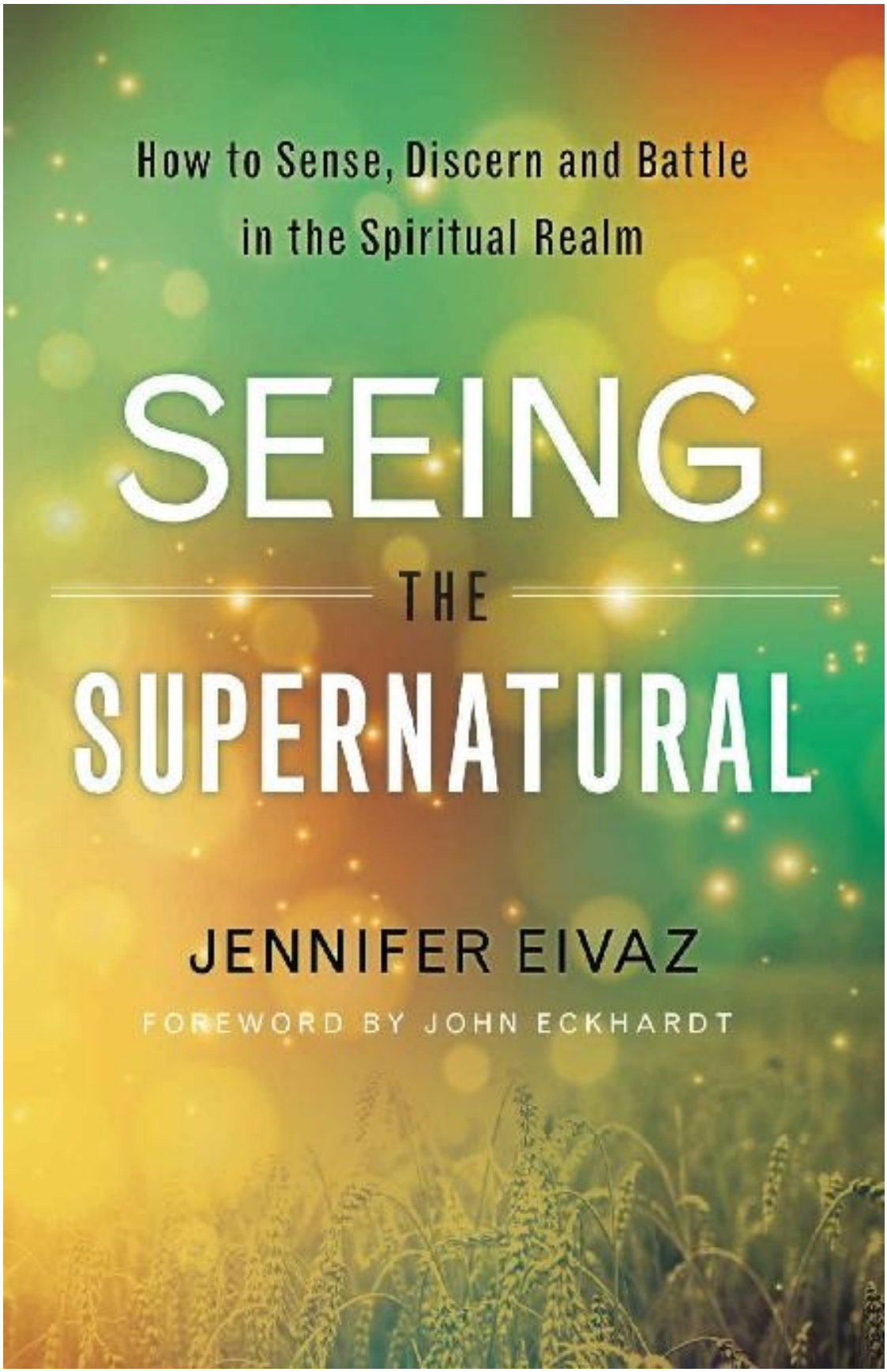
How to Sense, Discern and Battle in the Spiritual Realm

SEEING THE SUPERNATURAL

JENNIFER EIVAZ

FOREWORD BY JOHN ECKHARDT




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“Jennifer Eivaz is known for passion, strong prophetic insights, and an absolute devotion to Jesus. She is one of the more trusted servants of the Lord to all who know her, myself included. I’m certain that her latest book, *Seeing the Supernatural*, will bring you great strength, insight and much encouragement.”

Bill Johnson, Bethel Church, Redding, California; author, *God Is Good*

“It’s finally here! In *Seeing the Supernatural*, Jennifer Eivaz has written the most easy-to-understand-and-apply book available in the gift of discernment! Jennifer has filled her book with true, real-life stories of both successes and failures when using the gift of discernment. It is God’s rule into and through His Church. Get a copy for yourself and one for a friend!”

Steve Shultz, founder, The Elijah List

“This is a now-time book for the Body of Christ. Jennifer Eivaz is one of the voices in this generation equipping the Body of Christ and moving them into action. It will confirm things you have been experiencing and take you to a whole new level of insight, growth and wisdom. Great job, Jennifer Eivaz.”

Pasqual Urrabazo, executive pastor, International Church of Las Vegas

“Discerning of Spirits is one of the most misunderstood gifts of the Holy Spirit. Most believers have no idea what to do with what they see, so many either do the wrong thing or do nothing at all, resulting in shutting down and rejecting this gift from God, which is so vitally needed today. Jennifer Eivaz dispels the mystery surrounding this gift and releases powerful and practical wisdom.”

Jane Hamon, apostle, Vision Church @ Christian International

“*Seeing the Supernatural* is a wealth of insight and a timely resource. Through her practical stories, wisdom and keys of application, Jennifer Eivaz teaches how to steward and understand this powerful gifting. This book provides a safe place for the reader to process and reflect upon the depth of truth and revelation through the questions at the end of each chapter. A wonderful resource!”

Lana Vawser, international speaker, prophetic voice and author; Lana Vawser Ministries

“In a world of increasing spiritual confusion, the Church must awaken from a complacent mindset. Jennifer’s book *Seeing the Supernatural* pulls the curtain back on subjects that have been stigmatized or too uncomfortable to address. There is no more relevant time to be discerning of spirits than now and in the coming days!”

Brenda Crouch, speaker, author and singer; Brenda Crouch Ministries

“I believe it is critical for the Body of Christ to embrace the prophetic gifting, especially the gift of discerning spirits. One of the teachings in *Seeing the Supernatural* that blessed me is the guidance on how to discern a Jezebel spirit operating through a person. Jennifer explains how to dismantle the spirit’s powers, enabling the person to go forward in fulfilling their destiny. Jennifer gives powerful nuggets of truth with practical explanatory teaching. This book has been written for a time such as this to enrich the Church for today.”

