Why had no one ever told me about this? I didn’t know it yet, but I had just received my first prophetic word, and my life as a believer would never be the same.

Paul describes what prophecy is supposed to do when God’s people use it, and part of it happened to me in that café. The secrets of my heart were brought into the light, and I knew God was real and near.

> *As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, “God is truly here among you.”*
>
> **1 Corinthians 14:25**

Many of us were raised in churches that proudly say, “We do things by the book.” I understand that, and I still want to do things by the book. But after that day, my question became very simple. Have we read the book? The same chapter says that when believers gather, each one may bring a song, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation, and that we can all prophesy in turn so that everyone is instructed and encouraged (1 Corinthians 14:26–31).

> **We say we do things by the book. Have we read the book?**

The Silent Divorce

R. T. Kendall has put a name to what I lived through:

> *"There has been a silent divorce in the church, speaking generally, between the Word and the Spirit. When there is a divorce, sometimes the children stay with the mother, sometimes with the father. In this divorce you have those on the Word side and those on the Spirit side."*
>
> **R. T. Kendall**

I grew up on the Word side. Many of my friends grew up on the Spirit side. Each side kept some of the children. The Word side kept a love for Scripture, careful teaching, and a healthy fear of error. The Spirit side kept expectancy, gifts, and a hunger for God's power. But like children of any divorce, neither side grew up whole.

As the old saying goes, "All Word and no Spirit, we dry up. All Spirit and no Word, we blow up. But with both Word and Spirit, we grow up."

Jesus never intended the two to live in separate houses. On the night before the cross, He promised that the Spirit would lead His disciples back into His words:

> *But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.*
>
> **John 14:26**

The Spirit leads us into the Word, and the Word points us to the Spirit. Each one keeps sending us back to the other.

There is a story about this from a gathering called the Word and Spirit Conference. In front of 2,500 people, R. T. Kendall called the contemporary prophetic movement "Ishmael." Many charismatics at the time sincerely believed they were the promised end-time movement, the people who know their God and do great exploits (Daniel 11:32). Many were upset at being labeled Ishmael. They felt the comment challenged

their motives and their divine purpose. But after his message, someone pointed out that Smith Wigglesworth had given a similar prophetic word years earlier. That reminder softened some reactions and opened a deeper conversation about prophetic ministry, tradition, and discernment.

Why would that one word sting so much? Ishmael was the son Abraham had by human effort while he was waiting on God's promise. Isaac was the son of promise, born when only God could do it (Genesis 16; 21). Ishmael was real, and God even blessed him, but he was not the promise. To me the hope inside that hard word is this: the promise is still coming. There is an Isaac generation on the way, where the Word and the Spirit come home together.

Word without Spirit dries up into religion. Spirit without Word blows up into chaos.

The Marriage of Spirit and Truth

Jesus told a woman at a well what the Father is looking for:

> *For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.*
>
> **John 4:24**

Not spirit or truth. Spirit and truth. Here is a simple way to see why we need both. The Bible gives us the principle, and the Spirit leads us in the particulars.

1. **The Bible defines marriage but not whom to marry** (Genesis 2:24). Scripture establishes marriage as a covenant, but it does not hand you a name. You seek God's guidance and shared faith.
2. **The Bible says to work for the Lord but not where to work** (Colossians 3:23). God calls us to work with all our heart. The career or

workplace is left to discernment and gifting.

3. **The Bible calls you to be a witness but not where to live** (Acts 1:8). Every believer is sent. Where you are sent is determined by God's leading.
4. **The Bible commands us to be fruitful and multiply but not what size our family should be** (Genesis 1:28). Families decide prayerfully, according to their circumstances.
5. **The Bible says to work for provision but does not set an income level** (1 Timothy 5:8). Provision is about meeting your family's needs and wise stewardship, not a specific salary.
6. **The Bible tells us to pray for the sick but not to guarantee healing** (James 5:14–15). We pray in faith and in community, and we trust God's sovereignty when outcomes vary.
7. **The Bible says to meditate on the Word day and night, but without the Holy Spirit its true meaning remains sealed** (Joshua 1:8). The Pharisees taught the law but did not practice it (Matthew 23:3). Memorizing Scripture without living it leads to hypocrisy. True meditation produces obedience, not mere recitation.

We cannot discern or measure truth apart from the Word of God, and we cannot be made holy or transformed apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. True worship requires both: the truth of His Word and the transforming presence of His Spirit.

The Word draws the boundaries. The Spirit leads us within them.

The Pigeon and the Dove

I want to be fair to my dad, because he wasn't making things up.

In college, a friend took me to a charismatic church. I felt a spirit of chaos there rather than the Spirit of God. Someone asked me if I was saved. I

said yes. They asked if I had been baptized. I said yes. Then they asked if I spoke in tongues, and when I said no, they insisted I couldn't be saved without it. I left thinking there was nothing in that church that made me jealous for what they had.

That is the other side of the divorce. When the Spirit side loses the Word, it loses its anchor. People chase the feeling of a meeting more than the fruit of a changed life.

Sometimes we want to believe the Holy Spirit rained on everyone, when really the pigeons showed up and left a mess.

When the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus at His baptism, He came "like a dove" (Matthew 3:16). The dove is gentle. It rests. It brings peace, not confusion. A pigeon will land anywhere there's a crumb. I see in those two birds a picture of the difference between a move of God and a mess made in His name.

Here is a question I've had to ask myself, and I think every Spirit-hungry believer should ask it too: Do I desire God's will and Word as much as I desire to walk in His supernatural power? Paul wanted both, and he wanted them in the right order:

> *That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.*
>
> **Philippians 3:10 (NKJV)**

Each side of the divorce has its own sin. The cessationist's sin is a lack of faith in, and knowledge of, the Holy Spirit, and it tends to grow a critical spirit. The continuationist's sin is a lack of discernment and knowledge of the Word, and it tends to grow false hope. You can see the same split in how we treat people. Spirit with no truth turns into toxic empathy, which protects feelings at the cost of accountability. Truth with no Spirit turns

into malicious truth, which uses honesty as a weapon. We'll look at both closely in a later chapter. For now, notice that both come from the same broken home.

Don't Throw Out the Baby

There was a reason I was hesitant toward the works of the Holy Spirit. Growing up, the only charismatic churches I saw were chaotic, unhealthy ones that refused to practice discernment when it came to the supernatural.

So I understand the critics. John MacArthur is one of the most prominent voices for cessationism in American Christianity. He holds that the sign gifts were given to the apostles to confirm the origin and truth of the Scriptures, and that when the apostolic age closed, those gifts had served their purpose and ceased. He has written more than one book on the subject. His book *Charismatic Chaos* begins with a concern I can't wave away:

> *"Dramatic new accounts of bizarre, supernatural events attract those hungry for religious experiences, while even the watching world asks, What is real?"*
>
> **John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos***

That is a fair question, and I grieve much of what he grieves. People have been hurt, manipulated, and misled in the name of the Holy Spirit. Where I part ways with him is the conclusion. When something God gave has been misused, the remedy is to learn to use it rightly.

Rick Joyner says it well:

> *"The stringent standards applied to prophetic ministry are seldom applied to other ministries. Should we throw out the ministry of the pastor because some have made mistakes? … We must learn from the mistakes without throwing the baby out with the bath water."*
>
> **Rick Joyner, *The Prophetic Ministry***

Joyner goes on to point out that counterfeit money only exists because real money does. Nobody counterfeits a three-dollar bill. Jesus warned that many false prophets would come, and that warning only makes sense if there are true ones.

If we got rid of everything the devil has ever abused, we would have to get rid of sex and the Bible too. The enemy has never created anything. He can only twist what God has made.

A perversion is always a cheap demonic version of something God originally made for His glory.

That is why Paul did not tell the Thessalonians to shut prophecy down. He told them not to stifle the Spirit, not to scoff at prophecy, to test everything, and to hold on to what is good. That is the way home: both parents together again, the way the Father intended from the beginning.

I was raised on one side of a divorce. In His kindness, God introduced me to the other parent. And I have come to believe that the Church is not as divided as it looks. The children are ready to come home. God is raising a people who love the Book and know the Voice, who open their Bibles and open their hearts, and who will not settle for half a family anymore.

Common Union

> *My people are being destroyed because they don't know me.*
> *Hosea 4:6*

Several years ago I had a dream about Communion. It was a prayer night, nothing unusual, and Communion was about to be shared. As I reached for the plate, I realized it had disappeared. It had vanished as though it had never been there at all. A hush fell over the room, and I remember whispering, "Lord… where did it go?"

When I asked the Lord what it meant, He showed me the disappearance was no accident. It was a picture of the lack of true unity in the Body of Christ concerning the cost of discipleship: the will to follow God's Word. It was as if He were saying, "You cannot walk in true authority or power by choosing the parts of Me you want to practice."

Communion means common union. Jesus said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you" (John 6:53). He never offered us the bread without the cup.

But that's exactly what much of the Church has tried to do. As we have seen, R. T. Kendall has described a silent divorce between the Word and the Spirit. Some kept the bread of His Word. Others kept the wine of His Spirit. Each side thinks it got the better half of the meal.

Jesus said, "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). We need both, the way a railroad track needs a rail on each side to guide the train. Take away one rail and the train doesn't go half as far. It derails.

Those who lean toward idealism tend to feel at home with the knowledge that comes from studying the Word. Those who lean toward empathy and compassion tend to feel at home with the ways of the Holy Spirit. But natural intellect doesn't equal good theology, and personal feelings and soulish desires aren't the ways of the Spirit. We don't get to pick the half of Jesus that fits our personality.

You can't have common union with a Christ you've cut in half.

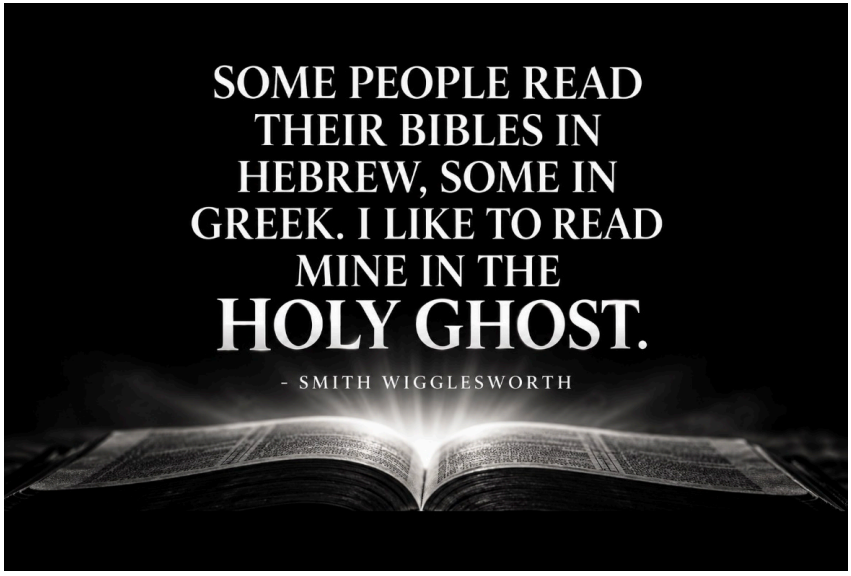
For the Road

1. Which side of the divorce did you grow up on, the Word side or the Spirit side? What did you keep, and what did you lose?

2. Have you had an encounter that changed your theology? What did it change, and what did it cost you?

3. Is there something in the life of the Spirit you have thrown out because you saw it misused? What would it look like to test it and hold on to what is good?

God never filed for this divorce. He is bringing His Word and His Spirit home together.



Chapter 3

Too Many Voices

> *But you don't believe me because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*
>
> **John 10:26–27**

A brother in the Lord once shared a dream with me that I have never been able to forget. He had it in March 2020, right as the whole world was shutting down.

In the dream, he was brought to a meeting with Satan along with a few other people. He felt like a spy. The others seemed unaware of what they were walking into. It felt like a recruiting session. They entered a room with elegant furniture and decor, and then a wall slid open to reveal a secret entrance. There he was: an intelligent-looking man dressed all in black with a cape, like a typical Hollywood picture of the devil. He sat behind a desk cluttered with books and papers. And directly in front of him lay an open Bible, as if he had been reading it moments before they arrived.

He began to lay out the requirements for joining his team, including a ritual they would have to perform. The others went along. When it was my friend's turn, he shouted, "Never!" and ran. As he fled, he passed another room filled with toys, candy, rides, and attractions. One of the toys defied Satan and declared, "I won't work for you anymore!" Satan crushed its head, and the toy multiplied into ten more. Then my friend woke up.

The most striking part of that dream is the Bible on the desk. We know Satan is familiar with Scripture. He quoted it to Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:6). But this picture was a sobering reminder. While we neglect God's Word, the enemy and false teachers study it intently, and then they weaponize it against us.

A. W. Tozer saw this long ago:

> *"The devil is a better theologian than any of us and is a devil still."*
>
> **A. W. Tozer**

Our weakness in faith is not only rooted in ignorance. It is rooted in choosing distraction and fun over the discipline of reading the Word of God. Notice that the room full of toys and candy was right down the hall. We forget that we are enlisted in a war. We were never called to chase the American dream. We are "sent ones" on a mission to transform the world, yet compromise and sin make us easy targets. It is time to stop playing games and stop giving in to enslaving distractions, worry, and sinful patterns.

While we neglect the Word, the enemy is studying it.

The Last-Days Flood

I believe the number one weapon the enemy will use against the Church in the last days is deception. Another name for it is subjective truth. Jesus did not leave us guessing about this:

> *And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people.*
>
> **Matthew 24:11**

Paul adds that "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). Deception rarely shows up looking like deception. It shows up looking like light, sounding like Scripture, and feeling like freedom.

Paul warned the elders of Ephesus that the danger would not only come from outside the church:

> *I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following.*
>
> **Acts 20:29–30**

That last phrase is worth slowing down for: "in order to draw a following." Deception and the hunger for a crowd have always traveled together. When a voice needs followers more than it needs the truth, it will eventually bend the truth to keep the followers.

Here is something I've noticed. Many people avoid or reject the prophetic ministry because of the damage that has been done in its name. I understand that, and later in this book we will look at that damage honestly. But they fail to see that the Church has split into more denominations than most of us could count, and for the very same reason. Somebody claimed God told them their way was the narrow and ancient path.

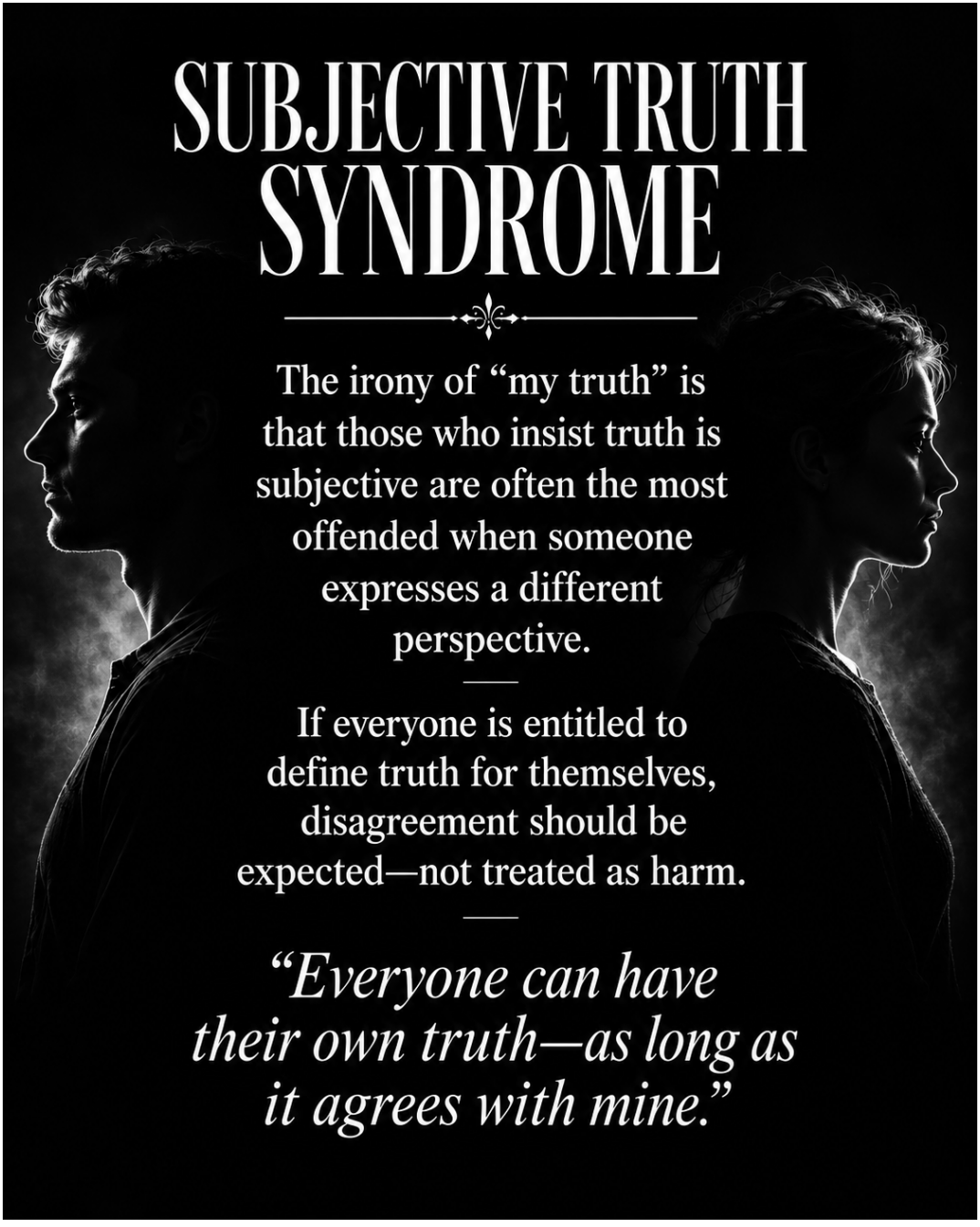
Sometimes the error comes through human intellect, where people define truth by their own private interpretation of the Bible. Sometimes it comes through personal feelings masquerading as the voice of the Holy Spirit. Those look like opposite problems. They aren't. Both are rooted in the same inability to hear the true Shepherd's voice.

Math is objective truth. One plus one equals two, whether you feel like it does or not. The same is true of the Scriptures. But when "my truth"

trumps “the truth,” the Word of God becomes an all-you-can-eat buffet instead of an unshakable foundation. We walk down the line taking the verses we like, skipping the ones we don’t, and calling our plate a meal.

When “my truth” trumps “the truth,” the Bible becomes a buffet.

There are too many voices in this generation. Podcasts, feeds, prophets, pundits, our own hearts. We will hear voices either way. What matters is whether we can pick out the One that matters most.


SUBJECTIVE TRUTH SYNDROME
The irony of “my truth” is that those who insist truth is subjective are often the most offended when someone expresses a different perspective.
If everyone is entitled to define truth for themselves, disagreement should be expected—not treated as harm.
“Everyone can have their own truth—as long as it agrees with mine.”

Noah and the Voice of God

Scripture doesn't tell us what went on inside Noah while he built the ark, but I have often tried to picture it.

I imagine him waking up each morning with a heavy heart, torn between building what God had told him to build and using his resources to establish a comfortable kingdom for himself. I imagine him walking to the edge of camp, watching everyone else build their homes and chase their dreams without a care in the world, and feeling the weight of the contrast. I can almost hear him crying out, "Why, Lord? Why must I bear this alone while everyone else follows their own desires?" And I imagine God meeting him in the night, maybe even in a dream of a world covered in water with the ark as the only beacon of hope, and Noah waking up resolved to commit fully to his calling, his sons joining him one by one.

That is only how I picture it. What the Bible does tell us is that he obeyed:

> *It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before.*
>
> **Hebrews 11:7**

Think about that. Noah could have committed himself to living a moral life, and it would have been a good life. But morality would never have persuaded him to build an ark. Morality is a pillar of the Christian faith, but submitting to the voice of God often means doing things that offend the natural mind. Many times it means rejecting what the world values and investing your time and resources in things that look like foolishness to everyone else. People may even think you are wasting your life.

Morality will keep you out of trouble, but only obedience to His voice will build an ark.

In a flood of voices, Noah had one voice he trusted above the crowd and above his own common sense. When the rain came, that voice was the

only thing that mattered. After the flood, Noah built an altar of thanksgiving, and the weight of all those years finally made sense.

The Prescription

So what is the cure for deception? It is not complicated, though it is costly. Read the Word of God.

Smith Wigglesworth had a way of saying it that makes me smile:

> *"Some people read their Bibles in Hebrew, some in Greek; I like to read mine in the Holy Ghost."*
>
> **Smith Wigglesworth**

Many people who love the prophetic are hungry for a dream, a vision, or a word from someone on a stage. But they leave the most prophetic book ever written closed on the nightstand.

If you love the prophetic, there is nothing more prophetic and heart-revealing than the Word of God.

> *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.*
>
> **Hebrews 4:12**

God Himself assures us that He communicates with us directly, whether through a dream, a vision, a burning heart, or a faint whisper. But He also makes it clear that His written Word is the final measure for discerning what comes from our own soul and what comes from His Holy Spirit.

In the film *The Book of Eli*, a gang member dismisses the last surviving Bible on earth as "just a book." The warlord he works for knows better. He understands its power and wants to get his hands on it so he can use it to control people. I see in that a picture of our moment. The world often

understands the power of this book better than the Church does.

Wigglesworth also gave four simple principles for living by the Word, and I have never found a better prescription:

1. **Read the Word of God.** Open it daily, even when you don't feel like it.
2. **Consume the Word of God until it consumes you.** Don't just read it. Let it read you.
3. **Believe the Word of God.** Take Him at His word, even before you see it.
4. **Act on the Word.** Faith that never obeys is only information.

Job said it this way: "I have not departed from his commands, but have treasured his words more than daily food" (Job 23:12). That's what a hungry heart looks like.

How Do You View the Bible?

Every believer has a view of the Bible, whether they've thought it through or not. Here are four common ones:

- **Inerrancy.** The Bible, in its original manuscripts, is completely free from error in all that it affirms, historically, factually, and theologically.
- **Infallibility.** The Bible is wholly reliable and trustworthy in its teaching on faith and salvation, and it will not fail to accomplish God's purpose.
- **Symbolic.** Scripture communicates truth mainly through symbols, metaphors, and myths, so its meaning is theological or existential rather than literal or factual.
- **Flawed.** Some passages reflect only the perspectives, cultural assumptions, or theological reflection of their human authors and are not truly authoritative.

Where you land on that list will shape how you hear God. The first two take God at His word when He says all Scripture is breathed out by Him.

The last two quietly make you the judge of which parts count.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He answered the devil three times with "It is written." If the Living Word quoted the written Word, how much more do we need to speak it and declare it over our own lives?

> *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*
>
> **2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV)**

All Scripture is God-breathed, not just the verses that fit your lifestyle.

Be a Berean

When Paul preached in the city of Berea, Luke gave the people there a compliment I would love to have written over my own life:

> *Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*
>
> **Acts 17:11 (NIV)**

Look at the two halves of that verse. They received the message with great eagerness. That is an open heart, hungry for what God is saying. And they examined the Scriptures every day. That is a tested heart, anchored in what God has said. The Bereans did not choose between being open and being careful. They were both. They are a picture of the marriage of Word and Spirit we talked about in the last chapter.

The Bereans also teach us something about prophetic people. They tested even the apostle Paul. If Paul's preaching was not above being checked against Scripture, neither is your dream, my prophetic word, or the most famous voice on the conference circuit.

Truth is not measured by how it makes us feel or how well it fits our logic. It is measured by the Word of God and confirmed by the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Logos and Rhema

Many teachers use two Greek words for "word" to describe two ways God speaks. The *logos* is the written Word, the revealed truth of Scripture. The *rhema* is a specific word spoken by the Spirit into a specific moment. You could put it this way: the Bible's definition of marriage is logos, and God's leading about whom to marry is rhema. We need both.

The Pharisees knew the Scriptures as well as anyone who has ever lived. Many of them had committed huge portions of it to memory. And yet the people who had memorized the written Word of God ended up crucifying the living Word of God. They placed greater faith in their own feelings and intellect than in being guided and instructed by the Holy Spirit.

Knowing God's Word and knowing God's voice are not the same thing.

Paul explains why we need the Spirit to understand what God has given:

> *But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 2:10–12**

When we believe that receiving revelation from God is mainly about intelligence or a high IQ, instead of a deep relationship with Him, we end up with a prideful knowledge that inflates our ego. Paul put it simply: "While knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the

church" (1 Corinthians 8:1). What God wants is a love that builds others up.

Remember who Jesus was talking to when He said, "My sheep listen to my voice." He was speaking in the Temple to people steeped in the Scriptures, who still could not recognize the Shepherd standing in front of them. They had plenty of Bible knowledge. What they lacked was a relationship with the One the Bible was about.

Here is the good news. The answer to too many voices is to learn one Voice so well that every other voice sounds wrong. A child can pick out her father's voice across a crowded playground. She has never studied sound waves. She has simply spent her life in his house. That is what the Word and the Spirit together do for us. The Word teaches us what the Father sounds like. The Spirit lets us hear Him speak.

There may be too many voices in this generation, but there has never been more than one Shepherd. And He has promised that His sheep will know His voice.

For the Road

1. Whose voices shape your view of truth most in an ordinary week? How many of them are shaped by Scripture?
2. Of the four views of the Bible, which one do you actually live by on a Tuesday afternoon, whatever you say you believe on Sunday?
3. Which of Wigglesworth's four principles is weakest in your life right now? What is one way to practice it this week?

There are too many voices in this world, but His sheep still know the Shepherd's voice.

PART TWO

He Speaks

Does God still speak, and to whom?

Chapter 4

Everyone Gets to Play

> *In this way, all who prophesy will have a turn to speak, one after the other, so that everyone will learn and be encouraged.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 14:31**

During my years in the NFL, I was on the phone one day in the training room. One of the trainers loved to tease me, and he saw his chance. "Who you on the phone with?" he barked. "God?"

He laughed. I looked up and said, "Well, if I were talking to God, would you even recognize His voice?"

The whole room erupted. It was a locker room joke, and everybody moved on. But I didn't. The joke carried a truth I couldn't shake. Somewhere along the way we have made hearing God sound strange, like something reserved for a handful of spiritual elites. Jesus never taught it that way.

> *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*
>
> **John 10:27**

Many Christians know that verse. Far fewer believe it.

Normal Christianity

There is an old story about two shepherds who led their flocks down to the same brook. The sheep mingled together into one wooly crowd. A man watching from a hill muttered to himself, "What a mess. How will they ever sort those sheep out?" Then one of the shepherds stood up and

whistled once. Every one of his sheep lifted its head, left the crowd, and followed him.

The shepherd did not need a sorting pen. He needed sheep that knew his voice.

That is normal Christianity. I want to be careful with my words here, because we often use "normal" to mean "average," and average Christianity in much of the Western world has very little to do with hearing God. What I mean by normal is what the Bible presents as normal. In the book of Acts, ordinary believers heard God, followed the Spirit's leading, prayed for the sick, and spoke words that strengthened one another. That was the baseline, not the ceiling.

Cultural Christianity works differently. In cultural Christianity, one person hears from God and everyone else listens to that person.

Normal Christianity hears the voice of God. Cultural Christianity depends on the man or woman in the pulpit to hear Him.

I know cultural Christianity well, because I grew up in it. I was taught that God had finished speaking when the last page of the Bible was written. I loved Jesus, I went to church, and I tried to live a moral life. But I had no idea that the Shepherd wanted to speak to me personally. Looking back, I can see that God was speaking to me long before I recognized it. If I had known He could speak directly to me, I would have saved myself a lot of trouble.

Think about it this way. Prayer is us talking to God. The prophetic is God talking back.

If prayer is us speaking to God, the prophetic is God speaking back to us.

Nobody would call a relationship healthy if only one person ever talked. Yet many believers have been taught to pray for decades without ever expecting an answer that sounds like a Father's voice. You cannot be a truly effective believer without hearing the voice of God, because you cannot follow a Shepherd you cannot hear.

A Command, Not a Suggestion

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about spiritual gifts, he did not treat prophecy as an optional extra for a few spiritual specialists. He made it a priority for the whole church.

> *Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophesy.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 14:1**

Notice the order. Love comes first. But love does not cancel the command to desire the gifts. Love is the soil the gifts grow in.

The early Church, the one we read about in Acts 2, assumed that all believers would move in prophetic gifting, not only the man behind the pulpit. When Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost, he explained what was happening by quoting the prophet Joel:

> *"In the last days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy."*
>
> **Acts 2:17–18**

All people. Sons and daughters. Young and old. Servants, men and women alike. The Spirit did not come to a stage. He came to a room full of

ordinary people.

Where did that normal practice go? I believe the modern Church slowly shifted toward program-driven, entertainment-based models of ministry, and those models produced passive members. I call them sideline disciples. They are saved, they are sincere, and they love God. But they have been trained to watch the game instead of play in it. In doing so, we have quietly set aside the biblical participation of all the saints.

Paul expected the opposite. He wrote that prophecy has a unique power to reach people who don't yet believe:

> *But if all of you are prophesying, and unbelievers or people who don't understand these things come into your meeting, they will be convicted of sin and judged by what you say. As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, "God is truly here among you."*
>
> **1 Corinthians 14:24–25**

"If all of you are prophesying." Paul was not describing a conference with a famous guest speaker. He was describing a normal Sunday in a house full of believers who expected God to speak through any one of them.

God never designed His Church to have a few players and a stadium full of fans.

Passionate yet Unprepared

I played three years in the NFL with a teammate I'll call Trent. One Sunday, in the chaos of the moment, Trent ran out onto the field without his helmet. A defensive lineman hollered, "Trent, where's your helmet?" He stopped, flushed with embarrassment, and sprinted back to the sideline.

The clip made the highlight shows for weeks. Fans laughed, announcers replayed it, and the moment became entertainment.

Later that week I was sitting in church, and I kept thinking about that clip. Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14 came to mind:

> *Well, my brothers and sisters, let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 14:26**

When you meet together, everyone comes ready to bring something. A song. A teaching. A revelation. Cultural church is a place you come to observe. Biblical church is a gathering where each person arrives equipped and ready to participate.

Trent was passionate. He wanted to be on that field so badly that he ran out before he was ready. I have met many believers like that. They love God, but nobody ever taught them to suit up. Trent only forgot his helmet in one game. How many Christians forget to put on the full armor of God every day? Paul tells us to "put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17).

Trent's helmet moment reminded me why we gather. We come to church to participate, not to be consumers or to be entertained. When everyone brings their gift with boldness and order, and everyone shows up wearing the armor, the whole body is built up. We become an army of believers ready for the game called life, instead of a crowd left vulnerable and unprepared for the cost of discipleship.

When we trade truth for tradition, we leave ourselves ill-equipped for the enemy's attacks.

Why People Reject the Prophetic

If prophecy is so clearly part of the New Testament Church, why do so many believers keep their distance from it? Over the years I have heard just about every reason. Most of them come down to one of these:

- **Distrust** from past abuse of the prophetic or from false prophetic words.
- **An overemphasis on intellect and skepticism,** fed by a religious spirit.
- **A preference for the traditions of men** and doctrinal preaching over Spirit-led messages.
- **Concern about emotionalism or manipulation.**
- **A lack of biblical knowledge** about prophecy and how to test a word.
- **Cultural stereotypes,** or association with radical charismatic groups.
- **Religious pride,** or an unwillingness to be corrected.
- **Poor accountability** in prophetic ministry.
- **Fear** of having sin exposed, or of conviction.
- **The struggle to tell prophecy apart** from mere opinion, opportunism, or control.

Some of those reasons are honest wounds. People have been hurt by careless words spoken in God's name, and I will spend a good portion of this book dealing with exactly that. But we need to be careful. A spirit of fear has attached itself to the prophetic because of its abuse. If we got rid of everything the devil has ever abused, we would have to get rid of marriage and the Bible too.

Paul gave the Church a better way than throwing everything out:

Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.

1 Thessalonians 5:20–21

Test it. Don't scoff at it, and don't swallow it whole. Test it.

Many sincere Christians believe God no longer speaks. Many others fear that if they go after the prophetic, they will be deceived. I understand that fear. But listen to how Jesus answered it:

You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

Luke 11:11–13

Jesus put it simply: ask your Father for bread, and He won't hand you a stone. Your Father is not trying to trick you. If you truly want Him, He will reveal Himself to you.

So be careful of the doubters. Remember Job's friends. They had plenty to say, and much of it sounded wise, but God was not pleased with them in the end. Paranoia and criticism often dress themselves up as wisdom.

Francis Chan put a finger on what is really going on:

"Refusing to teach a passage of Scripture is just as wrong as abusing it. I really believe it's time for some of us to stop apologizing for God and start apologizing to Him for being embarrassed by the ways He has chosen to reveal Himself."

Francis Chan

Fear of abuse is no excuse for disobedience.

Why We Need It

Prophetic ministry is a necessity, never a luxury reserved for a church that already has everything else in order. Here are five reasons I have come to believe that.

1. **The prophetic is a tool for correct theology and a weapon against the lies of the enemy.** We fight with God's mighty weapons "to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments" (2 Corinthians 10:4). Reading God's Word and knowing God's voice are the necessary diet of a believer. The Bible tells me what marriage is. It does not tell me whom to marry. For that I need to know His voice as well as His Word.
2. **The prophetic is evidence to believers and unbelievers alike that God is in our midst and God is real.** That is what Paul meant when he said an unbeliever would fall down and declare, "God is truly here among you." John tells us that "the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus" (Revelation 19:10). True prophecy points to Him.
3. **The prophetic is necessary to pray effectively.** We often don't know what to pray for. "But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words" (Romans 8:26). When the Spirit shows us how to pray, our prayers hit the target.
4. **The prophetic is part of our spiritual warfare.** Paul told Timothy to use the prophetic words spoken over him to "fight well in the Lord's battles" (1 Timothy 1:18). A word from God becomes a weapon in the hour of attack.
5. **The prophetic is the language of friendship with God.** "The LORD is a friend to those who fear him. He teaches them his covenant" (Psalm 25:14). Friends share secrets. Servants take orders.

Ability, Gift, and Office

Now, if everyone gets to play, does that mean everyone is a prophet? No. Paul asks the question plainly:

> *Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles?*
>
> **1 Corinthians 12:29**

The answer he expects is no. So how do we fit that together with "all who prophesy will have a turn"? I have found it helpful to separate three things: the ability to prophesy, the gift of prophecy, and the office of a prophet.

- **Simple prophecy (a general ability).** Every believer may speak Spirit-led encouragement or truth. "All who prophesy will have a turn to speak" (1 Corinthians 14:31). Think of it like cooking dinner at home or a pickup basketball game at the park. It is accessible to everyone, and it is informal.
- **The prophetic gift (a specialized skill).** Some believers are given a gift to deliver revelation with greater clarity and authority. Paul lists "the ability to prophesy" among the gifts the Spirit hands out as He chooses (1 Corinthians 12:10). Think of a great cook, or a college athlete. They are trained, accountable, and able to carry weight in public settings.
- **The prophet (a professional calling).** A prophet is a mature, God-appointed messenger entrusted with weighty revelation. Paul writes, "These are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets…" (Ephesians 4:11). Think of a Michelin-starred chef or an MVP. The calling demands rigorous discipline, precision, and a deep responsibility to steward the gift, because "the Sovereign LORD never does anything until he reveals his plans to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

I spent a lot of years playing football at the highest level. I can tell you that the kid throwing a ball around at the park and the man playing on Sunday are both playing football. They are both in the game. But they carry very different levels of responsibility, and nobody gets to skip from the park to the pros by announcing a new title.

Rick Joyner wrote something that belongs over every one of these three levels:

> *"The gifts of the Spirit are not toys; they are tools for building His church. The Holy Spirit is holy, and we must treat Him and His gifts with reverence."*
>
> **Rick Joyner**

Everyone gets to play, but nobody gets to play carelessly.

The Prophetic Birthright

When I first started to grow in the prophetic, I was the guy who never stopped asking questions. I wanted to know everything. One day a prophetic friend of mine came into town, and I asked her, "What's the most important thing to understand about the prophetic?"

She didn't hesitate. "It's the birthright of every believer."

I have never forgotten that answer. The Holy Spirit is no respecter of titles. Prophecy is part of the inheritance of everyone who follows Jesus. The enemy wants you to believe it is complicated or exclusive, a club with a secret handshake. But just as salvation is a free gift, so is the Spirit's voice. Your job is not to earn it. Your job is to steward it.

The prophetic was never meant to be a club. God set a family table.

There is one more thing I want you to hear before we go further. Stewarding your birthright does not begin with a dramatic word on a platform. It begins with obedience.

> *The LORD our God has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we and our children are accountable forever for all that he has revealed to us, so that we may obey all the terms of these instructions.*
>
> **Deuteronomy 29:29**

God reveals things so that we will obey. Before you ever give a word to someone else, live what He has already told you.

One of the most prophetic acts a believer can do is live an obedient life.

When we recover that, something beautiful happens. The Church stops being a place where a few people hear God for everyone else and becomes a family where every son and daughter knows the Shepherd's whistle. That is what it looks like to restore the Acts 2 DNA of the Church. The Word and the Spirit are back together, and the whole body is in the game.

For the Road

1. Do you believe John 10:27 applies to you personally, or have you been living as if only leaders hear God? What would change if you believed it?
2. Which of the ten reasons people reject the prophetic has shaped you the most? Is it an honest wound, or a fear you've never examined?
3. When you walk into church, do you come to watch or to bring something? What could you bring this week?

You were not saved to sit on the sideline. Your Father speaks, and every one of His children gets to play.

Chapter 5

Ten Ways God Speaks

> *For God speaks again and again, though people do not recognize it.*
>
> **Job 33:14**

For centuries, nobody could read Egyptian hieroglyphics. Scholars stared at temple walls covered in birds, eyes, and serpents, and they knew the carvings meant something. But the meaning was locked. Then a stone slab was found carrying the same decree written in three scripts, one of them Greek. Because scholars could read the Greek, they finally had a key. That slab became known as the Rosetta Stone, and it opened up an entire civilization.

I see in that stone a picture of what happens when someone without eyes to see and ears to hear tries to understand what God is saying. The message is right there in front of them. God is speaking "again and again." But without a key, it all looks like strange symbols on a wall.

Often when I hear someone say, "God told me," I want to ask a gentle question: What do you mean? Did you hear an audible voice? Did a verse jump off the page? Did you have a dream? Did a friend say something that hit your heart like an arrow? All of those can be God. Some of them can also be our own soul talking. So before we learn to test what we hear, which is the work of Part Three, we need to learn how God actually speaks.

The Ten Ways

Here are ten ways the Bible shows God speaking to His people.

