

PERSEVERE

WITH

POWER

*WHAT HEAVEN STARTS,
HELL CANNOT STOP*

SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ

Foreword by DEVON FRANKLIN

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HELL CANNOT STOP*

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I dedicate this book to my best friend,
basketball partner, pride and joy,
my personal “Elisha,”
my son, Nathan Samuel

Your father loves you beyond words.
Extremely proud of you.
Thank you for being a better version of me
by being who God made you to be.
Now go, change the world!

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FOREWORD

All of us love great stories. Whether we see them on the big screen or stream them on our televisions, we read them in novels or biographies, or we hear them as we sit around the family table, we anticipate plot twists, root for heroes and root against villains, and are thrilled by surprise endings. In the greatest adventure stories, a valiant hero always comes through even the most difficulty of challenges. My friend Pastor Sam is one of the greatest storytellers I know, and it's been a blessing for us to work together to produce hit Hollywood films like *Breakthrough*. With this book, *Persevere with Power*, I see all the elements of a compelling true story. The hero, though, isn't you and me; it's Jesus. He is the one who faces down venomous adversaries and rescues the helpless (us) from disaster. He is the protagonist in the drama, but you and I get to play important supporting roles.

Pastor Sam points us to the most gripping stories in the Bible. Page after page, he shows us how men and women of God faced roadblocks and breakthroughs, heartaches and heartbreaks. Sometimes they flinched, retreated or even failed, but they eventually held on to trust God to do what only He can do: deliver when we surrender. In His Word, God did not edit out the uncomfortable

parts of the story—it is all there. And He did not try to hide the unvarnished realities of the struggle. It is there, woven into a narrative that sweeps us from creation to the fall into sin to the magnificent saga of redemption through Christ. And through Christ we are reminded that our story has a powerful ending!

This book peels off any blinders we might use because we are afraid of the truth. When we see things as they are, we notice the layers of reality—physical, relational, cultural, emotional and spiritual. We are in a fight, but it is not only against things we can see. Our real battle is against things we can't see. We see personal tragedies, family calamities, cultural threats, economic setbacks and political division, but behind all these are spiritual forces of darkness that try to demoralize us and shatter our faith.

In each chapter, Pastor Sam shows how we can trust the Savior's sacrifice and the Spirit's power to be overcomers. In Paul's greatest theological dissertation, the letter to the Romans, he catalogs a list of difficulties believers face—tribulation, distress, famine, danger or sword—but none of these have the last word. He boldly proclaims, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). That is what this book is about: conquering through Christ.

Persevere with Power is both inspirational and practical. In each chapter, Pastor Sam provides clear points of application so we can actually incorporate spiritual truth into our hearts and our choices. And he goes further: At the end of each chapter, we find penetrating questions designed to expose our needs and target the Spirit's work. Pastor Sam then ends each chapter with a prayer that captures the heart of faith and our request for God to work miracles.

Do you see your life as a compelling story, with plot twists and the ultimate hero? Great stories always include steep obstacles and

fierce adversaries. I'm sure you have them—all of us do. Pastor Sam asks us to invite Jesus into the middle of our mess, to trust that God will show us the way over the obstacles and give us the strength to face our enemies. When Jesus is in the center of it all, we experience the beautiful blend of God's power, His love and our fulfillment.

Isn't that the kind of story you want your life to tell?

DeVon Franklin, producer, author and friend

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is not the book of perfect people. The Bible is not a historical categorization of pristine, unblemished, stainless saints. No! Without a doubt, from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is a book of overcomers. Just look at some of the most famous of the faithful and what they overcame:

Abraham overcame the deceit of others as well as his own lies.

Joseph overcame the pit and the betrayal of his own brothers.

Moses overcame Pharaoh, his temper and his past.

Joshua overcame the Amalekites, the disobedience of his troops and his fear of being alone when his mentor died.

Gideon overcame the threshing floor and his insecurities.

Samson overcame his pride, his lack of respect for the anointing and Delilah's deception.