Adam F. Thompson, author, *The Supernatural Man*; Voice of Fire,
www.voiceoffireministries.org

“It is with great joy that I am able to endorse Prophetess Jennifer Eviaz’s new book on a much-needed gift of the Spirit. Discerning of spirits is key because all interactions and activities pertaining to our human experience emanate from the spirit realm. God is a Spirit, man is a spirit and demons are spirits, hence the

need for each believer to covet this gift. Prophetess Jennifer once again, with real-life experience, has given us a practical tool of empowerment that I highly recommend to all."

Sarah Morgan, vice president and cofounder, Vision International Ministries, Los Angeles

"Fighting blind has nearly cost us a nation. Without eyes to see, we have been forced on the defensive. That is why we are constantly retaking the same ground instead of advancing. Here is a training manual to help end all of that and regain our rightful advantage as the people of God."

Mario Murillo, Mario Murillo Ministry

"Jennifer Eivaz has written a brilliant book. *Seeing the Supernatural* is an insightful and timely resource that should be in the hands of every passionate believer. This book will sharpen your gift of discernment in your journey of the supernatural. Thank you, Jennifer!"

Denise Goulet, pastor, International Church of Las Vegas

I dedicate this book to Jesus Christ,
who is forever faithful
to complete His work in me.

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Foreword

Many books have been written on the gifts of the Holy Spirit that have helped the Church understand the functions and importance of these spiritual manifestations. Certain gifts have been emphasized more than others, and our understanding of certain gifts is greater than others. This is especially true of discerning spirits.

I have heard teaching on the discerning of spirits that has simplified it to the realm of discerning angels, demons or human spirits. Many people teaching on this subject have not gone beyond this level of understanding. The teaching in this book will expand your understanding of this subject as the author takes you deeper into the spiritual realm.

Jennifer Eivaz teaches from personal experience on the importance of the discerning of spirits, and her firsthand experience is invaluable. She has a unique approach to this subject that I have never read or heard before.

She emphasizes the importance of training your senses to discern between good and evil. This training is a process and requires spiritual maturity and growth.

Whether you are beginning the process, in the intermediate stages or have come to a level of maturity, this book will benefit you greatly.

John Eckhardt, overseer, Crusaders Church Chicago; founder and presiding apostle, IMPACT Network

Acknowledgments

I first want to thank my wonderful husband, Ron, for his endless support after my many hours away writing this book. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to keep going and not quit.

I also want to thank my church family, again for their perfect support, prayers and encouragement while I wrote not only my story, but also many of theirs in this book.

Thank you, Steve Shultz from the Elijah List, for being a divine appointment and catalyst for God's plan in my life as a writer.

Thank you, Virginia and Justin Meyer, for allowing me to use your spare home to write when I just needed to get away so I could think clearly and write without distractions.

Thank you, Tom Hammond, for giving me a word of encouragement at just the right time, when I was fighting the hardest to accomplish this book.

Thank you to the many people who prayed and fasted for me, especially Andrea, Catherine, Charlene, Elaina, Emmanuel, Mary, Michelle, Nathan and Joe.

Introduction

A Gift with a Purpose

It was my first attempt ever to teach on the gift of discerning of spirits. I remember it being a Sunday night service at my home church, Harvest Christian Center, in Turlock, California. My husband and I had been ministering there for approximately five years, and we were teaching our church about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which included the gift of discerning of spirits (see 1 Corinthians 12:7–11).

My teaching about this gift was quite simplistic. I gave a standard definition of the gift—that it is a supernatural ability from the Holy Spirit to see and distinguish between spirits: the Spirit of God, the spirit of man and the spirit of devils. I then gave several biblical examples of the discerning of spirits, as well as some testimonies. I felt deep down that my teaching was somewhat lopsided and shallow. I just could not yet explain in plain language how I discerned what I discerned. There were so many variables and so many strange feelings and physical sensations involved. Trying to package that in an understandable way seemed almost impossible. At the same time, I felt I could only effectively present how to discern the demonic realm because I had only enough clear language to explain that side of this gift. Since then, I have gained the experience and found the language to explain both sides of the gift, the discerning of both the positive and the negative, as you will see when you read on. But even back then, my teaching was still well-received, and it opened the eyes of our congregants more than they had been before.

The night after I spoke, I had a disturbing dream. In the dream, a strong angel named Jeff was escorting me. Jeff means “the peace of God.” This angel was muscular, but the size and appearance of a man. He wore regular clothing, but his clothes were white, and so was everything else about him. He escorted me through the air to a large city. I did not know the name of the city or have any idea where I was. He then escorted me into a high-rise building located in the center of the city. We went up the elevator to the very top floor and then stepped out of the elevator, right into a penthouse office suite. There we met a physically short man wearing business attire. When he saw us, he stood up firmly from behind his desk and walked briskly around it, coming right in front of me to look

me square in the eyes. He had the meanest countenance I have ever seen. The fierce hostility radiated off him.

"Why are you teaching this?" the man demanded nastily and with force. "Don't you ever teach this again!"

Here the dream ended, and I woke up realizing that I just may have encountered Satan himself in a dream. Why was the gift of discerning of spirits such a threat to him?

As time progressed, I began to realize the price tag for those who operate in this gift. Most everyone loves you when you spiritually discern their more positive attributes, or the presence of the Lord or the angels. When you have the ability to discern the hidden things, however, it can bring a very real level of persecution by those who do not want you to see the things that you see. In addition, that vile deceiver, Satan, will do anything he can to stop you from blowing his cover. Still, it is immensely worth it to be in the know spiritually.

The dream also showed me that Satan still occupies very high places in the earth. He was in the tallest building, at the very top floor! Whoever occupies the high places overshadows the people with his presence—in this case, Satan's wickedly deceptive presence. For this reason, the gift of discerning of spirits will be challenged from the high places—that is, until we, Christ's Church, rise up and occupy them. This is what this gift is all about. You see and discern so you can respond. You see and discern so you can battle. It is a gift with a purpose: to advance Christ's Kingdom in the earth.