1. **The Bible, the ultimate Rosetta Stone.** Scripture is the primary way God speaks, revealing His character, His will, and His wisdom. Every other way He speaks is interpreted by this one. "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true" (2 Timothy 3:16).
2. **Prayer.** Prayer is a two-way conversation. We share our hearts, and we listen for His guidance and His peace (Philippians 4:6–7).
3. **The Holy Spirit.** The Spirit lives in every believer, bringing conviction, comfort, and direction. Jesus promised that He "will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you" (John 14:26).
4. **Creation.** "The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship" (Psalm 19:1). Nature reveals His attributes and His majesty.
5. **Conscience.** God has written an inner sense of right and wrong on the human heart (Romans 2:14–15). Our sense of justice, purity, and personal conviction all point to a download of objective morality from the One who made us.
6. **Circumstances.** "We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps" (Proverbs 16:9). God uses life events, open doors, and closed doors to guide us.
7. **Community and wise counsel.** "There is safety in having many advisers" (Proverbs 11:14). God often speaks through the wisdom and encouragement of other believers, including leaders and mentors.
8. **Dreams and visions.** "Your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions" (Joel 2:28). God still gives insight and direction in the night and in pictures.

9. **Stories and parables.** Jesus "never spoke to them without using such parables" (Matthew 13:34). God still speaks through stories, and we will spend the next chapter there.
10. **The five spiritual senses.** God speaks to the spirit the way the world speaks to the body: through taste, sight, hearing, touch, and smell. More on this in a moment.

A word about circumstances. Closed doors are not always the devil. I have learned to pray what I call a "Block Me" prayer. It is a settled posture of the heart where I ask God ahead of time to withhold any blessing that would derail my destiny by feeding my pride or distracting me. That prayer keeps me dependent on His providence. It guards His purpose for my life from becoming an idol, and it makes room for obedience I could never plan on my own.

Two more ways could be added to the list. God sometimes speaks through **numbers and signs**: patterns, dates, or repeated sequences that serve as prompts or confirmations. Think of Joseph explaining that seven fat cows and seven thin cows meant seven years of plenty and seven years of famine (Genesis 41:26–32). These are never a secret code to crack. They are providential signs that point to timing or call us to pray. And God speaks through **discerning of spirits**, which deserves its own section.

God is not hard to hear. We are often just listening in only one direction.

The Five Spiritual Senses

If you closed your eyes and someone put something in your hand, how would you know what it was? You would feel it. Touch would tell you what sight couldn't.

We have five natural senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. I believe we also have five spiritual senses, and when they are connected to

the Holy Spirit, they can be amplified. Your spirit, made in the image of God, is wired to discern. Discernment is a normal function of a born-again spirit, and the Holy Spirit sharpens it as we lean on Him.

- **Taste.** "Taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8).
- **Sight.** Paul prays that the eyes of our hearts would be "flooded with light" so we can understand our hope and His power (Ephesians 1:17–19).
- **Hearing.** "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!" (Matthew 11:15).
- **Touch.** When a woman reached for His robe in a pressing crowd, Jesus said, "Someone deliberately touched me, for I felt healing power go out from me" (Luke 8:46).
- **Smell.** "Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God" (2 Corinthians 2:15). To some we carry the aroma of life, and to others the aroma of death.

Look again at that woman in the crowd. Dozens of people were pressing against Jesus. Only one touch carried faith, and He felt the difference. That is spiritual sensing. He discerned what was happening beneath the surface, turned to her personally, and spoke healing and peace over her.

Discerning of Spirits

To discern is to recognize spiritual truth and the real condition of a person or situation by the Holy Spirit, not by natural senses alone. Paul lists "the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit" among the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10).

I want to speak directly to those of you who carry this gift.

There are moments when what you sense feels overwhelming. What you are experiencing is not random. It is a grace God has given you. For many of you, it has felt so normal that you didn't realize not everyone

experiences the world this way. You can walk into a room and feel what is happening under the surface: the atmosphere, the tension, the spiritual weight that others overlook. At times you carry emotions that are not your own. It can be exhausting, and it can drive you to withdraw just to fill back up.

Because of that, you must guard your eyes and ears with intention. What you watch, what you listen to, and the environments you put yourself in affect you more deeply than they affect others. A pregnant woman cannot do everything other people do. That is not because she is restricted. It is because she is carrying something valuable. In the same way, you are carrying a spiritual sensitivity that requires stewardship. Guarding what you carry is wisdom, and it has nothing to do with legalism.

This gift was never meant to overwhelm you. It was meant to equip you with eyes that see and ears that hear. When you learn to tell the difference between what is in the room and what is truly your own, something shifts. You stop simply reading the atmosphere and start influencing it. Instead of a thermometer, you become a thermostat. Through prayer, authority, and alignment with the Spirit, you can shift atmospheres, bring clarity, and help others find solid ground.

A sensitive spirit carries a personal responsibility.

Here is one practical way I have learned to use this gift. Think like a casting director. A casting director reads a script and chooses actors whose look, mannerisms, and personality naturally fit the story's characters. When you are discerning about a person, adopt that mindset. Consider their gifting, temperament, experience, and bearing in light of God's larger story, and quietly ask the Holy Spirit what role they are meant to play. Then treat that impression as a starting point. Confirm it through prayer, Scripture, wise counsel, and observable fruit before you act on it or speak it.

> *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 2:9–10**

I have also noticed that discerning people tend to come in two kinds. Some lead with how they feel in their heart. Others lead with what they hear in their mind. The first group relies on emotion, intuition, and the gut. Their posture says, "I feel what you are experiencing," and they bring empathy and compassion to the room. God promised to give us "a tender, responsive heart" (Ezekiel 36:26). The second group relies on logic, reason, and careful analysis. Their posture says, "I hear what you're thinking," and they bring clarity to the room. Paul reminds us that "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Neither one is better. They are different members of the same body, "different gifts" given by grace (Romans 12:6). The heart discerner needs the mind discerner, and the other way around.

Nine Gifts in Three Groups

Paul lists nine gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, and he starts with a sentence every believer should memorize: "A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other" (1 Corinthians 12:7). The gifts are tools for serving one another.

I teach the gifts in three groups:

1. **Revelation gifts** include the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, discerning of spirits, prophecy, and the interpretation of revelation. Agabus is an example: he prophesied a coming famine (Acts 11:28) and later warned Paul of what awaited him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10–11).
2. **Language gifts** include tongues in the Spirit, tongues in a known human language, and the interpretation of tongues, as at Pentecost

(Acts 2:4–6).

3. **Power gifts** include the gift of faith, healing, casting out demons, and the working of miracles, as when Peter and John healed the lame man at the Temple gate (Acts 3:6–8).

Four of these gifts sit under the umbrella of the prophetic, and Jesus modeled every one of them.

- **The word of wisdom** is divine strategy for how and when to communicate truth. "Timely advice is lovely, like golden apples in a silver basket" (Proverbs 25:11). Think of Solomon and the two mothers.
- **The word of knowledge** is divine insight into the past or the present. Think of Jesus telling the woman at the well about her life.
- **Discerning of spirits** is divine insight into the origin of something, whether it comes from God or from the enemy. Think of Jesus turning to Peter and saying, "Get away from me, Satan!"
- **Prophecy** is divine insight into what is coming. Think of Jesus telling His disciples that one of them would betray Him.

Levels of Revelation

Not every revelation comes in the same form, and not every form carries the same weight. Here is how I describe the levels, from the most subtle to the most direct.

- **Impressions.** A feeling, a download, or a "knowing" from the Lord. Because our biases and assumptions mix in easily here, impressions need to be shared with humility: "I feel like the Lord may be saying…"
- **Hearing.** Revelation that comes in our mind or heart as words, sometimes almost as if someone were speaking to us out loud.
- **Dreams.** Usually symbolic, though sometimes literal. Dreams have to be searched out, because God wants us to pursue His knowledge and His ways.

- **Visions.** Pictures we receive in our mind or heart. Like dreams, they need interpretation, but they are usually a higher degree of revelation than impressions. Think of the difference between feeling something with your hands and seeing it with your eyes.
- **Open visions.** Visions seen with your eyes open, almost like a movie projected in front of you. They still need interpretation, but they are much more reliable because the mind cannot easily manufacture them.
- **Trance.** Like walking through a virtual world while wide awake. Peter fell into a trance on a rooftop and saw a sheet let down from heaven (Acts 10:10–11), and Paul describes being caught up into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2–4).
- **Direct revelation.** A visitation from an angel or from the Lord Himself. Discernment is still needed, but this is very hard for the mind or heart to replicate.

Notice that discernment and interpretation never drop off the list. Even the highest level of revelation needs humility.

The more direct the revelation, the more it demands humility, not less.

Not All Words Weigh the Same

R.T. Kendall has taught that prophetic revelation comes in different levels of weight and authority. Building on that idea, I teach seven levels, from the base to the apex.

1. **General exhortation (the base).** Encouragement, reminders, comfort: "Stay faithful." "God is with you." It is broad and safe, carries no corrective authority, and requires the least revelation.
2. **Word of knowledge.** Spirit-given insight into a specific past or present situation. It is more specific, so accuracy matters more, and it

must be tested.

3. **Prophetic warnings.** Spirit-led alerts that identify danger or call for a course correction. They are often unpopular, and because they affect decisions, errors cause real damage.
4. **Prophetic preaching.** Public proclamation of revealed truth that confronts sin and calls for repentance, like John the Baptist or the Old Testament prophets confronting kings. It claims moral authority, so it invites judgment if it is false.
5. **Testifying under persecution.** Faithful witness to Christ while suffering loss, rejection, or danger. Its truth is authenticated by its cost, not by charisma.
6. **Noncanonical prophecy.** Personal words and direction for a season. It can edify, but it is fallible, it must be weighed, and it never adds doctrine or binds the Church.
7. **Holy Scripture (the apex).** The inspired Word of God. It is infallible and final, and it judges every level beneath it.

That last level is the guardrail for everything else in this chapter.

> *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.*
>
> **Hebrews 4:12**

Everything below Scripture is tested by Scripture, and nothing stands above it.

Four Prophetic Graces

God also shapes prophetic people differently. Through grace, I see four expressions of the prophetic in Scripture:

1. **Prophetic Intercessors**, mediators of breakthrough, like Hannah and Mary of Bethany.
2. **Prophetic Voices**, banners of repentance, like Jeremiah and Hosea.
3. **Prophetic Pioneers**, the reformers and voices of Reformation, like Moses and Elijah.
4. **Prophetic Worshipers**, atmosphere shifters who carry His presence, like David and Deborah.

You may find yourself in more than one of these. The point is not to put yourself in a box. The point is to stop comparing yourself to someone with a different grace. An intercessor who tries to be a pioneer will feel like a failure, and a worshiper who tries to be a confronting voice will feel out of place. Honor the grace God gave you.

Divine C.I.A.

Here is something that has always fascinated me. God gave some of the most powerful prophetic dreams in the Bible to pagan kings. Pharaoh dreamed of cows and grain. Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a great statue. Both received a divine blueprint, and neither had the wisdom to understand what he was seeing or how to apply it. Each needed a Joseph or a Daniel. Joseph told Pharaoh, "It is beyond my power to do this. But God can tell you what it means" (Genesis 41:16). Daniel declared that God "reveals deep and mysterious things" (Daniel 2:22).

That pattern shows me three stages in how God's word moves. I call it the Divine C.I.A.

- **C: Communication**, the Divine Blueprint. This is the Spirit of revelation, bringing to light what was hidden and pulling the veil off our eyes. Revelation comes in two forms: prophetic revelation, and divine revelation through experiences like dreams, trances, and encounters.

- **I: Interpretation**, the Divine Decoding. This is the Spirit of knowledge, the ability to take God's information and rightly interpret what is seen, heard, or discerned. It bears witness with a cutting and a burning in the heart, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus who said, "Didn't our hearts burn within us?" (Luke 24:32). "It is God's privilege to conceal things and the king's privilege to discover them" (Proverbs 25:2).
- **A: Application**, the Divine Execution. This is the Spirit of counsel, God's advice for a plan of action, which we hold until we have waited on the Lord. Counsel shows us what to do, but it is the Spirit of might who brings it to pass. Joshua was counseled to march around Jericho, and he simply showed up and obeyed. On the seventh day the Spirit of might brought the walls down (Joshua 6).

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would carry this same Spirit: "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD" (Isaiah 11:2).

Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Naaman, and Pilate's wife all received an invitation from God. Each one had to humble himself or herself to receive the blueprint. That is still the issue today.

God's communication is rooted in His love, but the interpretation and application of His words often depend on the humility of the one who receives them.

Sometimes God will offend the mind to reveal the heart. He will speak in a way you didn't expect, through a person you wouldn't have chosen, in a form you don't prefer. The question is whether you will humble yourself and search it out.

> *The LORD is a friend to those who fear him. He teaches them his covenant.*
>
> **Psalm 25:14**

Here is the question I keep asking myself: Do I carry the qualities of someone the Lord would call a friend? Someone He confides in because I value His presence more than His blessings? God is still speaking again and again. He is looking for friends who will listen.

For the Road

1. Of the ten ways God speaks, which one do you recognize most in your own life? Which one have you dismissed or never expected?
2. Do you tend to discern with your heart or with your mind? Who in your life discerns the other way, and how could you learn from them?
3. Think of something you believe God has shown you. Where is it in the Divine C.I.A.: still waiting on interpretation, or waiting on your obedience?

God has not gone quiet. He is speaking in more ways than we have learned to hear, and He is looking for friends who will listen.

Chapter 6

Eyes to See, Ears to Hear

> *But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.*
>
> **Matthew 13:16**

The first time I suspected God was speaking to me through a movie, I talked myself out of it.

I was in college, dating a girl who believed in Jesus but was lukewarm about Him, and if I am honest, so was I in many ways. One night we watched *The Devil's Advocate*. There is a point in that film where beautiful, ordinary-looking people begin to twist and contort into something demonic. Something in me went still. For the first time I became aware that the enemy can work through people who have been compromised spiritually, and that the things that look most harmless can be the very things he uses to wear down your convictions and shipwreck your destiny.

I was not looking at her as the villain. I was looking at myself, and at what I was allowing to shape my heart. I remember thinking, *God, how can You be speaking to me through a movie?*

So I decided it was a coincidence. I filed it away and kept going the way I was going. Looking back, I can say this plainly: if I had known that God could speak directly to me, I would have saved myself some trouble.

God is not limited to the pulpit, and He is not shy about using the screen.

In the last chapter we walked through the ways God speaks. This chapter is about learning to notice. Jesus said, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand" (Matthew 11:15). The issue has never been whether God is talking. The issue is whether we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Stories That Get Past the Guard

Jesus was the greatest prophetic voice who ever lived, and He taught mostly in stories.

> *Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables.*
>
> **Matthew 13:34**

A story does something an argument cannot. It slips past our defenses before we know to raise them.

The clearest picture of this is Nathan and David. After David took Bathsheba and arranged the death of her husband, Uriah, God sent the prophet Nathan to confront the most powerful man in Israel. Nathan did not walk in with an accusation. He told a story about a rich man with huge flocks who took a poor man's only little lamb, a lamb that "ate from the man's own plate and drank from his cup," and served it to a guest. David burned with anger and declared that the man deserved to die. Then Nathan said four words that pierced the king's heart:

> *Then Nathan said to David, "You are that man!"*
>
> **2 Samuel 12:7**

David passed judgment on himself before he realized who the story was about. That is the genius of a parable. It removes the distance between what we believe and how we live, and it lets the truth land without the person feeling attacked. It also shows us God's justice and mercy together. Sin was exposed, David confessed, and he was forgiven, though the consequences of what he had done still remained. A good story does not replace the call to repentance. It opens the door for it.

Stories bypass defenses and let people judge themselves.

I have seen this work in ordinary conversations. A young man once asked me why I didn't drink. He was afraid his mother was an alcoholic, a pattern that ran through his family, and he hadn't decided what he would do with his own life. I asked him if he would befriend a man who had assaulted his mother. "No," he said. So I told him that alcohol had been assaulting his mother her whole life. Why would he want to befriend it? I told him he could set a new pattern of sobriety for his future family and see it as a way to honor his mother and restore what alcohol had taken from her. He sat in stunned silence. Finally he whispered, "I never thought of it that way."

Another time a woman who was planning to marry an unbeliever couldn't see the problem. So I asked her if she would want her daughter to marry a man like him. Her answer came instantly: "Absolutely not." Then I asked her to picture the family holidays, the moral decisions, and the spiritual atmosphere her children would grow up in. She wiped her eyes and said, "I would never want that for my child."

I didn't have to win an argument with either of them.

The story did the work.

God Speaks Through Unlikely Mouths

Josiah was one of the few truly righteous kings in Israel's history. He tore down idols, restored the Temple, and led the nation back to the Word of God. And it was Josiah who died because he would not listen to God speaking through a pagan.

After Josiah finished restoring the Temple, Pharaoh Neco of Egypt marched north to fight at Carchemish, and Josiah went out to stop him. Neco sent messengers saying he had no quarrel with Judah, that God had told him to hurry, and that Josiah should not interfere with God. Scripture says something remarkable about that message:

> *But Josiah refused to listen to Neco, to whom God had indeed spoken, and he would not turn back.*
>
> **2 Chronicles 35:22**

Josiah disguised himself, rode into battle at Megiddo, was hit by archers, and died. Jeremiah wrote laments for him, and all Judah mourned (2 Chronicles 35:20–25).

Humility gives us the ability to hear God through any vessel.

Josiah is not the only example. One of the most important dreams in the Bible was given to an unbeliever, King Nebuchadnezzar, and it became a roadmap for God's people for generations (Daniel 2). God warned Pharaoh of famine through a dream, and Joseph's interpretation saved Egypt and Israel (Genesis 41). God even anointed Cyrus, a pagan king, to issue the decree that sent Israel home to rebuild the Temple, though Isaiah says Cyrus did not know the Lord (Isaiah 45:1–5).

I call this "TEL-A-VISION." I believe God can communicate through carnal, mainstream media. Like modern-day parables, He can use songs, films, the news, and other channels to bring warning, instruction,

comfort, or revelation to His people. They become prophetic trumpets for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

That raises a fair question. If God can speak through anything, how do I know when He is? Think about what happens when you buy a new car. All of a sudden you see that car everywhere. Psychologists call it the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon, or the frequency illusion. There aren't more of them on the road. You just started paying attention. Jesus put it this way:

> *Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.*
>
> **Matthew 6:21**

What we value shapes what we notice. When we treasure our relationship with God, our hearts become tuned like a tuning fork to recognize His patterns in everyday life. John Paul Jackson used to ask a simple question that helps here:

> *"If this situation were a dream, what would it mean?"*
>
> **John Paul Jackson**

Asking that question turns ordinary moments into a conversation with the Father. "It is God's privilege to conceal things and the king's privilege to discover them" (Proverbs 25:2). He hides things for us, not from us.

But hear this clearly. God speaks to us directly through a dream, a vision, a burning heart, or a faint whisper, and He also makes it clear that His written Word is the final test of what comes from our soul and what comes from His Spirit.

A movie can carry a message, but it can never carry the authority of Scripture.

Red Pill or Blue Pill

Few films have stirred more sermon illustrations than *The Matrix*. Thomas Anderson, a computer programmer who goes by Neo, discovers that the world he lives in is a simulated reality built by machines to keep humanity asleep while their bodies are harvested for energy. A man named Morpheus offers him a choice. Take the blue pill, forget everything, and go back to the comfortable illusion. Take the red pill, and see how deep the rabbit hole goes.

The red pill has become shorthand for choosing a painful truth over a comfortable lie. Paul warned Timothy that this choice would face the Church:

> *For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths.*
>
> **2 Timothy 4:3–4**

The Church should be the place where people wake up from the deception and compromise of a fallen world. It should not be a place that repeats the world's story back to us with a worship band. When a church prefers comfort over conviction, it starts offering a gospel stripped of sin, repentance, and the cost of discipleship. That is not always intentional falsehood, but it is deception all the same. Healthy ministry needs grace and truth, the courage to call people to repentance, and a people discerning enough to resist teaching that comforts them at the expense of their transformation.

Ignorance may feel like bliss, but it usually costs someone their freedom.

I also see in *The Matrix* a picture of the gospel. Neo is foretold as "the One," the way the prophets foretold the Messiah (Isaiah 53:5–6). He has a mentor who prepares the way, as John the Baptist did. He is betrayed by one of his own crew for personal gain, like Judas. He dies and rises again with power. He lays down his life for humanity, he brings light to people trapped in an illusion, and in the end he rises into the sky. The parallels are not perfect, and the film is not Scripture. But the shape of the story is the shape of His story.

The simulated world in the film keeps people obedient through fear and false rules. Once Neo sees the truth, he refuses to live under the agents' terror any longer. That is what Spirit-led boldness looks like. It trusts who God says we are more than what the system says we must do.

The Gospel in John Q

The movie *John Q* tells the story of a working father whose young son collapses and needs a heart transplant to live. I see in it five pictures of the gospel:

1. **John's son needs a new heart to live.** Humanity needs more than improvement. We need a new heart. "I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you" (Ezekiel 36:26).
2. **John and his wife sell all they own to save their son.** God gave everything, including His only Son, out of love for us (John 3:16; Philippians 2:7–8).
3. **John holds up the hospital to get his son a new heart.** This is a picture of the lengths God would go to redeem us: "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8).
4. **John's conversation with his son is broadcast to the world.** God's offer of salvation through Christ is for everyone who will believe (John 3:17; 1 John 4:9).

5. **John declares he will give his own heart so his son can live.** This points us to Gethsemane, where Jesus said, "Yet I want your will to be done, not mine" (Matthew 26:39), and laid down His life for His friends (John 15:13).

The most powerful scene comes when the doctor tells John there is no way forward without a new heart. John's answer is simple: take mine. He is ready to die so his boy can live.

In the movie, a donor heart becomes available at the last minute, and John doesn't have to die. That is where the picture breaks down, and where the gospel shines brightest.

There was no last-minute donor for Jesus.

No one was waiting to take His place. His sacrifice was deliberate and necessary. God looked at a humanity whose hearts were full of rebellion and offered us His own. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus perfected the heart we need and gives it to us by His Spirit.

> *"Jesus did not come into the world to make bad men good. He came into the world to make dead men live."*
>
> **Leonard Ravenhill**

The Nine Seasons on the Big Screen

In the books I've been writing on the nine seasons of the Kingdom of God, I've found that movies can help us recognize what season we are in. Here they are in order, with a film that pictures each one.

1. **Refinement.** Trials refine our faith the way fire purifies gold (1 Peter 1:7). Think of *The Shawshank Redemption*. Andy Dufresne is an innocent man sent to prison for a crime he did not commit. Through years of injustice he keeps his hope, quietly works, and comes out the

other side free. The righteous can suffer, and the fire still produces something precious (Psalm 34:19).

2. **Repentance: Orphans No More.** Turning from brokenness to receive forgiveness and belonging (Acts 3:19). In *Annie*, an orphan lets go of self-reliance and bitterness, and her turnaround with Daddy Warbucks brings her into a family and a clean slate.
3. **Revival: The Cost of Discipleship.** Hearts hungry for God's presence above all else, where Kingdom math says subtraction equals addition and division equals multiplication (Matthew 10:38–39). In *The Matrix*, Neo dies to his old identity, rises as the One, and his sacrifice multiplies freedom for others.
4. **Reformation.** Renewing the mind to break worldly patterns and recover God's blueprint for His house (Romans 12:2). When I first taught this, I called it "Make the Church Great Again." In *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, Caesar rejects oppression, renews the minds of those around him, and births a new society through transformed thinking.
5. **Recalculate.** Reexamining the practices and structures of reform so renewal stays faithful, applying wisdom, repentance, and new tactics (James 1:5). In *The Lion King*, Simba, haunted by his failure, receives wisdom, returns home, and restores a corrupted kingdom.
6. **Revolution: Driven by Eternity.** Living radically for the Kingdom as heaven's ambassadors who "have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6, KJV). In *Schindler's List*, Oskar Schindler spends his fortune to ransom lives and turns an empire's accounting upside down.
7. **Release.** The season when what God built in the hidden place is sent out, and we let go of the past to embrace a new assignment. "Forget the former things… See, I am doing a new thing!" (Isaiah 43:18–19, NIV). In *Up*, a grieving widower ties balloons to his house to keep a promise to his late wife. To save a boy, he finally throws out their furniture and lets the house drift away.

8. **Reward.** The season of harvest, when faithfulness bears fruit, and when increase becomes the test, not the goal. "When someone has been given much, much will be required in return" (Luke 12:48). In *Rocky III*, a champion grows comfortable on hand-picked opponents, fame and luxury, and is crushed by a hungry challenger. Stripped of everything, he goes back to a gritty gym and recovers the fire he lost. Power, promotion, prosperity and pleasure had softened him. Above every other reward stands the One who told Abram, "I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward" (Genesis 15:1, NKJV).
9. **Repeat: Break the Cycle.** Giving to others what God has given us, so that breakthrough becomes established culture (Hebrews 10:24–25). In *The Karate Kid*, Daniel learns discipline under Mr. Miyagi and commits to give the next generation what was given to him.

Every good story has a part of His story in it.

His Story

Here is the real reason movies and parables carry so much weight. All of history is moving toward one Person.

> *History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new.*
>
> **Ecclesiastes 1:9**

God has been telling the same story from the beginning, and He keeps foreshadowing it in the lives of His people. Look at Joseph. He was a beloved son, doubted by his own brothers, betrayed and sold for silver, falsely accused, and abandoned in a pit. He was unrecognized when he was raised to power, seated at the right hand of the throne, and became the source of bread for a starving world. Then he forgave the very ones who betrayed him: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for

good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people" (Genesis 50:20). Every line of that is a picture of Jesus.

Look at David. He was an anointed king who started as a shepherd boy. He was rejected before he was exalted, a warrior who defeated the enemies of God's people, and a sufferer who was betrayed and hunted. God promised him a house and a kingdom without end (2 Samuel 7), and he poured out psalms that the New Testament applies to Christ. David prepared for a temple made of stone. Jesus is building a temple made of living stones, the Church.

This is why I call Christology, the study of who Jesus is and what He accomplished, the Rosetta Stone of the prophetic. Every dream, every parable, every movie scene that stirs your heart has to be read in His light. He is the cornerstone:

> *The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing, and it is wonderful to see.*
>
> **Mark 12:10–11**

A cornerstone is laid first, and it sets the angle of every other stone in the building. Through His death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus became the chief cornerstone of the spiritual temple.

If what you are seeing doesn't line up with Him, it's crooked, no matter how inspiring it feels.

Dudley Hall said it simply:

> *"The best part of every story is 'His story.'"*
>
> **Dudley Hall**

So keep your eyes open. God is speaking in the Word first and always, and then in parables, in pagan kings, in a conversation over coffee, even in a

movie you almost didn't watch. I missed Him once in a theater because I thought it was a coincidence. I don't want you to miss Him the way I did.

For the Road

1. Think of a movie, song, or story that has stuck with you for years. If it were a dream, what would it mean?
2. Josiah missed God because the message came through someone he didn't respect. Who in your life might God be speaking through that you have been tempted to dismiss?
3. Look at the nine seasons. Which one do you believe you are in right now, and what does that season ask of you?

God is always speaking. Ask Him for eyes to see and ears to hear.

Chapter 7

The On-Ramp of Prayer

I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guardpost. There I will wait to see what the LORD says and how he will answer my complaint.

Habakkuk 2:1

My rookie year in the NFL, I was overwhelmed. The stress and pressure of trying to make it at that level pressed on me every day. In the middle of it, I heard God whisper something I have never forgotten:

"Take care of My business, and I will take care of yours."

Fast forward to my eleventh season. I was playing the best football of my life. I was stronger, more flexible, and smarter about recovery than I had ever been, because I had paid attention, learned from veterans, and used every new tool I could find to take care of my body. Then I tore my triceps, and the season was over.

Alone with that injury, I remembered the quiet way God speaks: "For God speaks again and again, though people do not recognize it" (Job 33:14). It was a reminder to stop pushing just to prove myself and start listening for His purposes in my career. So I did what Habakkuk did. I climbed up to my watchtower and waited to hear what He would say.

I came back for a twelfth year. I wasn't perfect, but I was wiser. I learned that wisdom sharpens what strength cannot, and that God often uses what the world calls weak (1 Corinthians 1:27). Around that time I was reminded of a scene from the movie *In Time*. A man who has lived for

decades gives every bit of the time he has left to Justin Timberlake's character and leaves a message on a window: "Don't waste my time." It struck me as prophetic. God was telling me the same thing. Don't waste the time and the calling I've given you.



When our dreams crush God's plans, He will crush our plans so He can resurrect His heavenly dream.

During that season one psalm became my companion:

> *Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act.*
>
> **Psalm 37:7**

I learned that God does speak, and that hearing and yielding to His voice matters more than being the best by human effort. True strength comes from listening to the Holy Spirit and trusting God to shape the work of my hands and my heart. God is still looking for someone to "stand in the gap" (Ezekiel 22:30), someone who will partner with Him in "Your will be done." That partnership begins in one place.

It begins in prayer.

Why a House of Prayer?

When Jesus cleared the Temple, He quoted Isaiah: "My Temple will be called a house of prayer" (Matthew 21:13). Not a house of preaching, though preaching matters. Not a house of music, though worship matters. A house of prayer.

Why?

Good fathers want to talk with their children.

If you consider yourself a follower of Christ but believe He doesn't communicate with His children, your connection with God looks more

like someone passively watching a documentary than a disciple in an intimate relationship. You know a lot about Him. You just don't hear from Him.

Prayer and the prophetic were never meant to be separated. They are a divine marriage. Prayer is where we talk to God, and the prophetic is where we hear Him talk back. Someone once put it this way: try going out on a date night with your wife and reading her your to-do list, and see how that works out for you. Too many of us pray that way. We bring the list, read it to Him, say amen, and leave before He can answer.

But God has promised to answer:

> *Ask me and I will tell you remarkable secrets you do not know about things to come.*
>
> **Jeremiah 33:3**

"My sheep listen to my voice," Jesus said (John 10:27). Isaiah promised, "Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, 'This is the way you should go'" (Isaiah 30:21). And Jesus still stands at the door and knocks. If we hear His voice and open the door, He will come in and share a meal with us as friends (Revelation 3:20). That is prayer: a meal with a Friend.

Elijah learned this on the mountain. A mighty windstorm tore at the rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. Then came an earthquake and a fire, but the Lord was not in those either. "And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper" (1 Kings 19:12). God can shake mountains, but He usually speaks to His friends in a whisper. And you only hear a whisper when you are close and quiet.

A prophetic voice without prayer is like a cloud that brings no rain.

God isn't looking for echoes in this hour. He is looking for voices that have sat in His presence and received His counsel, witnesses who carry His heart with words that come like tongues of fire and birth burning hearts in others.

Intimacy over Intellect

One of the sharpest things Jesus ever said was to the most devoted Bible students of His day.

> *You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.*
>
> **John 5:39–40**

Who was Jesus talking to? Not pagans. Not the irreligious. He was talking to men who knew the Scriptures better than almost anyone alive. They had the information. What they lacked was intimacy.

A few verses earlier, Jesus explained how He Himself lived: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does" (John 5:19). The Son of God ran His ministry on intimacy rather than on intellect or intuition. He watched the Father and did what He saw.

We tend to approach God through one of three doors: intellect, intuition, or intimacy. Intellect asks, "What do I know?" Intuition asks, "What do I feel?" Intimacy asks, "What is the Father doing?" Only the third door leads to the life Jesus lived.

Revelation flows from a close heart more than from a high IQ.

WHY REVIVAL TARRIES

The Folly Called "They Did Not Inquire of the Lord"

Scripture records a folly that repeats itself from generation to generation. It is not always open rebellion or obvious wickedness. Often it is something quieter: God's people making decisions without asking Him. They lean on what they can see, on sound advice, on what worked before, or on what seems reasonable in the moment, and they move forward without seeking the mouth of the Lord.

Again and again, the Bible traces the cost of that folly. Lives are lost, battles are forfeited, kingdoms are weakened, and consequences follow for generations. I believe the same folly is one reason revival tarries among us today. We plan, build, strategize, and then ask God to bless what He never authored. Consider the record of those who did not inquire of the Lord.

Abraham and Sarah: Ishmael (Genesis 16)

God promised Abraham a son, but the years passed and the promise seemed slow. Rather than wait, Sarah offered her servant Hagar, and Abraham agreed. Ishmael was born of human reasoning, not divine instruction, and the tension between the two lines of Abraham's house has echoed ever since.

Joshua and the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:14)

Men arrived with moldy bread, worn sandals, and patched wineskins, claiming to have come from a far country. Israel judged by the evidence in front of them and made a covenant. Scripture gives the reason they were deceived: they "asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD."

Saul (1 Chronicles 10:13–14)

When the heavens seemed silent, Saul sought out a medium instead of humbling himself before God. The chronicler's verdict is sobering: Saul died for his transgression, because he "enquired not of the LORD," and the kingdom was turned over to David.

David Moving the Ark on a Cart (1 Chronicles 13; 15:13)

David's desire to bring the ark to Jerusalem was right, but his method was borrowed from the Philistines. When the oxen stumbled, Uzzah reached out to steady the ark and was struck dead. David later admitted the cause plainly: "we sought him not after the due order." Good intentions could not replace God's instructions.

Judah Running to Egypt (Isaiah 30:1–2; 31:1)

Facing the threat of Assyria, Judah turned to Egypt's horses and chariots for help. God called them rebellious children who made plans that were not of His Spirit and went down to Egypt without asking at His mouth. They trusted in what was strong in the eyes of men, but they did not look to the Holy One of Israel.

Asa (2 Chronicles 16:7–12)

Early in his reign, Asa cried out to God and saw a great victory. Later, he paid the king of Syria for protection instead, and the prophet Hanani rebuked him for relying on man rather than on the Lord. When disease struck his feet, Asa again did not seek the Lord, only the physicians. A man who once leaned on God learned to lean elsewhere.

Abraham Going Down to Egypt (Genesis 12:10–20)

When famine struck Canaan, Abraham went down to Egypt with no record of seeking God first. Out of fear, he lied about Sarah and nearly lost her to Pharaoh's house. Pharaoh gave him servants in that season, and Hagar, an Egyptian, may well have been acquired there, linking this unguided journey to the trouble that followed.

Lot Choosing the Plain of Jordan (Genesis 13:10–13)

Given first choice of the land, Lot lifted up his eyes and chose the well-watered plain because it looked good. He chose by sight, pitched his tent toward Sodom, and in time was living inside it. What looked like blessing became the place that nearly destroyed his family.

Joshua at Ai (Joshua 7)

Fresh from the victory at Jericho, Joshua took the spies' advice and sent only a small force against Ai. Israel was routed, and thirty-six men died. Only afterward did Joshua fall on his face before the Lord and learn that Achan had hidden accursed things in his tent. Had he inquired first, the hidden sin would have been exposed before lives were lost.

Israel Taking the Ark into Battle (1 Samuel 4)

After a defeat by the Philistines, the elders fetched the ark from Shiloh, hoping it would save them. They treated the presence of God as a good-luck charm rather than seeking the God of the ark. Israel was slaughtered, Hophni and Phinehas were killed, the ark was captured, and the glory departed from Israel.

Jehoshaphat's Alliances (1 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 20:35–37)

Jehoshaphat was a godly king, yet he bound himself to wicked kings. He committed to fight alongside Ahab before seeking the Lord, then went into battle even after Micaiah prophesied disaster, and barely escaped with his life. Later he partnered with Ahaziah to build ships, and the prophet Eliezer declared that the Lord would break his works. The ships were wrecked before they ever sailed.

Josiah Fighting Pharaoh Necho (2 Chronicles 35:20–24)

Josiah led one of the greatest revivals in Judah's history, yet he went out to fight Pharaoh Necho uninvited. Necho warned him that God had sent him on another mission. Scripture says Josiah did not listen to these words "from the mouth of God," and he was mortally wounded at Megiddo. Even a revivalist can fall when he stops inquiring.

King Ahaziah (2 Kings 1)

After falling through a lattice and injuring himself, Ahaziah sent messengers to ask Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether he would recover. God sent Elijah to intercept them with a question: is it because there is no God in Israel that you go to inquire of Baal-zebub? Ahaziah sought answers from a false god and died, just as the word of the Lord declared.

God Listens to My Prayers

Francis Chan once told about a day when he was working in his yard and two Jehovah's Witnesses came up to talk with him about their faith. He welcomed the conversation. After they had talked a while, he asked if he could share some things God had been doing in his life. One of the women told him, "God doesn't listen to everyone's prayers."

To her surprise, he agreed. "Yes, I agree that God doesn't listen to everyone's prayers. But He listens to mine."

Then he walked almost two blocks with those women, telling them story after story of prayers God had answered.

I love that, because it is not arrogance. It is the confidence of a son. Jesus invites exactly that kind of confidence:

> *Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.*
>
> **Matthew 7:7**

He goes on: “So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him” (Matthew 7:11).

At the same time, James reminds us why some prayers go unanswered: “You don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong” (James 4:2–3). God values all people, but He doesn’t value all prayers. Praying without understanding the Father’s heart can lead us to ask for things that would distract or destroy us rather than mature us.

Sometimes God saying “no” is the most loving thing He can do.

A worship leader I’ve walked with once said:

> *“If He gives you the world but denies you Himself, He hates you; but if He gives you Himself and denies you the world, He loves you infinitely.”*

The greatest answer to any prayer is Him.

Holy Spirit, Come

There is a simple prayer that has opened the door to more moves of God than I can count: “Holy Spirit, come.”

Some people are uncomfortable with that prayer. “Isn’t God already everywhere?” Yes. But Scripture makes it clear that although His presence is everywhere, His presence is not desired or welcomed everywhere, and He will not force Himself on those who reject His glory and His ways. Israel “limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psalm 78:41, NKJV). The Spirit can be acknowledged and still not be welcomed.

I learned this in a coffee shop I own. For a season it felt strange to be a stranger in my own place. The baristas avoided my questions, the regulars chatted around me, and the shop felt leased to everyone but its owner. Then we hired a manager I'll call Lena. She moved with grace. She was attentive, warm, and excellent. She set the shifts, spoke my name with honor, and introduced me to customers not as a formality but with genuine excitement. Conversations opened up. Laughter came back. For the first time, that place felt like a home.

That is when I realized something.

Presence must be invited, and when it is, it transforms everything.

How many churches acknowledge the Holy Spirit in their statement of faith but never actually welcome Him in their services? He owns the house, and we treat Him like a guest we're too busy to introduce. Paul says, "Don't be drunk with wine… Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

You cannot be full of yourself and full of the Holy Spirit at the same time.

Chuck Missler once said:

> *"The only certain barrier to truth is the presumption that you already have it."*
>
> **Chuck Missler**

That presumption is what keeps us from praying, "Holy Spirit, come." We assume we already have all of Him we need. God's answer to that is through Jeremiah: "If they had stood before me and listened to me, they would have spoken my words, and they

would have turned my people from their evil ways" (Jeremiah 23:22). The prophetic starts with standing before Him.

Carry the River

A young man I'll call Owen noticed a frustrating pattern. His prophetic insights only seemed to flow at the weekly prayer meeting. Visions or verses would come clearly there, but never at home or with friends. Confused, he asked his mentor, "Why can't I operate prophetically anywhere else? What am I doing wrong?"