David overcame a bear, a lion, a giant, Saul's spear and his own moral turpitude.

Elijah overcame Jezebel.

Elisha overcame famine and siege.

Esther overcame the haters.

Daniel overcame the lions.

The Hebrew boys overcame the furnace.

Job overcame the loss of all he had.

Peter overcame the cursing of his blessing.

Paul overcame the shipwreck and the snake.

And Jesus, the Son of God and our wondrous Savior, Jesus overcame darkness, death and defeat. Jesus overcame everything!

No matter what you are facing right now, your battle might not be over but it has already been won. God will never give up on you and will instead anoint you with strength to help you overcome the powers of darkness that are trying to defeat you.

In this book we will take a hard look at what it means to persevere with power—to walk in the confidence that hell cannot stop the prophetic anointing that God has placed on your life. Put another way, you will learn how to keep your hand to the plow spiritually. If you are willing to do this, to push your plow spiritually, then you can know that God’s mantle of anointing and power is waiting for you. And when God’s mantle rests on your shoulders, then nothing or no one can stop you! Because—as we will learn from the struggles of two of the greatest prophets in world history—when the Elijahs speak up, the Jezebels cannot win. When the Elishas stand up, the Ahabs cannot endure. When you and I as God’s people pray down fire, it makes no difference how soaking wet the altar is; Baal cannot win.

No matter how bleak your circumstances, God’s power in you will prevail. Nothing is finished until God declares it finished. So let me declare something prophetically: When future believers

write about our generation, our time in history, they will not say, “This was the generation of Jezebel, Ahab or Baal.” They will say, “This was the generation when the blood-washed, Holy Spirit-filled, devil-rebuking, demon-binding, grace-filled, righteous-living Elijahs and Elishas stood up!”

Porque lo que es de Dios siempre gana!

Did you catch the meaning in those words? We will be remembered as overcomers *because those who are of God always win!*

The most powerful spirit on the planet today is not the spirit of consumerism or greed, and it is not the spirit of influence and affluence. The most powerful spirit on the planet *was and still is*, back then and right now, and always will be *the Holy Spirit of almighty God*.

When you have the Spirit of God dwelling in you, then you never have to fear again the times you live in. As a follower of Jesus who has accepted the free gift of salvation through His sacrifice on the cross, you are assured that “you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you” (1 John 2:27 NLT). You may face trials and tribulations, you may endure storms and setbacks, but you will never be defeated permanently. You might experience discomfort, distress or debilitation, but your joy and peace will not cease.

If you have that Spirit, then you will speak as if you have Him.

If you have that Spirit, then you will praise as if you have Him.

If you have that Spirit, then you will worship as if you have Him.

If you have that Spirit, then you will fight as if you have Him.

If you have that Spirit, then you will pray as if you have Him.

If you have that Spirit, then you will rebuke the devil as if you have Him.

If you have that Spirit, then everything about your life is in Him and through Him and by His power.

Here is the truth about overcoming the struggles we face.
When you are washed by the blood of the Lamb . . .
When you are forgiven through Christ's death on the cross . . .
When you are filled with the Holy Spirit . . .
When Jesus is Lord and Savior of your life . . .
Then you are *not* who you used to be!
You are not an eternal victim.
You are not the devil's punching bag.
You are not cursed.
You are not defeated.

When you have the mantle of God resting on your shoulders, you no longer depend on your own abilities. You no longer face your own limitations or the caveats and qualifications others try to impose on you. You no longer rely on your own strength because you understand that the unlimited, infinite and eternal power of the great I AM is inside you. And you are never the same.

Come with me to learn how in Christ, by Christ, through Christ and for Christ, you can overcome. You can *persevere with power!*

1



Prophetic Power for Pathetic Times

When you live in the power of the Holy Spirit, you can walk through any circumstance—no matter how challenging!