1

Seeing Both Sides of the Supernatural

My daughter and I were having a serious discussion about Santa Claus. We were approaching Christmas Eve, and she had asked to leave Santa a glass of milk and some baked cookies. Like many young kids, she expected Santa to visit our home in the middle of the night to leave her a surprise gift. Now, my husband and I do not have a problem with those who bring Santa into their Christmas family fun. It just was not something that we made a big fuss about in our home. Still, my daughter had become a wholehearted believer in Santa Claus, having been educated by her preschool teacher and classmates. They told her about the large white-haired man from the North Pole who flew around the world on a magic sleigh with reindeer. They let her know that Santa would leave every child a gift, including her, as long as she was not on the naughty list. She was sure that she was not on the naughty list.

And so I explained about Santa more accurately, which led to further discussion not only about Jesus, but also about the tooth fairy, the Easter bunny, angels, witches and ghosts. It turned out that my daughter was a true believer in all things mystical and supernatural in an age-appropriate way. I had already begun restricting her cartoon watching, having firmly said, “No witches, wizards or ghosts!” The children’s shows seemed to carry an abundance of such themes. I clarified that although some of these things (not all) can be real, they are evil. I then pointed out how Santa and the Easter Bunny are fun, but not factual, and then I joked, “I’m the tooth fairy and will gladly hide money under your pillow for each tooth!” Finally, I reemphasized the reality of Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the angels. I was grateful to be experiencing a genuine miracle with angels in that season. We had seen bursts of small white feathers appearing several times in midair during our worship services, prayer services and even at home. We understood this phenomenon to be a visible manifestation of angels in our midst. This was positive reinforcement with our daughter, who enjoyed collecting these

feathers to show her friends at school. It also kept alive our firm belief in the supernatural.

Keep in mind that I have experienced the supernatural my entire life. My experiences clearly changed in scope after I became a Christian during my freshman year of college, but nevertheless, I have always had them. And perhaps you have, too. The Bible, which is our guide, shows us how normal it is to have supernatural encounters of a wide variety. It even helps us know what experiences to accept and what to reject, and why. The Bible shows us that it is normal to see and experience both angels and demons, it is normal to have visions and dreams from God, and it is normal to encounter a wide variety of miracles. Understand that the supernatural is not a limited, one-time experience for us as Christians, because our God is supernatural and He has no limits. At the same time, many unbelievers also experience the supernatural, but in a much different context.

When non-Christians experience the supernatural, it creates a hunger in them to know more. Only they do not know how to discern or sort through it. If their home becomes haunted, for example, they do not know how to cast the spirit out. They often do not know they need to cast the spirit out! Or if they start exhibiting psychic or telepathic abilities, they do not know how to classify what is happening, and they often reach out to occult and New Age sources for answers. People desperately needing physical healing or personal deliverance from spirits might go to brujas, shamans, exorcists and the like to try to get relief, instead of going to Jesus and His Church. Countless television shows, books, radio programs, blogs and more attempt to provide spiritual counsel for such issues. Only they do not lead you to Jesus, so they ultimately harm you much more than they help you. And many people, including me, have found themselves wandering down wrong paths, looking for answers and still not finding any.

My first spiritual experience took place when I was only three years old. I lived with just my mother, as my biological father had gone absent. I do remember being a happy and energetic toddler during the day, but I was troubled at night. The reason is, I could always see *her*, and I am not referring to my mother. There was another woman in my bedroom who appeared to be sleeping on the floor of my closet. And then sometimes she would float off the floor. I could not see her until it was dark and the lights were off, but she was always there. She never made a sound or moved around. I remember that she had pale skin and long dark hair, and she appeared to be nude.

Once I shouted out something like, “Mom! There’s a woman in my closet!”

My mother investigated and then replied, “Just shut the closet door!” And that was the end of the conversation.

The following year, my mother moved us from Nevada to her home state of California. The good news is that the woman in the closet did not come with us. I never saw that apparition again. Mother also remarried a man who was an active member of the Latter-day Saints Church (LDS), also known as the Mormon church, and naturally we became an LDS family. Once my mother remarried, life seemed pretty normal for her, my new stepfather and me. I was still highly energetic, now a five-year-old, and I did not think much about it when the following happened.

One day I was playing and doing what normal five-year-olds do, when I heard two men talking somewhere in my house. They were having a full-on conversation with each other, and I went to investigate out of curiosity. I looked all over, but I could not find them. I could still hear the conversation quite clearly, however. No worries; I just went back to my playtime. I never heard these two men converse again, but off and on I would hear voices in or around the house, or feel as though I were being pulled into conversation with someone whom I could not physically see. This would take over my reality from time to time, so much so that my mother ended up taking me to the doctor to have my hearing tested. I had become habitually unresponsive to her when she would try to talk to me or get my attention. She thought I had a hearing problem, but the doctor said I was fine. Some of this was probably my not listening to her. But the other side of it—and it was something I could not explain at that age—involved my strong connection to the spirit world, which did absorb my attention.

At age seven, I was playing with some neighborhood friends in my bedroom. We all attended the LDS church together. I have no idea what prompted me to do this, but I told my friends something like, “Do you want to see me call a ghost into the room?” We all just laughed and squealed, as little girls do. No one said no, so I just called it in. “Come here, ghost! Come here, ghost!”

We all watched as my school papers tacked up on my bedroom wall began to flutter up and down as what seemed like a wind entered the room. Surprisingly, none of us were scared when this happened. The papers stopped fluttering within just a few seconds, and we returned to our playtime as if it were nothing. Only it was not just nothing. I was not playfully inviting Casper the Friendly Ghost to come over for a visit. I was inviting demons into my life in sheer ignorance.

As time progressed, heading into my teen years I was dabbling more intentionally in some occult activities. For example, I had tried to use a Ouija board to obtain information about the future. A Ouija board is typically used in séances and involves a board printed with letters, numbers and other signs, to

which a movable planchette points in response to your questions. My use of the Ouija board did turn into a séance when a spirit named itself through the board, pretending to be a long-dead relative of mine. This really was not a long-dead relative, but a familiar spirit, which the Bible describes as a demon (see Leviticus 19:31; 20:6). It was also the last time I did any conjuring through this method, as it had a dark presence attached to it.

On other occasions, my friends and I would attempt various incantations to conjure specific spirits, levitate and induce trances. These incantations were spells many teenagers do as a form of entertainment, such as the traditional "Bloody Mary" spell or the recently popularized "Charlie Charlie" spell. These incantations did work on occasion, which meant we were successfully conjuring spirits to perform magic. In addition, I was venturing out on my own into astrology, ESP, the paranormal and psychic powers. I never considered these activities wrong, because I did not do these things to try to harm anyone.