His mentor smiled. "You're not failing. You're learning the difference between riding a current and starting one. This prayer meeting is like a lazy river. The prayer, worship, and faith of the community are already creating momentum, so it's easier to flow. But the gift is within you. Your role is to fan that gift into flame, to learn how to flip your own switch through personal prayer, faith, and obedience. God gave you a spirit of power so you can carry the river with you, not just float in it."

> *Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, "Rivers of living water will flow from his heart."*
>
> **John 7:38**

Paul told Timothy the same thing: "Fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you" (2 Timothy 1:6). In the book The School of the Seers, the author describes a month when the Holy Spirit seemed to switch his seer gift on, and then a season when it went quiet. He thought he had sinned. Instead he sensed the Lord saying that He had shown him what was possible, and now He would teach him how to flip the switch himself.

I learned a small version of this on the way to a workout. I didn't know I was running out of gas. I just started praying in the Spirit as I drove. When the car finally signaled it was empty, I was able to coast into a gas station. It was a learning moment. The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness, even when we don't know what to pray for (Romans 8:26).

The gift is in you. Prayer is how you flip the switch.

Here are seven ways to fan the gift of God into flame:

1. Compassion/Empathy. Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them, and then He healed and fed them (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32). Compassion moves gifts out of theory and into action.

2. Stories/Images. As Nathan did with David, narrative and imagery get past our defenses and reach the heart. A humble, receptive heart is a clear channel for the Spirit's gifts.

3. Speaking in Tongues. A prayer language from the Holy Spirit builds up our inner spirit (1 Corinthians 14:2; Jude 1:20), and that strengthens every other gift.

4. "It is Written" (The Word of God). Meditating on and declaring Scripture renews the mind and makes us a clean vessel (Psalm 1:1–3; Hebrews 4:12). The Word is the foundation and the filter for every gift.

5. Faith. Faith is the switch that turns a promise into reality, like Peter letting down the net "at Your word" (Luke 5:5, NKJV) or the centurion believing a word was enough (Matthew 8:8–10).

6. Glorify God (Awe & Worship). Awe crushes pride and self-reliance and makes room for the Spirit to move for God's glory, not ours (Isaiah 40:12–14; Job 42:1–6).

7. Prayer. Prayer is the conduit for all the rest. It is where compassion is expressed, faith is exercised, the Word is declared, and God is glorified (Philippians 4:6–7; James 5:16–18).

Seven Ways to Offend the Holy Spirit

If we can fan the flame, we can also smother it. Scripture names seven ways we can offend the Holy Spirit:

1. Quench the Holy Spirit. "Do not stifle the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Disobedience and apathy shut down His conviction and guidance, like Israel's grumbling in the wilderness (Numbers 14:26–35).

2. Resist the Holy Spirit. Stephen told the council they were forever resisting Him (Acts 7:51). Like Pharaoh hardening his heart (Exodus 8:15), resistance leads to spiritual blindness.

3. Mock the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost some laughed and said the disciples were drunk (Acts 2:13). "You cannot mock the justice of God" (Galatians 6:7).

4. Lie to the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira lied about their offering (Acts 5:1–11). Hypocrisy breaks trust in the Body of Christ.

5. Sin Against the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees credited Jesus' miracles to Beelzebul (Matthew 12:24, 31–32). This is a deliberate, hardened rejection of the Spirit's testimony about Christ.

6. Hinder the Holy Spirit. "Who has held you back from following the truth?" (Galatians 5:7). Legalism laid on others restricts what the Spirit wants to do in them (Galatians 3:1–3).

7. Dishonor the Holy Spirit. “Do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live” (Ephesians 4:30). Tolerating sin in the temple of our bodies grieves Him (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

If you see yourself in that list, don’t run from Him. Run to Him. For those who belong to Christ, the same verse that warns us not to grieve the Spirit also tells us He has identified us as His own, “guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). The seal remains. Repentance restores the fellowship.

Grieving the Spirit doesn’t break His seal, but it does dim His fire.

So climb the watchtower. Bring Him more than your list. Ask Him to come, and make room when He does. The on-ramp to the prophetic life is not a stage or a class. It is a quiet place where a son or daughter sits with the Father and listens.

For the Road

1. If someone listened to your prayers for a week, would they sound more like a to-do list or a date night? What would change if you stopped and listened after you prayed?

2. Is the Holy Spirit acknowledged but not welcomed anywhere in your life? What would it look like to invite Him there today?

3. Which of the seven ways to fan the gift comes most naturally to you, and which one have you neglected?

Take care of His business, and He will take care of yours.

Part Three

Testing the Fire

How do we tell God's voice from every other voice?

Chapter 8

“God Told Me”

> *There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.*
>
> **Proverbs 14:12**

The story I’m about to tell is fictional, but it is built from real stories I have watched unfold more than once. A woman I’ll call Lydia was sure it was the Lord. For months she told anyone who would listen, “God told me I’m going to marry Pastor Dale.”

There was one problem. Pastor Dale was already married.

He was a kind man, and his kindness became part of the trouble. Lydia read every pastoral kindness as one more confirmation. Friends warned her to test what she was hearing against Scripture and wise counsel, but she insisted it was divine assurance. She began seeking private meetings with him and sending persistent messages. His wife grew uneasy. So did the church.

Tension rose and wounds spread. The elders stepped in and reminded her of what Scripture says about purity, about honoring marriage, and about submitting prophetic impressions to the community. Lydia refused to step back. In the end the elders dismissed her from fellowship for creating division and pursuing an inappropriate relationship. The congregation grieved. And Lydia was left to reckon with the question she had refused to ask at the beginning: had the voice she heard been God’s, or her own desire wearing His name?

Three words can shut down almost any conversation in church: "God told me."

Nobody wants to argue with God. That is exactly why those words carry so much weight, and exactly why they are so easy to misuse. God does still speak. This whole book is built on that. But He never asked us to believe every voice that borrows His name.

> *Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God.*
>
> **1 John 4:1**

Soulish Desire or Spirit-Driven

Every one of us has a soul that wants things. That is not wicked in itself. God made us with desires. The problem comes when a desire of the soul gets loud enough that we start calling it the voice of the Spirit.

The writer of Hebrews tells us there is only one blade sharp enough to separate the two:

> *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.*
>
> **Hebrews 4:12**

So when you hear something you believe is from the Lord, especially something you badly want to be from the Lord, run it through these five tests:

- **Source:** Does it originate in fear, pride, lust, or instant gratification, or in prayerful dependence on God's voice and His Word?

- **Fruit:** Does it produce holiness, love, peace, and long-term good, or selfish harm and bondage? Jesus said, "You can identify them by their fruit" (Matthew 7:16).
- **Holy Spirit witness:** Is there the Spirit's peace and clarity, or turmoil and compulsion?
- **Scripture:** Does it align with the clear commands and principles of the Bible?
- **Confirmation:** Is it affirmed by mature believers and by patient timing?

Lydia's "word" failed every one of them. It was born in longing, it bore the fruit of division, it drove her with compulsion instead of peace, it contradicted the plain teaching of Scripture on marriage, and every mature believer around her said no. The voice was loud. It just wasn't God.

Sometimes God saying no is the most loving thing He can do for us.

The same principle holds in the night season. Some dreams unveil the secret counsel of the Spirit of God, and others expose the deep-seated issues of the soul: the fears, wounds, and worries He brings to the surface so we can tear down a stronghold. Both can matter, but they are not the same thing, and the Word is what divides them. (The Appendix walks through how to tell the difference.)

Where the Soul Likes to Hide

Soulish desire rarely announces itself. It usually shows up in the areas where we most want permission. Here are four places to watch, with what the soul wants and what a God-given dream or goal looks like instead.

- **Unbiblical Divorce.** The soul flees conflict to satisfy selfish ambition, pride, or sexual appetite, walks away from responsibilities, and calls it convenience. A God-given desire pursues reconciliation and the sanctifying of the marriage. Where there is abuse or unrepentant sin, it seeks biblically warranted separation with wise counsel and pastoral guidance.
- **Sexual Immorality.** The soul gives in to lust, uses others, and makes secret compromises for personal pleasure. A God-given desire honors sexual purity, seeks covenant intimacy in marriage, and trusts God for healing and righteous desires.
- **Lying.** The soul deceives to protect an image, gain an advantage, or avoid consequences. A God-given desire chooses radical honesty, integrity, and humility, seeking truth even when it costs, because truth bears good fruit.
- **Greed.** The soul covets possessions, status, or security, hoards, and ties its identity to wealth. A God-given desire looks like stewardship and generosity, pursuing provision in order to bless others and advance God's Kingdom.

If the "word" you received happens to give you exactly what your flesh has been asking for in one of these areas, slow down. That doesn't automatically make it false. It does mean you should test it twice.

Prophetic Empowered Deception

In professional sports, PED stands for performance-enhancing drugs. Leagues test their athletes so no one cheats. The athletes who get caught are usually talented. They just wanted an unfair edge, and when they're caught, they're disqualified.

The prophetic ministry has its own kind of PED: Prophetic Empowered Deception.

There are anointed people who let the fear of man and the praise of men lead them into deception. They borrow prophetic words from others, gather information online, and repackage it as fresh revelation from the Lord. Borrowed insight gets presented as divine origin. God addressed this directly through Jeremiah:

> *But stop using this phrase, 'prophecy from the LORD.' For people are using it to give authority to their own ideas, turning upside down the words of our God, the living God, the LORD of Heaven's Armies.*
>
> **Jeremiah 23:36**

Jeremiah 23 is full of warnings about prophets who speak visions from their own minds and not from the mouth of the Lord, comforting people with false assurances instead of truth.

Until we test prophetic words the way athletes are tested for drugs, borrowed revelation will keep plaguing the Church.

Testing is not an insult to the gift. It protects the gift, the people who receive it, and the integrity of the One whose name we are using.

The Heart Is the Brain of the Soul

We all have a body, a soul, and a spirit. Paul prays for all three: "may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

When we sense something in our gut, it can be hard to pinpoint where that feeling is coming from. Is it the nervous system, which acts as the mind of the body? Is it the soul, with the heart serving as its mind? Or is it our spirit, united to the Holy Spirit, who gives us the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16)?

The body has a voice of its own. When the nervous system is overstimulated, we feel unsafe, rejected, lost, and disconnected, and it becomes very hard to make wise decisions. When it settles, our attention widens, self-doubt quiets down, and we are able to listen again. That is not a spiritual problem, but it can feel like one, and it can drown out the still, small voice.

The soul has a voice too, and Scripture does not flatter it:

> *The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?*
>
> **Jeremiah 17:9**

Paul felt the same pull. He described "another law at work" in his body, waging war against his mind (Romans 7:23). That is why the Word of God matters so much in telling the difference between a soulish feeling and a biblical truth. It is why Jesus answered the devil in the wilderness with "It is written." And it is why we live by faith and not by what we feel (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Be cautious of your feelings, because truth and deception can look a lot alike. Salt can resemble sugar, and sugar can resemble salt. You have to taste to know the difference, which is why the psalmist says, "Taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8). If all you have ever tasted is salt, you may never recognize sweetness. One leaves you bitter, and the other always leaves a sweet taste in your mouth. The truth sets us free, but a lie only frees the orphan mindset to chase selfish ambition.

Truth is not measured by how it makes us feel or whether it fits natural logic, but by the Word of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

What's Love Got to Do with It?

Here is one of the clearest examples I know of facts and feelings lying to us.

Unresolved trauma can cause us to confuse what is familiar with what is attractive. A faster heart rate, dilated pupils, and a dry mouth are all physical reactions we associate with attraction. They are also the reactions of our fight-or-flight response. Being drawn toward danger can simply be the soul reaching for what feels familiar, or "comfortable," even when it was toxic to us growing up. The mind tries to correct old rejection by drawing us toward people who carry the same familiar spirit as those who disappointed us before.

So the question every one of us has to ask is this: am I hearing a trigger, a trauma, or the truth?

That is why we trust His Word, not what we see or what we feel.

Always filter what you feel and what you see through the unwavering filter of the Word. His name and His Word will never conflict with what the Holy Spirit is saying.

How do we know whether we're being led by truth or by our fallen nature, our old memories, and the desires of the flesh? Even Jesus faced temptation (Hebrews 4:15). In the garden He prayed, "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine" (Luke 22:42).

Do we echo that surrender? Our emotions and thoughts do not always line up with God's will. Once we admit that our hearts and our flesh are touched by the fall, we can see how easily our own thoughts and feelings deceive us. The way out is to submit them to the objective authority of God's Word and His Spirit.

> *For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.*
>
> **John 4:24**

If we follow His Word without His Spirit, we may be led by our intellect and think we are following His truth. If we follow His Spirit without His Word, we may be swayed by our emotions and think we are following the Spirit of Truth.

There is a sobering lesson in the story of King Ahab. He had four hundred prophets telling him what he wanted to hear. When the prophet Micaiah finally spoke, he described a heavenly council in which a spirit offered to "inspire all of Ahab's prophets to speak lies," and the Lord allowed it (1 Kings 22:20–23). When we elevate personal desire over the Father's will, the Lord will sometimes let us be led by a spirit of deception instead of the Spirit of Truth, so that we learn the difference between natural confidence and being poor in spirit.

Jesus said, "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs" (Matthew 5:3). The poor in spirit are not easily deceived, because they have stopped trusting themselves.

When you are bound to a spirit of fear, your instincts will lead you by your past wounds instead of by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

The Most Dangerous Deception

One researcher found that most of us believe we are self-aware, while only a small minority truly are. I would add one line to that finding: most prophetic people believe they are in that small minority.

A. W. Tozer saw this long before anyone ran a study:

> *"Of all forms of deception self-deception is the most deadly, and of all deceived persons the self-deceived are the least likely to discover the fraud."*
>
> **A. W. Tozer**

As the old saying goes, we see things the way we are, not the way they are. We all make decisions based on our worldview. The question is whether it is a biblical worldview or a personal one.

Self-deception tends to show up in prophetic people as control. John Paul Jackson put it bluntly:

> *"Most of the time the only voice of authority that prophetic people listen to is their own."*
>
> **John Paul Jackson**

Psychologists talk about a "bias blind spot," our tendency to see ourselves as less biased than everyone else and to spot other people's errors more easily than our own. They also describe the Dunning-Kruger effect, where people with little skill overestimate their ability because they don't yet know enough to know what they don't know. Scripture said it first:

> *People may be pure in their own eyes, but the LORD examines their motives.*
>
> **Proverbs 16:2**

There is a pattern that repeats in many churches. Prophetic people often go through something like a two-year cycle. During that time, the parts of their character that need growth and refining come to the surface. Instead of embracing that uncomfortable "baptism by fire," many withdraw because the process hurts. They walk away feeling hurt, rejected, and wounded instead of transformed. Either they leave or they are asked to leave, and then they meet the same cycle in the next church.

The cycle only breaks when we stop asking, "Who hurt me?" and start asking, "Lord, what are You showing me about me?"

Being great is less about how much you know and more about knowing your deficiencies.

The first step in worshiping God in spirit and in truth is admitting that our hearts can be deceived. Then we can pray the prayer David prayed:

> *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.*
>
> **Psalm 139:23–24**

Four Ways to Filter Biblical Knowledge

A lot of confusion in the prophetic comes from treating every kind of knowledge as if it had the same weight. Here are four filters I use:

1. **Principle:** a commandment or fundamental truth that serves as the foundation for belief and behavior. "You must not murder" (Exodus 20:13).
2. **Personal Conviction:** a strong belief God has placed on your heart that may not be binding on someone else. Paul tells us to accept other believers and "don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong" (Romans 14:1).
3. **Preference:** a greater liking for one option over another. When a woman came to Jesus "with a beautiful alabaster jar" of perfume (Matthew 26:7), she chose an extravagant way to love Him. It was beautiful, but it was not a command for everyone.
4. **Wisdom:** the right use of knowledge to reach a good outcome; the ability to discern what is most just, proper, and useful. "The borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7) is not a commandment, but you ignore it at your peril.

Preference is about subjective personal choice. Principle is about objective biblical truth. Wisdom is the faculty that lets you apply the right measure of principle, conviction, and preference, at the right time, to what needs to be said.

The religious orphan turns a personal conviction into a corporate commandment. The rebellious orphan turns a corporate commandment into someone else's personal conviction.

When someone tells you "God told me," it helps to ask which of these four they are actually carrying. Many painful "words" are just a preference that got promoted to a principle.

Nine Hindrances to Prophetic Discernment

Finally, here are nine things that dull our ability to discern, each with a picture from Scripture:

1. **Media and Entertainment.** Overconsumption of the world dulls spiritual sensitivity and drowns out God's voice (1 John 2:15–16). Saul ended up at a medium's house instead of seeking God (1 Samuel 28:6–7).
2. **Unhealed Trauma.** Pain and shame create spiritual static. David's unconfessed guilt weighed on him until he repented (Psalm 32:3–5). Jesus came to bind up the brokenhearted (Isaiah 61:1).
3. **Doctrine of Demons.** False teaching opens the door to deception (1 Timothy 4:1), as Jezebel's idolatry did in Israel (1 Kings 16:31–33).
4. **Busyness.** A crowded schedule starves discernment. Martha was distracted while Mary sat at Jesus' feet (Luke 10:38–42).
5. **Fear of Man.** Fear of rejection silences prophetic boldness (Proverbs 29:25). Peter denied Christ to protect himself (Matthew 26:69–75).

6. **Selfish Motives.** We ask with wrong motives (James 4:3). Balaam's greed turned the gift into a tool for profit (Numbers 22).
7. **Lust Issues.** The flesh wars against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17), and Samson's appetite blinded him long before the Philistines did (Judges 16).
8. **Lack of Knowing the Scriptures.** "My people are being destroyed because they don't know me" (Hosea 4:6). The Sadducees erred because they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God (Matthew 22:29). The Word is the filter for testing the spirits.
9. **Human Error and Ignorance.** The sons of Sceva presumed on an authority they didn't have (Acts 19:13–16), and the Ephesian disciples had never heard of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1–6). Humility and teachability are vital.

None of these makes you a false prophet. They make you human. The good news is that every one of them has a remedy: a renewed mind, a healed heart, sound doctrine, stillness, courage, pure motives, a surrendered body, an open Bible, and a teachable spirit.

Lydia's story did not have to end the way it did. At any point she could have let the Word divide her soul from her spirit and let the people who loved her speak into her life. That door is open for every one of us. The Lord is not trying to trick His children. He is a good Father, and He will gladly tell us when the voice we're hearing is our own, if we are humble enough to ask.

For the Road

1. Think of a time you said, or thought, "God told me." Run it through the five tests: source, fruit, the Spirit's witness, Scripture, and confirmation. How does it hold up?
2. Which of the nine hindrances to discernment is loudest in your life right now? What would it look like to remove it for one week?

3. Are you carrying a personal conviction or a preference as if it were a principle? Who has felt the weight of that?

A voice that sounds like God must still bow to the Word of God.

Chapter 9

Truth in Love

> *An open rebuke is better than hidden love! Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.*
>
> **Proverbs 27:5–6**

He leaned back in the kitchen chair, legal pads spread across the table between them.

"I'm done," his cousin said. "I'm not paying taxes anymore. The government's just taking everything."

The lawyer folded his hands. "If you refuse to pay, you could face fines, liens, wage garnishments, and even criminal charges, depending on what you do next. The IRS has procedures, and courts enforce them."

"Don't judge me!" the cousin snapped, his face turning red.

"I'm not a judge with a gavel," the lawyer answered quietly, "but I am a lawyer with an understanding of the law."

I love that answer, because it is exactly the posture God asks of a prophetic people. The lawyer was not sentencing his cousin. He had no authority to. But he knew the law, and he loved his cousin too much to let him walk into a wall without saying something.

When we love someone, we tell them the truth. When love seeks its own way, we tell people what they want to hear.

A Judge with a Gavel or a Lawyer Who Knows the Law

Paul saw a day coming when the Church would prefer comfort over truth. His charge to Timothy reads like it was written for our generation:

> *Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths.*
>
> **2 Timothy 4:2–4**

Notice the order: correct, rebuke, and encourage. Paul did not tell Timothy to pick one. A shepherd who only encourages leaves the sheep exposed. A shepherd who only rebukes scatters them. A father does both, because he loves his children more than he loves their approval.

This matters so much in the prophetic. When prophetic voices seek power and popularity instead of integrity and intimacy with God, their words start to sound more like self-help books and horoscopes than the Word of the Lord and the voice of the Holy Spirit. Everyone leaves encouraged, and no one leaves changed.

Love without empathy is offensive, but love without truth is a lie.

Toxic Empathy and Malicious Truth

Jesus told the woman at the well that the Father is looking for worshipers who worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). When we separate those two, we fall off one side of the road or the other. I call the two ditches toxic empathy and malicious truth.

Contrary to popular belief,

truth can divide.

If your version of love
always unites,

it is love redefined without truth.



Toxic empathy

(Spirit and no truth) is excessive empathy that protects feelings at the cost of boundaries, truth, or accountability. It enables harm and blocks growth. Paul confronted the Corinthian church because they were proud of their tolerance while sin destroyed a man in their midst:

> *You are so proud of yourselves, but you should be mourning in sorrow and shame. And you should remove this man from your fellowship.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 5:2**

The picture of toxic empathy in Scripture is Aaron at the foot of the mountain (Exodus 32). The people wanted a god they could see, and Aaron gave them a golden calf rather than risk their displeasure. He avoided firm correction, and the whole community fell into sin. Jesus gave us a better way: if a brother sins, go to him privately and point out the offense, so he can be restored (Matthew 18:15). Toxic empathy skips that conversation because it is uncomfortable, and calls the silence love.

Malicious truth

(truth and no Spirit) is cruel honesty meant to wound or control rather than help. It is bluntness used as manipulation, and it destroys trust. Jesus described the religious leaders this way:

> *They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden.*
>
> **Matthew 23:4**

The picture of malicious truth is the Pharisees dragging the woman caught in adultery in front of Jesus (John 8:1–11). Everything they said about the Law was technically true. But they were using truth as a trap, to shame her and to catch Him, not to restore anyone. Jesus refused both

ditches. He would not condemn her, and He would not excuse her. “Go and sin no more.”

Proverbs says it simply: “Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing” (Proverbs 12:18). Malicious truth may be accurate, but it never heals.

God has always held these two together. Paul wrote, “Notice how God is both kind and severe” (Romans 11:22). Jeremiah Johnson once shared a dream in which he sat in a meeting between a well-known pastor, wearing a shirt that said “The goodness of God,” and the late David Wilkerson, wearing one that said “The severity of God.” The two men were very fond of each other. Then the Lord spoke:

> *“Jeremiah, I am going to marry My goodness and My severity in one generation, for the dirge and the dance will be played simultaneously all over the earth.”*
>
> **Jeremiah Johnson**

That is the generation I want to be part of: one where the people who carry His kindness and the people who carry His severity sit at the same table and honor each other.

Two Kinds of Discerners

Part of why we fall into one ditch or the other is the way God wired us. There are two distinct kinds of discerners in the Body of Christ: those who lead with how they feel in their heart, and those who lead with how they hear in the logic of their mind.

The first kind says, “I feel what you are experiencing.” These believers rely on emotion, intuition, and gut sense to make spiritual judgments. They prioritize empathy, compassion, and connection. God promised to give us “a new heart” and to take out our heart of stone (Ezekiel 36:26), and these brothers and sisters carry that tenderness well.

The second kind says, "I hear what you're thinking." These believers rely on reason and careful thinking to discern. They prioritize analysis and problem-solving. Paul wrote, "But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16), and these brothers and sisters carry that clarity well.

Neither is better. Paul tells us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought, because we are one body with many members and "different gifts" (Romans 12:3–6). But each one has a ditch on its side of the road. The heart-led discerner is most tempted by toxic empathy. The mind-led discerner is most tempted by malicious truth.

The heart-led discerner needs the logic of the Word, and the mind-led discerner needs the heart of the Spirit.

This is one more reason the prophetic belongs in community. We need each other to stay on the road.

Jesus Taught Us How to Judge

Few verses are quoted more often in church than "Judge not." But read the whole passage:

> *Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? … You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.*
>
> **Matthew 7:1–6 (ESV)**

It sounds like Jesus is telling us never to judge, and then in the same breath He tells us not to give what is sacred to dogs. If we are never to judge, how could we tell a dog from a sheep, or a wolf from a shepherd? A few verses later He says we will recognize false prophets by their fruit (Matthew 7:15–16).

Jesus is not telling us never to judge. He is teaching us how to judge.

A lack of self-awareness will always lead us into deception, so Jesus starts with the log in our own eye. We ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts first. And when the truth has cut us, we become far more careful about how we use it on someone else. We know firsthand that truth can do damage when it is swung as malicious truth instead of offered as loving correction.

Jesus warned that self-deception would mark the last days. Yet you will hear more sermons on "Do not judge" than on "It is written," the very words that separate biblical discernment from soulish feelings and logic. To avoid casting pearls before swine and to recognize wolves in sheep's clothing, you must judge fruit and motive with the sword of the Spirit.

Do not confuse accountability birthed by the Holy Spirit with the spirit of accusation used by the father of lies.

Examine your own heart and motives by the Word first. Then you can help others judge their hearts rightly. The Message paraphrase puts the end of Jesus' teaching in plain street language: "Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor" (Matthew 7:5, MSG).

The goal of judging, in Jesus' sense, is never to stand over someone. It is to kneel beside them with a clean washcloth.

When Discernment Is Labeled Condemnation

Here is what happens when a church gets this wrong.

A volunteer I'll call Gavin served in a church's kids' ministry. He had a warm smile and an easy manner. Over a period of months, a few volunteers noticed troubling patterns. He insisted on being alone with children. He ignored boundaries. He made jokes that made some kids uneasy. When he was gently challenged, he became defensive.

Many people saw the signs. Most hesitated to speak up. After years of hearing "Do not judge," they were afraid they would be the ones judged.

It took one parent's carefully worded concern, and one younger volunteer who followed the church's reporting steps, for the leaders to bring the issues forward. An internal review began. Gavin was removed from ministry while the church investigated, and support was offered to the children who had been affected. The investigation ultimately found him guilty.

The congregation had to face painful questions. Why had the warning signs gone unreported? How had a misunderstood command delayed the protection of children?

Out of that failure came change: clear safeguarding policies, mandatory training, and a culture that valued humble, Scripture-based discernment over silence. Members were expected to examine their own motives first, and then still act to protect the vulnerable. The church learned that accountability born of love, concern, and truth is not accusation. It is biblical stewardship.

Revival tarries when discernment is labeled condemnation.

Toxic empathy always feels kind in the moment. But the people who pay for it are usually the most vulnerable people in the room. Real love has a

spine.

Criticism Is Not Prophecy

Now the other ditch. Some people hear a chapter like this and decide their harshness has finally been vindicated. It hasn't.

A critical spirit is not the gift of prophecy. Prophetic people too often believe they know exactly what is right and wrong. If you want to prophesy a critical word, it is probably not prophecy. It is criticism. If your prophecy keeps hurting people, you are likely being critical, not prophetic.

Graham Cooke put it in one sentence:

> *"If we find it easy to give negative words, then we have no understanding of the grace and goodness of God."*
>
> **Graham Cooke**

A critical spirit births a beat-down of people's spirits instead of a breakthrough in their lives. The Spirit of prophecy does the opposite:

> *It shall come to pass in that day that his burden will be taken away from your shoulder, and his yoke from your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing oil.*
>
> **Isaiah 10:27 (NKJV)**

The prophetic anointing is supposed to break yokes, not put one on you.

That doesn't mean every word is soft. Sometimes the Lord corrects, and sometimes He warns. But even His correction comes as an invitation to righteousness, not a sentence of rejection. You can walk away from a true word cut, but you should never walk away crushed.

Dying to the Need to Be Right

Jeremiah Johnson tells a story about the day God confronted this in him.

He was leaving a ministry event when the man who had invited him stopped him at his car. The man said something he was still learning: Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He didn't say, "I am the way, the truth, and I'm right."

Jeremiah didn't know what prompted the brother to say it, but he described it as an arrow out of heaven that pierced his heart. He wept on the drive home, and the Father spoke to him:

> *"When are you finally going to lay down your need to be right prophetically and start releasing life like the father I have called you to be in the body of Christ?"*
>
> **Jeremiah Johnson**

That question led to some sober heart-searching. The Holy Spirit showed him that in the hard early years of planting a church, he had drifted from the Father's heart and at times preached out of his own frustration rather than from revelation. He even wondered whether he had driven away some of the very people God had sent to soften his young prophetic heart.

I love that he told that story. It takes a secure son to say it out loud.

Every prophetic person has to come to this place. We can be accurate and still be wrong in spirit. We can win the argument and lose the person. The goal was never to be right. The goal was to look like Jesus, who is the Truth, and who came "full of unfailing love and faithfulness" (John 1:14).

Jesus is the Truth. You don't have to be right; you have to be His.

Here is the hope in all of this. The same Spirit who convicts us of harshness also heals us of fear. The same Word that exposes our toxic empathy also gives us the courage to speak. God is raising a people who can hold a gentle heart and a firm word at the same time, lawyers who know His law and love the people in front of them too much to stay quiet. That is what truth in love looks like. And it is within reach of every one of us.

For the Road

1. Which ditch do you drift toward when you're under pressure: toxic empathy or malicious truth? What does that reveal about what you fear?
2. Is there a situation right now where your silence is protecting your comfort more than it is protecting someone vulnerable?
3. Where do you most need to die to the need to be right, in your family, your church, or your prophetic ministry?

Truth without love wounds, and love without truth lies,
but truth in love sets people free.

Chapter 10

Jealous, Jealous God

The Person and the Work of the Holy Spirit

> *For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. — Deuteronomy 4:24 (ESV)*

A friend of mine once scoffed when I told him marriage was hard. “If it’s that hard, why bother?” he asked. He was confusing the discipline that covenant requires with a pointless pursuit of suffering.

“It’s not hard like getting a root canal,” I told him. “It’s hard like building a house. You don’t always enjoy having your character refined, but you love living in a home instead of sitting alone in an empty one.”

He rolled his eyes. Years later, after his own wedding, he called me in the middle of a rough patch. “I finally get it,” he admitted. “There are moments when the weight of responsibility on my plate feels heavy, but the rewards of a marriage and a family are endless. I used to think ‘hard’ meant ‘not worth it.’ Now I see that hard is simply the cost of having something truly valuable.”

There is a hard that develops you and a hard that destroys your hope. Godly wisdom knows the difference.

A Bridegroom Jealous for His Bride

About thirty minutes into a powerful night of worship, the tone in the room changed. The anointed worship leader began to sing "A Jealous, Jealous God," and the atmosphere shifted from celebration to confrontation.

His words confronted a comfortable kind of faith: praying a prayer, assuming heaven is secured, and then going on to live like a pagan, as though declaring faith in Jesus required no surrender to Him.

Then the song became deeply personal. He sang about the losses that shake us most: a job, a house, a romantic relationship, a dream. In the middle of the melody, he posed a question that seemed to settle over the entire sanctuary:

> *What if it was God who took it away, so that He could become the first affection of your heart?*

Then came the thought that brought everything to a standstill:

> *If God gives you the world but withholds Himself, that is not love at all. But if He gives you Himself, even when it costs you the world, He loves you beyond measure.*

The sanctuary fell silent, not in distraction or complacency, but in holy reflection. The words invited every one of us to examine what we treasured most, and whether Jesus truly held that place.

That song was a sermon. It proclaimed the Jesus of Scripture, whose love will not settle for a heart that honors Him with its lips while belonging to another (Matthew 15:8). It revealed a Jesus with fire in His eyes (Revelation 1:14), a Lord who will not share His throne with the idols of our hearts.

And it reminded us why. His jealousy is the jealousy of love. Paul felt it for the church when he wrote, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2, NIV).

He is a Bridegroom jealous for His bride.

Covenant in Everyday Choices

The surrender we sing about becomes visible in ordinary decisions. When the Holy Spirit takes the lead, devotion becomes something we practice. Here are ten ways that obedience may take shape:

1. Break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend if the relationship dishonors God. “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

2. Quit your job if it compromises your integrity or calling. “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

3. Enter the ministry to serve others sacrificially. “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

4. Skip golf to take your spouse on a date and put covenant love first. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church” (Ephesians 5:25).

5. Wake up early for prayer and Scripture to cultivate intimacy with God. “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up” to pray (Mark 1:35).

6. Tell the truth, even at great cost, rejecting deception for righteousness. “Put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor” (Ephesians 4:25).

7. Take a lower-paying job to align with God's purpose for your life. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord" (Colossians 3:23–24).

8. Stop watching a show that feeds sinful thoughts or values. "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right… think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

9. Forgive someone who deeply hurt you, releasing bitterness to God. "Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

10. Give generously to someone in need, even sacrificially. "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act" (Proverbs 3:27).

"Well Done" or "What a Waste"?

A story is often told of a bodybuilder who traveled to Africa. A local man admired his impressive muscles and asked what they were for. "Just for show," the bodybuilder replied. The man shook his head. "What a waste."

Are we wasting what the Holy Spirit wants to accomplish in our lives? Are we merely displaying our faith without letting the Spirit work through us for God's purposes?

Remember Who You Are

In The Lion King, Rafiki tells Simba that his father lives in him. Simba looks into a pool and sees Mufasa's face in his own reflection. Then Mufasa appears in the night sky and calls his son to take his place as king, reminding him that he has forgotten who he is: "You are more than what you have become."

I hear the Spirit saying the same thing to a sleeping church. The Father lives in you. You have forgotten who you are, and in forgetting yourself you have forgotten Him.

For the Road

1. What did the worship-night question expose about the first affection of your heart?

2. Where has covenant become a word you affirm rather than a commitment you practice?

3. What step of obedience has the Holy Spirit been prompting that you have been putting off?

Chapter 11

Strange Fire

> *I will display my holiness through those who come near me. I will display my glory before all the people.*
>
> **Leviticus 10:3**

The fire had just fallen.

At the end of Leviticus 9, Aaron offered the first sacrifices of the new priesthood, and fire blazed out from the Lord's presence and consumed the offering. The people shouted for joy and fell on their faces (Leviticus 9:24). God Himself had lit the altar.

Then, almost in the next breath, two of Aaron's sons walked in with fire of their own.

> *Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu put coals of fire in their incense burners and sprinkled incense over them. In this way, they disobeyed the LORD by burning before him the wrong kind of fire, different than he had commanded. So fire blazed forth from the LORD's presence and burned them up, and they died there before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD meant when he said, 'I will display my holiness through those who come near me. I will display my glory before all the people.'" And Aaron was silent.*
>
> **Leviticus 10:1–3**

The Hebrew phrase is *esh zarah*, literally "strange" or "foreign" fire. Apparently they took coals from somewhere other than the altar, the only fire God had authorized (Leviticus 16:12). Ancient Jewish interpretation also taught that they came in drunk, which may be why God's next instruction to Aaron forbids wine before entering the Tabernacle (Leviticus 10:9). The same fire that had just shown God's approval was now sent in judgment.

I want to be careful here. This passage has been used by some to condemn every charismatic expression in the Church, as if any fire at all is strange fire. I am not saying that. Nadab and Abihu were not judged for wanting fire. They were judged for bringing the wrong kind. God is not afraid of a burning Church. He is jealous over where the burning comes from.

The problem was never the fire. The problem was the source.

The Fire on the Altar

God gave the priests a simple command about the altar:

> *The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out.*
>
> **Leviticus 6:12 (ESV)**

Under the new covenant, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, which makes us the priests of that temple. The command has not changed. We are called to keep our hearts burning for God with the oil of intimacy.

But here is the honest challenge. Our hearts are weak, frail, and inconsistent. We are constantly tempted to be motivated by performance and self-righteous works. That is exactly why we need the baptism of the Holy Spirit from Jesus, the Baptizer. We can only keep this fire burning by

getting oil from Him, and the only place to get it is bridal intimacy. There is no other supplier.

But in a culture that prizes the appearance of public burning over true private devotion, we are tempted to protect our reputation out of fear of man. That is a form of spiritual adultery, and it pushes out the true fear of the Lord.

When we feel pressure to project a burning heart we do not actually have, we become vulnerable to three things. We outsource our fire to other people. We embrace false doctrine. Or we develop a passion for ministry that wants to be celebrated by men, instead of letting ministry be a byproduct of our passion for God. The result is a culture of actors and echoes instead of true prophetic voices. Christianity slowly turns into "Churchianity," where the Bride becomes the center of attention instead of Jesus Christ.

We were called to be trumpets of heaven, not parrots of human wisdom.

We are meant to sit near other burning hearts so that our hunger is provoked and we go seek our own oil in secret. But there are no shortcuts. In a microwave culture and a drive-thru church mentality that worships comfort, popularity, and convenience, we go to prayer services, gatherings, and impartation meetings hoping to absorb the fire someone else paid for. It doesn't work that way.

The disciples in Acts 2 received tongues of fire because they had learned to wait. They sat in that upper room hungry, and God set them ablaze (Acts 2:1–4). Only burning hearts that depend on God will produce tongues of fire that line up word and deed with godly character.

Seven Lessons from Strange Fire

When I teach on this, I lay it out in seven parts, each with a question worth sitting with.

1. **Epidemic of "Strange Fire" in the Church.** Many leaders and congregants draw their doctrine from demonic sources, human wisdom, and selfish ambition rather than the burning heart of God (1 Timothy 4:1). *Are there teachings in my life that put human wisdom above God's truth?*
2. **The Need for Bridal Intimacy.** Our hearts are weak and often driven by performance, so we need the new heart God promised (Ezekiel 36:26). *Where am I performing instead of loving?*
3. **The Danger of Public Burning vs. The Power of Private Devotion.** Jesus warned us not to do our good deeds publicly to be admired by others (Matthew 6:1). *Is my devotion driven by a desire to be seen?*
4. **Dependency on External Fire.** A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it has to abide in the vine (John 15:4). Living off another person's fire leads to spiritual barrenness. *Am I depending on others for a life with God I should be cultivating myself?*
5. **Consequences of "Strange Fire."** When we preach messages bigger than the lives we live privately, the enemy comes to test those words. Aaron lost two sons in one day, and many family crises are still born from strange fire, when we express love in speech but not in deeds. God's verdict is plain: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Matthew 15:8). *Does my life match the words I say?*
6. **Obedience Over Sacrifice.** Religious performance will never be accepted as an offering, because "obedience is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22). As the rage of the nations increases, the grace to live off someone else's fire will decrease, and our barrenness will be exposed. *Where am I offering ritual instead of obedience?*

7. **Cultivating Personal Spiritual Fire.** Complacency and reliance on others leave us unprepared for the battles we are called to fight (Ephesians 6:11). *Am I building daily rhythms of prayer, Scripture, and fasting so that I have my own oil?*

When you love platforms more than you love people, it is a sign you love burning for God publicly more than you love burning for Him privately.

Korah's Fire

Strange fire shows up again a few books later, and this time it comes with a following.

Korah, a Levite, gathered Dathan, Abiram, On, and 250 prominent leaders of the community, and they confronted Moses and Aaron:

> *They united against Moses and Aaron and said, "You have gone too far! The whole community of Israel has been set apart by the LORD, and he is with all of us. What right do you have to act as though you are greater than the rest of the LORD's people?"*
>
> **Numbers 16:3**

Notice how spiritual that sounds, and in one sense it was true. But Korah was not trying to lift up the people. He was trying to take the priesthood. Moses saw it right away: "Korah, he has already given this special ministry to you and your fellow Levites. Are you now demanding the priesthood as well?" (Numbers 16:10). Korah already had a calling. He wanted a position.