Sam, I'm taking Yvonne to the emergency room—she has a fever and she's . . . she's gasping for breath.” My wife's voice choked with emotion then as only a mother's can for her child. *“I think she has the virus.”*

With that one short sentence, my faith was suddenly tossed into a Category 5 hurricane. Our oldest daughter, Yvonne, a mother of two young children herself, my grandchildren, had been feeling poorly for several days. My wife, Eva, who trained as a combat nurse during her military career, had been taking care of Yvonne as well as her little ones. If Eva thought our daughter needed emergency care for the potential effects of COVID-19, then I knew she had based her opinion on painful reality.

My precious daughter did indeed test positive for the deadly virus and was admitted to the hospital. I have never felt more

helpless and powerless in my life than when I saw her lying in a hospital bed on the screen of my phone—I could not even visit her in person because of the preventative measures taken by the hospital. Our church began praying around the clock for her recovery, along with the restoration of health for everyone suffering the life-threatening impact of that unprecedented viral assault on humanity.

I continued ministering and serving as best I could, if only to pour my energy into something constructive rather than ruminating on the dark thoughts gathering at the edge of my mind like storm clouds. To combat the worst-case scenarios darting through my mind, I took every thought captive and clung to the promises of God in His Word. I know He is inherently good and loves His children. I know that by the power of His Spirit and the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, I can do all things.

Then the enemy would tempt me with graphic reminders of the toll the coronavirus was taking. The way it defied analysis and seemed to behave erratically in individual cases. I wanted to believe that my daughter's healthy body could sustain the attack, but then I would see cases of other young adults who never recovered. I wanted to believe that her immune system would aggressively develop antibodies, the invisible protein cells generated in her plasma to counter the invading virus, but then I would wonder, *What if, for some reason, her body cannot fight back?*

I wanted to believe that she could not possibly die, that God loved her—and me and my wife—too much to allow such a devastating loss. But then I would think of other men and women of God whom I knew, in our church and in my pastoral network of relationships, who endured the loss of loved ones, including their children. I worked hard to sustain my faith and remain strong for Eva and for Yvonne and her own young family.

When I was alone, though, the emotions would bubble from inside my heart until I could no longer contain my tears. I remember driving myself home from my office. I would be cruising down the highway and suddenly realize my vision had grown blurry, almost as if it were raining on my windshield. The tears spilled out so hard and fast a couple times that I had to pull over, sobbing and crying out to God, begging Him to obliterate the virus from my daughter's body, praying His Spirit would give us all the supernatural peace that is beyond earthly understanding.

Then the unthinkable happened: Yvonne was moved to the hospital's Intensive Care Unit because her lungs were losing capacity. She was put on a ventilator and given stronger steroids. Her doctors told us that her body was not generating adequate antibodies to fight the virus.

Though I had felt powerless in the days leading up to that moment, nothing was like the impact of those words. I truly did not know how I could go forward.

I felt as if I had wandered into a deep, dark cave with no way out.

Afraid of the Dark

During those dark days when we walked with Yvonne through the battle for her life, I knew, as I mentioned, that I was not the only one suffering. The shadow of the pandemic spread across our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our communities and our churches. Loved ones lost, businesses shuttered, careers stalled, events postponed, homes locked, hopes and dreams suspended—for the rest of their lives millions and millions of people will grapple with seismic shifts, struggling to reorient themselves to a different world.

Even people blessed enough at the time to have remained healthy, maintained their employment and shepherded their families through the valley of the shadow of death still tell me to this day how they struggle. Some feel traumatized by the possibility of the unimaginable once again upending their lives. Others wrestle with chronic, ambiguous grief because they saw so much suffering around them.

No matter the age and stage of life in which we find ourselves, darkness inevitably descends. When we are in it, everything suddenly seems unfamiliar and uncertain. We grope along, sometimes afraid to ignite even a flicker of hope because something else might happen to quench that small spark of light. We try to trust God and rely on Him to lead us forward and guide our steps. We try to exercise faith and not allow fear, anger, sorrow and doubt to consume us.