The heavier stuff came in when I began participating in rituals for the dead at the LDS temple on a regular basis. These rituals are not perverse or scary, but are believed to secure eternal benefits for the deceased as you stand in proxy for specific persons and perform the various rites. These rituals typically invoke the spirits of ten to twenty deceased persons at each temple visit and require that you be baptized in water for each one. Some participants would say they could see the spirits of the dead in the temple facilities, but I never saw such apparitions. The ritual is then complete once the LDS elders lay their hands on you to impart their version of the Holy Spirit upon you. These rituals did carry and release a spiritual presence upon me, but now, on this side of the cross, I can certainly distinguish that it was a false presence.

By the time I turned sixteen I was rebelling at home in reaction to family issues, and I became conscious of a tangible darkness around me. What I mean by this is that I was aware of a canopy or cloud of darkness around my person, and I could not see or feel any hope for my future. For example, I was in honors classes but no longer cared about excelling. I chose unstable friends over stable ones. I also put myself in dangerous situations several times because, at the time, I felt no personal worth. I was also experiencing an increase in dark spiritual encounters, usually at night. I would hear eerie voices outside my bedroom window—the kinds of voices that left an instability in your mind once you heard them. And then my bed would sometimes shake on its own while I slept. This was absolutely terrifying and would jolt me out of sleep. I could also sense the coming and going of dark spirits, and I was bottoming out emotionally. Jesus gave warning not to let darkness overtake us, because those in darkness cannot see where they are going (see John 12:35). He then said, "I have come as a light

into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46 NKJV). The word *abide* in this passage means to live and dwell in darkness. Darkness, then, is a place and a state of being, not just a metaphor. And darkness, in my situation, had become a perceptible presence.

Through the fervent prayers of relatives, neighbors and some high-school acquaintances, not only did I survive this period of my life, but I was also introduced to Jesus Christ. I gladly surrendered my life to Jesus as a freshman in college, and the Light of the world truly began to destroy the darkness in my world. The stronghold of Mormonism came off me instantly, I did away with all occult practices, and I learned how to let go of wrong friendships. I was also baptized in the Holy Spirit, which is an infilling of God's power (see Acts 1:8). I could genuinely feel God's light working inside me instead of that foul darkness. I had godly hope and could see with clarity for the first time.

As a new Christian, I did undergo a very serious deliverance from spiritual bondage in direct connection to my occult past. It happened innocently enough during a weekly house prayer meeting, after one woman in attendance expressed that she saw a spirit of sorcery standing over me. When she said that, something picked me up and threw me against the wall. Next, I went into a grand mal demonic manifestation, mine being one of the worst in comparison to those I have personally witnessed in all my days of ministry. I wrote about this incident in more detail in my book *The Intercessors Handbook* (Chosen, 2016).

What happened to me at this prayer meeting was challenging to my pastor and to others in my church. They believed that Christians could not manifest demonically if they truly had the Holy Spirit. (I discuss this very issue in more detail in the appendix that I have included at the end, "Can a Christian Be Demon Possessed?") I did have the Holy Spirit, but I still manifested demonically since those areas of occultism had to be firmly addressed and dealt with. The good news is, I found my spiritual authority in Christ during that season and learned to walk out my freedom.

After my deliverance, the Holy Spirit gave me a very powerful gift. It is called the gift of discerning of spirits, and you can see it listed with other supernatural gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. This is a gift that allows you to see and sense the truth about the spiritual realm. It reveals to you what spirit, whether good or evil, is motivating people, opportunities, conflicts, supernatural experiences and a whole lot more. It is a gift that came to me without a set of instructions, but with a clear invitation to listen to the Teacher, the Holy Spirit, day by day and moment by moment in order to experience this gift's truths and benefits. And it is this gift that I want to introduce to you throughout this book in ways you may have never considered before.

Understand that this gift from the Holy Spirit is intended for "the good of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7 MOUNCE). The word *good* in this verse is the Greek word *sympherō*, which means to bring together (as in a symphony) and to be profitable, beneficial and advantageous.[1] And it is true. This gift gives you a tremendous advantage as a believer in Christ. It allows you to see what is in the dark so you will not stay in the dark. It supernaturally puts you in the know and gives you the upper hand in difficult circumstances. It gives you the right information so you know how to pray, prophesy and battle intelligently.

Unfortunately, this gift has been highly misunderstood in its operation. Those who have it often do not know they have it, and they have mislabeled themselves as crazy. Others have misused this gift and gone on to harm people instead of building them up. The Holy Spirit wants to open our eyes and shift our understanding. He wants to activate this gift powerfully, but properly, in the Body of Christ. I have written this book to help you understand and operate in this gift. By the time you are finished reading it, you will become aware of and equipped for seeing the supernatural, so that you can effectively sense, discern and battle in the spiritual realm.

2

The Gift of Discerning of Spirits

Midway through my second year of college, I was invited to serve on a campus ministry leadership team. I was thrilled to be asked and immediately said yes. A few months had flown by when the campus ministry director called an emergency leadership team meeting at his home to discuss a difficult matter. He said, “We have to pray for Easton (not his real name), and we have to pray now!” He explained that Easton was being tormented by a demon almost every night.

Easton, a leader just like me, went on to describe the hair-raising details of each incident. Incidentally, Easton attended a local congregation and had plans to attend seminary at a popular Christian university. While renting a room at the campus ministry director’s home, he found himself being spiritually attacked in the night. What added to his dilemma was that Easton came from a theological paradigm in which people did not believe in the supernatural, or at least did not experience it personally. Being forced to set his paradigms aside, he was now in a genuine spiritual battle of eerie proportions. In short, he described a giant black snake that would wake him up in the middle of the night and threaten his life over and over.

As Easton shared his story, I began feeling as though I were being pulled to the back of the house. I recognize now that the One pulling me was the Holy Spirit, but back then I only knew it was an unusually strong feeling. I interrupted Easton and asked if I could go look in his room. He agreed, but the campus ministry director wanted to test me in what I was sensing. He said with enthusiasm, “Sure! Go ahead! But I’m not telling you which room is his.”

Without mistake, I walked straight into Easton’s room and then into his closet. I normally would not go into someone’s closet without permission, but in this situation it seemed appropriate, and the outcome proved it was true. As I reached toward the back of his closet, I discovered his personal collection of heavy metal

band LPs tucked neatly away under some clothing. I handed the LPs to Easton and said, “I think I found the source of your problem!”

Easton responded by breaking each record into pieces, realizing that he had cohabitated with compromising music that clearly hosted both sexual and occult themes. He repented of his sin, and that spirit never came back.