Moses fell on his face, then set a test: everyone would bring an incense burner with fire before the Lord, and God would show who was His. The ground opened and swallowed Korah's household, and fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men offering incense (Numbers 16:31–

35). The New Testament still uses Korah as a warning about those who rebel against God's order (Jude 1:11).

I see in Korah a picture of a spiritual civil war of fire: Moses' reformation against Korah's rebellion. One fire comes from God's appointment, the other from human ambition dressed in the language of equality. Rick Joyner once warned:

> *"A great spiritual civil war now looms before the church. Many will do everything they can to avoid it. This is understandable and even noble. However, compromise will never maintain a lasting peace."*
>
> **Rick Joyner**

Let me be clear, because this book says over and over that everyone gets to play. Every believer can hear God and prophesy. That is not Korah's sin. Korah's sin was envy, grasping, and rebellion against what God had set in place.

You can carry a prophetic word and still honor the order of the house.

The Symptoms of Strange Fire

How do we know when strange fire has crept into the house? I teach ten symptoms.

1. **Kings Without Judges.** Leadership without accountability drifts toward corruption. Saul made impulsive decisions without seeking counsel and lost his kingdom (1 Samuel 13:8–14).
2. **Prophets Without Kings.** Prophetic people need leaders who can put God's vision into action. Nathan served David best by staying close enough to bring him back to righteousness (2 Samuel 12:1–14).

3. **Apostles Without Divine Blueprints.** Builders need God's plan before they build. Paul let the Holy Spirit redirect his whole mission (Acts 16:6–10), and apostles submitted to His will birth movements.
4. **Shepherds Without Sheep.** A shepherd's role is fulfilled in caring for people, and the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).
5. **Heroes Without Courage.** True heroism acts in the face of fear. Gideon was afraid and obeyed anyway (Judges 6–7).
6. **Disciples Without Discipline.** Daniel kept his prayer rhythm even when it could cost him his life (Daniel 6).
7. **Experts Without Experience.** Knowledge that is never lived out deceives us. We are called to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:22).
8. **Kingdom Hospitals That Reject the Sick.** Jesus said the sick need a doctor, not the healthy (Matthew 9:12), and He touched the leper no one else would (Mark 1:40–45).
9. **Christianity Without Christ.** Apart from the Vine we can do nothing (John 15:5). Laodicea had a church and still left Jesus standing outside the door (Revelation 3:14–22).
10. **Doctrine Without Diligently Searching the Scriptures.** The Bereans checked even the apostle Paul against the Scriptures every day (Acts 17:11).

Look at the pattern. Every symptom is something good cut off from the very thing that keeps it healthy.

Strange fire rarely looks like rebellion at first. It looks like ministry with one piece missing.

Godly Encouragement or Charismatic Witchcraft?

In any prophetic community, you will hear a lot of words. Some carry the weight of heaven. Some fall to the ground. Scripture tells us how to handle both:

> *Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.*
>
> **1 John 4:1**

By charismatic witchcraft I mean the misuse of spiritual gifts, or counterfeit gifts, to manipulate or control people. True prophecy does the opposite. It "strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them" (1 Corinthians 14:3). Knowing the Word without the Spirit makes Pharisees. Knowing the Spirit without the Word opens the door to charismatic witchcraft.

I once received a word in a meeting that was full of red flags. It was a public rebuke. I was open to that, because not every word from God is positive. But there was not one redemptive element in it. I planned to weigh it in my heart and quietly set it aside. Then the person made a beeline for me after the service and doubled down. I stayed open to the possibility that it was God, but when I started asking questions about the word, the person began to stutter. I told them plainly why I disagreed and why I would not receive it. They apologized and left the meeting.

I am not into hurting people, because it takes courage to prophesy. But I am also not into charismatic witchcraft dressed up as a "word from the Lord."

The prophetic is not a tool to lord over people in the name of competition. It is a tool from the Lord to equip and purify His Bride.

So how do we stay open without being naive? First, practice humility and teachability, being "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry" (James 1:19). Second, guard against charismatic witchcraft, remembering that "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). Red flags include a word that does not line up with Scripture, a focus on condemnation with no redemption, and an absence of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).

Four practical steps help:

1. **Align with Scripture.** Measure every word against the Word (Isaiah 8:20).
2. **Seek Confirmation.** Pray, and ask mature believers. "Plans go wrong for lack of advice; many advisers bring success" (Proverbs 15:22).
3. **Observe the Fruit.** Look at the fruit of the word and the character of the one who gave it (Matthew 7:16).
4. **Pray for Wisdom and Discernment.** God gives wisdom generously to anyone who asks (James 1:5).

Counterfeit Fire

Not all strange fire burns inside the Church. Some of it is lit outside, and hungry people go looking for it.

A young woman, curious and weary, went to a shamanic ayahuasca ceremony hoping for deep healing. Afterward she drifted for weeks in restless sleep, tormented by vivid night terrors and a constant sense of invasion that followed her into the daytime. Fear and shame grew as she realized she had opened a door she did not understand.

Humbled, she reached out to friends who gently pointed her to Scripture, then to a pastor and a deliverance ministry. Through confession, prayer, and steady discipleship, she repented and renounced what she had taken part in. Her prayer was simple: "Help me, Jesus. Close this door and make

me whole again." Over time the nightmares faded. Her worth and identity were re-centered in Christ, and she found real healing in the Holy Spirit instead of the counterfeit she had chased.

A shaman, from a worldly perspective, is a healer who reaches into the spiritual realm through altered states, rituals, drumming, or plant medicines in order to interact with spirits. Scripture calls that sorcery. God told Israel not to let anyone among them practice sorcery, engage in witchcraft, or call up the spirits of the dead (Deuteronomy 18:10–11). Paul said pagan sacrifices "are offered to demons, not to God" (1 Corinthians 10:20). All spiritual authority belongs to God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, not to spirits, ancestors, or psychedelics.

Shamanism is the occult counterfeit of the Holy Spirit's role. True healing, wisdom, and encounter come only through Jesus.

I don't say that to shame anyone who has been there. Here are some of the reasons people go:

1. Deep pain or trauma looking for immediate relief, especially when prayer and support haven't seemed to help (Psalm 34:18).
2. Unresolved grief or loss that leaves an emptiness they want filled (Ecclesiastes 3:11).
3. Genuine spiritual hunger, misdirected toward experiences instead of Christ (Jeremiah 29:13).
4. Curiosity, or a culture that has made ritual medicine and altered states look normal (1 Corinthians 10:23).
5. A desire for secret knowledge, power, or control over life (Proverbs 14:12).

Look at number three. Some people chasing counterfeit fire are simply hungry. If the Church offered real encounter with a real God, some of them would never have gone looking elsewhere.

Jesus in Their Fire

Here is the good news. Holy fire is stronger than strange fire.

Graham Cooke has told of a late-night phone call from a woman who recognized his name with open contempt. She told him flatly that her coven was preparing a curse against him that night. He did not answer with fear or with a counter-curse. He prayed for them, asking Jesus to find them in their darkness and turn the curse into a blessing. "May He meet you tonight," he said.

Weeks later the same number called again. This time her voice was smaller and full of surprise. She apologized. During their ritual, she said, Jesus had appeared in the fire they had lit. One by one the members of the coven broke down. Some wept, some cried out, and in the end they renounced their practices. She admitted she had never expected God's power to overwhelm theirs. He encouraged her to keep following what had begun in that fire.

I love that story because it shows what our posture should be.

We do not answer strange fire with fear. We answer it with the presence of Jesus.

He is perfectly able to walk into any fire He chooses.

Did Our Hearts Not Burn?

After the resurrection, two discouraged disciples walked toward Emmaus with a Stranger who explained the Scriptures to them. They recognized Him only when He broke bread at their table. Then He vanished.

> *They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"*
>
> **Luke 24:32**

I believe this is the litmus test for true spiritual authority. For far too long we have grown used to messages that tickle our intellect, entertain us, or co-sign what we already wanted to hear. Burning hearts are rare under our preaching because it takes the opening of the Scriptures to light that fire. If a speaker only opens up his life experiences, his humor, or human wisdom, people leave the service unchanged and malnourished. A. W. Tozer grieved over "the flat, stale, and profitless words heard in the average pulpit from week to week."

Strange fire can draw a crowd, but only the opened Word can set a heart on fire.

Jesus told a parable about ten virgins and their lamps, and we will come back to it at the very end of this book. For now, hear this. The altar fire in Leviticus was lit by God, not by Aaron. He is still the One who lights it. You don't have to borrow anyone's coals. You can come to Him hungry, wait on Him like the disciples did, and ask Him for your own oil. He has never turned away a hungry heart.

Holy Spirit, give us discernment to tell strange fire from the true fire of Your presence. Give us strength to cultivate our own oil as living sacrifices, instead of borrowing fire to appear to burn in public while we neglect You in private. Make us a Bride ready for her Bridegroom's return.

For the Road

1. Whose fire have you been living off? What would it look like to go get your own oil this week?
2. Which of the ten symptoms of strange fire do you recognize in your own life, not just in your church?
3. Think of a word you received that did not sit right. How did you weigh it, and what would the four steps of discernment have changed?

Come hungry to His altar, and He will give you a fire no one can lend you and no one can take away.

Chapter 12

Faith over Fear

> *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.*
>
> **2 Timothy 1:7**

The king of Aram was furious. Every time he planned an ambush against Israel, the prophet Elisha warned the king of Israel ahead of time. So the king sent an army by night to surround the little town of Dothan and capture one prophet.

> *When the servant of the man of God got up early the next morning and went outside, there were troops, horses, and chariots everywhere. "Oh, sir, what will we do now?" the young man cried to Elisha. "Don't be afraid!" Elisha told him. "For there are more on our side than on theirs!" Then Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes and let him see!" The LORD opened the young man's eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire.*
>
> **2 Kings 6:15–17**

Notice something about that servant. He was not wrong. The army was real. The horses were real. The danger was real. His eyes were working fine. His problem was that he saw only half of what was there, and the half he saw filled him with terror.

That is where many prophetic people live. We are anointed with eyes to see, but infected with an orphan spirit of fear. We see the darkness accurately and then interpret it as if no Father were standing on the hillside.

You can see true and still interpret falsely.

Eyes That See, a Heart That Fears

Back in the '90s, MTV had a show called *What If* that played out imagined scenarios. Let me borrow that idea. What follows is total fiction; Scripture never records this scene. But it makes a point.

Picture Eliab, David's older brother, grabbing David by the shoulders the morning he arrives at the battle lines. Eliab has had a dream: a great shadow over the valley, a principality behind the Philistine army, and it has chosen its champion. "It comes for all Israel," he says. "We are doomed." His dream was meant as a warning, but he delivers it as a sentence.

And David, calm and sure, answers him: "Your eyes saw true, my brother. But your heart interpreted falsely." If a principality has risen, then the Lord of Hosts rises higher. The same Spirit who gave Eliab the dream gives David the faith. And David walks toward the valley not to meet a monster, but to slay one.

The Bible tells us what David actually said that day: "The LORD who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!" (1 Samuel 17:37). David saw the giant. He just saw God bigger.

> *But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.*
>
> **1 John 4:4**

John Paul Jackson used to say it this way:

> *"Faith and fear both have this in common: you are trusting for something that hasn't happened yet to happen."*
>
> **John Paul Jackson**

Fear is a kind of faith. It is faith pointed in the wrong direction. Jackson put it even more plainly: "Fear is when you have more faith in the enemy to attack you than having the faith that the Father will protect you."

A spirit of fear can cause you to have more faith in demonic spirits to possess you than in the Holy Spirit to fill you.

Earlier I talked about *The Matrix*. One reason that story hits so hard is that the system keeps people obedient through fear and false rules, until Neo sees the truth and refuses to live under the agents' terror anymore. That is what Elisha's prayer did for his servant. It didn't remove the army. It opened his eyes.

Who You Gonna Call?

Some of you remember *Ghostbusters*. I want to borrow the name for a pitfall I see in prophetic ministry, something I call a "Ghostbuster prophetic ministry."

It is a ministry built around the enemy. It knows every spirit by name, tracks every curse, and maps every principality, but it spends very little time gazing at Jesus. It means well. It wants people free. But it slowly magnifies the enemy's tactics and people's flaws instead of God's sovereignty, protective power, and authority.

Ghostbuster theology leads you to become more intimate with the kingdom of darkness than with our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

Why Revival Tarries: The "Almost Right"

There is a line often credited to Charles Spurgeon:

> *"Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right."*
>
> **attributed to Charles Spurgeon**

Much of our teaching on spiritual warfare is almost right, and I believe that is one more reason revival tarries.

Many charismatic leaders begin with the biblical reality of spiritual warfare and then go beyond what Scripture actually reveals. With good intentions, they magnify the enemy and shrink our view of God. Demons start to look highly organized, specialized, and nearly everywhere, while believers are portrayed as dependent on secret knowledge, precise terminology, or elaborate strategies to overcome them.

But Scripture does not call us to become experts in the kingdom of darkness. It calls us to know Christ, walk in truth, resist the devil, and stand firm in the victory Jesus already won. The New Testament emphasizes:

1. **Christ's absolute authority**, not Satan's supposed hierarchy.
2. **The sufficiency of Scripture**, not hidden spiritual intelligence.
3. **Repentance, faith, and obedience**, not specialized deliverance formulas.
4. **The armor of God**, not an encyclopedia of demons.
5. **The finished work of the cross**, not our ability to "dethrone" principalities.

Paul did not want us to be outsmarted by Satan, "for we are familiar with his evil schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11). But he also warned against people

who get caught up in visions and angels and lose their connection to Christ, the head (Colossians 2:18–19).

The enemy is real, but he is not anywhere close to being God's equal. Satan is created, limited, defeated, and subject to Christ. Jesus said, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). He did not just hand us better techniques for fighting darkness.

> *In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.*
>
> **Colossians 2:15**

When spiritual-warfare teaching produces more fascination with demons than awe and confidence in Christ, its emphasis has drifted from the Bible.

A biblical worldview does not deny the enemy. It simply refuses to make him bigger than God.

A Spirit of Fear or a Spirit of Might

There is a story told of a woman who came to a prayer meeting with a long list of declarations. She had prayers against ancestral curses, named demonic spirits, supposed Masonic roots in her family line, and many specific rebukes. She was convinced that naming each one was necessary to break every stronghold.

An older minister with more than twenty years in inner healing and deliverance listened, then asked her one question: "How do these practices line up with the biblical witness of Jesus and the apostles?"

He explained that the New Testament models deliverance differently. Jesus emphasized repentance, forgiveness, authority in His name, confessing sin, rejecting worldly wisdom, and healing the brokenhearted. Spiritual warfare language is in Scripture, but exhaustive lists and extra-

biblical or conspiratorial frameworks can pull us away from Christ. Fear, along with human tradition and sensational naming, leads to confusion, legalism, and sometimes even open doors to darkness.

His counsel was simple. Use Scripture as the measuring rod. Put repentance and relationship with Jesus first. Let deliverance happen inside patient, Spirit-led discipleship with pastoral oversight. The woman folded her list, humbled, and began again with prayer, repentance, and the patient work of the Holy Spirit.

God didn't ask us to have faith in a formula. He asked us to have faith in His character.

What's the difference? Formulas promise us control over the outcome. Faith puts our trust in the goodness of God whatever the outcome. We have to decide in advance that God is good, and that we will not waver in our obedience when He doesn't show up the way we wanted Him to.

Six Lies That Make the Devil Bigger

Fear-based ministry tends to produce six false beliefs. Here they are, with the truth that answers each one.

1. **"Generational curses are more powerful than my inheritance and adoption in Christ."** Christ rescued us from the curse by becoming a curse for us (Galatians 3:13).
2. **"If I don't pray the right prayer, I remain in bondage to my past."** Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person; the old life is gone (2 Corinthians 5:17). Freedom rests on union with Him, not perfect wording.
3. **"Occult rituals trump the prayer of salvation, water baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit."** Jesus disarmed the powers and triumphed over them on the cross (Colossians 2:15). No ritual can override His finished work.

4. **“The inner healing modality is my savior.”** There is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12). Tools can help, but no method replaces Jesus.
5. **“The seer’s revelation is objective truth and cannot be challenged.”** Every word, even from a gifted seer, must be tested, and we hold on to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:20–21).
6. **“I have to strive through effort and performance for what Christ already secured.”** Those who enter God’s rest have rested from their labors (Hebrews 4:10).

Trespasser, Not a Title-Holder

Picture a small living room that smells like coffee and old books. A twenty-five-year-old I’ll call Ethan sits on the couch, knees bouncing, while an older brother in the faith I’ll call Walter finishes walking him through a prayer roadmap: unforgiveness, soul ties, generational curses, objects in the home, music, tattoos, and more.

Ethan rubs his temples. He knows strongholds are real. He knows he needs to forgive his dad and himself. But the way some of this is taught makes the kingdom of darkness sound more powerful than the kingdom of light.

He grew up in church. He walked aisles. He got baptized twice because he feared the first one didn’t “take.” He prayed a hundred prayers and still lived in pornography, drunkenness, rage, and lying. Looking back, he realizes he was religious, not born again. Then two months earlier, something broke. He met Jesus for real on his bedroom floor at three in the morning, crying like a child, and for the first time he knew that greater is He who is in him than he who is in the world.

Now he is being told that if he misses one renunciation, one T-shirt, one old family ring he never wore, the demon stays. So he asks the honest question. Once someone is truly born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, does the devil still own real estate in him unless he hands it over

through ongoing sin? Or did Jesus defeat him at the cross, and much of what we call demonic is really flesh we haven't crucified and lies we haven't replaced with truth?

Walter is quiet for a long time. Then he smiles like a father watching his son think, and answers:

"Greater is He that is in you. Period. The devil is a trespasser, not a title-holder."

He tells Ethan that many so-called generational curses are inherited patterns and lies, because no one ever taught us who we are in Christ. The blood broke every curse. The Spirit sealed him. Yes, close the doors you knowingly opened: repent, renounce, renew your mind, and forgive from the heart. That is wisdom. But never let anyone tell you the devil stands equal with the Holy Spirit in a blood-bought child of God.

Then he says something every believer needs to hear: "You got born again on your bedroom floor. That settled your eternity and your authority. Everything else is cleanup, not qualification."

"So I'm not demon-possessed if I still struggle?" Ethan asks.

"You're a son learning to walk in victory," Walter says. "Some battles are won by declaration, some by discipline, all by grace."

The enemy roars, but he cannot undo the finished work.

When Fear Speaks Louder than Faith

There is one more thing I need to name, because prophetic people run into it all the time. It is what happens when fear speaks louder than faith.

Israel had just walked out of Egypt on the strength of a promise. Then they looked up and saw Pharaoh's army coming.

They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?"

Exodus 14:11 (NIV)

When a prophetic voice encourages people to hold on to God's promises in the face of giants, that voice will often face reproach. People would rather go back to slavery than risk hoping and being disappointed. But promises are not received passively. They are fought for. Moses told the people, "The LORD himself will fight for you. Just stay calm" (Exodus 14:14), and the sea opened.

Scripture is full of people who fought for a promise in the face of fear:

1. **Moses and the Israelites.** He led a doubting people out of slavery through opposition and hardship toward a land they had never seen.
2. **Joshua and Caleb.** Ten spies saw giants; two saw God's promise. They waited forty years because of others' unbelief, and then they entered.
3. **David and Goliath.** A shepherd faced the giant while an army stood paralyzed.
4. **Jacob.** He wrestled through the night and would not let go without a blessing, and God changed his name.
5. **Abraham.** He waited for the son of promise, stumbled by trying to fulfill it through Ishmael, and still became the father of many nations.
6. **Gideon.** Hesitant and afraid, he asked for signs, then led a small army to victory.
7. **Nehemiah.** He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem through outside opposition and inside strife with prayerful persistence.
8. **Noah.** He built the ark under ridicule, and his family was saved.
9. **The 5 Wise Virgins.** They carried extra oil because they believed the bridegroom was really coming.
10. **Joseph.** From favored son to slave to prisoner, he stayed faithful until the dream came true and his family was saved from famine.

Hope is not foolish when it rests on the character of the One who promised.

None of these people lived without fear. They simply refused to let fear have the final word. God's command to Joshua is still His word to every prophetic son and daughter standing at the edge of a promise:

> *This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*
>
> **Joshua 1:9**

So here is my prayer for you, the same one Elisha prayed: Lord, open their eyes. The armies are real. The giants are real. But the hills are full of horses and chariots of fire, and there are more on our side than on theirs.

For the Road

1. Where have you been seeing true but interpreting falsely? What would it look like to see that same situation with the Father in the picture?
2. Have you been trusting a spiritual formula more than God's character? Which of the six false beliefs has had a grip on you?
3. What promise have you stopped fighting for because fear spoke louder than faith?

Fear and faith both trust in what hasn't happened yet, so trust the One who has already won.

Part Four

Giftedness Is Not Godliness

What happens when the gift outruns the character?

Chapter 13

Gifts Without Repentance

For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

Romans 11:29 (KJV)

Here is a question I have had to wrestle with, and you will have to wrestle with it too. How can someone carry a genuine gift from God, see real fruit in their ministry, and still be falling apart in private? When that person finally falls, was the gifting and anointing ever real?

Paul gives us the answer in his letter to the Romans. The New Living Translation says it plainly: "For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn." The King James puts it in words that should stop every gifted believer in their tracks. The gifts and calling of God are *without repentance*. God does not take back what He gives. He does not change His mind because we changed our behavior.

That is a mercy, and it is also a warning. It means a gift can keep working long after the heart behind it has stopped surrendering. It means the platform can keep growing while the prayer life is shrinking. It means the crowd can still be blessed while the vessel is quietly breaking.

Giftedness is not godliness.

This chapter is not an easy one. In it I will name men whose falls are a matter of public record. I am not doing it to throw stones. I need grace as much as any of them did. I am doing it because the Church keeps making

the same mistake, and we will keep repeating what we refuse to learn from.

Samson, Saul, and Balaam

Scripture does not hide the failures of the gifted. It puts them on display so we would not have to learn the same lessons the same way.

Samson, Saul, and Balaam expose a hard truth. Each one was genuinely called and empowered by God, and each one fell through compromised character. Their gifts stayed active while their lives were compromised.

Samson was God's chosen vessel in a dark hour of Israel's history. Despite selfishness, lust, and arrogance, he judged Israel for twenty years (Judges 15:20) without losing his ministry or his anointing. In one night he visited a prostitute in Gaza and then, before dawn, tore the city gates out of the ground and carried them up a hill on his shoulders (Judges 16:1–3). The power was real. The man was not well.

Then came the night with Delilah, and one of the most sobering sentences in Scripture:

> *Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him.*
>
> **Judges 16:20 (NIV)**

"As before." He assumed tomorrow's strength would show up because yesterday's strength had. That is what happens when we take the gift as proof of God's approval. If you assume you are in good standing with God because of your anointing, the speck in your eye can grow into a mountain-sized blind spot.

Saul was anointed by the prophet Samuel and empowered by the Spirit. He even prophesied among the prophets. But when he disobeyed, Samuel reminded him where it all began: "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel?" (1 Samuel 15:17, ESV). Saul's fall did not start with the sin. It started when he stopped being small in his own eyes.

Balaam heard from God. His oracles over Israel are some of the most beautiful prophecies in the Old Testament. Yet his heart was for sale. Peter calls him the prophet who "loved to earn money by doing wrong" (2 Peter 2:15). Accurate words came out of a corrupted heart. (We'll look at the specific door Balaam opened in Chapter 14.)

Your gift is not proof of your character. Your spiritual gifts reflect God's goodness and mercy, not your own.

God is not impressed with gifts, talents, and anointing the way people are. He gave them to you, and He longs for you to steward them in wisdom and righteousness. What He looks for is something else:

> *I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts, who tremble at my word.*
>
> **Isaiah 66:2**

A Name in My Spirit

One afternoon I woke suddenly from a nap with a single name echoing in my spirit: "Lonnie Frisbee." It wasn't vague or symbolic. It was unmistakable, as if the Lord Himself had spoken it.

A few days later, without any prompting from me, a friend sent me the cover of a new album by a worship leader I've walked with. He was wearing a T-shirt with Lonnie's picture on it. In that moment I heard the

Lord say, “I am sending you people who carry his mantle, and I do not want you to repeat the same mistakes his mentors made.”

That opened the door, and I ended up watching a documentary about Lonnie’s life.

For those who don’t know the story, Lonnie Frisbee was saved out of the hippie culture of drugs, free sex, and New Age spirituality, and he became one of the most influential evangelists of the Jesus Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. God used him powerfully at the birth of more than one of the church movements that came out of that era. He also struggled openly with homosexuality and substance abuse, and he died of AIDS-related complications in 1993. At his funeral, Chuck Smith, who had worked with him in those early years, compared him to Samson: a man through whom God accomplished great things, who also fell to his own struggles and temptations.

As I watched, clarity settled in. I sensed the Lord wasn’t just revisiting Lonnie’s story. He was showing me why it unfolded the way it did.

What stood out was this: the anointing Lonnie carried was real, but the wineskin couldn’t sustain it. I felt the Lord saying He wants to release that kind of mantle again, but this time it must be poured into family, not just ministry. Ministry was put ahead of marriage. There was poor counsel, thin spiritual fathering, and little true belonging. Gifting was elevated over relational covering. An orphan heart was put on a stage without ever being healed. Those fractures added up to collapse.

I texted the worship leader what I had seen: the failure wasn’t just personal sin but a broken system. He stopped me in awe. That very night, without knowing anything I had sensed, he had begun singing prophetically, “We are a family first.”

That’s when it hit us both. The Jesus Movement was powerful, but it brought empowerment without lasting freedom. It became a moment

rather than a movement, because it broke under the wrong wineskin. What is coming next is not only about empowerment. It is about family, inheritance, and generational healing that doesn't collapse when the spotlight fades.

Another movement is coming, and this one will last, because character will come before calling.

The Rise and Fall of the Kansas City Prophets

In the late 1980s a prophetic movement gathered in Kansas City around a group of men that included Mike Bickle and Bob Jones. It drew national attention through claims that prophetic authority was being restored to the Church.

But over time, confessions, discipline, and allegations of sexual misconduct and spiritual abuse revealed a pattern of unchecked power, moral failure, and institutional protection. These are the facts as they have been publicly documented.

In 1991 Bob Jones was removed from ministry for sexual misconduct.

In late 2023, allegations of sexual misconduct surfaced against Mike Bickle, who had led a prophetic and prayer ministry for decades. In 2024 an independent investigation commissioned by the ministry he founded concluded that he had engaged in sexual misconduct.

Remember Samson's twenty years. Leaders can carry decades of fruitful public ministry before hidden compromise comes to light. Twenty years of victories do not mean twenty years of victory over the flesh.

It has also been said that the Kansas City prophets got words about one another, warnings that the others were dangerous to their own ministries. Whether every detail of that is accurate, the pattern is familiar. Competition and insecurity breed suspicion, and suspicion makes a leader start believing that God's sheep are his sheep.

What began as a spiritually gifted movement now stands as a cautionary example. Powerful gifting existed alongside moral failure and weak accountability. The result was personal collapse and the collateral damage of wounded sheep and shaken faith.

Charisma without accountability leads to collapse.

The answer is not to protect our heroes. The answer is genuine repentance, justice and care for those who were harmed, and the courage to stop building systems that protect power rather than truth. Anointing without character harms both the vessel and the sheep. The Church must stop equating power with approval and start asking for character equal to calling.

"Get Off of the Road"

Those were the words God whispered to one of my closest friends in the middle of a ministry trip to Ukraine.

It was a warning, and he took it seriously. As he tells it, God then showed him two well-known charismatic leaders who had received the same warning and ignored it: Jimmy Swaggart and Todd Bentley. God had told both of them to slow down and work on their character. Both, he sensed, chose momentum over obedience, and both fell publicly.

The public part of that story is a matter of record. In 1988 Jimmy Swaggart, one of the best-known television evangelists in the world, confessed to sexual sin before his congregation and a national television audience. In 2008, at the height of a widely watched revival in Florida, Todd Bentley stepped away from ministry after announcing that he and his wife were separating; he later divorced and remarried.

Years after that trip, my friend was able to meet Jimmy Swaggart face to face. He told him what God had spoken to him and asked directly

whether God had given Swaggart the same warning. According to my friend, Swaggart answered yes, and confessed that he had ignored it.

No one can verify every word of a private conversation, and I won't pretend to. But the warning stands on its own. When God says "slow down," momentum is not your friend, even when the road ahead looks wide open.

If you do not crucify your flesh privately, your hidden sin will crucify you publicly.

That leaves a question every one of us has to answer:

Do you have the character to sustain the move of God on your life?

The 7 Levels of Prophetic Health

Romans 11:29 means gifting alone is not evidence of God's approval, maturity, or long-term faithfulness. Gifting and anointing can remain while character declines. Anointing can function while integrity erodes. Influence can increase while intimacy with God decreases.

These seven levels exist to remind us that prophetic gifting is not the same as prophetic health. (They are not the same as R. T. Kendall's levels of prophetic revelation from Chapter 5. Those measure the weight of a word. These measure the health of the vessel.) Think of them as the good, the bad, and the ugly.

1. **Faithful Under Pressure (Healthy / Enduring): Daniel.** Anointed with character, integrity, and consistency; stays faithful to God under sustained cultural and political pressure.
2. **Discernment with Private Compromise (Impaired): Samuel.** Bold and discerning in confronting sin publicly, yet compromised by what he tolerated and failed to correct in his own household.

3. **Passive Leadership and Misplaced Honor (Dysfunctional): Eli.** Served in the priesthood and recognized God's voice, yet was fatally compromised by passive leadership, honoring his sons above God.
4. **Power Without Discipline (Unstable): Samson.** Genuinely anointed with supernatural strength, but repeatedly governed by fleshly impulses rather than discipline and obedience.
5. **Anointing Quenched by Selfish Ambition: Saul.** Anointed for a season and empowered by the Spirit, but quenched Him through pride, insecurity, jealousy, and persistent disobedience.
6. **Prophetic Gift for Personal Gain (Corrupted): Balaam.** Operated with real prophetic insight, yet was driven by profit, reward, and self-interest instead of submission to God's will.
7. **Counterfeit Spiritual Authority (False): Simon the Sorcerer.** Counterfeited spiritual power, seeking influence, money, and status without repentance, humility, or true submission to Christ (Acts 8:9–24).

Only the last name on that list was a fake. The rest were real gifts carried by vessels in various states of health.

Power is not proof of purity. Results are not evidence of righteousness.

God gives gifts freely. He does not endorse everything the gifted person does. The goal is not merely to be anointed. The goal is to be faithful under pressure and to have the character to sustain the move of God on your life.

Would They Qualify as Elders?

Here is a humbling exercise. Paul gave Timothy and Titus a list of qualifications for anyone who would lead in God's house (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9). It begins like this:

So an elder must be a man whose life is above reproach.

1 Timothy 3:2

The list goes on: faithful to his wife, self-controlled, gentle, able to teach, not a heavy drinker, not a lover of money, managing his own family well.

Now hold some of the great names of the Old Testament up against that standard. Would they qualify to lead under New Testament requirements?

- **Daniel: yes.** Integrity under pressure; blameless in public and private.
- **Joseph: yes.** Moral purity in temptation; a faithful steward in adversity.
- **Job: yes.** Righteous and blameless; faithful in suffering.
- **Josiah: yes.** A zealous reformer, tender toward God's Word, if sometimes impulsive.
- **David: no.** A man after God's heart, but with serious moral failure (adultery and murder) and household dysfunction.
- **Hezekiah: yes, with some caution.** A strong reformer whose pride surfaced late in life.
- **Samuel: no.** A faithful prophet and judge who failed to restrain his corrupt sons.
- **Eli: no.** Passive toward persistent sin; honored his sons above God.
- **Samson: no.** Spirit-empowered, but governed by impulses.
- **Saul: no.** Anointed, but undone by pride, jealousy, and disobedience.
- **Balaam: no.** Genuine prophetic encounters, but motivated by greed.
- **Noah: yes.** Righteous in a corrupt generation; one lapse after the flood, but faithful overall.

David and Samuel on the "no" list should sober every one of us. God used them mightily. He loved them deeply. And still, their households told a story their public ministries did not. If they would not pass the elder test,

we should not be surprised when our modern heroes fail it, and we should not lower the standard to keep them on the stage.

When Truth Comes Through a Broken Vessel

So what do we do with everything we received through people who later fell? Do we throw out every sermon, every song, every word?

Biblical truth is not validated by the moral integrity, longevity, or legacy of the messenger. It is validated by being rooted in Scripture. When a teacher communicates what is biblically true, that truth belongs to God, and we keep it on the basis of Scripture, not on admiration for the person who delivered it.

Human nature is complicated. Someone can write a beautiful song of worship in the middle of a long struggle, and the song is still true even if the writer later fell away. A preacher can open the Scriptures with accuracy and still be losing a private war. The message can stand even when the messenger did not. God has never depended on the purity of the messenger to establish the authority of His Word. If He can speak through Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22:28), He can speak through flawed men.

Truth remains truth, even when it comes through a broken vessel.

But hear the other side of that, because it matters just as much. The fact that God spoke through someone is never a reason to excuse what they did. Jesus said, "You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act" (Matthew 7:16). We test the word by the Word, and we test the vessel by the fruit.

Human vessels are temporary and fallible. The Word of God is eternal, self-authenticating, and sufficient. So what aligns with Scripture is to be

kept, and what is bound to the man is to be left behind. Eat the chicken, and throw away the bone.

How Long Will You Mourn for Saul?

Some of you reading this were deeply shaped by one of these ministries, or by a leader in your own life whose fall never made the news. You learned to pray under them. You heard God's voice for the first time in their meetings. And now you don't know what to do with the grief.

> *The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king."*
>
> **1 Samuel 16:1 (NIV)**

Samuel loved Saul. He had poured the oil on his head. His grief was real, and God did not shame him for it. But God also did not let him stay there. There was oil to carry and a new king to anoint.

One counselor put words to this kind of loss:

> *"You're grieving for who you thought they were, or in some cases who they pretended to be."*
>
> **Nedra Glover Tawwab, *Set Boundaries, Find Peace***

It's okay to see the truth about who someone really is and still miss the person you thought you knew. You can grieve and still obey.

So let me ask you: are you following someone the Lord has already disqualified from spiritual leadership? Are you mourning someone or something God has commanded you to let go of? It may be time to heal, move on, and anoint what He has chosen to work through in this season.

Honor the gift, grieve the fall, and refuse to repeat it.

Honoring the fallen does not mean defending them. It means we refuse to gossip about them, we refuse to gloat over them, and we refuse to pretend nothing happened. We pray for them. We stand with those they harmed. And we let their stories do the one thing they can still do: warn the rest of us.

Paul told the Galatians, "If another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself" (Galatians 6:1). That last sentence is the point of this whole chapter. If it happened to them, it can happen to me, and it can happen to you.

But here is the good news. The same God who gives gifts without repentance also gives grace that leads to repentance. The cross is big enough for every name in this chapter, and for yours and mine. God is not looking for flawless vessels. He is looking for surrendered ones: people who will let Him build the character to carry what He has given. That kind of vessel doesn't have to fall. That kind of vessel can finish well.

For the Road

1. Where have you been tempted to treat your gift, your fruitfulness, or your platform as proof that God approves of everything in your life?
2. Look at the 7 Levels of Prophetic Health. Which level best describes where you are right now, honestly, and what would it take to move one step toward Daniel?
3. Is there a leader you are still mourning, or still defending, whom God may be asking you to release? What truth from them will you keep, and what will you leave behind?

God will not take back your gift, so let Him build a character that can carry it.

Chapter 14

Surviving the Anointing

> *But when he had become powerful, he also became proud, which led to his downfall.*
>
> **2 Chronicles 26:16**

There is a film called *Brightburn* that takes the Superman story and asks a terrifying question: what if he had chosen evil instead of good?

A boy from another world lands on a farm and is raised by a loving couple. As he grows, he discovers he has superpowers. Then, activated by the ship that brought him, he rejects his humanity and turns those powers on his hometown, including the parents who raised him.

It is not a movie for family night. But its premise is the question this chapter is about. What happens when someone receives power without the heart to carry it?

Someone once said, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."

Jesus told us to seek two things, not one:

> *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*
>
> **Matthew 6:33 (NIV)**

Why did Jesus say His Kingdom *and* His righteousness? Because the Kingdom is God's power, but His righteousness is God's heart and

character. We need both. Power without righteousness is *Brightburn*. It is a gift that destroys the very people it was meant to protect.

In the last chapter we looked at what happens when gifted people fall. In this one I want to talk about how to survive the anointing.

Gift, Calling, Anointing, Authority

Romans 11:29 tells us that God's gifts and calling can never be withdrawn. To understand why that matters, it helps to separate four words we often blur together:

- **Gift:** talents and abilities from God.
- **Calling:** your assignment in the Kingdom.
- **Anointing:** the measure of God's presence on your life for a divine purpose.
- **Authority:** your intimate relationship with God.

The first three can be given in a moment. The fourth can only be grown over time. John Paul Jackson said it in one line:

> *"The anointing is a gift. Authority is a relationship."*
>
> **John Paul Jackson**

You can walk in your assignment in the Kingdom of God and miss the opportunity to walk in an intimate relationship with God. The anointing on your life is there to help the Body of Christ know God more intimately. Your authority comes from your own personal relationship with Him.

Jesus warned that some who did remarkable things in His name would hear devastating words on the last day:

> *On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*
>
> **Matthew 7:22–23 (ESV)**

They prophesied. They cast out demons. They did mighty works. And He never knew them. Gift, calling, and anointing were all there. Relationship was not.

Compare that with young Samuel. "As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him, and everything Samuel said proved to be reliable" (1 Samuel 3:19). His words carried weight because the Lord was *with* him. That is authority.

Don't confuse your ministry effectiveness with your spiritual authority.

Judas and Mary of Bethany

Two people in the Gospels show this better than any definition.

Judas had an anointing and an effective ministry. He was sent out with the Twelve to heal the sick and cast out demons. He carried the money bag. By every outward measure he was on the team. But he had no intimate relationship with Jesus.

Mary of Bethany did not have an anointed public ministry. We have no record of her preaching or healing anyone. But she sat at Jesus' feet and listened, and when she poured out her perfume on Him, Jesus said what she had done would be told wherever the Good News was preached (Mark 14:9). She had an intimate relationship with Jesus and a testimony that has outlasted empires.

Don't bend to what Christian culture says success is.

What's valued in heaven is different than what's valued here on earth.

Moses understood this. He prayed, "If I have found favor in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You" (Exodus 33:13, AMP). And the psalmist tells us the result:

> *He revealed his character to Moses and his deeds to the people of Israel.*
>
> **Psalm 103:7**

Israel saw many miracles in the wilderness, but Moses understood God's heart and why He did those miracles. The answer was love.