And if we are able to emerge from darkness, we still struggle. When the darkness has lifted, many of us resist acknowledging that it even exists. It is simply too painful and stirs up too many overwhelming memories of the past. Why consider something unpleasant, we reason, when our lives are going well enough and everything colors within the lines of our expectations? Once we have experienced the fragility of life and the way almost every aspect of our world can change, literally overnight, then we have a whole new basement for the worst-case scenarios haunting our imaginations.

Either way, regardless of our circumstances, we often end up afraid of the dark, afraid to face what might be there.

When the Worst Happens

As much as I wish I were immune to trials and tribulations, I am right there with you, just like everyone trying to keep the faith and

take each day as it comes. While in many ways my faith is stronger than ever, I also know what it feels like to have the unfathomable become reality. All it takes, really, is one moment, one text, one email, one phone call.

In fact, if you are like me, you are probably tempted to feel overwhelmed by the times in which we live. Political division and social distancing; civil unrest and systemic racism; bankrupt morality and cultural promiscuity. We could each make our own lengthy lists of the triggers of tension in our lives right now.

The toll of such ongoing, unrelenting stress leads to chronic anxiety, depression and fatigue. Whom can we trust for truth in the swirl of so much sensationalism, social media spin and fake news? We truly live in unprecedented times, and the cumulative weight of so much pain, grief, anger and negativity can shatter our lives and derail our relationship with God—if we let it.

But we always have a choice, and our choice right now is clear: We can give in to our emotions amidst overwhelming, tumultuous circumstances, or we can live by faith through the power of the living God. Despite my struggles and moments of doubt, I believe the only choice forward is by faith. I believe the only source of truth we can trust—above and beyond any other—is God’s Word. And when I look to Scripture to light the path in this present darkness, I turn to the example I find there in two heroes of the faith.

You see, the genesis of this book was my search for biblical precedent for hope amidst the darkest of times. I wanted to see if Scripture provided an example that can serve as a template for these distressing days in which we are living. And if so, I wanted to see evidence of God’s promise to respond to His people with an outpouring of prophetic power. Many questions formed in my mind: How did those people keep their hope alive, their faith intact when all was darkness around them? What understanding did they

have that gave them strength and brought them through their valleys? Is it available to us in equal measure? How do we access it?

While numerous possibilities came to mind, I felt led to the story of the relationship between two Old Testament prophets, Elijah and his successor, Elisha. I have always been inspired by the diligence, dedication and devotion displayed in their lives during one of Israel's darkest historical periods. They lived during one of the most corrupt, violent, immoral times ever and yet remained faithful to God and experienced His faithfulness, power and provision in the face of impossible odds.

A Match Made in Hell

Look briefly at the world in which Elijah and Elisha lived. By the time Ahab claimed the throne, more than a century had passed since King David had reigned over Israel, and the nation of God's chosen people had split into two weaker fragments. David's descendants continued to rule the Southern Kingdom of Judah, while the Northern Kingdom of Israel endured a plague of toxic kings one after another, culminating in the person of Ahab. Amidst a list of notorious, nefarious, no-good leaders, it is telling that Ahab is introduced as the worst yet: "Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him" (1 Kings 16:30).

This is the first instance when Ahab's name appears in Scripture—talk about first impressions! Right away we are told he was more rebellious, degenerate and evil than any of his predecessors. And he definitely lived up to this reputation in his selection of a wife: "He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him" (1 Kings 16:31).

Basically, Ahab chose his queen for advantageous political reasons, but given the fact that her father is cited by name, a name identifying him as a priest of the false god Baal, it is clear she was a match made in hell for the equally idolatrous Ahab. She came from a household and culture that worshiped idols and listened to false prophets. Jezebel, as it turns out, may have been even worse than her wicked husband.

She hated the prophets.

She persecuted the preachers.

She rejected the truth.

In fact, as you may recall, after Elijah's display of God's power in a showdown on Mount Carmel against hundreds of Jezebel's false prophets, which led to their deaths, Jezebel in turn threatened the Lord's chosen prophet with death.

Consequently, Elijah became afraid and ran away. As we will see, he had to push a metaphorical plow before he could resume his ministry with the mantle God had placed on him.