What took place in Easton’s life that day all began with the gift of discerning of spirits being in operation. Because of this, he was freed from a tormenting demon. I still did not know yet that this gift existed. I did know enough, however, to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and do what Jesus did: “Jesus went around doing good. He healed all who were under the devil’s power” (Acts 10:38 NIRV).

This story also presents us with several questions, namely, “How could secular LPs sitting in a closet be the cause of a demonic attack?” And, “Is this something that could happen to me?” This is where we need to expand our paradigms to *include* and not *exclude* the spiritual. We do not live in just a natural realm; we also live in and are affected by the spiritual realm. Spiritual laws that the Bible defines for us govern both realms. Honoring God’s Word creates conditions in which we experience natural and spiritual blessings. On the other hand, violating God’s Word nullifies His promises to us, including His promise to protect us from harm and torment (see Deuteronomy 28; Romans 2:6–8).

Easton had violated God’s clear word about sexual impurity and false religion through his choices in music. The apostle Paul commands us, “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality,” and he tells us to “flee from idolatry” (Ephesians 5:3; 1 Corinthians 10:14). Ignorance or dismissiveness about the spiritual does not absolve us of consequences, either. When we violate God’s holiness, it is like leaving the front door to your house unlocked. A thief might not discover it immediately, but eventually the thief comes to your neighborhood, looking for opportunity. And when he finds an unlocked door, he will enter in and try to steal, kill or destroy (see John 10:10). Fortunately for Easton, his situation was short-lived because the gift of discerning of spirits was in operation.

The Gift Explained

A common description for the gift of discerning of spirits is that it is a supernatural ability from the Holy Spirit to distinguish between spirits—divine,

demonic and human. It also enables us to discern the hidden motives of the heart. Since this gift embraces the "hard to explain" and the "intangibles" of the spiritual realm, it has historically been difficult to teach since we have lacked adequate language to explain it properly.

The apostle Paul shared a similar struggle in discussing visions from the Lord, specifically visions of the third heaven and paradise. He referred to both places as "inexpressible" (see 2 Corinthians 12:1–4). I believe this was the apostle John's challenge, too, as he attempted to detail the visions and revelation of the end times in the book of Revelation. If John had been able to use clearer terms with which to express the ideas, we probably would understand this book more fully, rather than having continual arguments over what in heaven and on earth he was pointing to. This is the same challenge we face in describing the workings of the gift of discerning of spirits. We are still engineering vocabulary to explain the formerly "inexpressible" aspects of the spiritual realm. I humbly pray and believe that this book will be a forerunner in this regard by giving words to your experiences, thus enabling you to walk out the fullness of this gift.

There are numerous examples of the gift of discerning of spirits in both the Old and New Testaments. Remember, this gift sees past the natural realm to reveal the spiritual realm, causing us to know what is really behind our circumstances and how to respond. For example, the prophet Elisha prayed an unusual prayer for his servant during a time of battle: "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see" (2 Kings 6:17 ESV). Elisha was not referring to his servant's physical eyes, but actually to his spiritual ones. Elisha and his servant had been targeted for certain death by an enemy army. The servant had become terrified with that strangling fear that manifests when you know the worst is about to happen. Elisha could see into the spiritual realm, which is the gift of discerning of spirits in operation, and he saw the true spiritual conditions of the matter. The truth was that a fierce army of warlike angels had jam-packed the spiritual horizons, ready to fight on their behalf. Their physical enemies were completely outnumbered, which dispelled all thoughts of death and execution. This is what Elisha wanted his servant to see, and God answered the prophet's prayer.

We also see how this gift operated in other lives in the Old Testament. We see it in the life of Lot, when he encountered the two angels God sent to rescue him. We see it in the life of Samuel, when he heard the audible voice of God—something that was rare in those days. It operated in the lives of Saul's attendants, who saw the evil spirit that was tormenting him (see Genesis 19; 1 Samuel 3:1, 4; 16:15).

In the New Testament, Jesus not only cast demon spirits out of their helpless victims; He also could identify them by their kind—unclean spirits, spirits of infirmity, deaf and mute spirits, etc. This, too, was the gift of discerning of spirits in operation. You cannot identify a spirit unless the Holy Spirit reveals it to you. Later, the apostle Paul did the same thing by identifying a spirit of divination that had possessed a young female fortune-teller in Ephesus, more specifically a python spirit.[1] He cast the spirit out of her, which caused the entire city to go into an uproar (see Acts 16:16–22). Finally, the apostle Peter knew by the gift of discerning of spirits that a husband and wife by the names of Ananias and Sapphira had brought him a deceptive offering. They had pretended to sell their land at a certain price, but had secretly held back a portion of the proceeds for themselves. He addressed their sin openly, but unfortunately, their actions brought the judgment of the Lord upon their lives and they both died for it (see Acts 5:1–10).

These examples exhibit the gift of discerning of spirits in operation, but they don't explain how this gift operates or how to distinguish one spirit from another. We see the end point, but not the process. And it is the process of discerning that is often misunderstood, ignored or rejected. The reason is that this gift is a sensory process before it is an intellectual one. And in our Greek-thinking culture that elevates logic and reason above emotions and the spiritual, we have inadvertently shut down the internal mechanism by which this gift flows.

Training Your Senses

The writer of Hebrews provides us with some insight about how the gift of discerning of spirits works, which is primarily through your senses: "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14 NASB). In other words, this gift from the Holy Spirit causes us to discern good and evil through our physical senses. That would be through our eyes, ears, smell, taste and touch, as well as through our emotions. And then the mature have learned through practice how to accurately sort out what they are sensing, so they can respond to the information appropriately. This implies that the gift of discerning of spirits has a learning curve to it and requires community and accountability in order for a person gifted in it to grow in accuracy.

Around the same time as the incident with Easton, my neighbor, Patricia, invited me over to her home. Now deceased, she had prayed for the salvation of my family for years. She had felt the assignment of the Lord to pray faithfully for us and was now enjoying the fruit of her prayers. She also was an avid garage sale shopper and had decorated her home with several objects she had purchased over the years. Patricia began to recognize that I might be walking in the gift of discerning of spirits and decided to put it to the test. She asked me, "Are any of these objects in my home spiritually unclean for any reason?"

I looked around her kitchen and her living room and picked out only four or five objects that irritated my spirit, even though I had no reason for it. When I identified them for her, Patricia said, "Hmm . . . all those objects were purchased from the same home."

Neither of us knew exactly why I felt that irritation, but it prompted Patricia to pray. She prayed that anything unholy or demonic still lingering on those household objects would be removed, and then she asked God to bless them instead. To her, that seemed like the right way to handle it.