Children prize gifts. Mature sons and daughters prize character. When the seventy came back to Jesus thrilled that even demons obeyed them, He redirected their joy: "But don't rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

To the immature, the gifts are the reward. To the mature, the fruit is the goal. To the more mature, Jesus is the reward, the fruit is the byproduct, and the gifts are weapons to build His Kingdom.

When We Choose Power over Presence

King Uzziah is one of the saddest stories in the Old Testament, because it started so well. He became king at sixteen, sought the Lord, and as long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success. He built, he farmed, he fortified Jerusalem, and his fame spread far.

Then comes the sentence at the top of this chapter. "But when he had become powerful, he also became proud, which led to his downfall."

Uzziah walked into the Temple and tried to burn incense on the altar himself, a task God had given only to the priests. Eighty priests followed him in and confronted him:

> *"It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is the work of the priests alone, the descendants of Aaron who are set apart for this work. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have sinned."*
>
> **2 Chronicles 26:18**

Instead of repenting, he raged at them, and leprosy broke out on his forehead right there beside the altar. He lived the rest of his life isolated, cut off from the house of the Lord (2 Chronicles 26:19–21).

Uzziah didn't want less of God. In a sense he wanted more. He wanted the presence without the boundaries, the altar without the priesthood. That is what power does to a heart that is no longer small in its own eyes. It starts to believe the rules are for other people.

Leonard Ravenhill put it this way:

> *"Everyone wants to be clothed with power, but no one wants to be stripped of self."*
>
> **Leonard Ravenhill**

Paul said that if he had the gift of prophecy and understood all of God's secret plans, and could move mountains with his faith, but didn't love others, he would be nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2). Power was never meant to be the point. Love is the point, and power is the tool love uses.

The power of God without the heart of God will destroy the very people you are called to love and disciple.

Solomon's Anointing and Spiritual Decline

Solomon's story begins with one of the most humble prayers in Scripture. When God told the young king to ask for anything, Solomon admitted he felt like a little child who didn't know how to lead (1 Kings 3:7), and he asked for an understanding heart to govern God's people. God was so pleased that He gave him wisdom, riches, and honor besides.

Here is how I trace the arc of his life:

1. **Solomon's Gift of Wisdom (1 Kings 3:5–14).** Instead of wealth or power, he asked for wisdom. His humility pleased God, who granted him unparalleled wisdom along with riches and honor.
2. **Wisdom Compromised by Pride (1 Kings 10:14–29).** Over time his wisdom became entangled with pride. He accumulated excessive wealth, horses, and wives, in direct violation of God's commands for kings (Deuteronomy 17:16–17), and shifted from reliance on God to human strategy and political alliances.
3. **Rebellion and Consequences (1 Kings 11:4–13).** His wives turned his heart to idolatry, breaking his covenant with God. Though he kept his wisdom, his lack of humility fractured his relationship with God and set up the division of the kingdom after his death.
4. **Solomon's Later Reflection (Ecclesiastes).** He laments the emptiness of wisdom detached from God, "Everything is meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 1:2), and concludes that life only finds meaning in fearing God and obeying His commands (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

> *In Solomon's old age, they turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the LORD his God, as his father, David, had been.*
>
> **1 Kings 11:4**

Notice that Solomon kept his wisdom. The gift never left. The queen of Sheba was still being dazzled while his heart was already drifting (1

Kings 10:1–9). Solomon's life shows that spiritual gifts and anointing are God's grace, not proof of character. His early humility crumbled under selfish ambition, a stark warning that even the wisest can fall when they are no longer surrendered.

The anointing is a gift to steward, not a license to satisfy self.

John the Baptist had the right posture: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30, ESV). Prophetic voices in the Body of Christ become vulnerable to compromise when the desire to be coddled and celebrated takes priority over the hunger to be consecrated and convicted.

Titles and Function

In much of the Christian world there is an obsession with power and position. You can see it in how much weight we put on the titles in front of our names. Using a title is not wrong in itself. But when we let titles define spiritual authority, we drift toward idolatry.

In the Bible, titles described function, not identity. True spiritual authority comes from the Lord, not from a title. When people become inseparable from their titles, their sense of worth gets tangled up with their position, and they start believing that what they do defines who they are. That mirrors the world's values instead of setting a higher standard.

As Rick Joyner has pointed out, it is not wrong to desire a higher platform if we want it for the right reasons: to glorify the name of the Lord and accomplish His will. But it is wrong to build that platform ourselves. Even Christ did not glorify Himself:

And no one can become a high priest simply because he wants such an honor. He must be called by God for this work, just as Aaron was.

Hebrews 5:4

Before you call yourself a prophet or an apostle, remember the ones who carried those names first. Church tradition holds that Isaiah was sawn in half and that Peter was crucified upside down. They built no megachurches, yet they turned the world upside down. Today many people appoint themselves apostles, prophets, bishops, or pastors without understanding the weight of those titles. Never reduce your calling to a means of profit. Your calling belongs to God.

When you draw your identity from your calling rather than from God's unconditional love for you, you will be preoccupied with performance instead of resting in His love. If you need your function in the Body of Christ to validate you, you will grow weary chasing power. But when you fall in love with God and stay focused on pleasing Him, your reward will be knowing Him, and your function will be a byproduct of being in love, not of being recognized by people.

I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.

Genesis 15:1 (NKJV)

Pride, the Trojan Horse

You can't conquer what you don't confront, and you can't confront what you don't identify.

In the old story, Troy did not fall to an army at the gate. It fell to a gift the city wheeled in itself. Pride works the same way. It rarely storms the walls. It slips in looking like a reward: a bigger stage, a more accurate word, more people asking for your prayers. Pride is the Trojan horse of

spiritual warfare, and if you are not willing to face it head on, it will shipwreck your faith.

God has promised to pour out His Spirit on all people so that sons and daughters will prophesy (Acts 2:17). We can all prophesy. But the strength and accuracy of our gift will be shaped by how self-aware we are about what we picked up along the way, and by how we steward the anointing.

Rick Joyner's allegory *The Final Quest* contains a scene I think every leader should read. In his vision, Joyner meets a "general" in the faith in heaven, a man who had built a large organization and had considerable influence on earth. The general apologizes to him. He confesses that insecurity made him want to control everyone around him, that he looked for faults in those he could not control so he could justify rejecting them, and that he drove away many of the very people God had sent him to father. His summary is chilling:

> *"I esteemed my ministry more than I did the people for whom it was given to me."*
>
> **Rick Joyner, *The Final Quest***

I see in that general a picture of what an unguarded anointing becomes. It does not always end in a scandal. Sometimes it simply ends in a large ministry and a long line of wounded sons and daughters who never got a father. In that heavenly scene, what looked like success on earth looked very different in eternity.

Eyes on Him

If I could give you one rule for the prophetic ministry, it would be this: eyes on Him.

Not eyes on the gift. Not eyes on the platform, the accuracy, the title, or the crowd. Not even eyes on the falls of others, as if watching them closely enough will keep you from your own. Every person we have looked at in

these two chapters began with their eyes on God. Uzziah sought the Lord. Solomon asked for wisdom. Samson was set apart from birth. The drift always began the same way: their attention moved from the Giver to the gift.

> *We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.*
>
> **Hebrews 12:2**

Here is the hope. You do not have to be strong enough to survive the anointing on your own. You only have to stay close enough to the One who gave it. Authority is a relationship, and relationship is something God freely offers to anyone who will come. The same Jesus who will one day say "I never knew you" to some who prophesied is right now inviting you to know Him. Sit at His feet like Mary. Ask Him, like Moses, to show you His ways. Let Him make you small in your own eyes again.

The gift will open doors. Only intimacy will keep you standing once you walk through them.

For the Road

1. Of the four words (gift, calling, anointing, authority), which one have you been leaning on most? What would it look like to invest in the one you've neglected?
2. Where have you started to believe that the rules are for other people, like Uzziah walking into the Temple? Is there a boundary God has drawn that you have been testing?
3. If your title, platform, or ministry were taken away tomorrow, what would be left of your relationship with God?

The anointing will take you places, but only intimacy will keep you there.

Chapter 15

Prophets or Performers?

> *If they had stood before me and listened to me, they would have spoken my words, and they would have turned my people from their evil ways and deeds.*
>
> **Jeremiah 23:22**

What do Hollywood and Christian culture have in common?

More than we would like to admit. The word *hypocrite* comes from the Greek *hypokrites*, an actor, a stage player. When Jesus warned about hypocrisy, He was talking about people who performed. They prayed on street corners and gave where they could be seen, and they got exactly what they were after: applause. One paraphrase puts His warning this way:

> *Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding.*
>
> **Matthew 6:1 (MSG)**

Every prophetic voice has to settle this. Am I standing before God to hear what He is saying, or before people to see how they respond?

A church that values entertainment over character will make actors instead of disciples.

Here is the question underneath all the others: Do you value the presence of the Lord over validation from human platforms? Your answer will show whether you fear God or fear man.

A Gift or a Mantle

Everyone gets to play (Chapter 4). Some carry a prophetic gift, and fewer carry the office of a prophet. So what is the difference between someone with a prophetic gift and someone who carries a prophetic mantle?

A list like this can become a ladder people try to climb. Please don't read it that way. These are marks to recognize, not rungs to grab:

1. **Wilderness trained.** Unusual hardships and persecutions. If people knew the thorns and thistles that come with this path, most would run for the hills.
2. **Ability to duplicate the prophetic ministry in others.** Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 Kings 2:9). A mantle reproduces. It raises sons and daughters, not fans.
3. **Dreams, visions, visitations or trances from God confirming the office.** "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).
4. **Confirmation from Church leaders.** Jesus Himself bore witness to John: "Yes, and he is more than a prophet" (Matthew 11:9). Paul's "two or three witnesses" (2 Corinthians 13:1) is more a biblical principle than a command, but it is a wise one.
5. **Commissioned by the Lord.** Not self-appointed. You will see three things: anointing, character, and accuracy. "As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him, and everything Samuel said proved to be reliable" (1 Samuel 3:19).
6. **Unoffended (good forgivers).** In Jesus' parable, the unforgiving servant was handed over to be tortured (Matthew 18:34), and it is hard

to hear God clearly while you are being tormented.

7. **Tremble at His Word.** "I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts, who tremble at my word" (Isaiah 66:2). Humility, contrition, and love for God's Word (2 Kings 22:11).
8. **Zeal for His house (passion).** "Passion for God's house will consume me" (John 2:17).
9. **He is your reward (the one thing).** "The one thing I ask of the LORD" (Psalm 27:4). You can walk in your assignment and miss intimacy with God. Don't confuse ministry effectiveness with relationship.
10. **Burden for His heart (brokenness).** Paul felt a godly jealousy for the Church, "for I promised you as a pure bride to one husband—Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). A prophet carries what the Bridegroom feels for His Bride.
11. **The anointing that breaks the yoke.** "The yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing" (Isaiah 10:27, KJV). God's word through a true prophet is "like a mighty hammer that smashes a rock to pieces" (Jeremiah 23:29).
12. **Submitted to community and accountability.** The Roman officer understood faith because he understood authority: "I am under the authority of my superior officers" (Matthew 8:9). Those who carry authority have learned to live under it.

When you are walking in forgiveness, you are a broken vessel, not a bitter one.

Notice how few of these marks are about the platform. Jeremiah Johnson put it well:

"When prophetic voices are not trained in hiddenness, they constantly crave visibility. They hunger to be commissioned when they need to be consecrated."

Jeremiah Johnson

Prophetic voices that reject community and accountability should not be trusted as ambassadors of the Kingdom.

False Words or False Prophets?

The prophetic gift does not equal obedience. A person can give accurate words and have inaccurate character. And a true prophet can give a word that does not come to pass the way people expected.

Jonah walked into Nineveh shouting, "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" (Jonah 3:4). Forty days came and went, and the city stood, because Nineveh repented. Jonah was not a false prophet. Balaam, on the other hand, prophesied accurately. When King Balak paid him to curse Israel, he blessed them instead, just as God told him to (Numbers 22–24). Yet Scripture remembers him as a wicked man. His words were right, and his heart was wrong.

Moses warned that even a sign that comes true can be used to lead people after other gods. "The LORD your God is testing you to see if you truly love him with all your heart and soul" (Deuteronomy 13:3). Accuracy alone was never the test. Direction was. Does this voice lead me closer to Jesus or away from Him?

False words don't always equal false prophets, but false words will always give rise to false expectations.

Balaam's Open Door

Balaam could not curse Israel. He admitted it himself:

> *But how can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I condemn those whom the LORD has not condemned?*
>
> **Numbers 23:8**

So he found another way. Jesus later named it in His letter to the church at Pergamum:

> *But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin.*
>
> **Revelation 2:14**

God's covering over His people is strong when they walk with Him. But unrepentant sin, and sexual sin in particular, defiles the body that is His temple (1 Corinthians 6:18–19) and gives the enemy a foothold (Ephesians 4:27). Prophetic people need to hear this, because the same sensitivity that helps us feel what God feels can leave us vulnerable when our emotional needs go unmet.

The enemy who cannot curse you from the outside will try to get you to open the door from the inside.

If that door is open in your life, hear me as a father and not a judge. The blood of Jesus is stronger than any foothold. Confess it, renounce it, and bring it into the light with someone you trust. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Deliverance begins when we close the door and stand on what Christ has already done (Colossians 2:15).

Not every attack means an open door, though. I sort the weapons formed against us into three kinds, Calling, Curse & Consequences:

- **Calling:** attacks and spiritual warfare birthed through a divine calling. These trials often validate and purify the call and sharpen our

dependence on God (1 Peter 4:12–13).

- **Curse:** an open door because of sins and lies we embraced from the enemy. Bondage usually follows concession. Freedom requires honest confession and removing the access point (James 4:7–8).
- **Consequences:** living in a fallen world. Some pain is simply the fallout of brokenness and other people's choices, and it calls for wise endurance (Romans 8:20–22).

Knowing which one you face keeps you from rebuking the devil for something God is using, or calling "persecution" what needs repentance.

Tickle Ears or Convict Hearts

Jeremiah 23 may be the most sobering chapter in the Bible for anyone who says, "Thus says the Lord." Jeremiah wrote it with a broken heart and trembling bones (Jeremiah 23:9). He saw that the prophets of Jerusalem were "even worse" than the prophets of Samaria who prophesied in the name of Baal: "They commit adultery and love dishonesty. They encourage those who are doing evil so that no one turns away from their sins" (Jeremiah 23:14). Then he delivered God's warning to the people:

> *Do not listen to these prophets when they prophesy to you, filling you with futile hopes. They are making up everything they say. They do not speak for the LORD! They keep saying to those who despise my word, "Don't worry! The LORD says you will have peace!" And to those who stubbornly follow their own desires, they say, "No harm will come your way!"*
>
> **Jeremiah 23:16–17**

Then the question that should search all of us: "Have any of these prophets been in the LORD's presence to hear what he is really saying?" (Jeremiah 23:18).

These prophets were not short on words. They were short on presence. Ezekiel saw the same thing: prophets saying "All is peaceful" when there is no peace, painting whitewash over a flimsy wall (Ezekiel 13:10). Paul warned of a day when people would look for teachers "who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3).

God named three marks of false prophets in that chapter. They steal messages from each other (Jeremiah 23:30). They tell dreams that come from their own imagination (Jeremiah 23:25–28). And they use the phrase "prophecy from the LORD" to "give authority to their own ideas" (Jeremiah 23:36). Then He drew the line:

> *"Let these false prophets tell their dreams, but let my true messengers faithfully proclaim my every word. There is a difference between straw and grain! Does not my word burn like fire?" says the LORD. "Is it not like a mighty hammer that smashes a rock to pieces?"*
>
> **Jeremiah 23:28–29**

A prophetic voice embraces the challenge of being a hearer and a doer of God's Word. A Pharisee reads it but does not live it, and uses it as a tool for manipulation instead of sanctification. Jesus said of the religious leaders, "they don't practice what they teach" (Matthew 23:3).

A prophetic voice without prayer is like a cloud that brings no rain.

When prophetic voices seek power and popularity instead of integrity and intimacy with God, their words start to sound more like self-help books and horoscopes than the word of the Lord.

Echo-Chamber Prophets

An echo chamber is a social environment where a person only hears opinions that reflect and reinforce their own, until they are closed off to anything different. The Church can build these too. When we only keep company with people who think exactly as we do, we create echo chambers of theology, and our prophets learn to prophesy only what the room already believes.

That is the temptation to prophesy only positive words. It feels kind, and it keeps the invitations coming. But it is the very thing Jeremiah wept over.

God isn't looking for an echo in this hour. He is looking for voices that have sat in His presence and received His counsel.

He wants witnesses whose words come like tongues of fire and leave hearts burning.

Never settle for the counterfeit peace that comes from compromising to please people. Choose the division and persecution that may come from fulfilling the purposes of God.

Prophets for Profit

Jude described false teachers with three names from the Old Testament: "For they follow in the footsteps of Cain, who killed his brother. Like Balaam, they deceive people for money. And like Korah, they perish in their rebellion" (Jude 1:11). Peter called it following "the footsteps of Balaam" (2 Peter 2:15). They are anointed but not authorized. Jude calls them "clouds blowing over the land without giving any rain" (Jude 1:12).

Money is not the only profit. Some prophesy for invitations or followers. The root is the same: the spirit of Jezebel and the spirit of Saul, control and the need to be seen.

Prophets for profit run to platforms, lights, and stages because they love the praises of men more than the presence of God.

Jesus gave us the test in one sentence: "Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1). Do we minister to serve or to be seen?

Trophies over Truth

When I played in the NFL, we had to run three 300-yard shuttles with two minutes of rest between them. As a lineman, you had to hit each one in under a minute. The test was not punishment. It enforced a standard so nobody would cut corners on being in shape.

The Church needs the same in the prophetic. Without clear standards, people drift, because biblical discipline conflicts with the flesh. Paul told Timothy that leaders who keep on sinning should be corrected publicly, as a warning to others (1 Timothy 5:20). And God's plan for His priests was that "they will teach my people the difference between what is holy and what is common" (Ezekiel 44:23).

Once, prophets were known for calling out sin and living in obscurity. Today too many are known for covering up sin and living in luxury.

When we lower the standard to protect the gifted, we trade truth for trophies. Standards applied with love produce maturity and protect the vulnerable.

Celebrated or Consecrated

Someone once wrote that if you want to be celebrated and adored, don't join the prophetic ministry. People will slander you and think the worst of you. Ministry is not your place of celebration. It is your place of death, burial, and resurrection.

Vance Havner said it even more plainly:

> *"Popularity has slain more prophets of God than persecution ever did."*
>
> **Vance Havner**

The spotlight we crave for personal pleasure often becomes the same spotlight that crucifies us publicly.

Prophetic voices are subject to compromise when the desire to be celebrated takes priority over the hunger to be consecrated.

Jeremiah Johnson named the difference between the two:

> *"There are too many trying to shine their lamps publicly, who don't burn privately."*
>
> **Jeremiah Johnson**

Nine Things That Can Hinder the Prophetic Ministry

1. **Lack of Character.** Saul learned too late that obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22–23).
2. **Need to Be Seen and Recognized.** Seeking human validation breeds hypocrisy, like the Pharisees praying on street corners (Matthew 6:1, 5).
3. **Weak Theology Distorts Effectiveness.** "My people are being destroyed because they don't know me" (Hosea 4:6). Ahab's four

hundred prophets chose flattery over truth (1 Kings 22).

4. **Failure to Take Responsibility for Fleshly Words.** Saul blamed the people for his disobedience (1 Samuel 15:20–21).
5. **Resisting Godly Authority.** True prophets honor accountability (Hebrews 13:17). David would not lift his hand against Saul (1 Samuel 24:6).
6. **Yielding to the Pressure to Perform.** Showmanship turns ministry into entertainment (Galatians 1:10). Simon the Sorcerer wanted power for fame (Acts 8:18–19).
7. **Mistaking Personal Opinion for a Divine Word.** Hananiah announced that God would break Babylon's yoke, and God had not said it (Jeremiah 28).
8. **Rejection and Insecurity.** Unhealed wounds breed self-focused ministry. Yet God's power works best in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9), and Jeremiah's loneliness became a channel for God's voice.
9. **Lowering Prophetic Standards.** Amos refused to soften God's message (Amos 7:14–16). The prophets of Jeremiah's day cried "peace" without repentance.

Pitfalls on the Road

Here are twenty-four pitfalls that pull prophetic integrity off the road. Read them slowly and let the Holy Spirit point.

1. **Carnal Stereotypes vs. Spiritual Discernment.** The Lord looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).
2. **Ministry of Reconciliation vs. Ministry of Recklessness.** Prophecy strengthens, encourages, and comforts (1 Corinthians 14:3).
3. **Competition Focus vs. Conviction Driven.** Competition breeds suspicion (1 Timothy 6:4). Celebrate others' success.
4. **Friend of God vs. Simon the Sorcerer.** Test the spirits (1 John 4:1).

5. **The Holy Spirit vs. The Pigeon.** God gives power, love, and self-discipline, not fear (2 Timothy 1:7).
6. **Toxic Empathy.** Protecting feelings at the cost of truth (see Chapter 9).
7. **Malicious Truth.** Truth used to wound or control (see Chapter 9).
8. **A Critical Spirit.** Harsh judgments often reveal our own blind spots.
9. **Frustration & Bitterness.** Unprocessed rejection hardens and taints the word.
10. **Anger.** Unmet expectations corrupt the message.
11. **Pride.** True prophecy points to Christ, not the prophet's reputation.
12. **Prophetic Control.** Be content if the word is heard and you get no credit.
13. **Rebellion.** Speak faithfully under healthy submission.
14. **Manipulation.** Don't "help" a word come to pass through condemnation, control, or criticism.
15. **Misuse of Power.** Follow Jesus' restraint, not the urge to shame or punish.
16. **Temptation to Prophesy Politics.** Agreement among many voices does not guarantee accuracy.
17. **Jealousy.** Die to self-glory and cultivate the fear of the Lord.
18. **Sexual Immorality.** Keep discipline, accountability, and clear boundaries.
19. **Excusing Mistakes.** Owning errors builds trust.
20. **Calling Out People's Sins Publicly.** Follow Matthew 18 and confront privately first.
21. **The Love of Money.** Beware of bending words toward those who pay or flatter.
22. **People Pleasing.** Seek God's approval above human praise.
23. **Confusing Wisdom and Prophecy.** Label clearly what is revelation and what is good advice.

24. **Ministry Bubbles.** Love for your own culture or tribe can blind you to its sins.

After any word, ask: Did the Spirit of Truth show up and set the captive free, or did a spirit of condemnation show up and leave confusion behind?

Here I Am, Send Me

None of this is meant to scare you away from the prophetic. It is meant to scare the performer out of all of us. God is not looking for polished actors. He is looking for messengers who have stood in His council.

When Isaiah saw the Lord, he did not ask for a stage. He confessed his unclean lips and let the coal touch his mouth. Then:

> *Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me."*
>
> **Isaiah 6:8**

That is still His question. And there is still a place for every hidden, trembling, broken, unoffended heart that will answer it.

For the Road

1. Look at the twelve marks of the prophetic office. Which ones are about your heart, and which have you been tempted to treat as a platform?
2. Do you tend to want words that tickle your ears or words that convict your heart? Who in your life is allowed to tell you the truth?
3. Which of the nine hindrances or twenty-four pitfalls did the Holy Spirit highlight for you? What is one step of repentance or accountability you can take this week?

God is not looking for performers who shine in public. He is looking for messengers who burn in private.

Part Five

The Refiner's Fire

Why does the road to the prophetic run through the fire?

Chapter 16

Run with Horses

> *If racing against mere men makes you tired, how will you race against horses? If you stumble and fall on open ground, what will you do in the thickets near the Jordan?*
>
> **Jeremiah 12:5**

I played football for twenty-one years. High school, college, and the NFL.

My body reads like a map of every play. Concussions. Torn ligaments. Aching joints. Nights when sleep gets stolen by pain. People ask me all the time, "Was it worth it?"

There were seasons when the weight felt beyond my strength, when regret was something I could almost touch and life felt unbearably heavy. If you measure the answer by contracts, scoreboards, and the applause of a stadium, I'm not sure what I would say.

But Paul gave me another way to measure it. Writing to the Corinthians about a season when he was crushed beyond his ability to endure and expected to die, he said that "as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:9).

That changed the question for me. "Was it worth it?" became less about what football gave me and more about what the crushing produced in me: dependence on God, humility, compassion for others who suffer, and a refusal to measure my life by success, fame, or comfort. If learning to run with horses required the Refiner's Fire, and if the desperation drove me to lay down my pride and trust the Father of Lights, then even the

injuries and the limp bear testimony to grace. Temporary pain, eternal glory.

Sometimes it feels like God is destroying you, when in reality He is developing you.

That's why we don't trust what we feel. We trust what we know. We know God is a promise keeper, and what He has planned, no man or demon can crush.

Job knew something about this. He had lost everything, and he could not find God anywhere he looked: east, west, north, or south. Yet he refused to let the silence have the last word.

> *But he knows where I am going. And when he tests me, I will come out as pure as gold.*
>
> **Job 23:10**

God asked Jeremiah the question this chapter is named for. If the footmen wear you out, what will you do when the horses come? It was not a taunt. It was training. The Lord was telling His young prophet that the road ahead would be harder than the road behind, and He was building in him the strength to run it.

Where Our Dreams End and God's Begins

I finished my senior season in college thinking my future was secured. Then the next few months hit me like a freight train.

A high ankle sprain left me limping into the NFL Combine, unable to work out. During my medical assessment, the doctors clustered around the X-ray of my knee, and I watched their faces. One of them said it bluntly: "Arthritis of a seventy-year-old." My agent later told me half the teams had taken me off their boards. "We'll just have to wait and see," he said.

I remember driving my car, a young man with my palms tight on the wheel, afraid that everything I had worked for was slipping away. A Fred Hammond song about God ordering our steps came on the radio, and it felt like it had been written for that very moment. The chorus steadied me when panic tried to take over.

Years later, a scene from one of the X-Men films kept coming back to me. An older Professor Xavier sits across from his younger self, who is angry and hollowed out by betrayal and loss. The older man doesn't lecture him. He tells him that the pain he is running from can make him stronger if he will stop running and feel it, and he pleads with him, "We need you to hope again."

That scene used to feel like a prayer. I wished I could sit across from an older version of myself and ask why life was so hard. But one day, in the middle of that memory, the Lord interrupted my thoughts and took me back to that young man in the car. I remember the conversation like this.

"Why did this happen to me?" I asked.

There was a pause. It wasn't empty. It was present. Then a quiet answer: "Not everything that happens is against you, son. Some things are for Me to shape you."

"I worked for this," I said, edging toward anger. "I studied. I sacrificed. I don't understand why it's being taken from me."

"You earned things, but without Me they would have fallen apart. You do not carry the whole future. I have ordered your steps long before you knew to call upon Me. Commit your ways to Me. Give Me the fear, give Me the plans you can't control, and I will direct your path."

Tears came then, unexpected. "So what do I do now?"

"Do the next right thing. Trust. Listen. Follow My voice, not toward certainty in the outcome, but toward Me. I will meet you in the waiting."

You could not have told me, or those doctors, that about twelve seasons in the NFL were on the horizon, and that I would never miss a single practice or game because of that arthritic knee. In that moment I was terrified my labor had been in vain. I didn't yet see that the end of my plans was the beginning of God's.

That is what repentance really is. It is the place where our dreams end and His begin. The movie taught me about hope. The conversation with God in the car taught me how to live it: not as a guarantee that my plans would always work out, but as a daily choice to trust, commit, and keep walking when the path is unclear.

> *Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you.*
>
> **Psalm 37:5**

One verse kept echoing through my memory like a confirmation:

> *I have refined you, but not as silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering.*
>
> **Isaiah 48:10**

What felt like the end of my dream was the beginning of His work in me. The fire changed the shape of the dream and deepened my dependence, so that when doors opened again, I walked through them with a faith and endurance I might never have had otherwise.

The end of your plan may be the first page of His.

What You Misdiagnose, You Will Mistreat

There is a woman in Scripture who understood the furnace better than most of us ever will.

Hannah was loved by her husband, Elkanah, but she had no children. His other wife, Peninnah, had sons and daughters, and year after year, when the family went up to worship at Shiloh, Peninnah provoked her bitterly. Elkanah gave Hannah a double portion because he loved her, but the Scripture says plainly that "the LORD had closed her womb" (1 Samuel 1:5–6). So Hannah wept and would not eat.

Then her husband asked her a question:

> *Hannah, why do you weep, and why do you not eat, and why is your heart sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?*
>
> **1 Samuel 1:8 (NASB)**

When I read that, I hear the voice of our Savior. "Why do you weep? Am I not better than ten sons?"

We all have "sons" we are waiting for. A career. Recognition. Marriage. Children. Health. A restored relationship. Justice. Influence. And in seasons of denial, the enemy will tempt us to let the facts of our circumstances distract us from the truth of God's goodness and His unchanging, beautiful character.

Here is the danger. What you misdiagnose, you will mistreat. If you misdiagnose God's refining as God's rejection, you will treat Him like an enemy. You will treat the people around you like rivals. You will treat your own heart like a failure. Hannah's closed womb was not a sign that she was forgotten. It was the soil where Samuel would be born.

Being favored by God can feel a lot like being forgotten by everyone else.

God's ways are higher and wiser than ours. That is why so many people who are deeply favored and marked for His purposes carry heavier crosses and more painful thorns. I sometimes picture it like this. It is almost as if, before time began, there was a room full of people, and God

asked, “Who will say yes to the crucible of pain, to rejection, betrayal, and life’s injustices, so that their love for Me will remain the one thing, their most cherished prize?” And without hesitation the hungry and faithful raised their hands. “Yes, Lord. Send me. Whatever the price, I will follow You to the end, as long as the oil of brokenness and the power of Your Spirit give me strength, wisdom, and endurance.”

That is the pattern of the Refiner’s Fire all through the Bible. God takes human pain, desperation, and disappointment and turns it into divine purpose through costly surrender. You see it in Hannah’s tear-filled, wordless prayer. In Job’s cry after losing his children and his livelihood. In Joseph’s faithfulness after his own brothers betrayed him. In Leah’s ache of feeling unloved. In the Canaanite woman who refused to take offense when everything looked hopeless. In Paul’s surrender in weakness. And above all in Jesus, who faced the cross and prayed, “Not my will.”

Every one of them came out of the furnace singing the anthem Joseph sang to the brothers who sold him:

> *You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.*
>
> **Genesis 50:20**

The Refiner’s Fire Train

The Lord once showed me a picture that has stayed with me ever since.

I saw a train riding toward eternity, its engine blazing with holy fire. “This is My Refiner’s Fire train,” He said. “It’s for those who want all of Me. No half-hearted riders.”

The passengers were the Remnant, His end-times Church, and they climbed aboard with tears and cheers, ready to change the world. At first

they sang, “We’ll follow the Lamb wherever He leads!” But as the train moved on, the heat rose along with the cost of discipleship. Trials and disappointment seared their skin. Persecution and rejection rattled their bones. Some began to cry out, “Why does it hurt so much? Why have we lost so many friends and loved ones along the way?”

Then the train pulled into a stop, a city called Comfort, Compromise, and Convenience. A crowd stumbled off, gasping, “This isn’t what we signed up for! Where’s the prosperity? Where’s the easy victory?”

The Divine Conductor stepped down. His voice was gentle but unyielding. “You say you love Me, but you run from My purifying fire. Don’t you know I am an all-consuming fire? To follow Me is to deny yourself and pick up your cross.” Then He turned to those who remained, their faces weary but their eyes fixed on Him, and said, “You are the ones I’ve written in My scroll of remembrance. You are My treasured possession.”

Some who had left looked back, weighed down by shame, and a few crawled back on board, whispering, “We’ll choose the Refiner’s fire over the temporary pleasures of this world.” Others hardened their hearts and went chasing shadows of safety.

Inside the train, the faithful huddled together and bandaged one another’s wounds. “Remember the early church?” one said. “They shared everything, even their pain.” The flames melted their pride, their greed, and their fear of man, until nothing remained but a raw, desperate love for Jesus. “Don’t quit now,” they told one another. “The pain is purifying us.”

When the train reached the edge of heaven, the Conductor flung open the doors, and light exploded into a place where every tear and every sacrifice finally made sense. “Welcome home,” He said. “You didn’t just ride the Refiner’s Fire. You endured it, and it became a fire of passion within you.”

I see in that train a picture of what God is doing with His people right now. His fire is not here to punish us. It is here to consume what is not of Him and purify what is, and to make us dangerous to the kingdom of darkness.

Jesus never hid the fine print. He promised that everyone who leaves house, family, or property for His sake will receive a hundred times as much in this life, and then He added three words we like to skip: "along with persecution" (Mark 10:30). The hundredfold is real. It is a new family, a shared inheritance, a home in the household of God. But it comes with a cross.

We want revival without repentance, power without persecution, and a crown without a cross.

New Stories Cost Too Much

During my early years in the NFL, I had a mentor I'll call Adam. His shelves overflowed with journals full of miracle stories and prophetic words from decades past. But I noticed that he never stepped out in the prophetic in the present. Whenever I asked for a new story, he would shake his head and change the subject.

One day I finally asked him straight out. "I've noticed you never step out to operate in the prophetic anymore. Why did you stop?"

He sighed. "Because new stories cost too much."

"What do you mean?"

"The warfare became too strong."

He told me about a time he prayed for a sick boy who recovered. Afterward, terrible things followed: nightmares, a sudden job loss, problems in his family. "When you walk in the prophetic," he said, "darkness fights back. It's a lot of warfare, and I grew tired."

“But you changed people’s lives!” I said.

“Yes,” he said quietly, “but the price was too heavy.”

Over time we drifted apart. He gave himself to teaching young people about purpose and serving in schools, which is good and honorable work. But I was hungry for Acts 2. I wanted to live the Scriptures in the present tense, not only read about them in the past. And as the years went on, I learned he was right about the warfare. It is real. Yet once you’ve tasted the prophetic path, ordinary life without His voice feels shallow. Hearing God had become more vital to me than comfort.

The prophetic path has more altars and crosses than stages and platforms.

> *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*
>
> **Galatians 6:9 (NIV)**

If You Don’t Quit, You Win

In 1952, Florence Chadwick stepped into the icy water off Catalina Island, determined to swim to the California coast. The fog was so thick she could barely see the boats following her. The current was against her, and there were sharks in the water.

She swam for about fifteen hours. Then she began to doubt. Her mother and her trainer, riding in the boats beside her, kept urging her on, but all she could see was fog. Finally, exhausted in body and mind, she asked to be pulled out. Only afterward did she learn the shore had been less than half a mile away.

The next day she told reporters, “All I could see was the fog.”

Two months later she got back in the water. The same thick fog rolled in. This time she made it, and by most accounts she broke the record for that

crossing. She said that while she swam, she kept a picture of the shoreline in her mind.

Florence did not fail because the water was too cold or the distance too long. She stopped because she lost sight of the shore. That is why revival so often tarries in our lives. Most of us are not defeated by the enemy. We are discouraged by the fog.

You don't need to see the shore to reach it. You need to know it's there.

Why Are Things So Hard?

God knows how deeply the human heart wants to avoid pain. But there is great wisdom in learning to discern when hard things are the very tools He is using. Here are a few of the passages about the Refiner's Fire I carry with me:

- **Proverbs 17:3.** Fire tests the purity of silver and gold, but the Lord tests the heart.
- **Malachi 3:3.** He sits like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. A refiner sits close to the fire. He does not walk away from the metal.
- **Zechariah 13:9.** He brings His people through the fire, refines them like silver, and they call on His name, and He answers.
- **Psalm 66:12.** "We went through fire and flood, but you brought us to a place of great abundance."
- **Psalm 119:71.** "My suffering was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your decrees."
- **Acts 9:16.** The Lord told Ananias He would show Paul "how much he must suffer for my name's sake."
- **1 Peter 1:7.** Your faith is being tested "as fire tests and purifies gold," and it is far more precious than gold.

Sometimes the fire comes to transform our hearts for His purpose (Malachi 3:3). Sometimes it teaches us to trust Him (Hebrews 12:11). Sometimes it is the cost of following Jesus (Luke 14:27), or the rejection that comes from doing what is right (John 15:18–20). If we run from every hardship to stay comfortable, we may miss becoming strong in faith and character. Jesus said that if you try to hang on to your life you will lose it, but if you give up your life for His sake and the sake of the Good News, you will save it (Mark 8:35).

Pain is never pointless in His hands. It burns away selfish ambition. It teaches us to lean on His wisdom instead of our own. It joins us to the sufferings of Jesus. What we lose here, a little temporary happiness, a little approval, a little ease, cannot compare with what He promises: a life with Him that never fades.

There is one more verse I love, because it shows how the story ends. After all the wilderness and all the fire, the Bride appears, and heaven asks:

> *Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?*
>
> **Song of Songs 8:5 (NKJV)**

She doesn't come out of the wilderness strutting. She comes out leaning. That is what the Refiner's Fire produces: not a strong person who no longer needs God, but a person who has learned to lean on Him with their whole weight. Those are the ones who run with horses.

For the Road

1. Is there an area of your life where you have misdiagnosed God's refining as God's rejection? How has that changed the way you treat Him and the people around you?
2. If you were on the Refiner's Fire train, what would tempt you to step off at the city of Comfort, Compromise, and Convenience?

3. What is the “shore” God has shown you that the fog is hiding right now? What would it look like to keep swimming toward it this week?

God isn’t destroying you. He’s developing you, so you can run with horses.

Chapter 17

The Reproach of the Prophetic

> *Jesus himself had said that a prophet is not honored in his own hometown.*
>
> **John 4:44**

Jeremiah Johnson was a young man fresh out of Bible college, newly married, and leading a college ministry, when he sensed God calling him to plant a church someday. He said so to his pastor. As he tells the story, the pastor answered with an ultimatum: if he ever wanted to plant a church within fifty miles, he was fired. He had twenty-four hours to decide.

He walked out of the building weeping. He couldn't eat for a day. The next morning he went back to the pastor and the board and told them honestly that he knew God had called him, though not for a few years, and he asked if they would help father him along the way. They refused and fired him on the spot. The following day he learned that the denomination he was licensed with was meeting to revoke his credentials. People were calling him a false prophet.

He sat in the parking lot outside that meeting and called his dad. "Why me?" he cried. He has never forgotten what his father told him:

> *"Son, you need this as part of your destiny. You must understand the sting of rejection and false accusation so that you never operate in this spirit and so that you will learn to father many gifted leaders rather than allowing your insecurities to reject them."*
>
> **Jeremiah Johnson**

He walked in and was stripped of his credentials. For two hours he was rebuked and accused, and the Lord told him to stay silent the whole time. Like a lamb led to the slaughter, he said nothing. And in that room, he says, the Holy Spirit began to minister to deep places in his heart like never before.

Anyone who has carried a word from God long enough knows that parking lot.

The prophetic ministry is not for the faint of heart or for those ruled by the fear of rejection.

The desire to please God and win the race of eternity has to be greater than the desire to fit in or please people. Jesus said a prophet is honored everywhere except at home. The people who know you best often find it hardest to receive God through you. That is not a sign you missed God. It may be a sign you are walking where He walked.