Elijah was a man with a mantle.

A man with a message.

A man with a mission.

Then, after persevering through his own trials precipitated by Ahab and Jezebel, Elijah went in search of the person God had anointed to join him on his mission, a man named Elisha.

The essence of their message emerges vividly in the first meeting between our two prophets:

So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field. There were twelve teams of oxen in the field, and Elisha was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and then walked away.

1 Kings 19:19 NLT

Look at that key Scripture again: When the older prophet arrived to see the younger man pushing a plow, breaking ground and sowing seeds in faithful service to God, Elijah placed his mantle upon Elisha and walked away.

That mantle changed Elisha's life and shifted the trajectory of a nation.

One that would subsequently embody the notion of a greater portion.

Elisha's plow prepared him to wear God's mantle and wield the power and responsibility that came with it. The same cause-and-effect sequence of spiritual growth and unlimited holy power continues to operate today. When we carry out faithfully the roles and responsibilities, the duties and directives that God assigns to us, then He gives us more—more power, more provision, more passion—to meet the next challenges we are called to face.

No matter how dark our night, God's morning always comes.

No matter how downcast we may feel, God's presence is always with us.

No matter how desperate our circumstances, God's power always prevails.

Hard times may leave us in darkness, but they can never separate us from the Light.

This Present Darkness

I am convinced and convicted that 1 Kings 18 and 19 speak to this very hour in which we live. Our world, spiritually speaking, bears a remarkable resemblance to the time of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, leaders of Israel who not only served as antagonists for Elijah and Elisha but also represent the antithesis of everything

holy. Simply put, Ahab was a horrible king and a *mucho malo hombre*. And his wife was even worse—evil on steroids!

Spiritually speaking, Ahab represents forces that tempt and prompt us to sacrifice truth on the altar of expediency. These forces try to tell us what to believe and how to act, coercing us into conforming to their own idolatrous agendas rather than obeying the Word of God. They are the political leaders doing whatever is expedient for their own power and profit, pretending to care about their constituents but intent on exploiting them. They are the social media celebrities and style icons, seducing followers to imitate them without any limits to their language, behavior and morality. They are the corporate executives and media moguls driven by greed and worshiping mammon rather than the truth of the living God.

Concurrent with the obliteration of biblical truth in our culture, Jezebel represents the manipulative, sexually coercive, perverse, corrupt spirit determined to murder goodness, poison innocence and silence prophetic voices. Modern Jezebels want to construct counterfeit temples and legitimize bogus institutions that will marginalize noble, God-honoring oracles of righteousness and justice. They are the entertainers offering their self-aggrandizing authority and the advertisers selling self-delusion and vanity. They construct their Asherah poles, or some other dispenser of noxious noise, and try to drown out the cries of the persecuted, the impoverished, the wounded.

In the 21st century, in the United States and around the world, we cannot deny that the spirit of Jezebel is alive and well, thriving voraciously in our midst where once it was forced to hide. Rather than covert seductions and individual corruption, now we see leaders and entire organizations persecuting, prosecuting and attempting to silence the children of the cross. The spirit of Ahab is alive and well, stealing love, killing joy and destroying

peace. The spirit of Baal is alive and kicking, demanding that truth and children in and out of the womb be sacrificed on the altar of self-defined autonomy.

The word that I use most often to describe such dark and desperate times is *pathetic*. I like the way its two primary definitions both apply: It means “something wretched” as well as “something useless and contemptible.” Derived from the Greek word *pathos*, meaning “suffering” or “feeling,” *pathetic* most likely entered the English language in the sixteenth century and referred to that which evoked pity bordering on sympathy. While *sympathy* allows us to acknowledge loss or tragedy in the lives of others and feel the weight of their grief, *pity*, on the other hand, carries the sense of recognizing pain without valuing it. Yes, pity sometimes is used synonymously with sympathy or mercy, but usually *pity* harkens back to its pathetic roots.