I also had a friend who suffered with diabetes around this same time frame. Once when I sat near her, I suddenly had a strange physical sensation. I became uncomfortably warm and began to feel unwell all over. When I voiced my physical feelings, she explained that she often felt the same way when her blood sugar was doing the wrong thing. I put it together, although at a much later date, that what I was experiencing was the gift of discerning of spirits in operation. I was sensing the presence of a spirit—specifically, a spirit of infirmity—but I detected it by feeling it in my own body as if it were my own.

Jesus once described a woman as having this same kind of spirit of infirmity, which was the reason she was bent over and could not stand up straight. A spirit of infirmity does not cause just one kind of physical illness; it stands behind many physical ailments. Jesus then cast the spirit out of the woman, and she stood up straight again (see Luke 13:10–13). What we don't know is how Jesus knew this information and how He distinguished that it was a spirit instead of a physical condition that would have needed the Holy Spirit's gift of healing instead. Having had that experience with my diabetic friend and others, I believe that Jesus, too, may have felt the woman's problem within Himself. He thus could accurately diagnose its source, because He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15 KJV).

It is important to point out that the gift of discerning of spirits is not just the discerning of evil. It is a supernatural ability to discern both good and evil. The evil and the demonic just seem to stand out more once you have tasted of heavenly things and finally know the difference. Steve Shultz, founder of the

Elijah List, shared with me that while reading something on his computer, he suddenly experienced a fragrant scent all around him. He thought it might be soap on his hands, but he checked it out and realized his hands did not smell like anything at all. He knew through his sense of smell that he was experiencing the presence of the Lord.

I also have smelled the fragrance of Christ in worship and have even tasted a sweetness in my mouth, knowing that I was sensing the Lord's presence by "taste." These simple but profound experiences bring the Scriptures to life. We can experience the "aroma" of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14), and we can "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8 NKJV). Many people have cited that they felt goose bumps or electricity on their skin and recognized these feelings as pointing to the presence of the Lord. Others have heard the voices of angels singing in heavenly chorus, or they have felt the wind of the Holy Spirit upon their person. The gift of discerning of spirits is very multifaceted in its expression, but it works powerfully through our senses to reveal the spiritual realm.

Keep in mind that the gift of discerning of spirits is listed alongside other power gifts such as the gifts of healings, the gift of faith, and the working of miracles (see 1 Corinthians 12:8–10). We all know of persons who have moved in these powerful gifts in profound ways. With that said, what would happen if someone received the gift of discerning of spirits in the same strength of anointing as the anointing we have seen on some people for healing or miracles, such as Maria Woodworth-Etter, Smith Wigglesworth or Jack Coe? I believe we are seeing something like this just beginning to emerge in the Body of Christ, only we have not yet fully grasped it.

Also, if this gift is something that flows mostly through your senses, could it be possible to become anointed but not recognize it at first? The answer to that is yes! It happened to me. The Holy Spirit anointed me with this gift well before I ever knew it. And because it works through your senses, your senses begin to react and resonate to the "spirit" of your surroundings—whether good or bad—before your mind can even explain what you are reacting to. This can be quite disturbing, until you know what is happening to you and why.

You're Not Crazy; You're Gifted

After my deliverance, I went into a kind of spiritual and sensory overload that is somewhat hard to describe. Hearing voices was not abnormal for me, but it

escalated into unmanageable proportions. I would hear voices in the air, in my mind, on objects and more. My emotions would also shift erratically from one moment to the next. Crowds, shopping malls and classrooms, for example, often became a sensory avalanche crashing against my mind and senses. For those reasons, I began to crave being alone and finding silent places. I honestly thought this was temporary and reasoned how this must only happen to those who have just gone through a demonic deliverance. Only it did not go away, and things never did quiet down. My best efforts to cope with it were now turning into desperation as I seriously wondered if I were losing my mind. On top of it, my symptoms mimicked those of medical schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, both in my family history.

There just happened to be an emphasis in the Body of Christ on "spiritual warfare" during that time period. There were fresh waves of teaching about how to pray and combat the devil, what to do if you were under demonic attack, and how to deliver people from demonic spirits. Because of this emphasis, and through some basic teachings on spiritual discernment, I grew to accept the idea that I might not be crazy; I might have a gift from the Holy Spirit since I did see and sense demons. I will also add that spiritual discernment back then was mostly about discerning the demonic and not much else.

But what about the rest of it? Erratic mood shifts, hearing voices, seeing strange sights and feeling unexplained physical sensations. Literally no one was talking about this side of the gift of discerning of spirits. For years this became my secret strange world, by which I knew spiritual and hidden information but could not explain how I knew it. It is only in the last few years that I have been able to find words to teach, activate and give identity to those who are given this gift in the strength and manner that I have received it.

Melissa Villegas attends Harvest Christian Center in Turlock, California, and also has the gift of discerning of spirits. She describes this gift as overbearing at times because it involves all her physical and emotional senses. Melissa will feel, literally, what another person feels. For example, if she were to read a news article about someone who attempted suicide, she would find herself agonizing in the deep anguish of pain that the person could not see past. This intensity of feeling, of course, pushes her into places of deep intercession.

"This gift is not a 'feel great' gift, but a gift that goes deep," Melissa said. "That's where our heavenly Father is. He's in our deep places, the places that need His cleansing."

My friend Sid Widmer, a business owner, describes himself as always having an awareness about people and a sensitivity to the spirit realm. In his twenties he could often be found in his pastor's office, "emotional and stormy," describing

various burdens he felt for the church and the people in it—burdens about situations he had no prior knowledge about. He finally realized in his thirties that he discerned a lot through his emotions, picking up things that were going on in the spiritual environment and processing them through his feelings.

"I used to think I was becoming unstable or bipolar," Sid said. "My moods would shift so fast and disproportionally to the situation I was in."

Sid began to make mental notes about his mood shifts, noticing repeated patterns and realizing that his mood would shift in reaction to certain spirits in the vicinity. He is still learning about this gift and how to remain anchored to the Holy Spirit when these things take place, something most will say is easier said than done.

I take great joy in helping people such as Melissa and Sid dispel the lies that something is wrong with them and that they are crazy. They are not crazy, but are powerfully anointed with the gift of discerning of spirits. They are chief agents in setting the captives free and healing the land. As most of those gifted with it have discovered, however, this gift is something that requires time and diligence on the part of those who are gifted, so that they develop the emotional stamina and accuracy they need for operating in the gift effectively.