The Sauls in Your Life

Some of the hardest rejection comes from authority. David was anointed by Samuel, served Saul faithfully, played music to quiet the king's torment, and won his battles. His reward was a spear thrown at his head and years of running for his life (1 Samuel 18–26).

Here is what I've learned. God often uses opposition as part of the training. The people who resist you are not always your enemies, and the

season of opposition is not wasted. There are certain personalities you will almost surely face on the road to your prophetic destiny. I think of them as six characters from Scripture.

1. **A "Saul" (Oppressive Authority).** A person in power who feels threatened by your calling and tries to suppress your voice. Stay humble and honor authority (Romans 13:1), but obey God above all (Acts 5:29). See 1 Samuel 18–26.
2. **A "Judas" (Betrayer Close to You).** Someone near you who betrays your trust for gain, envy, or a hidden agenda. Discern motives (1 John 4:1), keep healthy boundaries, and trust God's sovereignty (Psalm 41:9; Matthew 26:14–16).
3. **An "Absalom" (Usurper).** A charming person who undermines your leadership to lift up themselves. Guard against your own pride (Proverbs 16:18), stay rooted in integrity, and let God defend your position (2 Samuel 15–18).
4. **A "Jezebel" (Intimidating Controller).** Someone who tries to silence you through fear, slander, or spiritual manipulation. Stand firm in your authority in Christ (James 4:7) and confront deception with truth (Revelation 2:20; 1 Kings 19:1–3).
5. **A "Korah" (Rebellious Challenger).** A person or group that rises to contest God-given authority, often in the name of equality or fairness. Uphold God's order and refuse rebellion yourself (Hebrews 13:17; Jude 1:11; Numbers 16).
6. **A "Delilah" (Honey Trap).** A temptation, whether a person, an ideology, or a compromise, aimed at weakening your focus and your purity. Guard your heart (Proverbs 4:23), run from lust (1 Corinthians 6:18), and stay loyal to your covenants (Judges 16:4–21).

Notice that every lesson on that list is about your heart, not theirs. You can't control a Saul. You can only refuse to become one.

A person who will not fight with you is a person who will not fight for you.

That is the strange mercy in conflict. The ones who are willing to wrestle with you honestly are often the ones who will stand with you when it counts.

Wreck-It Ralph and Fix-It Felix

There is an animated movie I keep coming back to when I think about prophets and pastors. Wreck-It Ralph is an arcade villain who is tired of always being the bad guy. For decades all the glory goes to Fix-It Felix, the good guy who repairs everything Ralph breaks. So Ralph sets out to win a trophy and prove he can be a hero. On his quest, he accidentally unleashes an enemy that threatens the whole arcade.

I see in Ralph a picture of a prophetic voice wounded by rejection, and in Felix a picture of a pastor or leader who has never had to learn what Ralph is for.

When we step out of our God-given role, the Church gets "out of order." Prophetic voices who struggle with rejection will be tempted to chase their own trophies to find affirmation in this world. And leaders who struggle with insecurity will be tempted to investigate prophetic voices instead of investing in them.

Insecure leaders investigate prophetic voices. Secure leaders invest in them.

By the end of the movie, Ralph embraces the role he was made for. He stops chasing trophies and uses the very thing that made him the "wrecker" to sacrifice for the arcade and save it. That acceptance heals his rejection. And Felix learns to build a relationship with him instead of keeping control. When prophets and leaders align with God's order

instead of colliding in rejection and insecurity, the Body thrives, the real enemy gets defeated, and everyone finds joy in their calling.

Sometimes the cost of discipleship is being the bad guy in someone else's story.

The Weight of Reproach

The prophets did not speak because it was pleasant. They spoke because they could not stay silent.

> *The lion has roared—so who isn't frightened? The Sovereign LORD has spoken—so who can refuse to proclaim his message?*
>
> **Amos 3:8**

Reproach is the weight of carrying God's word in a world that does not want it. I see four sources of that weight.

1. **The Problem of a Truth Claim.** To say "this is true because God has said it" will always clash with a culture that treats truth as personal and relative.
2. **Compromise in the Past that Brought Reproach to the Gospel.** Our own compromises and immature choices, intended or not, can give people reasons to mock the faith. Some of the reproach we carry, we earned. That calls for humility and repentance, not defensiveness.
3. **The Tendency of People Avoiding Speaking Truth Out of Fear of Rejection.** When we hold back what God has said because we fear ridicule or conflict, we lose authentic relationship and stunt our own growth and the growth of others.
4. **The Sin of Self-Righteousness.** Assuming moral superiority and judging others harshly instead of leaning on grace distorts the gospel, repels the very people God is seeking, and destroys a credible prophetic witness.

Someone once put it bluntly:

> *"If you want to be celebrated and adored, don't join the prophetic ministry! … The ministry is not your place of celebration and affirmation, it's your place of death, burial and resurrection!"*
>
> **Unknown**

Then Isaiah heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send?" and he said, "Here I am. Send me" (Isaiah 6:8). And Jesus said it is the meek, not the loud, who inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).

Authenticity over Acceptance

No prophet felt the weight of reproach more than Jeremiah. There are days when the call of God feels like buyer's remorse, that sinking regret after a costly purchase when you wonder if you made the wrong choice. Jeremiah had one of those days, and he said so out loud. He told God he felt misled, that he was mocked every day and had become a household joke. He wanted to quit. And then:

> *But if I say I'll never mention the LORD or speak in his name, his word burns in my heart like a fire. It's like a fire in my bones! I am worn out trying to hold it in! I can't do it!*
>
> **Jeremiah 20:9**

That is authenticity over acceptance. Jeremiah could not trade the fire in his bones for the approval of his neighbors.

Corey Russell has written that if we judge Jeremiah by results, we would probably call his life a failure. But heaven sees it differently:

"Jeremiah actually entered into God's tears; this was his success and his reward."

Corey Russell

When prophetic words only affirm your personal feelings, they may be closer to humanism than to the Kingdom of God. A true word will often challenge you and call you to real repentance. Jesus warned us to expect the response: "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first" (John 15:18).

When God's Word Is Treated Casually

"Zeal for my Father's house has consumed me." (John 2:17)

In high school, a player from the opposing team deliberately spit on our school logo at midfield. My football coach was deeply upset. To him it wasn't paint on a field; it represented something we were expected to honor.

At the time, I was only 15 and still immature. I struggled to keep from laughing, because I had not yet grasped the depth of disrespect that gesture conveyed. My coach saw what I couldn't see yet: when you love what a symbol stands for, you can't watch it be dishonored and shrug.

That moment raises a question I can't get away from. If disrespect toward a school emblem provokes such a strong response, what should happen within us when God's Word is dishonored, distorted, or dismissed?

Scripture answers that question again and again. Across the Bible, the people closest to God's heart responded the same way when His Word was rejected: they wept.

The Psalmist Wept

The psalmist didn't shrug. He wept because he loved God and understood the destruction that follows when His truth is rejected.

> *"Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed." (Psalm 119:136)*

His grief wasn't quiet sadness only. It was also holy indignation:

> *"I become furious with the wicked, because they reject your instructions." (Psalm 119:53) "Seeing these traitors makes me sick at heart, because they care nothing for your word." (Psalm 119:158)*

The psalmist was gripped with indignation and grief because people refused God's Word. Both reactions flowed from the same place: love for God and for what He has spoken.

The Prophets Wept

The prophets carried that same burden. Jeremiah cried, "Tears stream from my eyes because of the destruction of my people" (Lamentations 3:48). He wept over the people's sin, their destruction, and their pride (Jeremiah 9:1; 13:17).

In Ezekiel's vision, God gave a striking command:

> *"Walk through the streets of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of all who weep and sigh because of the detestable sins being committed in their city." (Ezekiel 9:4)*

God marked those who grieved over the detestable things committed among His people. Heaven noticed who still cared.

Kings and Leaders Wept

This grief wasn't limited to prophets on the margins. It reached the throne. When the Book of the Law was rediscovered in the temple, young King Josiah didn't treat it as a historical curiosity:

> *"When the king heard what was written in the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes in despair… For the LORD's great anger is burning against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words in this scroll. We have not been doing everything it says we must do." (2 Kings 22:11–13)*

Josiah humbled himself and wept when he realized how far the nation had departed from God's Word, and God took note of his tender heart (2 Kings 22:19).

Generations later, Ezra and the people wept as they confronted Israel's unfaithfulness (Ezra 10:1; Nehemiah 8:9).

> *"While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly." (Ezra 10:1)*

One man's grief became a nation's repentance.

Jesus Wept

Then we come to the Son of God Himself. Jesus wept over Jerusalem because the people rejected the truth standing before them (Luke 19:41–44).

> *"But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. 'How I wish today that you of all people*

would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes.'" (Luke 19:41–42)

The Word made flesh walked their streets, and they didn't recognize Him. Notice what moved Jesus to tears: not that He had been insulted, but that they were missing the way to peace.

Paul Wept

The pattern continued into the early church. Paul warned with tears about false teachers and those living as enemies of the cross (Acts 20:29–31; Philippians 3:18).

"For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ." (Philippians 3:18)

Why They Wept

The psalmist, Jeremiah, the faithful in Ezekiel's day, Josiah, Ezra, Jesus, and Paul all shared one thing: those who love God's Word do not remain indifferent when it is rejected.

Not because truth is fragile, but because they understand the consequences of refusing it. God's Word will stand forever whether anyone honors it or not. The tears are for the people who walk away from it and the destruction that follows.

Where Do We Stand?

That brings the question back to us.

Does it grieve us when Scripture is twisted to justify sin? Does it grieve us when correction is called hatred, accountability is treated as accusation, and obedience is portrayed as oppression?

Or have we become so accustomed to rebellion that it no longer moves us?

We need to be careful here. Biblical grief is not self-righteous outrage. It doesn't point fingers from a safe distance. It brings us to our knees, causes us to examine ourselves, and moves us to speak the truth in love. Josiah didn't say "they have not obeyed"; he said " we have not been doing everything it says." Real grief over sin always starts with our own hearts.

A Call to Weep Again

When God's people drifted in Joel's day, the prophet didn't call for a rally or a protest. He called for an assembly of weeping, beginning with those who ministered before the Lord:

> *"Let the priests, who minister in the LORD's presence, stand and weep between the entry room to the Temple and the altar. Let them pray, 'Spare your people, LORD! Don't let your special possession become an object of mockery. Don't let them become a joke for unbelieving foreigners who say, "Has the God of Israel left them?"'" (Joel 2:17)*

That call still stands for the church today, and for those of us who lead and teach.

Trembling at His Word

God has made a promise to the people who respond this way:

"I will bless those who are humble and contrite in spirit,
who tremble at my word." (Isaiah 66:2)

Many want to be blessed, but few want to stand in awe and tremble at the Word of God. Too often it's treated as a side note, forgotten and handled like just another book, while its authority and reliability are increasingly questioned, even within the church.

We need to bring back the trembling and the revelation of the divine Word of God, so the church can once again be what God called it to be.

At 15, I laughed at something my coach grieved over, because I didn't yet understand its worth. The question for each of us is whether we're still laughing, or simply numb, while God's Word is mocked, twisted, or ignored.

May God give us a zeal for His house and a reverence for His Word that grieves what grieves Him.

His Heavy Hand

David described a season when he said, "For day and night your hand was heavy upon me" (Psalm 32:4, ESV). The prophets knew that heavy hand too.

When God called Ezekiel, He told him to eat a scroll, and Ezekiel said "it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth" (Ezekiel 3:3). Then God warned him that Israel would not listen to him any more than they listened to God, and promised, "I have made your forehead as hard as the hardest rock!" (Ezekiel 3:9). Before Ezekiel said anything to anyone, the Lord added this:

Son of man, let all my words sink deep into your own heart first. Listen to them carefully for yourself.

Ezekiel 3:10

Then the Spirit lifted him up, and he went away in bitterness and in the heat of his spirit, with the hand of the Lord strong upon him, and he sat among the exiles overwhelmed (Ezekiel 3:14–15).

The word is sweet in the mouth and heavy in the heart. That is the divine burden. A few chapters later, God rebukes the prophets who whitewashed a crumbling wall and cried "peace" when there was no peace (Ezekiel 13:10). The whitewashers never felt the weight, because they never carried the word. The true prophet carries it first in his own heart.

Being lovesick for Jesus will always look like legalism to the lukewarm and the rebellious.

Pharaoh's Dungeon

Joseph had the dreams long before he had the palace. Between them was a pit, a slave market, a false accusation, and a prison.

In that prison he met two of Pharaoh's officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, both locked up because they had angered the king. Each had a dream on the same night. Joseph interpreted them. Within three days the cupbearer would be restored and put Pharaoh's cup back in his hand. Within three days the baker would be executed (Genesis 40).

I see in those two men a picture of two kinds of ministry passing through a prison season. Both are tested. Both are accused. One is found innocent and restored to serve wine in the presence of the King. The other is exposed, because there was poison in his bread.

The bread is a picture of the ministry of the Word: speaking, teaching, singing, writing. And the poison is a ministry that does not produce character and humility in God's family.

The prison season is how God tells the difference. Jesus said the wheat and the weeds grow together until the harvest (Matthew 13:30). Before the harvest they can look almost identical. But mature wheat bows low under the weight of its grain, while the weeds stand tall.

With maturity, true gifts lead to greater humility. With immaturity, gifts lead to pride.

The dungeon is also a test of perspective. Joseph could have believed he was rotting in Pharaoh's dungeon. Instead he served, interpreted, and waited, because he trusted that God was in the dark with him.

Your perspective will either become your prison or your passport to the palace.

A worship leader I've walked with once described it with the picture of a cocoon. The caterpillar hangs upside down for a couple of weeks while transformation happens in the dark, and what comes out can fly. The question in the dungeon is the same: do you believe the lie that you're stuck in Pharaoh's dungeon, or the truth that you're in a divine cocoon?

Trials of the Prophetic Path

Many prophetic people carry a kind of PTSD: prophetic traumatic stress disorder. Rejection leaves marks. And if we don't let God heal them, the wounds start to drive us.

Here is how it happens. Competition and personal insecurity pair up with suspicion and criticism, because insecurity makes a prophetic leader believe that God's sheep are his sheep. As a healthy prophetic voice, make sure you are empowering people, not controlling them. Don't build codependent relationships because you were rejected in the past and you're trying to make sure you can't be replaced.

The trials are not random. Paul received such wonderful revelations that he was given a thorn in the flesh "to keep me from becoming proud" (2 Corinthians 12:7). As the saying goes, new levels bring new devils. But God also gives revelation to carry us through the testing that is coming. Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9–10) led straight to a beating and a prison cell in Philippi (Acts 16:22–24), and the clarity of that call is what held him steady there. Joseph's dreams came before the pit. Samuel's oil was on David before Saul's spear. Revelation often comes before testing, so that the testing doesn't break us.

It's Good When You Know Who You Are Not

When the religious leaders sent priests to question John the Baptist, they kept asking who he was. Are you the Messiah? Are you Elijah? Are you the Prophet? His answers were short. "I am not the Messiah." "No." "No." Then he told them who he was: a voice shouting in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Lord, not even worthy to untie His sandals (John 1:19–27).

There is a freedom in knowing who you are not. John didn't need to defend a title, so he didn't need to defend himself. When James and John asked for the seats of honor, Jesus answered, "Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?"

(Matthew 20:22). The honor they wanted was on the other side of a cup they didn't understand.

When the reproach comes, and it will, you don't have to fight for your reputation.

> *The LORD himself will fight for you. Just stay calm.*
>
> **Exodus 14:14**

The Eagle

One night I woke up and saw an angel standing beside my bed. This was not a dream. I was fully awake. The longer I looked, the more detail I saw. His feathers were strikingly real, and he held a sword pointed downward. The last thing my eyes settled on was his face, and it startled me. It was the face of an eagle. I hadn't been thinking about the living creatures in Ezekiel 1 or Revelation 4, yet there he stood, resolute and unmoving.

Then I heard the Lord whisper, "He is there to protect you."

The intensity became overwhelming, and I turned on the light. He was gone. I opened my Bible and was reminded of the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant, guarding the glory of God. Under the new covenant, we are His temple, and the Holy Spirit lives within us. It was as if the Lord was reminding me that He still protects His glory, even when it is carried in jars of clay, even in broken vessels.

The eagle has become a lesson to me about the prophetic life. Eagles don't flap and strive in their own strength. They glide, yielding to the wind and letting it carry them. "Not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit," says the Lord (Zechariah 4:6). An eagle stands on the rock and waits for the wind, and when the wind comes, it steps off. That is faith. The eagle is also fierce and tender

at once, like the Lord who stirs up the nest and spreads His wings to carry His young (Deuteronomy 32:11). Eagles train their young to fly instead of keeping them dependent. True prophetic voices do the same.

If you are carrying the reproach of the prophetic right now, here is my word to you. You are not alone, and you are not unprotected. The same God who let Jeremiah burn, let Joseph sit in the dungeon, and let David run from Saul was guarding His glory in them the whole time. He is guarding it in you.

> *But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength.*
> *They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and*
> *not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.*
>
> **Isaiah 40:31**

For the Road

1. Who has been a "Saul" in your life? What would it look like to honor them without letting their rejection define you?

2. Are you more like Ralph chasing a trophy or Felix guarding control? Where is God asking you to invest instead of investigate?

3. Is your current season a dungeon or a cocoon? What would change if you believed it was the second?

Reproach is the price of the fire in your bones, and the God who lit it will carry you through it.

Chapter 18

Do Not Despise Small Beginnings

> *Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin.*
>
> **Zechariah 4:10**

Earlier in this book I told you about the first prophetic word I ever received, spoken by a woman in a small café while I finished my breakfast. I almost laughed at it. What I did not tell you is how long it took before I saw that kind of word operating in my own life.

It took eight years.

For years after that café, I sat in prayer, read the Word, and yielded to wise mentorship. I was unlearning the lies of the religious spirit I grew up with and relearning the gentle leadings of the Holy Spirit. There were seasons that felt barren. I knew the frustration of a well that seemed dry and the disappointment of chasing quick results that never came. So I stayed faithful in little things: daily disciplines, patient plans, quiet obedience. I tended a small community of believers, and for a long time it felt slow and lonely.

Then, in God's timing, the fruit came. What took eight years to cultivate began to bear fruit in eight days. I started seeing lives multiplied in ways I could not have engineered.

One Friday night, as new faces filled the room, someone leaned over and whispered, "It was all worth it, right?" I just smiled. I was thinking about

that café, and an old saying came to mind: you can count the seeds in an apple, but you cannot count the apples in a seed.

> **What took eight years to plant can bear fruit in eight days.**
>
> *If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones.*
>
> **Luke 16:10**

Don't Let an Amateur Discourage You

When I was a freshman in high school, a lot of parents told me I was not big enough to play football. Honestly, I was fine with that. I had a plan to play basketball in college, and I didn't like getting hit anyway. So when my choir teacher told me I should quit football, I wasn't discouraged at all. I went to my football coaches and told them I was quitting so I could focus on basketball and choir.

They laughed at me.

The people who actually knew the game saw something the others couldn't. The experts told me I could play at the next level, while the amateurs told me I wasn't big enough to play in high school. You know how that story ended, because I spent years in the NFL.

> **Don't let an amateur discourage you from your divine destiny.**

I think about growth in three stages:

- **Beginner.** Everyone starts here. There is no shame in it.
- **Amateur.** You have some ability, but you have settled. You stay at the same level year after year.
- **Teacher.** You have grown far enough that you can multiply yourself in others.

What separates these stages is not mainly talent. It is time, ability, and dedication to excellence, sustained over a long season. The beginner who won't stay with it usually drops out. The amateur stays where he is. The teacher keeps pressing in until what he carries can be handed to someone else.

The prophetic works the same way. Many people hear God once or twice, feel awkward, get corrected, and quietly drop out. Others learn just enough to be comfortable and stop growing. God is looking for sons and daughters who will keep going until they can pass it on.

Study and Practice. Years of It.

In the movie *Doctor Strange*, a brilliant and arrogant surgeon loses the use of his hands in a car crash. Medicine can't fix him, so he searches the world for a cure and ends up at the feet of a teacher called the Ancient One. He is skeptical and bitter. He wants a quick fix. At one point he asks her how he gets from where he is to where she is. She asks him how he learned to reattach severed nerves and rebuild a human spine. His answer is simple: "Study and practice. Years of it."

That is the answer for us too. We want the anointing to drop on us in one meeting. God usually grows it in us over years.

> *An inheritance obtained too early in life is not a blessing in the end.*
>
> **Proverbs 20:21**

Rick Joyner has pointed out that people often ask him to pray for them to receive his gift of writing, and he compares that to a student pilot asking for "the gift of piloting" by impartation. Would you fly with that pilot? You would want him to have the best training and thousands of hours in the air. Joyner says he believes in impartation, but even spiritual gifts are

given as seeds that have to be cultivated with patience and devotion. Then he adds a line that makes me laugh every time:

> *"I would love to have the gift to just pray for people and command them, 'Be mature!' That is one miracle that I cannot find anywhere in the Bible."*
>
> **Rick Joyner**

Scripture is full of this kind of patience. Let perseverance finish its work (James 1:4). Don't grow weary in doing good, because at the right time you will reap a harvest if you don't give up (Galatians 6:9). Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12). And when the vision seems slow, wait for it:

> *This vision is for a future time. It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place.*
>
> **Habakkuk 2:3**

The Company of the Prophets

There is a strange and wonderful story in 1 Samuel 19. David is running from Saul and goes to Samuel at a place called Naioth in Ramah. Saul sends soldiers to arrest him. When they arrive, they find Samuel leading a group of prophets who are prophesying, and the Spirit of God comes on the soldiers, and they start prophesying too. Saul sends a second group. Same thing. A third group. Same thing. Finally Saul goes himself, and on the way the Spirit comes on him, and he prophesies all the way to Naioth (1 Samuel 19:18–24).

I see in Naioth a picture of what I call the misunderstood significance of prophetic training. Samuel did not just prophesy. He built a company. And look at what that company produced:

- **A prophetic culture.** The atmosphere was so full of God that even people who came to do harm were overtaken by the Spirit. There is a synergy when hungry people gather. "As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend" (Proverbs 27:17).
- **Discipleship and mentorship.** Later in Scripture, the "sons of the prophets" trained under Elijah and Elisha, learning to discern God's voice and obey it (2 Kings 2–6). Wisdom was passed from Eli to Samuel, and from Samuel to the young leaders around him.
- **Honor and humility.** Jesus said, "If you receive a prophet as one who speaks for God, you will be given the same reward as a prophet" (Matthew 10:41). Honor unlocks what another person carries.
- **Accountability.** These schools were never solo acts. They lived together, worshiped together, and shared the same discipline.

Prophetic culture today still needs the same things: intentional training in prayer and Scripture, humility that keeps us teachable, and the death of the Lone Ranger mentality.

> *Instruct the wise, and they will be even wiser. Teach the righteous, and they will learn even more.*
>
> **Proverbs 9:9**

Prophetic people are not meant to grow alone. They are meant to grow in a company.

Your Gift Will Die with You

There is a story about John Paul Jackson, the late prophetic teacher, that has been passed around for years. As it's been told, he once interpreted a troubled man's dream with startling accuracy. The man asked him how he did it, and John Paul admitted he didn't really know. He just did. The man's reply stopped him cold: "When you die, your gift will die with you."

According to the story, that sentence changed the direction of his ministry. He spent the following years studying, praying, testing principles, and teaching, haltingly at first and then with clarity, until what had been an instinct became something he could hand to others. Whatever the exact details, the lesson is true. A spiritual gift is meant to be given away, not kept to yourself.

Have you ever noticed that great players often make some of the worst coaches? When you are highly gifted, you lean on natural ability. An average player has to master the fundamentals and build discipline just to get on the field, so he knows how to teach them. Skill and discipline can be taught. A gift can't. Many highly anointed prophetic people rely on their gifting and never master the disciplines they would need to pass it on. They know what to do but not how they do it.

This is also why so many gifted people don't survive their anointing. The gift is freely given, but character is cultivated through discipline and consistency.

A gift is given in a moment. A legacy is built over a lifetime.

Everyone gets to play. But if you are the one who has been playing the longest, part of your job is to teach the next person how.

Practical Ways to Grow in Your Prophetic Gift

Here are seven practical ways I have seen people grow in the prophetic. I keep them simple on purpose:

1. **Be Open to Correction [Humility].** Humility anchors prophetic integrity. Accepting correction refines your discernment and guards you against pride. "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).
2. **Maintain a History of Accurate Words [Accountability].** Consistency builds trust. Let your words be weighed (1 Corinthians

14:29), and keep track of what God has actually said through you.

3. **Steward Your Gift and Your Character [Integrity].** Character precedes calling. "You can identify them by their fruit" (Matthew 7:16).
4. **Test the Posture of Your Heart to Avoid Manipulation [Spirit of Jezebel].** Guard against motives that want to control or impress. A pure heart edifies; a manipulative one binds.
5. **Be an Asset, Not a Liability to the Body of Christ [Be a Blessing, Not a Burden].** A spiritual gift is given to each of us "so we can help each other" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Prophetic people should unify and build up, not divide and drain.
6. **Ground Your Prophecy in Scripture [Biblical Foundation].** All Scripture is inspired by God and equips us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Knowing the Word guards revelation from error.
7. **Avoid Self-Labeling as a Prophet [Let Others Affirm Your Calling].** In Antioch, it was the Holy Spirit speaking through a praying community who set Barnabas and Saul apart (Acts 13:1–3). Let God and His people name you.

And here are the everyday means God uses to grow the gift:

- **Prayer.** Prayer teaches us to recognize the Father's voice. If someone called me on the phone pretending to be my wife, would I know? Of course I would. When you spend a lot of time with someone, you learn their voice. "My sheep listen to my voice" (John 10:27).
- **The Bible.** The Word of God is the most prophetic book ever written.
- **Prophetic friends.** Ask questions. I was the annoying little brother who never stopped asking.
- **Good books.** A few that have shaped many people are Rick Joyner's *The Prophetic Ministry*, Jeremiah Johnson's *Cleansing and Igniting the Prophetic*, and Bill Hamon's *Prophets, Pitfalls and Principles*.

Finally, make the prophetic part of your normal life, not just something that happens in church meetings. “What you say flows from what is in your heart” (Luke 6:45). A prophetic lifestyle will always outlast a prophetic platform.

Hunger Is the Currency of Heaven

Paul knew something about athletes.

> *Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!*
>
> **1 Corinthians 9:24**

Most Christians are just trying to cross the finish line. Paul is telling us to run with first place in mind. That metaphor is not meant to stir up a spirit of competition. It is meant to stir up a spirit of excellence. So here’s the question: do we run the race of life just hoping to finish, or do we run to win?

Daniel was promoted over the whole kingdom “because an excellent spirit was in him” (Daniel 6:3, NKJV). That excellence grew in a man who prayed three times a day with his windows open toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10).

Michael Jordan once described how a young Kobe Bryant used to call and text him at all hours of the night, even three in the morning, asking about post moves and footwork. At first it was an aggravation. Then Jordan realized it was passion.

When it came to the prophetic, I had that same mentality. I was the annoying little brother with questions, and I never shut off. Once a prophetic friend of mine came into town, and I asked her, “What’s the most important point about the prophetic?” She said, “It’s the birthright of every believer.”

That answer still moves me. It's a birthright, so you don't have to earn it. But you do have to want it.

How can people sit under the same preaching, read the same books, and follow the same leaders, yet come out with completely different results? Because knowledge doesn't transform a person. Spiritual hunger does.

> *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*
>
> **Matthew 5:6 (NIV)**

Hunger is the currency of heaven.

"It is God's privilege to conceal things and the king's privilege to discover them" (Proverbs 25:2). God hides things for the hungry, not from them. So let me ask you what I ask myself. What have you sacrificed or inconvenienced yourself to get in the natural? Have you sought the Kingdom of God the same way?

Taking the First Step

People often ask me, "How do I start operating in the prophetic?"

If you ask your friends to name their favorite scene from the Indiana Jones movies, many will pick the one from *The Last Crusade* where Indy has to cross an invisible bridge. According to his map, the only way across is to step out into what looks like empty air. It is a literal leap of faith, trusting the support will be there when his foot comes down.

That is how a lot of powerful prophetic words get delivered. If you ask anointed people how they got where they are, the answer is usually the same. They walked by faith, not by sight. "For we live by believing and not by seeing" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

But what if I'm wrong?

That is the question that keeps most believers silent. Let me turn it around: what if you're right? What if the word God gave you was the very thing someone needed to be set free? Later in this book I'll tell you about a word that seemed to make no sense to the man who gave it, and how it opened the door to a young woman's healing. He almost didn't say it.

Often the thing standing in our way is perfectionism, and perfectionism is usually fear wearing nice clothes.

> *"At its root, perfectionism isn't really about a deep love of being meticulous. It's about fear. Fear of making a mistake. Fear of disappointing others. Fear of failure."*
>
> **Michael Law**

I love the story of D. L. Moody being confronted by a woman who told him she didn't like the way he did evangelism. Moody said he didn't much care for it himself and asked how she did it. She admitted that she didn't. "Well, madam," he replied, "I rather prefer the way I do evangelism to the way you do not do it."

Imperfect obedience beats perfect silence.

You will make mistakes. That is why God put you in a family that tests words and loves you through the learning. But you will never grow in what you never start.

Even the Unnamed Roles

> *You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you.*
>
> **Psalm 8:2**

When my daughter was ten, she auditioned for a church production of *Annie*. For weeks she had belted "Tomorrow" into her hairbrush,

dreaming of red curls and the spotlight. I prayed quietly as I watched her disappear into the audition room.

Three days later the email came. “I got a part!” she squealed, twirling in her pajamas. My heart leapt. Surely her joy meant the lead. Then she told me with total excitement, “I’m a servant!” Her joy didn’t skip a beat.

Mine did. I tried to hide my disappointment that the staff hadn’t seen her amazing talent. But before I could say a word, the Lord’s whisper cut through my thoughts and my pride: “Would you celebrate as she does, if I cast you as ‘servant’ in My story?”

The rebuke stung, and it was holy and kind. How often had I raged at life’s unscripted trials, blind to the Director’s hand? My daughter’s humility mirrored the gospel itself. Jesus, the Servant-King, embraced obscurity to rewrite eternity.

On opening night I watched her, radiant in her tiny role. When the curtain fell, she bowed with the ensemble, her joy undimmed. And I finally understood. God’s story is not a solo act. In His perfect play, even the unnamed roles magnify the Star.

That is the heart of small beginnings. You may feel like you’ve been cast as a servant in the back row. You may be eight years into a slow, quiet obedience that no one else can see. But the Lord rejoices to see the work begin. Stay faithful in the little, keep showing up hungry, and let Him decide when the eight days come.

For the Road

1. Where are you right now: beginner, amateur, or teacher? What would it take to move to the next stage?
2. Which of the seven practical ways to grow is hardest for you, and who in your life could help you with it?

3. Is there a “servant” role God has given you that you have secretly despised? What would it look like to celebrate it the way my daughter did?

Stay faithful in the small beginning, because God is already counting the apples in your seed.

Part Six

Cultivating the Community

What does a healthy prophetic family look like?

Chapter 19

Stewarding a Prophetic Word

> *Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.*
>
> **1 Thessalonians 5:19–21**

I once told my kids that if they finished their chores, we would go to the trampoline park after school. When school let out, they piled into the car, buzzing with excitement. Then I asked about the chores.

None were done.

They were outraged. They accused me of breaking my promise. So I pulled out a Sharpie, wrote a big "I.F." on a scrap of paper, and held it up. "This means the promise is real," I told them, "but it's conditional."

They sat quietly for a moment. Then they scrambled home and got to work. Later, sweaty and triumphant, they came back, and we went. That little "I.F." stayed on our fridge for a long time as a gentle reminder.

Many promises are available, not automatic. Conditional, not concrete.

That scrap of paper holds one of the most important lessons I know about prophecy. A prophetic word is much more like an invitation than a lottery ticket. What we do after we receive it matters as much as the moment we receive it. This chapter is about what happens after the word: how to receive it, test it, carry it, and give it in a way that builds up the family of God.

Comfort and Challenge, Not Control and Condemn

When a young man I'll call Derek shared a word at his college Bible study, the teacher answered, "I hope you're right so we don't have to stone you."

He was half joking. But a lot of suspicion toward the prophetic comes from mixing up the Old Testament standard with the New. Under the Old Covenant, a false prophet who led people after other gods was to be put to death (Deuteronomy 13:1–5). So was an adulterer (Leviticus 20:10). We tend to remember the first and forget the second. Rick Joyner put the double standard well:

> *"The stringent standards applied to prophetic ministry are seldom applied to other ministries. Should we throw out the ministry of the pastor because some have made mistakes?"*
>
> **Rick Joyner**, *The Prophetic Ministry*

The New Testament keeps the bar on truth high, but it changes how we handle error. Instead of stoning, it calls us to test. "Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said" (1 Corinthians 14:29). And Paul tells us exactly what New Testament prophecy is for:

> *But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 14:3**

A prophetic word is not meant to control and condemn a person. It is meant to comfort and challenge a person.

I once read about a young man who believed he had received prophetic words and dreams telling him to marry a certain young woman. The problem was that she was already engaged to another godly man. His counselor urged him to let those words go, but he kept pursuing her, pressuring her with invitation after invitation. Her fiancé was angry, she

was hurt, and the young man ended up heartbroken. The trouble was never the gift of prophecy. It was a "word" used to control someone else's life.

Who Calls Himself a Prophet?

Have you ever noticed how rarely anyone in Scripture introduces himself with the title "prophet"? Usually God, the narrator, or the people do the naming. Amos even insisted, "I'm not a professional prophet" (Amos 7:14).

The clearest exception I can find is Elijah. On Mount Carmel he announced, "I am the only prophet of the LORD who is left" (1 Kings 18:22). What strikes me is that the claim wasn't accurate. Just a few verses earlier, the palace administrator Obadiah, a devout believer, had hidden a hundred of the LORD's prophets in caves to protect them from Jezebel (1 Kings 18:3–4). Later, after he had run for his life and collapsed in exhaustion, Elijah told God again that he alone was left. God corrected him: there were still seven thousand in Israel who had never bowed to Baal (1 Kings 19:18).

Was it pride? Despair? Tunnel vision from exhaustion? Probably some of each. Elijah's raw honesty, followed so closely by his collapse, paints a picture of a man buckling under the weight of the call. I see in him a picture of the tension every prophetic person carries between a real anointing and real human frailty.

That is why I encouraged you in the last chapter to let others affirm your calling instead of labeling yourself. The title is not the point. Faithfulness with the word is.

Available, Not Automatic

God once sent Jeremiah to watch a potter at work. The jar didn't turn out right, so the potter crushed it back into a lump and started over. Then the

Lord spoke:

> *As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand. If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned.*
>
> **Jeremiah 18:6–8**

Notice the contrast inside the book of Jeremiah. In chapter 18 God says, "I am planning disaster for you instead of good. So turn from your evil ways" (Jeremiah 18:11). In chapter 29 He says, "For I know the plans I have for you… They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). So which is it? Disaster or good? The disaster is God's discipline. The good is what that crushing produces: hearts softened and dependent on Him. "No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way" (Hebrews 12:11).

The movies have stumbled onto this truth more than once. In *Minority Report*, a police unit arrests people for murders they haven't committed yet, based on visions from three gifted "precogs." Occasionally one of them sees something different from the other two, a "minority report" that shows the future is not as fixed as everyone assumes. In *Next*, Nicolas Cage plays a man who can see a few minutes into his own future, and he says that every time you look at the future, it changes because you looked at it. And in Disney's *Tomorrowland*, a machine broadcasts visions of the world's destruction until people stop hoping and the warning becomes a self-fulfilling sentence. Only when a young girl refuses to accept the doom as fixed does the outcome begin to change.

None of these films is Scripture. But every good story has a part of His story in it, and the Bible is full of its own minority reports:

- **Micaiah (1 Kings 22).** Four hundred prophets promised Ahab victory. One prophet warned of his death. Ahab ignored him and died.
- **Nineveh (Jonah 3).** Jonah announced destruction in forty days. The city repented, and God relented.
- **Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:1–6).** Isaiah told him he would die. He prayed, and God added fifteen years.
- **Ahab (1 Kings 21:27–29).** Even this wicked king humbled himself, and God delayed the judgment.
- **Josiah (2 Kings 22:15–20).** His tender heart and reforms delayed disaster until after his death.
- **The nation (2 Chronicles 7:14).** "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land."

Most personal prophetic promises work the same way. Many are invitations to cooperate with God, not guarantees that will happen no matter what we do. When those who prophesy leave out the condition, people can miss the very blessing God was inviting them into.

Prophetic words require participation.

Eleven Days, Forty Years

> *Normally it takes only eleven days to travel from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea, going by way of Mount Seir.*
>
> **Deuteronomy 1:2**

Moses spoke those words forty years after Israel left Egypt. An eleven-day trip took forty years. That is a tragedy. It wasn't the distance that delayed them. It was the path they chose.

God Himself had promised them the land. But when the spies came back with a bad report, the people refused to go in. Then, after God pronounced judgment, they changed their minds. "We realize that we have sinned," they said, "but now we are ready to enter the land." Moses warned them that the LORD was not with them. They went anyway and were chased back as far as Hormah (Numbers 14:39–45).

There is such a thing as too late to apologize. Esau found that out. He traded his birthright for a single meal, and afterward, "It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears" (Hebrews 12:17).

I see four stages in the way God brings a promise to pass in a person's life:

- **Calling**
- **Consecration**
- **Character**
- **Commissioned**

Many receive the calling. Fewer walk through consecration and let God build character before He commissions them. "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14).

Don't let the process of your promise make you focus more on the problem than on the Promised Land.

Revelation, Interpretation, Application

> *A house is built by wisdom and becomes strong through good sense. Through knowledge its rooms are filled with all sorts of precious riches and valuables.*
>
> **Proverbs 24:3–4**

Stewarding a prophetic word involves three distinct things:

- **Revelation:** knowledge, what we see.

- **Interpretation:** understanding, what it means.
- **Application:** wisdom, what we do about it.

Most of the time, the problem in prophetic ministry is not a lack of revelation. It is a lack of interpretation and application.

Joseph dreamed that his brothers' sheaves of grain bowed down to his sheaf, and later that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed to him (Genesis 37:5–9). The revelation was true. But he shared it with brothers who already resented him, and "they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them" (Genesis 37:8). Mary, on the other hand, received astonishing words about her Son and "kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often" (Luke 2:19).

Then there is Agabus. He took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it, and declared that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem would bind the owner of that belt and hand him over to the Gentiles (Acts 21:11). He was right about the outcome. Paul was seized and bound. But the details didn't unfold exactly as Agabus said. The Jewish crowd attacked Paul, and it was the Roman commander who rescued him and had him bound with chains (Acts 21:27–36). Agabus likely saw Paul in trouble with the Jews and then saw him bound in Gentile hands, and he assumed how it would happen.