But here is the Good News, the truth at the heart of the Gospel: *Pathetic times last for a while but God’s prophetic power always triumphs!*

Anointed Antibodies

I saw this truth illustrated firsthand in my daughter’s recovery. When Yvonne’s body failed to produce enough antibodies on its own to combat the viral infection, her doctors realized that her best chance of recovery was using power appropriated from another source. In this case, such treatment meant injecting into her body plasma and antibodies from someone else, someone with her same blood type who had already contracted the coronavirus and recovered. Her doctors hoped her body would circulate the new antibodies and perhaps stimulate the creation of more of her own, offering a kind of dual antibody attack on the virus.

There was risk involved, of course, but it was the best possible course of treatment available, the one with the greatest chance of succeeding. After two weeks in the hospital, with much of that time spent in the ICU, Yvonne began to recover. Her body's systems began to resume their normal functioning, especially her respiratory system, and her symptoms began to fade. Injecting antibodies from another patient who had already recovered proved successful. Her body now had the antibodies it needed. Within hours of this treatment, she began making a full recovery and was soon discharged from the hospital.

After I wept for joy and prayed with praise and thanksgiving to the Great Physician, I reflected upon the symbolism of my daughter's treatment. The more I considered everything I had learned about the way viruses attack the human body, the more similarities I saw in the assault of evil on our spiritual health. It presented a unique illustration, metaphorically and spiritually speaking, of what takes place when a spiritual virus gets an inroad into our souls, our hearts, our faith, our families and our communities. A virus is a microscopic infectious entity, a foreign substance that seeks living cells for the purpose of replicating itself. In other words, it does not belong where it lands, just as darkness does not belong in our souls. Evil always seeks to kill and destroy. The enemy, like a virus, persists in tempting us with defeat until we grow weaker and more vulnerable. At the very worst, we give up and allow sin into our lives, which affects every area, every decision, every relationship.

There is an antidote, however. Hope—the unwavering belief in the goodness of God—counterattacks darkness like powerful antibodies. Antibodies recognize foreign substances like bacteria and viruses, and neutralize them. They also stay on guard in order to provide protection against future exposures.

In other words, because you survived, now you are stronger.

If you are stronger, then you will defeat the darkness when it tries to infect you again.

Do you see the spiritual connection?

Think of the many people in Scripture who were infected by evil, fell into sin and were swept away. This is where the story of Elisha and Elijah is crucial to understand if we are going to survive individually and as God's people. Darkness, if left unchecked, will pull us from the forward march of faith and throw us into the grip of fear and defeat.

But every time we stand and win the battle against darkness, then we are equipped to overcome, to defeat, to conquer and to triumph over that enemy the next time it tries to infect our lives.

What an extraordinary picture of the way God empowers us with His Spirit to defeat darkness! Never doubt that God has anointed you with spiritual antibodies to overcome the virus of pathetic times.

The Choices

If Elijah and Elisha had given up and stopped trusting God, then they would have missed out. If they had not persevered with pushing their respective plows, one metaphorical and the other literal, then they would have missed the mantle of blessing God had for them. The Lord would still have defeated His enemies and provided prophetic power to overcome such pathetic times, but He would have used someone else.

You and I can be part of what God is doing, or we can sink into the cultural muck trying to pull us under. We can thrash and splash as the relentless currents of unexpected circumstances overwhelm us, or we can grab the lifeline of prophetic power

God extends to those who trust Him. We cannot control all that happens to us and around us, but we always have a choice about how we respond.

We can choose to keep plowing, faithfully and obediently, even when we are tired, afraid, anxious and sad, trusting God to know when we are ready to wear His mantle and move on. Or we can abandon our plows and lose ourselves in the wilderness of hedonism and humanism surrounding us. We can refuse to keep going and trusting God and instead listen to the voices of false prophets, idolaters and other wolves in sheep's clothing.