Wrong Discernment

The fruit of this gift is just as important as learning how the gift processes. Are people being set free? Is the Kingdom of God being established in greater measures? Too often, this gift has been credited for shaming and blaming people and/or falsely accusing them. Because the gift of discerning of spirits works primarily through the senses, it requires practice and maturity to know what you are sensing and why. It also needs a redemptive application. Unfortunately, wrong discernment happens. Let's look at some of the reasons why.

1. Having a loveless heart

As I looked to the Holy Spirit on how to be effective in walking this gift out, He first pointed to my heart and instructed me "not to judge." Be aware that not judging something is not the same as ignoring it. A proper response, however, requires a right heart condition in order to be effectual. He was directing my heart toward love and redemption, especially when I encountered negative

spiritual information about people or circumstances. I think Francis Frangipane says it best in his book *Discerning of Spirits*:

> There is a false discernment that is based on mistrust, suspicion, and fear. You can recognize false discernment by the coldness around it. False discernment may be packaged in a type of love, but it does not originate in love; it comes out of criticism. True discernment is rooted deeply in love.[2]

Let's say, for example, that I am discerning a disloyal and greedy heart with an acquaintance or a business peer. I don't have any evidence yet for what I discern, but it truly feels like a point of discernment from the Spirit of God. Regardless, I first need to discern my own heart to determine if I am functioning out of mistrust, an unhealed past experience or a competitive attitude. If not, then I need to ask the Holy Spirit, *What does love look like in this situation?* And the answer will depend on context. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, except to be led by the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

I will say that when you discern by the Holy Spirit something negative about another person, remember that God has just told you a secret. Secrets remain in the secret place, unless God gives you permission otherwise. Remember that God loves that person even if he or she is demonized, struggling or wicked. There will be times you are called on to deal with the situation more openly, but prayer is usually all that is required of you.

2. Looking on outward appearances

One of the key mistakes associated with the gift of discerning of spirits is looking at someone's outward presentation and presuming a spiritual condition, either good or bad. It is true that you can make some general assumptions by observing how people carry themselves over time, how they habitually dress and act, and how they communicate. This is not spiritual discernment, however, but natural perception. It can provide helpful information, but it is not the gift of discerning of spirits.

Jesus said, "Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly" (John 7:24 NLT). The gift of discerning of spirits therefore goes deeper than outward appearances. It bypasses our intellect and logic to reveal what is imperceptible to the natural eye. It discloses the spirit of the matter and the real motives of the human heart.

When Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet with fragrant spikenard oil and wiped His feet with her hair, the disciple Judas raised a terse complaint. He said, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a

year's wages" (John 12:5). But Jesus knew the truth behind both Mary's and Judas's actions. Mary was not being wasteful at all. She had been moved upon by the Holy Spirit to anoint Jesus prophetically for burial. Judas, on the other hand, was a thief and would often steal from the offering. That was the real reason he complained (see John 12:6–7). The gift of discerning of spirits revealed the truth behind their actions, and Jesus responded by defending Mary's honor.

3. Being inexperienced with the spiritual

Just before Jesus went to the cross, He spoke to those around Him about His impending death. He was troubled and vexed, but had determined within Himself not to ask our heavenly Father to spare Him the cross, but rather be glorified in it. When He shared that out loud, our Father in heaven responded audibly, saying, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:29). Amazingly, the crowd heard the audible sound of the Father's voice! Only they had trouble distinguishing it. Some heard it as thunder, while others thought it was an angel speaking (see verse 29). Jesus was experienced in our Father's voice and therefore discerned it more easily than the crowd did.

Recognize that there is a continuous learning curve when it comes to the gift of discerning of spirits. Walking out this gift is like learning a new language; only it is a spiritual language that requires time, practice and commitment for us to become fluent in it. Discerning the spiritual realm and doing it well is the mark of the mature believer (see Hebrews 5:14). Compare this thought to the attitude of committed musicians who practice their gift and train their ears to distinguish the notes correctly. We, too, need to do the same with this gift.

We will wrongly discern, or not discern at all, until we have first developed a grid for what is spiritually possible through the study of the Bible. For example, we read how God was in the fire of a bush, in the wind, in the earthquake and in the still, small voice (see Exodus 3:2; 1 Kings 19:11–12). We also read how Satan killed Job's family with a whirlwind, tempted Jesus in the wilderness, and possessed Judas to betray and murder our Lord (see Job 1:19; Luke 4:1–13; 22:3). We further read about angel armies, about the Holy Spirit falling like a dove on Jesus and then like fire on the disciples, and a whole lot more (see 2 Kings 6:17; Luke 3:22; Acts 2:3–4). Armed with biblical knowledge, we then need to pay attention to what is happening in our senses and emotions.

You will come to discover that things like numb hands, strange fragrances, certain headaches, unusual sights and sounds, or feelings of sudden joy or

unusual heaviness may or may not have a spiritual parallel behind them. This is intended to draw you into dialogue with the Teacher, the Holy Spirit, who will gladly lead you into all truth and assist you in managing your spiritual sensitivity.

Kingdom Principles

1. The gift of discerning of spirits comes from the Holy Spirit and enables us to distinguish between spirits—divine, demonic and human. It is also a supernatural ability to discern the hidden motives of the heart.
2. This gift works primarily through our physical senses (see Hebrews 5:14). That would be through our eyes, ears, smell, taste and touch, as well as through our emotions.
3. You can become anointed with this gift just as strongly as those famously anointed with the gifts of healings or working of miracles. Only you might not know it at first because of the way it manifests.
4. Walking out this gift is like learning a new language; only it is a spiritual language that requires time, practice and commitment for us to become fluent in it. Discerning the spiritual realm and doing it well is the mark of the mature believer.
5. Because the gift of discerning of spirits works primarily through the senses, we can wrongly discern the spirit motivating people and circumstances if we have a loveless heart, are looking on only outward appearances, or are inexperienced with the supernatural.

Thoughts for Reflection

1. Do you have the Holy Spirit's gift of discerning of spirits? If so, how do you know?
2. How have you discerned good or evil through your senses and/or through your emotions?
3. Has this gift ever left you wondering if you were going crazy? How has this teaching helped you settle that issue?

4. Have you ever wrongly discerned something, thinking it was the Holy Spirit? What did you learn from that situation?
5. Do you struggle not to condemn people when you discern something that is negative? If so, how can you cultivate a redemptive heart toward them?