I doubt Paul sat in the Roman barracks calling Agabus a false prophet. He was probably thankful for the warning. But Rick Joyner draws the right lesson: we would spare ourselves a lot of confusion if we would "learn to only share exactly what we are shown in visions and dreams" and not add our own interpretations.

Seven Steps to Steward a Word

So when you receive a prophetic word, what do you do with it? Here are seven steps I have found helpful:

1. **Did Our Hearts Burn When We Heard the Word?** The disciples on the Emmaus road said, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). Pay attention to the witness of the Spirit inside you.
2. **Meditate on What Was Said and Ask the Holy Spirit for Clarity.** Like Mary, treasure it and ponder it (Luke 2:17–19). Don't rush to act or to dismiss.
3. **Don't Let Lack of Understanding Cause You to Reject the Word.** When the boy Jesus said He had to be in His Father's house, Mary and Joseph "didn't understand what he meant," yet "his mother stored all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:49–51).
4. **Search the Scriptures to See If It Lines Up with God's Word.** The Bereans "searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth" (Acts 17:11). No word outranks the Word.
5. **Live an Obedient and Surrendered Life.** The wise man hears Jesus' words and does them, and his house stands (Matthew 7:24–25). A word you won't obey is a word you can't keep.
6. **Subject and Test the Prophetic Word to Trusted, Mature Believers.** "Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said" (1 Corinthians 14:29).
7. **Be Aware of Signs of Manipulation or Control.** "Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). A word from God will never put you in a cage.

Edify, Exhort, Comfort

Now let's turn it around. If you are the one giving a word, what are the protocols?

Milan and Kay Yerkovich, in their book *How We Love*, describe how our early life experiences create an "intimacy imprint" that shapes every relationship we have. I believe our early prophetic experiences leave a

"prophetic imprint" too. If the first prophetic people you met were harsh, careless, or controlling, you will be tempted to repeat what you saw. That is why we need clear guidelines.

Are all prophetic words positive? No. God does warn and correct. But when someone offers advice, warnings, or cautions without also building up and bringing comfort, that is often the sign of a critical spirit rather than the Holy Spirit. Jeremiah Johnson writes:

> *"Fault-finding and accusation are not gifts of the Holy Spirit and should never be welcomed as prophetic ministry."*
>
> **Jeremiah Johnson**, *Cleansing and Igniting the Prophetic*

Walking away feeling slimed and condemned is very different from walking away cut to the heart by the Holy Spirit with an invitation to righteousness.

If you want the prophetic in your church, you have to be willing to purge the phony and put up with some mess.

> *Without oxen a stable stays clean, but you need a strong ox for a large harvest.*
>
> **Proverbs 14:4**

Two boundaries help a great deal:

- **Prophetic words are not meant to control people.** Choosing a spouse, having children, investing money, changing jobs, moving to a new city, buying a house, choosing a college: we can and should give each other godly counsel about these things. But I am strongly against giving that counsel under the label of prophecy.
- **Prophetic words are not meant to shame, label, or condemn.** Never embarrass people by exposing negative things about them in a

public gathering. Scripture is clear that correction starts in private: "go privately and point out the offense" (Matthew 18:15).

Encourage and comfort in public. Correct and deliver in private.

The Accuracy Formula

In *Next*, Cage's character can usually see only two minutes ahead. But when he falls in love, he can suddenly see far into the future. That's a movie, but it points to something true in the Kingdom. Love makes our words kinder, and it makes them clearer too.

> *If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 13:2**

Before Jesus told the rich young ruler the one thing he lacked, Scripture says Jesus "felt genuine love for him" (Mark 10:21). The hard word came out of love. When we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we start to see people the way He sees them, and then we can exhort, encourage, and correct out of love instead of arrogance or flattery.

Here's the simplest way I know to say it:

Prophetic gift + Holy Spirit + Bible + Love = Accuracy

And here's the simplest prayer I know to start with. It is the one young Samuel prayed in the night: "Speak, your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10).

Another Word for the Year?

Every January, prophetic words for the new year flood our feeds, and many people roll their eyes. I understand why. Some of those words were careless, some never came to pass, and some were more about the speaker than the Lord.

But the answer to bad prophecy has never been no prophecy. The Corinthian church was gifted and messy, full of division and conflict. Paul did not tell them to shut down the gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12 he taught about the gifts, and in chapter 14 about prophecy and tongues, but right in the middle he put chapter 13. We often skip it. It is the core of the whole message: prophecy without love is noise and amounts to nothing.

Many prophetic churches and ministries have failed for lack of love, and some churches have responded by throwing prophecy out entirely, calling it divisive, error-prone, or outdated. Instead of discarding prophecy, let's increase love, maturity, and sound biblical teaching on hearing God's voice. Prophetic people are human. They are as vulnerable as anyone to error and immaturity, and they need room to grow.

So test everything. Hold on to what is good. Write your own "I.F." on the fridge if you need to. God's promises are real, and He is inviting you to walk into them with Him.

For the Road

1. Think of a prophetic word you received in the past. Was there a condition attached that you may have missed?
2. Which of the seven steps to steward a word do you tend to skip? What would change if you practiced it?
3. When you encourage or correct someone, which is stronger in you right now: the revelation or the love?

A prophetic word is an invitation, so steward it with love and walk it out in obedience.

Chapter 20

Fathers, Not Franchises

> *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.*
>
> **Ephesians 6:4**

It is late at night in the house of the Lord at Shiloh. An old priest is lying down in his room. His eyes have grown so dim he can barely see. A few steps away, a boy is sleeping near the Ark of God, and the Bible adds a small detail that I believe is full of meaning: "The lamp of God had not yet gone out" (1 Samuel 3:3).

Then a voice calls the boy by name.

Samuel jumps up and runs to Eli. "Here I am. You called me." Eli tells him he didn't call and sends him back to bed. It happens again. And again. Samuel could hear the voice, but he did not yet know whose voice it was. On the third time, the old man finally understands what is happening, and he gives the boy the most important instruction of his life:

> *Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, "Speak, LORD, your servant is listening."*
>
> **1 Samuel 3:9**

I see in that night a picture of everything this chapter is about. A young prophetic voice can hear God before he can recognize Him. What he needs in that moment is not a stage, a microphone, or a ministry brand.

He needs a father who is awake enough to say, "That's the Lord. Here's how you answer Him."

And the same story carries a warning. The man who taught Samuel to hear God's voice had sons he would not correct, and the glory departed from his house.

In Chapter 1 we talked about the difference between a family and a franchise. Here is where that difference becomes personal. A franchise needs employees, volunteers, and customers. A family needs fathers and mothers. God is not looking for more brands in His house. He is looking for fathers.

Where family has no value, the future has no value.

Equipping or Trafficking the Saints

God has always had strong words for leaders who use His people instead of serving them. Through Ezekiel, He spoke directly to the shepherds of Israel:

> *What sorrow awaits you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. Shouldn't shepherds feed their sheep? You drink the milk, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve. You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty.*
>
> **Ezekiel 34:2–4**

The New Testament gives leaders the opposite job description. Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers "to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church" (Ephesians 4:12). A

leader's assignment is to equip the saints. The temptation is to traffic them.

What do I mean by trafficking the saints? I mean using people to build something that is really about us. Their gifts become fuel for our vision. Their giving funds our platform. Their pain becomes a sermon illustration and then they are left on their own. They are counted on Sunday and forgotten on Monday. In the end the sheep are serving the shepherd instead of the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep.

An equipping leader asks, "Who is this person becoming?" A trafficking leader asks, "What can this person do for us?"

Shepherds who feed themselves will always have hungry sheep.

Children of Wrath

There is an old proverb that has stayed with me: the child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.

That proverb explains a lot of what we see in the Church. So many angry, rebellious, cynical believers are not monsters. They are sons and daughters who were never fathered well. Paul tells fathers not to provoke their children to anger. I have come to believe that fathers, natural and spiritual, give birth to children of wrath in three ways.

1. **Abandonment.** Laying them on the altar of sacrifice and rejection. Israel was forbidden to offer its children to Molech (Leviticus 18:21), yet leaders still sacrifice sons and daughters on the altar of ministry, success, and busyness. Think of David and Absalom. After Absalom came home, he lived two full years in Jerusalem without seeing his father's face (2 Samuel 14:28). The rebellion that followed did not grow in a vacuum. Scripture is blunt: "Those who won't care for their

relatives, especially those in their own household, have denied the true faith" (1 Timothy 5:8).

2. **Enablement.** Dipping them in gold. This is the parent who worships the child's image, or his own image reflected in the child, and can't tell them no. It produces rebellion and child-centered homes. Think of Eli's sons. "Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them" (Proverbs 13:24).
3. **Abuse.** Crushing their spirits, whether physically or psychologically. Jesus is the opposite of this: "He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle" (Isaiah 42:3). Someone once said you can look into a child's eyes and see whether the sparkle has been snuffed out. "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength" (Proverbs 17:22).

Abandonment says, "You don't matter." Enablement says, "Nothing you do matters." Abuse says, "You will pay for mattering." All three leave a son or daughter without a father, and orphans tend to grow up angry.

The good news is that God is "Father to the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5). Every wound on this list can be healed, and we'll talk about how in the next chapter. But leaders need to own their part first.

Eli and Ichabod

Of the three, I want to slow down on enablement, because I believe it is the one most tolerated in the Church today.

Eli was not a wicked man. He carried real authority. He taught Samuel how to answer God. But his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were abusing the offerings and sleeping with the women who served at the entrance of the Tabernacle (1 Samuel 2:12–17, 22). Eli talked to them about it. He never stopped them. And God's verdict was severe:

I have warned him that judgment is coming upon his family forever, because his sons are blaspheming God and he hasn't disciplined them.

1 Samuel 3:13

Eli's problem was not a lack of information. He knew. His problem was that his convictions were weaker than his coddling. His desire to be liked by his sons was greater than his desire to be trusted by God.

The end of that story is one of the saddest scenes in Scripture. The Ark was captured, Eli's sons died in battle, and Eli fell backward and died when he heard the news. His daughter-in-law went into labor and named her son Ichabod, which means "Where is the glory?" (1 Samuel 4:21).

Jeremiah Johnson has warned that when church and ministry leaders operate in the spirit of Eli and stop confronting sin in their midst, the glory departs and many don't even know it. He compares it to Samson, who woke up thinking he would shake himself free as before, "but he didn't realize the LORD had left him" (Judges 16:20). If sin is never confronted where you worship, you may be fellowshipping with Ichabod, and a spirit of Eli in our leaders will breed a generation of Hophnis and Phinehases.

Here is what makes the story even more sobering. Samuel, the boy who heard God in Eli's house, grew up and made the same mistake. When he was old, he appointed his sons as judges, "but they were not like their father, for they were greedy for money. They accepted bribes and perverted justice" (1 Samuel 8:3). That failure became the very reason Israel demanded a king.

I believe Samuel repeated the sins of his spiritual father because he did not stop to reflect. He confused having an effective ministry with having an obedient one. Samuel's ministry was effective. His words did not fall to

the ground. But effectiveness at the altar did not equal faithfulness at the dinner table.

So how do we keep from repeating it? PJ Vescovi gave the simplest answer I have ever heard:

> *"How do you break the cycle? Do for others that which was not done for you."*
>
> **PJ Vescovi**

You will repeat what you refuse to reflect on.

The Samuels in My Life

The relationship between Eli and Samuel also shows us something beautiful. Samuel could hear God's voice, but it was Eli who helped him discern it. That is the heart of prophetic mentorship. Hearing is the gift. Recognizing and responding well is what we learn from those who have walked longer.

Years later, Samuel had a whole company of prophets gathered around him at Naioth. When King Saul sent men to arrest David there, the messengers ran into that company and started prophesying themselves. It happened three times, and finally Saul himself prophesied (1 Samuel 19:18–24). We looked at that company in Chapter 17. What I want you to see here is the pattern: Samuel was discipled, then he mentored, and then he raised up others. Discipled, mentored, repeat. That is how a prophetic culture multiplies.

So let me ask you the question I have had to ask myself. Have you relationally sat under a Samuel?

I don't mean have you watched someone online or read their books. I mean has someone known you, corrected you, and walked with you long enough to see your weaknesses?

I once sat down and wrote out the names of the Samuels in my life, the direct mentors who have shaped me in the prophetic, and how long each one had walked with me. There were seven names on the list. The shortest relationship was six years. Several have lasted more than a decade. The longest has been with Rob Jones, who has walked with me for fourteen years.

Not every season with every one of them was easy. But each of them did something no conference speaker could ever do for me. They knew me.

People who have a stage can influence you, but people you have a relationship with can impact you.

Influence can motivate you. Impact will transform you. I am grateful for every voice that has influenced me from a distance. But the people who changed me were the ones close enough to see what I was really like and patient enough to stay.

A Culture of Honor

A family culture does not happen by accident. Pride and elitism can be imparted, and so can honor and humility. I have found three principles for cultivating a culture of honor.

1. **Blessing without a critical spirit.** God desires to bless other ministries, even ones that have not matured yet. We speak affirmations we actually believe, without flattery, and we bless without needing to agree with every difference in focus or style. Blessing is not the same as tolerating every doctrine and practice. But "Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters" (James 4:11).
2. **Honoring gifts without elitism.** God values all His people and wants to use all of them. So we use what He has given us to help others succeed, without asking how it affects us. James asks how we can

claim faith in Christ "if you favor some people over others" (James 2:1). As one pastor put it, how we walk with the broken speaks louder than how we sit with the great.

3. **Loyalty to truth without compromise.** The culture of the Kingdom is built on our allegiance to Jesus and His Word. Honor does not mean silence. There are times we must bring righteous judgment to destructive doctrine and behavior, precisely because we honor the people it is hurting.

If pointing out someone's failure doesn't affect you emotionally, it is probably criticism rather than correction.

Truth sounds like hate to those who hate the truth.

When I think about what a healthy church culture aims at, I see eight targets. Different streams in the Body of Christ have become known for one or two of these. A healthy family needs all of them:

- The Word of God
- Prayer
- Intimacy
- Identity
- The prophetic
- Financial stewardship
- Family
- Character

Notice the last two. You can have strong teaching, a vibrant prayer room, and accurate prophetic words, and still lose your people if you miss family and character.

What the Fivefold Births

Paul describes the gifts Christ gave His Church this way:

> *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*
>
> **Ephesians 4:11–13 (NIV)**

I like to think of the fivefold ministry in terms of what each one gives birth to.

- **Apostles birth movements.** They are the trailblazers who lay foundations and mobilize God's people for a common purpose (Ephesians 2:20).
- **Prophets birth breakthrough.** They discern God's will from the will of man and call the Church into alignment, breaking strongholds and ushering in new seasons (Amos 3:7).
- **Evangelists birth souls.** They carry a burning passion for the lost and bring new believers into the family (2 Timothy 4:5).
- **Pastors birth family.** They shepherd, counsel, and nurture relationships so the church feels like a home (Jeremiah 3:15).
- **Teachers birth disciples.** They impart understanding of the Word so believers grow up and live it (Matthew 28:19–20).

I even see a picture of the fivefold in the way the Gospels and Acts present Jesus. Matthew shows Him as the Teacher, with the Sermon on the Mount and the parables. Mark moves fast from miracle to miracle like an Evangelist. Luke is full of the Holy Spirit and prophetic fulfillment, like a Prophet. John gives us the Good Shepherd and the intimate farewell in the

upper room, the heart of a Pastor. Acts shows the Apostles planting churches across the world.

No one gift can raise a whole family. Jeremiah Johnson has spoken of a coming day when a mature company of apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors and evangelists will work and walk together and get over their pride, insecurity, and jealousy. That is what fathers look like in the New Testament. Not one man with a platform, but a family of gifts raising sons and daughters together.

No Lone Rangers

What is one of the most profound killers of a prophetic gift? Isolation.

> *Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.*
>
> **Proverbs 18:1 (ESV)**

Many prophetic people get wounded by the Church and then decide they are done with it. I understand the pain. But there is a difference between a true biblical pioneer and an orphaned spiritual nomad.

A biblical pioneer carries the costly love of Luke 15: the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine, the father who waits for the prodigal. Pioneers get rejected by Pharisees and by prophets for profit, and they still bear others' burdens (Galatians 6:2) and keep building Christ-centered community. Like Jesus, they overcome offense and entrust themselves to the Father (1 Peter 2:23).

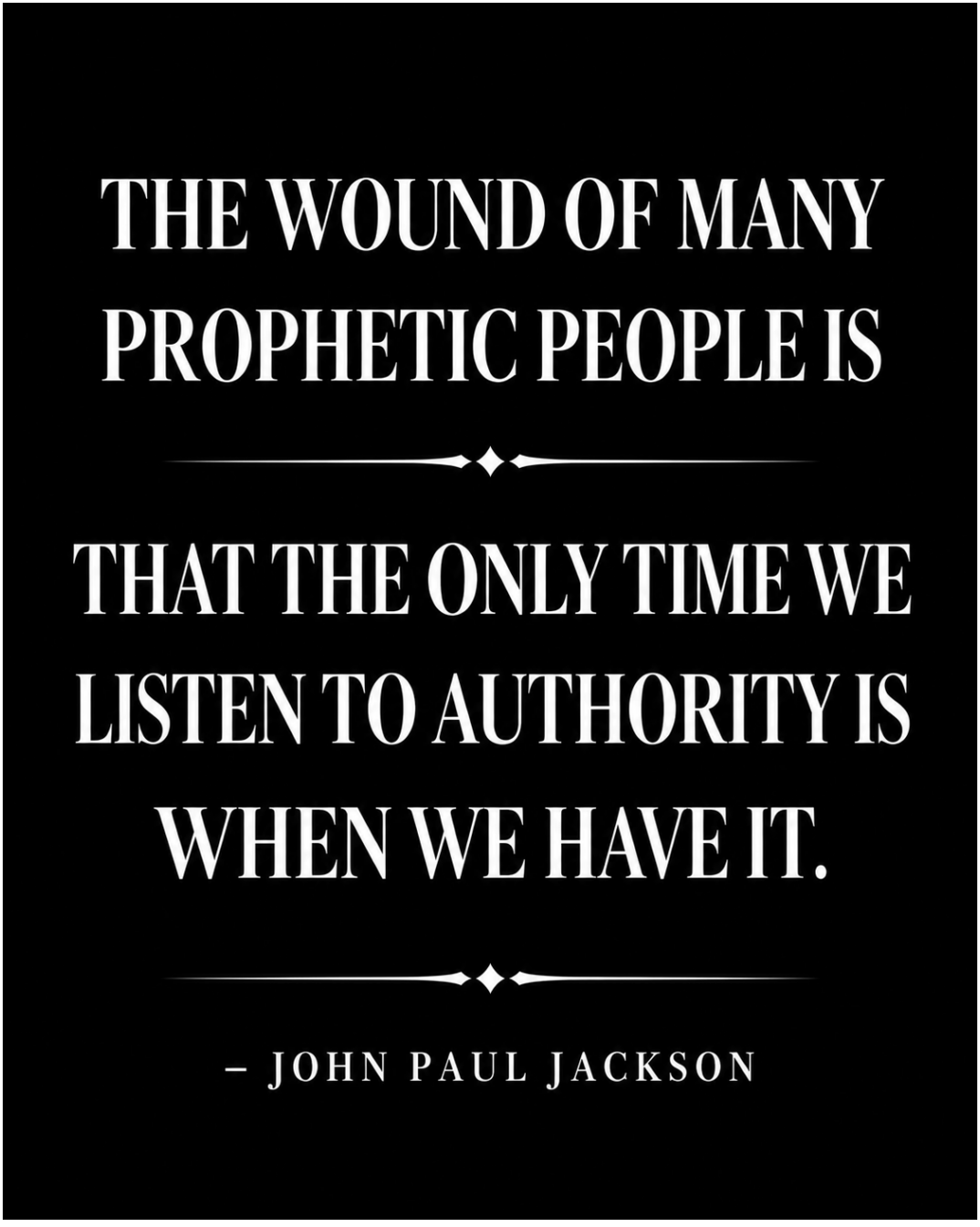
A spiritual nomad cloaks isolation in the language of revival and reformation while rejecting community. Nomads critique "the system" and "the hypocrites" from a spirit of offense. Their reformation is really deconstruction. It protects them from the mess of real relationships and the work of forgiveness. Underneath the critical spirit is a fear of trusting

God's people, like the older brother in Luke 15 who resented the Father's patience with someone else's process.

John Paul Jackson put his finger on the danger:

> *"Most of the time, the only voice of authority that prophetic people listen to is their own."*
>
> **John Paul Jackson**

That is why community is not optional for a prophetic person. Thomas Paine once wrote that a body of men holding themselves accountable to nobody ought not to be trusted by anybody. The same is true of prophets.


THE WOUND OF MANY PROPHETIC PEOPLE IS
THAT THE ONLY TIME WE LISTEN TO AUTHORITY IS WHEN WE HAVE IT.
– JOHN PAUL JACKSON

If you are highly prophetic but cannot withstand the crucible called community, you will not withstand the furnace of the last days.

Over the years of watching prophetic people in community and on platforms, a few observations have settled in my heart:

- However educated, attractive, talented, wealthy, or charismatic you are, how you treat people reveals your character. Money, power, and beauty cannot earn you friendship with God (1 Samuel 16:7).
- The fear of the Lord will give rise to a character movement in the Body of Christ. We will be known for our love instead of our gifts (John 13:35).
- A new reformation is emerging that I call a "Father Movement." It honors God's discipline and cultivates the fruit of the Spirit rather than focusing only on gifts and works. "God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10).
- Community supplies the accountability and perspective a prophetic voice cannot supply for itself. "As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend" (Proverbs 27:17).

That “Father Movement” is what I am praying for. Not bigger franchises, but more fathers and mothers who will lie awake in the house of the Lord, listen for the young ones, and say, “That’s His voice. Answer Him.” The lamp of God has not gone out. There are still Samuels sleeping in the temple, waiting for someone to help them recognize the One who is calling their name.

For the Road

1. Name your direct mentors in the prophetic. How long have you walked with each one, and was that relationship positive, negative, neutral, or simply an experience you learned from?
2. Which of the three wounds, abandonment, enablement, or abuse, have you received? Which one are you most at risk of passing on?
3. Who is the Samuel in your life right now that you could help recognize God’s voice? What would it look like to do for them what was not done for you?

God is not building a franchise. He is raising a family, and every family needs fathers.

Chapter 21

Setting the Captives Free

> *For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*
>
> **2 Corinthians 3:17**

Jesus came home to Nazareth after forty days in the wilderness and walked into the synagogue on the Sabbath, the way He always did. Someone handed Him the scroll of Isaiah. He unrolled it, found the place He was looking for, and read it out loud to the people who had watched Him grow up.

> *The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the Lord's favor has come, and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies. To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for his own glory.*
>
> **Isaiah 61:1–3**

Then He rolled up the scroll, handed it back, and sat down. Every eye in the room was on Him. And He said, "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!" (Luke 4:21).

Think about what Jesus chose to read. Of all the passages He could have used to announce His ministry, He picked the one about the brokenhearted, the captives, the prisoners, and the people sitting in ashes. That was His mission statement. It still is.

Jesus came to heal the wounds we have learned to manage.

This book has spent a lot of time on testing, character, and the cost of the prophetic. All of that matters. But if we stop there, we've missed the point. The prophetic was never meant only to warn and correct. In the hands of Jesus, it sets people free.

The Prophetic Anointing Sets the Captive Free

The same Spirit who rested on Jesus in that synagogue now lives in His people. That means the anointing of Isaiah 61 is not only something we read about. It is something we carry.

Paul tells us the Spirit searches out even the deep things of God and shows them to us, so that we can understand what God has freely given us (1 Corinthians 2:10–12). The natural person can't receive those things, but "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). When the Holy Spirit reveals something about a person's heart, He is not putting on a show. He is opening a prison door.

That is what inner healing and deliverance is about. I describe it as a biblical tool that helps people uncover and renounce the lies they believe about themselves, about God, about others, about their circumstances, and about their purpose. As the old saying goes, we see things the way we are, not the way they are. Our wounds become lenses. A child who was abandoned grows up seeing abandonment everywhere, including in God. A child who was never good enough grows up hearing a Father in heaven who is never satisfied.

Inner healing exposes those distorted inner stories so we can see what is actually true. It frees us from the father of lies (John 8:44) so we can embrace the Father of lights, the One from whom every good and perfect gift comes (James 1:17). It points us to the saving work of Jesus Christ and the renewing, mind-changing power of the Holy Spirit.

The enemy works through lies. The Holy Spirit works through truth.

That is why the prophetic and healing belong together. Prophecy at its best is truth delivered with love at the exact place a lie has been living.

Go to Azusa and Be Healed

When the fire of the Holy Spirit fell on a small building on Azusa Street in the early 1900s, it was not only known for tongues and powerful preaching. It became known as a place where hurting people could find help. Rick Joyner describes it this way:

> *"For many years, Azusa continued her healing ministry while her fame spread all over southern California. During that time, whenever there was suffering, people said, 'Go to Azusa and be healed…go to Azusa.'"*
>
> **Rick Joyner, *The Fire That Could Not Die***

I love that. Imagine a church whose reputation in the city was simply this: if you are hurting, go there.

I see in the Pool of Bethesda a picture of what a prophetic culture can become. John tells us that near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there was a pool with five covered porches, and crowds of sick people lay there: blind, lame, paralyzed (John 5:2–3). It was a place where broken people gathered because they expected something to happen.

One man had been lying there for thirty-eight years. Jesus saw him, knew how long he had been sick, and asked him a question that sounds almost strange: “Would you like to get well?” (John 5:6). The man answered with his story of why it had never worked. He had no one to help him. Somebody always got there first. Jesus didn’t argue with his story. He spoke over it. “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!” (John 5:8). And the man did.

Prophetic cultures can birth a Pool of Bethesda atmosphere.

A healthy prophetic community should feel like that. It should be a place where the hurting gather because they expect Jesus to show up. A place where people who have had no one to help them finally find a family that will carry them to Him. And a place where the voice of Jesus speaks louder than the old story of why nothing ever changes.

A Word That Unlocked a Prison

When it comes to the prophetic, we often ask, “What if I’m wrong?” There is a better question that we rarely ask: “What if I’m right?”

There is a story in my notes that shows why that second question matters.

A man who was well acquainted with the prophetic was in a setting with a young woman in her late twenties. As he looked at her, a phrase came into his mind, and it seemed to be meant for her: “God hates mommies and daddies.”

It made no sense to him. It even conflicted with what he knew about God and His character. God made families. Why would He say something like that? But he couldn’t shake it, and he felt compelled to share it. With shaking hands and a racing heart, he finally found the courage to speak those words to her.

Instantly, tears streamed down her face, and she broke down sobbing. When she was able to speak, she told him what those words meant. When she was a little girl, after her parents divorced, a man her mother dated harmed her for years. “Mommies and daddies” was the name he gave to the evil he did to her.

No one in that room knew. But God knew. He had seen every one of those years. And the words that sounded so wrong to the man who carried them were the very words that told her heaven had not looked away. God was not saying He hated families. He was saying He hated what was done to her.

Read that slowly if you need to. If that is part of your story too, hear me: it was not your fault. You were a child. The shame belongs to the one who hurt you, never to you. And the God who saw it has not stopped seeing you.

> *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*
>
> **John 10:27**

That word didn’t heal everything in one moment. Prophecy rarely does. But it unlocked a door that had been bolted for years. It told her she was seen and that the Shepherd knew her by name. That is what the prophetic anointing does at its best. It finds the place where a lie has been living and says, “I was there, and I am here now.”

One word from the Shepherd can reach a room no one else knew was there.

Eleven Healing Frameworks

Over the years I have gathered several tools that help people walk through inner healing and deliverance. I call them the Isaiah 61 Healing Frameworks. They are not formulas, and none of them is the healer. Jesus

is the healer. These are simply ways of making room for Him. Here they are in the order I teach them.

1. Father Ladder & Earthly Relational Lenses.

Our earthly relationships become lenses we see God through. There are three rungs on this ladder.

- *Father God and the earthly father.* Your relationship with your dad shapes your default view of God's character, whether distant, critical, absent, or safe. If your father was harsh, you may see God as demanding. If he was absent, you may doubt that God is near. The healing is to invite God to rewrite what "Father" means to you (Romans 8:15). A simple prayer: "Father, show me where I've misjudged You because of my earthly dad."
- *Jesus and friends or siblings.* How you relate to peers affects how you receive Jesus as a brother (Hebrews 2:11) and a friend (John 15:15). If siblings betrayed you, you may struggle to trust His loyalty. If friends rejected you, you may fear His closeness. Let Jesus redefine friendship: "Jesus, heal my fear of being known, and show me Your relentless love."
- *The Holy Spirit and mother.* Your bond with your mom influences how you receive the Spirit's comfort and guidance (John 14:26). God Himself says, "I will comfort you … as a mother comforts her child" (Isaiah 66:13). If your mom was controlling, you may resist the Spirit's lead. If she was emotionally cold, you may dismiss His tenderness. Surrender those false stories: "Holy Spirit, help me trust Your care like a perfect parent."

2. Four Doors.

We close the doors that give the enemy access: fear, hatred, sexual sin, and the occult. We close them through confession, renunciation, and

walking in freedom. A believer is not owned by the devil, but we can leave doors open that we were never meant to leave open.

3. Presenting Jesus.

We invite Jesus into a past wound so He can replace the lies and rejection with His truth. He was there, and He can show us where.

4. The Wall / Not Hearing God.

Some people feel like heaven is silent. Often there is a wall built from past hurts and the lies that came with them. The Holy Spirit helps us take that wall down, one truth at a time, so we can hear His voice and receive His love again.

5. Trigger Mechanisms.

Some reactions are bigger than the moment that set them off. We ask the Lord to show us the lie attached to the trigger, so its link to unhealed trauma can be severed and old flashbacks lose their power. I think of it as moving through triggers, tension, and trauma until we land on truth.

6. Divine Editing.

We don't pretend painful memories never happened. We invite Christ to fill them with His truth, so the empty places that pain carved out are filled with Him.

7. Forgiving Trespassers.

We release resentment toward those who hurt or abused us, because Jesus commands it (Matthew 6:14–15). This is a prayer-led process, not a feeling we wait for, and it breaks cycles of bitterness and gives us back our spiritual authority. Forgiving someone does not mean what they did was acceptable, and it does not mean you have to trust them again. It means you hand the debt to God.

8. Dining Table.

This one looks forward. It is a prophetic practice of cultivating future healthy relationships through present disciplines like boundaries and grace. Who do you want at your table, and what kind of person do you need to become to sit there well?

9. Coffee Table of Confrontation.

Sometimes healing means addressing past harm with courage. With prophetic insight and the Spirit's timing, we bring it into the open, aiming for closure or reconciliation.

10. Happy Place.

This is a spiritual and emotional sanctuary where a person feels safe, protected, and close to Jesus, so they can learn to trust His presence again in the middle of chaos or trauma. It has three parts:

- *Visualization:* picture a place where His protection feels real, like a meadow, the throne room, or the green meadows of Psalm 23.
- *Sensory engagement:* ask the Holy Spirit to make you aware of His peace, whether that is warmth, light, or Scripture whispered to your heart.
- *Daily practice:* return there when stress rises, and let His peace replace fear.

11. Heart Sync Model.

This one needs its own section.

Heart Sync

Heart Sync is a model I have found helpful in prayer ministry. I hold it loosely. It is a picture to help people pay attention to their own hearts in

God's presence, not a scientific map of the brain. But it has helped people see why they can know the truth in one part of themselves and still not feel it in another.

The model describes three parts of the heart, each asking its own question.

- **Why (Emotion).** This part holds our pain and asks, "Am I being heard?" It is relational, like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. It is healed when we experience truth through connection. If you've seen the animated film *Inside Out*, this is Sadness.
- **How (Function).** This part manages tasks and asks, "Am I doing it right?" It is analytical, like Martha busy in the kitchen. It is healed when our actions line up with truth. In *Inside Out*, this is Joy, always working to keep things running.
- **What (Guardian).** This part protects us and asks, "Am I safe?" It is instinctual, like David the shepherd standing between the sheep and the lion. It is healed when we learn to discern truth in the middle of threats. In *Inside Out*, this is Anger, always on guard.

None of these parts is the enemy. Each one is trying to help. The trouble comes when one runs the whole house. When the Guardian is in charge, everything feels like a threat. When Function is in charge, we perform for God instead of resting in Him. When Emotion is in charge with no truth to anchor it, our feelings become our theology.

Wholeheartedness is when every part of your heart is finally on the same side.

That is the goal. Wholeheartedness brings together the Guardian's discernment, Function's discipline, and Emotion's vulnerability under the lordship of Jesus.

The model also pictures this in body, soul, and spirit terms, and I offer it the same way, as a picture:

- The relational, feeling side is healed by sensing God's presence, the posture of Mary.
- The thinking, doing side is healed by Scriptural truth applied with discipline. It guards against the "little foxes" of compromise that ruin the vineyard (Song of Songs 2:15).
- The protective, alarm-sounding side is calmed by God's peace, "which exceeds anything we can understand" and "will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

Notice where each part ends up. Presence. Truth. Peace. Every one of them leads back to Jesus.

Jesus Is the Healer

I need to say this clearly, because I have watched good tools turn into idols. No model, method, prayer roadmap, or framework is the savior. Salvation is found in no one else (Acts 4:12). When a method becomes the focus, people start hunting for the right technique instead of seeking the Person. We spend more time naming every spirit than worshiping the One who already defeated them.

The frameworks open the door. Only Jesus walks through it.

Use these tools the way you would use a lamp in a dark room, to help you find the treasure. And always keep Scripture as the measuring rod, honest relationship with Jesus as the center, and patient, Spirit-led discipleship as the setting. Healing happens best inside a family, not in a one-time encounter with a stranger.

Grace for the Wounded Seer

I want to end this chapter by talking to the prophetic people reading this book.

Many of the most sensitive, prophetic people I've met are also some of the most wounded. Perhaps the same sensitivity that lets them pick up on the Spirit also made them feel pain more deeply. Whatever the reason, unhealed trauma is one of the great hindrances to prophetic discernment. Pain and shame create a kind of spiritual static that muffles God's clarity. A wounded seer can still see, but often through a cracked lens. Rejection sounds like revelation. Fear sounds like warning. Old anger sounds like righteous judgment.

That doesn't mean you're disqualified. It means you need the same Jesus you want to bring to others. The man in that story carried a word that unlocked her prison. But every one of us also needs someone to carry the Shepherd's voice to us.

Isaiah 61 doesn't end with captives released. It ends with oaks. "They will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for his own glory." God wants more for you than an open prison door. He wants to plant you, root you, and grow you into something strong enough that others can rest in your shade.

Healed people heal people.

So let Him into the rooms you've kept locked. Let Him rewrite what "Father" means. Close the doors. Forgive the debts. Sit at the table. Let every part of your heart come home. The same Spirit who rested on Jesus in Nazareth is still announcing good news to the brokenhearted, and the time of the Lord's favor has come for you too.

For the Road

1. Which of the three relational lenses (Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit) do you suspect is the most distorted in your life? What earthly relationship shaped it?

2. Of the three parts of the heart in Heart Sync, which one tends to run your house: the Guardian, Function, or Emotion? What would it look like to bring it under the lordship of Jesus?
3. What would it take for your church or small group to become a "Go to Azusa" or Pool of Bethesda place, where the hurting expect Jesus to show up?

Jesus read Isaiah 61 as His mission statement, and He has not stopped setting captives free.

Chapter 22

The Consecrated Bride

> *The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.*
>
> **2 Samuel 3:1 (NIV)**

In my fifth season with one of my NFL teams, we signed a free agent I'll call Dominic. He had a bodybuilder's frame and a quiet confidence, and honestly, he provoked me.

He didn't do it with his mouth. Dominic was not a loud talker. He led with disciplined habits. He showed up the same way every day and trained the same way every day. Watching his consistency did something to me. I started getting in better shape. I cleaned up my diet. I took my training more seriously. Without one sermon from him, his example raised the standard I expected of myself.

I have thought about Dominic many times since, because his life asks a question every believer needs to answer.

Do we spiritually provoke the same kind of response in people when they see our relationship with Jesus?

A life that truly provokes others toward Christ is marked less by performance and more by transformed character. Visible love, joy, humility, and self-control. Consistent devotion to prayer and the Scriptures. Servanthood. Authentic repentance. Nobody has to announce a life like that. People feel it, and something in them wants to rise.

A consecrated life preaches before it ever opens its mouth.

That is the Bride Jesus is coming back for. Not a loud Bride. A consecrated one.

Two Brides

When I look at the Church in this hour, I see something like a civil war. In 2 Samuel, after Saul died, Israel had two houses claiming the throne. One house was built around a king God had already rejected. The other was built around the man after God's own heart. The war lasted a long time, but the outcome was never in doubt. David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.

I see in that war a picture of the last days. There is a Harlot Bride and there is a Consecrated Bride, and they are both in the house.

The Harlot Bride is what I call "Churchianity." She has the building, the calendar, and the vocabulary. Paul described her well when he wrote of people "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:5, NIV). She keeps the outer court busy while the inner sanctuary sits empty. In Revelation, John is told to measure the temple, the altar, and the worshipers, but to leave out the outer court (Revelation 11:1–2). God is not impressed by how many people are in the courtyard. He is measuring who is at the altar.

At the end of the Bible, two women stand in contrast. One is "the great prostitute, who sits on many waters" (Revelation 17:1, NIV), seated on the wealth, power, and approval of the world. The other is the Bride, who has only one desire and one voice:

> *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."*
>
> **Revelation 22:17**

The Harlot Bride wants what Jesus can give her. The Consecrated Bride wants Jesus.

None of this is a call to point fingers at other churches or other streams. The battle line between Saul's house and David's house runs through my own heart before it runs through anyone's congregation. Every one of us has to decide which house we are building. And here is the hope in that old verse: the house of David grows stronger. It is not a fair fight forever. God is on the side of His Bride.

The outer court can be crowded while the altar is empty.

The Remnant

Throughout Scripture, when the majority drifted, God always kept a remnant. Daniel saw a day when a corrupt ruler would flatter people into abandoning the covenant, and then he saw something else:

> *Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.*
>
> **Daniel 11:32 (NKJV)**

Notice who carries out the exploits. Not the people who know about God. Not the people with the biggest platforms. The people who know their God.

Mixture is the problem of the Harlot Bride. A little of the world, a little of the Word. A little presence, a lot of performance. Mixture lets us keep everything and surrender nothing.

God is looking for an unmixed people, not a perfect one.

The remnant God is raising up is made of believers who have decided that Jesus gets all of them.

This is not about being harsh or superior. A consecrated people is marked by humility and love before anything else. They are simply set apart, like a bride who has turned down every other offer because she has already said yes to one.

At the beginning of this book I told you about my friend's dream of buses and motorcycles. The buses stopped coming, and in their place came riders who could each move on their own but chose to ride together, bound by love and covenant. I believe those riders are a picture of this remnant. Each one has oil in their own lamp. Each one hears the Holy Spirit for themselves. And together they are a consecrated Bride rising in holiness, unity, and love, so that the Lamp receives the reward of His suffering.