And even when we fail, we can rejoice that God is faithful! Despite the repeated disobedience and frequent idolatry of the people of Israel, God did not abandon them but sent prophets, including Elijah and Elisha, with His message of repentance and His power to conquer adversity. Ahab and Jezebel blatantly worshiped pagan gods and practiced rituals and customs abhorrent to the Lord of lords. We are told they were the worst of the worst, the bottom of the barrel, the lowest of lows despite their royal status at the top of their social and cultural hierarchy. They thought they had won and had proved that the God of their ancestors was no longer relevant, reliable or relatable.

Unbeknown to Ahab and Jezebel, however, they had simply created an opportunity for God to reveal His prophetic power through His people. What they intended for their own glory, greed and pleasure, God used as a showcase to spotlight His character, His love and His mercy.

Do not be distracted, my friend, by the ever-changing demands on your life.

Do not leave your plow behind because you are too weary, too afraid or too unsure.

Do not give up hope when God is preparing you for your breakthrough.

Do not despair when sin tries to infect your life.

Pathetic times are no match for the limitless prophetic power of the living God!

Choosing Prophetic over Pathetic

While you and I have never witnessed anything like the challenges of recent times, God has. He exists outside of chronological time as we know it, and His omniscience knows all that can be known, far beyond what mortal minds can comprehend or human senses can engage. God is not surprised by anything that is happening right now—not in your life, your family, your neighborhood, your community, your workplace, your church, your city, your county, your state, your nation or your world.

Whether you realize it or not, God has prepared you for times such as these. He has already anointed you with antibodies for the virus of a sinful world that is trying to infect your life. When the world turns upside down, God is the same as He has always been. When the light around you grows dim, the Light inside you shines brighter. James assures us that “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). God sees what you are facing and He will meet you in the midst of your struggles.

He might not show you the end of your story just yet, and He might not provide what you want when you want it. You might have to take it a step at a time, a day at a time rather than be magically transported into a life free of pain or discomfort. Nonetheless, God is with you and will not leave you defenseless in the face

of evil. If you are willing to let go of how you want your life to be, then God can begin showing you what your life *can* become—a trophy of His grace, a testimony of His power, a spiritual mirror of His glory.

Why do I know this? Not because God healed my daughter, not because of the abundance of blessings He has faithfully bestowed on me and my family throughout my life, and not because of how I feel yesterday, today or tomorrow. I know God cares about you and wants to drape your soul with His mantle of protection, power and provision because this is who He is and has always been and will always be. This is the great I AM who loves us relentlessly despite our failures, flaws and fluctuations. This is who God is in the Old Testament, who He is in the New Testament, and who He is in this present moment.

Push Your Plow, Meet Your Mantle

At the end of each chapter, you will find a few questions to help you reflect on my message and apply it to your own life. There is no obligation; this is not homework. And you do not have to write down your responses, but you might be surprised to discover how helpful it can be to keep a record of how God speaks to you through these pages.

Whether you record your answers or not, after you have spent a few moments thinking about these questions, I encourage you to go to the Lord in prayer and share with Him what is going on in your heart. To help ignite your conversation with God, to help spark your communication with Him, I have provided a short prayer for you. No matter what you are facing, remember that He is your heavenly Father, your Creator and the Lover of your soul.

The plow you are pushing today is preparing you for the mantle you will wear tomorrow.

1. What are the hardest things you are facing right now?
What burdens are you carrying that weigh the most on your soul? How have you handled their pressure so far?

2. What examples do you see in the world around you that parallel the pathetic times during which Ahab and Jezebel ruled? What trends, issues and conflicts concern you the most in your community right now? What frightens you most about them? What impact are they having on your life? On the lives of those you love?

3. How have you seen God meet you in the midst of your struggles lately? What do you need from Him most right now?

Dear God, I need You now more than ever! I want to trust You and walk by faith each day, every day, but it is hard when everything feels overwhelming. I know You are present in my life and in my heart even when my feelings cloud my spiritual senses. Hear my prayer, Lord, and the cries of my heart as I surrender all the grief, anger, fear, anxiety and depression lingering inside me. Fill me with Your Spirit so that I may be renewed, refreshed and recharged. Empower me to push the plow placed before me so that I can be ready when the time comes to wear the mantle You want to give me. Amen.