The Rock of Revelation

When Jesus brought His disciples to Caesarea Philippi, He asked them who people said He was. They gave Him the crowd's opinions: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets. Then He made it personal. "But who do you say that I am?"

> *Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."*
>
> **Matthew 16:16–18 (NKJV)**

Christians have discussed what "this rock" means for centuries. Here is what I see in that passage. Peter did not figure out who Jesus was by his own intellect. The Father revealed it to him. I believe the rock Jesus builds His Church on is not the person or position of Peter, but the revealed

truth of who Jesus is, received by children who can hear and discern their Father's voice.

That is why a prophetic community matters so much. Without the Holy Spirit unveiling the Scriptures and the circumstances of our lives, we try to unlock the mysteries of God with natural intellect, "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7, NKJV). The gates of hell do not tremble at our programs. They tremble at a Church that knows who Jesus is because the Father told them.

Jesus builds His Church on what the Father reveals.

Here I Stand

Every reformation in history has had a moment when someone had to choose between permission and obedience.

Martin Luther could not ask the church authorities of his day for permission to start the Reformation. When he posted his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg in 1517, it was seen as a challenge to the authority of the Church and its teachings. In 1521 Pope Leo X excommunicated him. That same year, standing before the emperor and the princes at Worms and asked to take back what he had written, Luther gave his famous answer:

> *"My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me."*
>
> **Martin Luther**

Luther's conscience was captive to the Word. That is what reformation always looks like: surrender to a higher authority.

Permission builds a franchise. Obedience builds a reformation.

"We must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29).

Rick Joyner has pointed out that the Church has gone through great controversy with the restoration of every truth and every one of the equipping ministries in Ephesians 4. Luther shook Christendom when he declared the priesthood of all believers. The men who helped restore the evangelist were accused of heresy, yet their accusers are forgotten and the ministry they restored lives on. I believe the same will be true of the prophetic.

The priesthood of all believers is the soil a prophetic community grows in. If every believer can come to God, then every believer can hear from God. That was the seed of the last reformation. I believe it is the harvest of this one.

To the Samuels of This Hour

There is a hard question I have had to ask, and I'll ask it of you. Are you still following someone the Lord has disqualified as a spiritual leader?

> *The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way."*
>
> **1 Samuel 16:1 (NIV)**

Grief is real. As counselor Nedra Glover Tawwab has written, you can see the truth about who someone really is and still miss the person you thought you knew. But there comes a time when God says, "Fill your horn with oil." It is time to heal, move on, and anoint what He has chosen for this season.

So let me ask it plainly. Are you mourning someone or something in this season that God has already told you to let go of? Samuel's grief was honest, but it could not be permanent. Israel needed a king, and the oil in

Samuel's horn was not meant to sit on a shelf in Ramah while he wept over Saul.

Many of you reading this were discipled under Eli-type leaders. In Chapter 19 we saw both sides of Eli: the man who taught Samuel to answer God and the father who would not restrain his sons. So this word is for you.

You learned real things under real authority. Through those leaders you learned the voice of God, the weight of His Word, and the discipline of obedience. That was not wasted, and it was not counterfeit.

But now your eyes have been opened to what was tolerated in their midst: compromise that went unchecked, sin that was excused, and sons who were protected instead of confronted. That revelation is painful, disorienting, and deeply grievous.

Still, do not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Truth remains truth, even when it comes through a broken vessel. God has never depended on the purity of the messenger to establish the authority of His Word. If He can speak through a donkey, He can speak through flawed men. The failure of leadership does not invalidate the truth you received, only the misuse of it.

You are not responsible for what they tolerated, but you are responsible for what you steward now. Do not abandon the altar because the priest was corrupt. Do not forsake your calling because those before you lacked courage. What God planted in you through obedience, Scripture, and reverence is still holy. Keep what is true. Release what is defiled. Learn from Eli's mistake so that you do not repeat history, and you can help write it instead.

You are Samuels not because Eli was perfect, but because God was faithful.

Stand. Discern. And carry the truth forward without compromise, bitterness, or fear.

A Joseph and Daniel Generation

When I pray for the generation rising now, I keep thinking of Joseph and Daniel. Both were young men carried into foreign courts. Both stayed pure in places built to corrupt them. Both were trusted by pagan kings because they could interpret the dreams those kings could not understand. And both gave the credit away. Joseph told Pharaoh, "It is beyond my power to do this. But God can tell you what it means" (Genesis 41:16). Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, "There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets" (Daniel 2:28).

God has not stopped speaking to the people around us:

> *For God speaks again and again, though people do not recognize it. He speaks in dreams, in visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they lie in their beds.*
>
> **Job 33:14–15**

The world is full of people having dreams they cannot interpret and sensing things they cannot name. God is looking for Josephs and Daniels who can stand in those places with clean hands and say, "Here is what God is saying." (The Appendix at the end of this book is a field guide to help you do exactly that.)

That kind of access carries a responsibility. God told Ezekiel, "Son of man, I have appointed you as a watchman for Israel. Whenever you receive a message from me, warn people immediately" (Ezekiel 3:17). A consecrated Bride is not only intimate with the Bridegroom. She also stands on the wall for the sake of the city.

Driven by Eternity

In the nine seasons of the Kingdom, this book has lived in Reformation: God rebuilding His house so it can hold what He pours out. But Reformation is not the last season. After it comes a season I call Revolution, driven by eternity. When the early believers came to Thessalonica, their enemies said, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too" (Acts 17:6, NKJV). A reformed house becomes a sending house. A consecrated Bride becomes a people who live radically for the Kingdom because their eyes are fixed on forever.

That is where I believe God is taking us. Not back to bigger stages. Forward, into a family of believers who hear His voice, test it by His Word, carry it with character, and are willing to turn the world upside down with love.

Before the Bride can shine, she has to burn.

Jeremiah Johnson said it well:

> *"There are too many trying to shine their lamps publicly, who don't burn privately. It's the revelation of Christ on the throne that will sustain the consecrated bride in a time of warfare!"*
>
> **Jeremiah Johnson**

Remember Dominic? He never gave a speech. He just kept showing up, day after day, until his consistency changed the people around him. That is how the Consecrated Bride will provoke this generation. Not with louder voices, but with steady, private fire that eventually becomes impossible to hide.

The Bridegroom is coming. The question that remains is not whether you have a lamp. It is whether there will be oil in it when He arrives. That is where we will close.

For the Road

1. When people watch your relationship with Jesus, what does it provoke in them? What would have to change for your life to raise someone else's standard the way Dominic raised mine?
2. Where is there mixture in your life right now, a place where you are keeping a little of the world alongside your devotion to Jesus?
3. Is there a "Saul" you are still mourning? What truth did God plant in you through that season that you need to keep, and what do you need to release?

The Consecrated Bride burns privately before she shines publicly, and her Bridegroom is coming.

Epilogue

Keep Your Lamp Burning

> *"Then the five foolish ones asked the others, 'Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.' But the others replied, 'We don't have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves.'"*
>
> **Matthew 25:8–9**

Jesus told a story about ten bridesmaids waiting for a wedding to begin. All ten had lamps. All ten were invited. All ten fell asleep while the bridegroom was delayed. From the outside, you could not tell them apart.

Then, at midnight, the shout went up: "Look, the bridegroom is coming!" And in that moment the difference was finally exposed. Five had oil. Five did not.

What has always struck me about this parable is what the wise bridesmaids said when the foolish ones asked to borrow. They didn't say no because they were stingy. They said no because it was impossible. Oil is the one thing you cannot lend.

Someone can lend you their platform, but no one can lend you their oil.

Oil from Past Seasons

I've spent this whole book talking about a prophetic community, a family that hears God together. But I want to end with you alone, because that is

where the oil is bought.

The folly of the foolish bridesmaids is that they were living off oil from past seasons of encounter with God. The wise ones were living off fresh, daily encounters, so they had reserves when the night got long. Foolish virgins know how to be radical for a season. Wise virgins know how to be radical for a lifetime.

You can lead worship on borrowed oil for a while. You can preach on last year's revelation. You can prophesy out of a gift that God will never take back. But when midnight comes, gifts, titles, and stages will not keep a lamp lit. Only intimacy will.

Here's a simple test. If you can't remember the last time you cried tears of brokenness in the presence of God, it might be a sign that the oil well of intimacy has gone dry. That's not a word of condemnation. It's an invitation. The shop is still open. The Bridegroom still sells oil without money and without price to anyone who will come and sit with Him.

Keep Your Lamp Burning

Every chapter you've read was an attempt to help you keep oil in your lamp.

Hearing God's voice keeps it burning. Testing what you hear by the Word keeps the flame clean. Character keeps the wick trimmed. The refiner's fire burns off what was never oil in the first place. And community keeps you awake when you would otherwise drift off to sleep with everyone else.

But in the end, the lamp is yours.

I think about all the stories in these pages. The woman in China who memorized 2 Peter on scraps of paper in prison. Tyndale in hiding,

translating by candlelight so a plowboy could read. The men and women in Chapter 12 whose gifts outlasted their oil, and whom we still honor even as we grieve. The mentor who stopped telling new stories because new stories cost too much. Every one of them is asking you the same question the parable asks.

When the shout goes up at midnight, will you have oil?

Burn privately, and you will never have to borrow light publicly.

A Blessing for the Road

So here is my prayer for you as you close this book.

May you hear His voice clearly, and may you love His Word even more than you love His voice. May you never mistake your gift for your godliness. May the fire that falls on you be holy fire, kindled on His altar, not your own. May you find fathers and mothers who will tell you the truth, and may you become one. May you carry your scars with honor, and let them become a map for someone else. May the Church in your city become less of a stage and more of a table. And when the Bridegroom comes, may your lamp be full, your heart be awake, and your eyes be on Him.

The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.”

Keep your lamp burning.

Appendix

A Dreamer's Field Guide

> *For God speaks again and again, though people do not recognize it. He speaks in dreams, in visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they lie in their beds.*
>
> **Job 33:14–15**

God is raising up a Joseph and Daniel generation. Joseph dreamed in a field and interpreted in a prison. Daniel interpreted in a palace while refusing to eat from the king's table. Both of them heard God in the night, and both of them carried what they heard with humility and integrity. That combination is what this appendix is for.

Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and announced that the outpouring Joel saw had arrived: "your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions" (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28). God has not stopped speaking in the night. But a dream is not Scripture, and it never stands above Scripture. Every dream is tested by the Word, weighed in community, and held with an open hand.

So please read what follows as a field guide, not a formula. A field guide helps you recognize what you are looking at. It does not replace walking with the One who made the field. Symbols shift from person to person and from dream to dream. A horse may mean one thing to a farmer and something else to a soldier. The same Holy Spirit who gave the dream is the only One who can give the interpretation (Genesis 40:8).

Interpretations belong to God, so hold yours humbly.

Eat the chicken and throw away the bone. If something here helps you hear Him more clearly, keep it. If it does not bear witness with the Word and the Spirit, set it down.

Where Dreams Come From

Dreams come from three sources: the Spirit of God, the soul, and the enemy.

Some dreams unveil the secret counsel of the Spirit of God. They reveal His mysteries, His plans, and His heart for a person, a family, a city, or a nation. Other dreams expose the deep-seated issues of the soul: emotional wounds, lies we have believed, and chronic trauma. And some originate from the kingdom of darkness, designed to frighten you and discourage you from operating in your spiritual gifts.

This is why we need the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, to divide what is birthed of the Spirit of God from what is of the soul or from the enemy.

> *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.*
>
> **Hebrews 4:12**

I find it helpful to think about two kinds of dreams that the Lord uses.

- **Subconscious dreams** bring our fears and worries to the surface. God is not trying to torment you with them. He lets them surface so that you can see the stronghold and tear it down.
- **Directive dreams** give direction and insight for your circumstances and your personal life. They point the way forward.

A soul dream is not wasted. Often it is the Holy Spirit holding up a mirror so He can heal what you could not see. But we must not mistake our own longings for His instructions.

A dream from the soul can lead you to healing; a dream from the Spirit leads you to obedience.

How do you begin to tell the three apart? Here are a few simple questions I bring to every dream before I try to interpret a single symbol.

- **Does it agree with Scripture?** God will never contradict His Word. A dream that tells you to do what the Bible forbids did not come from the Author of the Bible.
- **What is the fruit?** A dream from God may be sobering, even frightening, but it leads toward repentance, peace, and life. A dream from the enemy leaves you with torment, accusation, and hopelessness.
- **Where does it point?** The Spirit always glorifies Jesus. A dream that feeds pride, makes you the hero, or sets you above others should be held at arm's length.
- **What does it stir in me?** If the dream echoes something you have been craving, fearing, or replaying all week, start by asking what your own soul is saying.
- **Does it bear witness in community?** Share it with mature believers who love you enough to tell you the truth.

If you discern that a dream came from the enemy, you do not have to receive it. Reject it in the name of Jesus, ask the Lord what lie it was trying to plant, and replace that lie with His truth. Then go back to sleep. He gives rest to His loved ones (Psalm 127:2).

Dreams in the Bible

God has always spoken in the night. Here are eleven dreams from Scripture that every dreamer should know.

1. **Jacob's Ladder** (Genesis 28:10–19). Jacob sees a stairway reaching to heaven with angels going up and down on it. God stands above it and reaffirms the covenant He made with Abraham and Isaac.
2. **Joseph's Dreams** (Genesis 37:5–11). His brothers' sheaves of grain bow to his sheaf, and then the sun, moon, and eleven stars bow to him. Both dreams foreshadow his rise to power in Egypt.
3. **Pharaoh's Dreams** (Genesis 41:1–32). Seven fat cows are devoured by seven thin cows, and seven healthy heads of grain are swallowed by seven withered ones. Joseph interprets seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.
4. **The Cupbearer and the Baker** (Genesis 40:5–19). In prison, Joseph interprets two dreams. The cupbearer's vine with three branches means restoration. The baker's three baskets, pecked by birds, mean execution.
5. **Nebuchadnezzar's Dreams** (Daniel 2:1–45; 4:1–33). A great statue of different materials reveals successive kingdoms. A great tree cut down reveals the king's coming humbling until he acknowledges God's sovereignty.
6. **Daniel's Visions** (Daniel 7:1–28; 8:1–27). Symbolic beasts and events reveal future empires and the end of the age.
7. **The Man from Macedonia** (Acts 16:9–10). Paul sees a man pleading, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" and the gospel crosses into Europe.
8. **Solomon's Dream** (1 Kings 3:5–15). God offers Solomon whatever he asks. He asks for wisdom to govern, and God adds riches and honor.
9. **The Dream of Gideon's Enemy** (Judges 7:13–15). Gideon overhears a Midianite describe a loaf of barley bread tumbling into the camp and

flattening a tent. His friend interprets it as Gideon's victory, and Gideon worships.

10. **Pilate's Wife's Dream** (Matthew 27:19). During Jesus' trial she sends her husband a warning to leave that innocent man alone, because she has suffered in a dream about Him.
11. **Joseph, Husband of Mary** (Matthew 1:20–24; 2:13–15, 19–23). An angel tells him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, then to flee to Egypt from Herod, and later to return to Israel.

Notice how ordinary most of these dreamers were. A runaway son, a teenage brother, a pagan king, a soldier on the wrong side of a battle, a governor's wife. God is not limited to the qualified.

Notice too what the dreamers did next. Jacob woke up, set up a memorial stone, and made a vow (Genesis 28:18–20). Joseph, the husband of Mary, got up and obeyed, sometimes in the middle of the night (Matthew 2:14). Solomon woke up and went to Jerusalem to worship (1 Kings 3:15). Pharaoh's dream saved nations because he listened to the interpreter God sent him. And Pilate's wife's dream was a mercy her husband ignored.

A dream is given for a response, not just for a reaction.

How to Approach a Dream

Here is the approach I use to interpret a dream or a vision. Take the steps in order the first few times, and in time they will become second nature.

1. If this were a parable, what would it mean?

Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables (Matthew 13:34–35). Dreams often work the same way. Nathan told David a story about a rich man who stole a poor man's lamb, and the story drew out David's own judgment before it exposed his sin (2 Samuel 12:1–7). Ask what the dream is saying as a story before you pick apart the pieces.

2. Identify any patterns with scriptural meanings or biblical stories.

Cars, books, stairs, teeth: look for images that echo the Word. God makes things known through signs and symbols (Revelation 1:1). Ezekiel's valley of dry bones used physical imagery to speak of a nation's spiritual resurrection (Ezekiel 37).

3. Describe who or what the dream is about, as if it were a movie or play.

Who is the protagonist? Who is the antagonist? Who are the key supporting characters? Joseph's life reads this way: a clear main character, brothers who oppose him, and helpers like the cupbearer and Pharaoh (Genesis 37; 41). "Though good advice lies deep within the heart, a person with understanding will draw it out" (Proverbs 20:5).

4. Note the colors, or the lack of color.

Were the colors normal or unusually vivid? What might that indicate? God uses contrast to speak: "though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). John's visions are full of meaningful color: white robes, a red horse, a rainbow around the throne (Revelation 4–7).

5. Ask the Lord for words of knowledge or wisdom about the dreamer.

Record any impressions, scriptures, or images that come in prayer. If you need wisdom, ask God (James 1:5). Young Samuel learned to say, "Speak, your servant is listening," and then carried what he heard to Eli (1 Samuel 3).

6. Speak the dream aloud.

Faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). Sometimes hearing the dream with your own ears helps you discern what you missed while it stayed in your head. Jesus spoke His parables aloud to the crowds and then explained them privately to His disciples (Mark 4:33–34).

7. Contrast the details.

Why were they riding a bike instead of driving a car? Why did the front teeth fall out instead of the wisdom teeth? Daniel paid careful attention to each element of Nebuchadnezzar's statue, because each material had its own meaning and its own season (Daniel 2). Careful, orderly discernment honors God (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40).

8. Ask the dreamer how the dream felt overall.

Was the dominant emotion fear, joy, confusion, clarity, peace, or chaos? The fruit of the Spirit, including peace and self-control, helps reveal where an impression came from (Galatians 5:22–23). Paul was redirected twice by the Spirit before the vision of the man from Macedonia brought clarity and a settled conviction to go (Acts 16:6–10).

9. Discern whether the dream is soulish or from the heart of God.

Based on Hebrews 4:12, ask whether the dream is driven by ungodly desire or the flesh, or whether it comes from the Spirit. Micaiah son of Imlah exposed the lying spirit in the mouths of Ahab's prophets and spoke God's true word, but Ahab refused to listen and suffered the consequences (1 Kings 22:1–38).

Do not interpret a dream faster than you can pray over it.

Remember that receiving a dream, understanding it, and knowing what to do with it are three different things. Revelation, interpretation, and application each need the Lord. Joseph had the revelation as a teenager,

but he did not have the wisdom to keep it to himself, and he paid for it. Many true dreams are wounded by a rushed interpretation or a reckless application.

When someone shares a dream with you, treat it as something precious. Listen to the whole thing before you speak. Do not add details that were not there. Offer what you sense with humility ("Here is what I think it might mean; does that bear witness with you?") and let the dreamer weigh it. If the dream touches other people, especially in a painful way, be slow to repeat it.

Questions to Ask

People are often the heart of a dream. Sometimes the person is simply that person. More often they represent something: a quality, a season, a part of your own heart. These questions help you tell the difference. Do not skip the obvious ones. The plain answer to "What stands out most about this person?" often unlocks the whole dream. And remember that the person in your dream may be showing you something about yourself. If a critical person keeps showing up, it may be worth asking whether a critical spirit has found a home in you.

People you know

- How is this person connected to me? What role does he or she play in the dream?
- Can I fully describe him or her? Do I know the person's name, and what does that name mean?
- What adjectives describe this person? Do I like or dislike him or her?
- What stands out most about this person? Is he or she acting differently than usual?
- What qualities, liabilities, and spiritual qualities does this person have?

- What does this person portray or represent in my life?
- What percentage of the dream is this person in?
- Has this person appeared in other dreams?

Faceless people (angels, demons)

- Is their countenance dark or light?
- Do they help or hinder the dream's direction?
- Do they display any heavenly qualities?
- What feeling or tone do they add to the dream?
- Have they appeared in other dreams, and in a similar context?

Named people

- Is this person known or unknown?
- Is this person a political or spiritual leader?
- Is this person's name in Scripture?
- Does this person have a position or title?

Symbols

These are some of the most common symbols in dreams, listed alphabetically. Each entry gives a common meaning, a possible positive or negative reading, and one passage to start with. Read the passage in context. Remember that the dream's setting, feeling, and the dreamer's own life always weigh more than a list.

Alligator.

Often linked with the Leviathan spirit: verbal attack, hidden gossip, twisting words, something lurking just under the surface. Pay attention to whose mouth it is attacking from. The good news is that God crushes Leviathan's heads (Psalm 74:14).

Attic.

History, the past, things stored away. Positive: godly heritage and wisdom from those who went before. Negative: living in old memories (Deuteronomy 32:7).

Basement.

Things not seen; basic or foundational issues beneath the surface. Positive: a solid foundation of faith. Negative: hidden things, old wounds, or buried sin that God wants to deal with at the root (Hebrews 11:1).

Bathroom.

Cleansing, purification, getting rid of toxins. A toilet, shower, or public restroom often signals that God is washing something out of your life. A public bathroom may add the feeling of exposure in the process (1 John 1:9).

Bed.

Intimacy and rest. Positive: peace and safety in God. Negative: sloth, or intimacy in the wrong place (Psalm 4:8).

Bee or hornet.

Often read as a higher demonic power or a stinging attack. Yet in Scripture God also sends hornets ahead of His people to drive out their enemies. Enemies may swarm like bees, but they are destroyed by the authority of the Lord (Psalm 118:12).

Boots.

Protection and warfare intertwined; readiness to carry the gospel of peace. Worn-out or missing boots may point to weariness or an unprepared walk (Ephesians 6:15).

Car and other vehicles.

Your ministry, career, calling, or life purpose. Notice who is driving, how fast, and where it is headed. A crash may signal a collision in ministry; a stalled car, a season of waiting. The Spirit still says, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage” (Acts 8:29).

Cat.

Often read as independent thinking or self-will. House cats are never mentioned in the Bible, so hold this one loosely. The lion passages sometimes quoted here are about lions, not cats.

Chased, being.

Enemy lies, fear, intimidation, or something you are avoiding. Ask what is chasing you and whether you are meant to stop running and face it. The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but Jesus came to give life (John 10:10).

Circle.

Covenant, completeness, unbroken promise. Negative: going in circles, repeating the same lesson. The rainbow was the sign of God’s covenant with the earth (Genesis 9:13).

Dart.

Negative: curses and bitter words aimed at you. Positive: accuracy, hitting the mark (Psalm 64:3).

Deceased relative.

Generational issues, good or bad. It may expose an inherited pattern that needs breaking, or it may point to a godly inheritance. God’s unfailing

love extends to a thousand generations of those who love Him (Exodus 20:5–6).

Dog.

Friendship, loyalty, protection. Scripture more often uses dogs negatively, as a picture of returning to foolishness or of attack (Proverbs 26:11). Let the dog's behavior in the dream guide you.

Door.

Opportunity. An open door God sets before you; a closed door He has shut for your protection (Revelation 3:8).

Dying, someone.

Rarely literal. Usually the end of an era, an issue, or a career, so that something new can begin (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Falling.

Loss of control, anxiety, fear of failure. Even when we stumble, the Lord holds us by the hand (Psalm 37:24).

Flying.

Spiritual authority and giftedness; rising above circumstances, not confined to the natural. Negative: escaping instead of facing what God wants you to face (Isaiah 40:31).

Gun.

Power to reach beyond yourself; spiritual authority over the enemy. Negative: words or attacks aimed at you or by you (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Horse.

Power and authority. Positive: God making His people strong like a proud warhorse. Negative: trusting in your own strength rather than the Lord (Zechariah 10:3).

House.

Your personal life, your family, your church, your body as a temple. The condition of the house often mirrors the condition of the heart. Each room matters (see Attic, Basement, Bathroom, Bed) (Psalm 127:1).

Knife.

Negative: the tongue, gossip, cutting remarks. Positive: skill, precision, discernment (Proverbs 12:18).

Money.

Loss or gain of favor. Positive: provision and favor. Negative: money becoming a master that competes with God (Matthew 6:24).

Nakedness.

Vulnerability, exposure, transparency. Negative: shame or fear of being found out. Positive: honest transparency before God, and His offer of white garments to cover us (Revelation 3:18).

Nightmares, frequent.

Enemy intimidation, fear, and an attempt to dull your spiritual sensitivity. Pray before you sleep and take your authority (Psalm 91:5).

Nose.

Discernment, the ability to sense what is going on. The Hebrew phrase behind “He will delight in obeying the Lord” is related to the word for smelling (Isaiah 11:3).

Past relationship, returning to.

Old habits, old thinking, an old way of life pulling you back. Rarely about the person (Ephesians 4:22–23).

Pregnancy.

Promise, process, expectancy, new ideas. Something God has spoken is growing, and it will be born at the appointed time. Negative: a miscarriage in a dream may point to a promise under attack or a plan birthed too early (Genesis 21:2).

Purse or wallet, losing.

Lost purpose, identity, or favor. It invites you to remember who you are and the future God has planned (Jeremiah 29:11).

Rat.

Disease, deceit, something unclean gnawing away in secret (1 Samuel 6:4–5).

River.

A move of God; the Holy Spirit flowing from within. Notice whether it is shallow or deep, clear or muddy, and whether you are standing on the bank or in the water. Negative: a flood or a polluted river may picture a contaminated stream (John 7:38).

School or test.

Testing for promotion; relearning a lesson you missed. God tests to show what is in the heart (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Snake.

Lies and deception. A snake is nearly all tail, a fitting picture of the long tale the enemy tells. Positive: your authority to trample it underfoot (John 8:44).

Spider.

The demonic, the occult, witchcraft, entrapment; webs of deceit. A web is a trap that someone patiently built, so ask where you may be getting tangled (Isaiah 59:5).

Storm.

Either a move of God or a demonic attack, depending on the feeling and outcome. Jesus has authority to speak peace to it (Mark 4:39).

Sword.

Like a knife but reaching further; the Word of God in the mouth of the believer. Negative: division, or words used as weapons against others (Ephesians 6:17).

Teeth. The ability to understand, comprehend, and chew on truth. Solid food is for the mature (Hebrews 5:14). - *Teeth falling out:* loss of discernment, fear, inability to speak truth (James 1:5). - *Eye teeth falling out:* loss of discernment in key areas (1 John 4:1). - *Wisdom teeth falling out:* loss of wisdom (James 3:17).

Thigh.

Faith, and the strength of your walk with God. Jacob's hip was touched when he wrestled with God, and he walked differently from then on (Genesis 32:25).

Train.

A church denomination, movement, or corporation, something long and many-carted that moves on a fixed track. This reading leans on an English wordplay ("the train of his robe"), so weigh it with care (Isaiah 6:1).

Tree.

A leader or leadership, or a person's life and influence. Positive: planted, fruitful, and shading others. Negative: withered, uprooted, or cut down. Daniel told the king, "That tree, Your Majesty, is you" (Daniel 4:20–22).

Tunnel or hallway.

Transition, moving from one season to the next, sometimes through darkness. Light at the end is hope; a hallway of closed doors may mean waiting for the right one to open. God promises to lead the blind along unfamiliar paths (Isaiah 42:16).

Window.

Protection, or a way of escape from a bad situation. Negative: exposure. Rahab let the spies down through her window to safety (Joshua 2:15).

A symbol is a doorway into the conversation, not the end of it.

Colors

Many colors appear in Scripture. Some do not, and for those I can only say what they are often associated with. Read the color in light of the whole dream: a gray sky and gray hair say very different things.

Amber.

In Ezekiel's visions the glory around God's throne glows like amber, like fire (Ezekiel 1:4, 27–28; 8:2). Positive: the fire of God revealing Himself in

a more intimate and personal way; a visitation from the Lord; the fire that burns but does not consume (Hebrews 12:29). Negative: God's judgment and rebuke toward a life or ministry because of sin (Isaiah 66:15).

Black.

Scripture pictures God surrounded by thick darkness, His secret place (Exodus 20:21; Psalm 18:11; 97:2). The bride says, "I am black but comely," dark and lovely (Song of Songs 1:5). Black hair growing back in a sore was a sign of healing (Leviticus 13:37). Positive: the presence of the Father, a hidden beauty, healing. Negative: famine and lack of spiritual nourishment (Lamentations 5:10; Revelation 6:5–6), mourning (Jeremiah 8:21; 14:2), or judgment and evil (Joel 2:2; Zephaniah 1:15).

Blue.

One of the royal and heavenly colors of the tabernacle and temple (Exodus 28:31; 2 Chronicles 3:14). The Lord told Israel to put blue cords on the tassels of their clothing to remember His commandments (Numbers 15:38–40). Positive: a heavenly visitation, revelation, the Word; sometimes water and the Spirit, to drink freely (John 7:37). In older translations, the "blueness of a wound" cleanses away evil, a picture of the Father's discipline (Proverbs 20:30, KJV). Negative: blue was also worn by idols and by the Assyrians Israel lusted after, a picture of vanity and corruption (Jeremiah 10:9; Ezekiel 23:5–6). In our culture blue can also speak of sadness, though that is modern idiom, not Scripture.

Brown.

Not given a symbolic meaning in Scripture. It is often associated with dead grass, something without life or spirit (Psalm 37:2; 1 Peter 1:24). Positive: being born again, repentance, dying to the old. Negative: spiritual deadness, being without God's guidance.

Crimson.

Scripture links crimson with sin washed white (Isaiah 1:18), and the red of blood with life (Leviticus 17:11). Positive: the shed blood of Christ, covenant restored, covering and cleansing (Exodus 12:13; Hebrews 9:22; 1 John 1:7). Negative: bloodshed, war, spiritual warfare (1 Kings 2:5; 1 Chronicles 22:8).

Gray.

Gray hair is a crown of glory, a picture of dignity and honor (Proverbs 16:31). Positive: wisdom in a certain area. Negative: weakness without realizing it (Hosea 7:9); indecision, a hazy or unclear path; hidden deception.

Green.

In Scripture green is the color of vegetation, life, and growth (Genesis 1:30; Psalm 23:2; Hosea 14:8). Positive: rest in the Lord, renewal, growth and maturity. Negative: withering and weakness (Job 15:32; Isaiah 15:6); immaturity or inexperience. Green for envy is a modern association; if it fits the dream, ask whether comparison is drying up your walk with God.

Orange.

Not named in Scripture. Often associated with fire. Positive: being purified or perfected under fire or persecution (Proverbs 6:27; Luke 12:49). Negative: great danger, or an evil force trying to harm your spiritual or natural life.

Pink.

Not named in Scripture. Often associated with a blend of white (purity) and red (the blood of Jesus), and sometimes with sensuality. Positive: a heart of stone exchanged for a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26), purity (2

Corinthians 11:2). Negative: a watered-down gospel and a lack of passion for the Word of God.

Purple.

The color of royalty, kingship, royal robes, and wealth (Judges 8:26). Lydia, a merchant of purple cloth, was the woman whose heart the Lord opened to the Word (Acts 16:14). Positive: high rank in your spiritual or natural life; hunger for the Word of God. Negative: the corruption of riches (Revelation 17:4), royalty in mockery, as when soldiers put a purple robe on Jesus (John 19:2–5), or the religious pride of those who love their robes and titles (Luke 20:46).

Red.

In Scripture red describes ordinary things like Jacob's stew (Genesis 25:30) and the color of blood, which often symbolizes life. Positive: overcoming, victory, being washed in the blood of Jesus (Nahum 2:3; Isaiah 63:2). Negative: struggle and battle, vengeance, temptation, or illness tied to disobedience (Revelation 12:3; Proverbs 23:29–31; Leviticus 13:19). Moab saw water red as blood and was deceived (2 Kings 3:22).

White.

Refined, righteous, and heavenly. The Lord's throne is a great white throne (Revelation 20:11), and the redeemed wear white (Revelation 7:9; 19:14). The young man at the empty tomb was clothed in a white robe (Mark 16:5), and the fields are white for harvest (John 4:35). Positive: cleansing, innocence, truth, victory, a fresh start (Psalm 51:7; Isaiah 1:18; Revelation 19:11). The notes give no negative reading for white.

Yellow.

In older translations yellow appears as gold on a dove's feathers (Psalm 68:13, KJV) and as thin yellow hair in a skin disease (Leviticus 13:30, KJV).

It is often associated with wisdom, God's glory, and honor. Positive: a gift from God, understanding of His Word, a strong desire to seek wisdom. Negative: illness or uncleanness; a deceitful gift that looks like light but is not (2 Corinthians 11:14); fear or cowardice, which is a modern association.

Numbers

Numbers in Scripture are real, and some carry clear patterns. Others rest more on tradition than text. I have kept the meanings as taught and marked the weaker ones honestly. Never build a doctrine on a number. Numbers in a dream are usually confirmations that sit alongside the main message, not the message itself. If you keep seeing the same number, ask the Lord what He is highlighting, and then search the Scriptures rather than the internet.

1. **God.** Unity and the oneness of God (Deuteronomy 6:4).
2. **Multiplication (+), Division (-).** God promised to multiply Abraham's descendants (Genesis 22:17); the nations were divided at Babel (Genesis 11:9).
3. **Godhead (Trinity).** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; completeness in God (Matthew 28:19).
4. **God's creative works.** Creation and the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:12).
5. **Grace, redemption, favor, and anointing.** Often associated with grace, as in the five offerings of the Levitical law (Leviticus 1–7).
6. **Man (humanity).** Man was created on the sixth day (Genesis 1:27–31).
7. **Perfection, completeness, fullness.** The seven days of the creation week (Genesis 2:2–3).
8. **New beginnings (Teacher).** Eight people were saved in the ark to start anew (1 Peter 3:20).

9. **Gifts, fruit, judgment (Evangelist).** Nine fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) and nine gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8–10).
10. **Free will, wilderness, nurture (Pastor).** Often associated with order and responsibility, as in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20).
11. **Transition, intercessor, remnant (Prophet).** The eleven apostles after Judas, waiting for the twelfth (Acts 1:26).
12. **Government (Apostle).** The twelve tribes and the twelve apostles on the gates and foundations of the city (Revelation 21:12–14).
13. **Rebellion.** The kings rebelled in the thirteenth year (Genesis 14:4).
14. **Reprieve, mercy.** Hezekiah was given fifteen more years (2 Kings 20:6).
15. **Elect of God.** A traditional reading. The flood began on the seventeenth day of the month (Genesis 7:11), and the ark came to rest on the seventeenth day (Genesis 8:4), a picture of complete victory.
16. **Beginning ministry training.** Not given a symbolic meaning in Scripture, but Levites began their service at age twenty-five (Numbers 8:24).
17. **Beginning ministry.** Priests began their duties at thirty, and so did Jesus (Numbers 4:3; Luke 3:23).
18. **Generational, testing, wilderness.** Israel's forty years in the wilderness (Exodus 16:35).
19. **Jubilee.** Freedom and release in the fiftieth year (Leviticus 25:10).
20. **End of flesh.** God set man's days at 120 years (Genesis 6:3), and about 120 believers waited in the upper room for the Spirit (Acts 1:15).
21. **Kingdom multiplication.** The 153 large fish caught after the resurrection, and the net did not tear (John 21:11).
22. **Lawlessness, man, subjective truth.** The number of the beast, man's imperfection and rebellion (Revelation 13:18).
23. **Resurrection.** Not a number found in Scripture. It is traditionally associated with Jesus because, in Greek gematria, the letters of His

name, *Iēsous*, add up to 888.

The tags on 8 through 12 (Teacher, Evangelist, Pastor, Prophet, Apostle) are a teaching aid, not something Scripture assigns.

Dream Categories

Most dreams fall into one or more of these nineteen categories. Naming the category helps you know what to do with the dream: pray, repent, wait, act, or simply rest. A single dream can fit more than one category. A warning dream may also be an intercession dream, and a soul dream may become a healing dream once you bring it to Jesus.

1. **Correction.** Divine correction or warning that turns us from wrong (Job 33:14–18).
2. **Courage.** Dreams that inspire or encourage bravery (Joshua 1:9).
3. **Dark.** Darkness that symbolizes confusion or lack of understanding, and the promise that light will dawn (Isaiah 9:2).
4. **Deliverance.** Liberation or rescue (Psalm 34:4).
5. **Direction.** Guidance or instruction, like the wise men warned to go home another way (Matthew 2:12).
6. **False.** Misleading or deceptive dreams (Jeremiah 23:32).
7. **Fear.** Dreams that reveal or provoke fear, so it can be confronted (2 Timothy 1:7).
8. **Flushing.** Cleansing or purging (Psalm 51:10).
9. **Healing.** Physical or emotional healing (Isaiah 53:5).
10. **Intercession.** Dreams that prompt prayer for others (1 Timothy 2:1).
11. **Inventions.** Dreams that inspire creativity and innovation. Wisdom finds out knowledge and discretion (Proverbs 8:12).
12. **New Season.** A change or transition (Ecclesiastes 3:1).
13. **Promotion.** Elevation or advancement, which comes from God (Psalm 75:6–7).

14. **Prophecy and Revelation.** Divine messages or insight (Joel 2:28).
15. **Self-Condition.** Dreams that reveal your own spiritual or emotional state (Psalm 139:23–24).
16. **Spiritual Warfare.** Battles or conflicts in the spiritual realm (Ephesians 6:12).
17. **Soul.** Dreams that reflect the state of your inner being (Proverbs 20:27).
18. **Warning.** A caution or alert, like Joseph told to flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:13).
19. **Word of Knowledge.** Dreams that impart specific knowledge or understanding (1 Corinthians 12:8).

Things to Remember

- **Record your dreams.** Use whatever method fits how you think: cluster, diagram, spiral, intuitive, or linear.
- **Title and date your dreams.** Patterns often show up only over months and years.
- **Establish the focus of your dream.** What is the one thing it keeps pointing to?
- **Where are you in the dream?** Are you participating, observing, or the focus?
- **If this were a movie, who is the main character?**
- **Compare and contrast.** Why this and not that? Why a bicycle, not a car? Why an apartment, not a house?
- **Know the sphere of the dream.**
    - *Internal:* it is about you: heart issues, emotions, longings, opinions, your relationship with God.
    - *External:* it is about others: people, cities, churches, nations.

Most dreams are internal. Start with your own heart before you announce something over a nation.

Keep a notebook or a note on your phone by the bed, and write the dream down before you check anything else. Dreams fade quickly. Write what you saw, what you felt, and any words that were spoken, even if they make no sense yet. Some dreams will not open up for months or years. Joseph waited a long time to see his sheaves bow. Do not throw a dream away just because you do not understand it today.

And above all, stay close to the Word. The more Scripture you carry, the larger your vocabulary for what God is saying in the night.

A Blessing for Dreamers

May the Lord who spoke to Jacob at Bethel meet you in the night. May He give you the humility of Joseph in the prison and the integrity of Daniel in the palace. May your dreams drive you to the Word and not away from it, and may every interpretation draw you closer to Jesus, who is the point of every dream He sends. Sleep in peace, for He alone keeps you safe. And when you wake, may you find that He was there all along.

The God who speaks in the night is the same God who wrote the Book: let the Book have the final word.