3

The Fundamentals of Distinguishing between Spirits

During my stint as a leader with a college campus ministry, I developed a strong friendship with another leader on the team by the name of Ron Eivaz. We had first met at an on-campus worship service, services that we both attended regularly prior to our leadership roles. Ron claims that during one of these worship services, I turned to him and gave him a too-friendly hug. It is something I cannot remember taking place, but it is a fact that he shares freely with almost everyone. He humorously claims that this is how I made the first move.

Ron and I were both invited to teach Bible studies on the college campus as part of our leadership responsibilities. We both agreed, but as a new Christian I obviously did not know very much about the Bible. And it was evident that Ron knew the Bible backward and forward. I would attend his weekly group and take copious notes before teaching his notes to my own Bible study. Ron often taught using material from well-known teachers such as Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland and Jerry Savelle. These men were referred to as “Word of Faith” teachers and were controversial at the time. This caused a mild degree of tension for our campus ministry director, but Ron was allowed to continue teaching from these sources. These well-known teachers laid a strong foundation in our hearts “to have faith in God and not to doubt”—a truth that grounded us through every obstacle we were going to face in the future.

The Holy Spirit then spoke to Ron’s heart and said, *You are going to marry Jennifer*. Ron was not too sure about me as far as marriage was concerned, and he also questioned if he had heard correctly.

I, too, heard the Holy Spirit, but He had a different message for me. I approached Ron and said, “The Holy Spirit told me to tell you that He really did show you who your wife is going to be.” I did not know the message referred to

me, but God has a terrific sense of humor. Long story short, we fell in love and began to plan the rest of our lives together.

Ron and I both loved the move of the Holy Spirit, but this was something we rarely experienced in our home church, let alone anywhere else in our city. For that reason, we decided to leave Turlock, California, for good and go where we knew the Holy Spirit was moving. With much zeal and excitement we relocated to Tulsa, Oklahoma, so we could finish our education at Oral Roberts University (ORU). We also believed God would respond to our zeal with a well-suited, dynamic ministry position for us upon graduation.

While we were still attending ORU, the Holy Spirit spoke to us both. He said that we would return to our home base in Turlock, California, and eventually pastor the church that we had both attended. Actually, Ron did not hear a voice. But during his morning prayer time, he had a vision of himself preaching on our church platform. When that happened, he reacted in shock by jumping backward and shouting, “No!”

For me it was a strong internal knowing, and like Ron, I was very apprehensive. Ron and I knew this church well, and we knew it would not be an easy assignment. In reality, it was an impossible assignment! The church had become spiritually sick with legalism, sin and strife and was very close to dying. Upon our graduation, however, it was the only door of ministry that opened to us, as if God was making His point. My soon-to-be husband accepted the senior pastor’s offer to become an associate minister alongside him, and we were married soon after.

What began to unfold through many trials, tests and decisions was a deeper understanding of the spiritual realm in connection to purpose. The gift of discerning of spirits flows the strongest and with the most impact when it is attached to purpose; only it is hard to discern what you don’t yet understand. With that said, as a means of increasing our understanding, let’s dive more into the fundamentals or the “hows” of distinguishing between spirits.

Recognition through Perception

Just to review, the gift of discerning of spirits is a supernatural ability from the Holy Spirit to distinguish spirits—meaning to differentiate, tell apart or discriminate between them, whether a spirit is divine, demonic or human. This gift is necessary to determine spiritual origins, which in turn will determine

outcomes. When we fail in our recognition, we miss out on what God is doing, or we allow demonic harassment to continue out of ignorance.

James and Michal Ann Goll wrote this in their book *Angelic Encounters*:

> In general, discernment always involves the evaluation of some kind of evidence. We can only accomplish this by using our five bodily senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch. We notice something; then we start sifting quickly through the incoming data. We discriminate between the pieces of evidence and we detect patterns. Then we decide what to do, based in large part on what our discernment tells us.[1]

Our first encounters with the Holy Spirit are often in the form of "goose bumps," a feeling of electricity or perhaps a prickly feeling on our skin. Two of my neighbors were saved around the same time, and both would proclaim with excitement how they felt goose bumps during church services. It was exciting to them because they knew they were sensing the presence of God. They could distinguish their connection with Him through goose bumps and other sensations on their skin.

Conversely, our encounters with demonic spirits are not so pleasant. Sometimes we can sense them through a bad taste in our mouths, or we feel an unpleasant coldness in a certain location, or we might experience a nauseous feeling whenever we come around a certain person or group of people. While ministering at a conference in Latvia, for example, I began to experience a certain feeling around one of the attendees. I would compare the feeling to a rubber band being stretched around my forehead and temples. I also remembered this particular feeling, through past experiences, as being connected with occultism. At the end of the service, I went to this person and began to pray with her. I also asked her some pointed questions to determine her involvement, or not, in magic or sorcery. It turns out this person was practicing forms of witchcraft. After our discussion she left the service with a friend, to whom she confessed, and then she surrendered her life to Jesus.

We also will discern the attitudes and struggles of people, good or bad, which can be a directive for prayer or an opportunity for ministry. While I was traveling with a ministry partner to a conference, she predicted that we would encounter a homosexual woman in need of ministry while there. I asked her how she knew that. She replied, "Well, I can tell by where my thoughts are going."

This can be tricky, because such thoughts are often mistaken as your own thoughts unless you know yourself really well. But in this case, my ministry partner was discerning very accurately. Right before the conference session, I felt drawn by the Holy Spirit to a particular woman in the room. I walked up to her and began prophetically to call out her gifts and talents. I then revealed

God's heart for her and His plans for her future. Tears began flowing down her face, and she gave her life to Jesus. Later we found out that she was the woman my ministry partner was discerning before we ever even got there.

Once you realize how much spiritual information you perceive through your senses, you begin to pay attention. Gut feelings and hunches that were once ignored are now examined for their meaning. We sift more carefully through our random thoughts and feelings, asking questions like, *Why am I thinking that? Where did that come from?* We also begin to notice coincidences and patterns involving our senses, now investigating them for spiritual possibilities.

Examine Your Senses

With the Bible as our foundation, let's begin to pair up biblical precedent with our modern-day experiences, to better identify how the gift of discerning of spirits flows through our senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell and feeling). What follows is only a snapshot of illustrations, but it provides a framework to help you begin recognizing when this gift is operating in your individual world.

What do you see?

Discerning through sight involves our inner eyes, also known as the eyes of our heart, as well as our two physical eyes. The apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesians, that their spiritual eyes would be opened by the Holy Spirit, resulting in knowledge and understanding: "And [I pray] that the eyes of your heart [the very center and core of your being] may be enlightened [flooded with light by the Holy Spirit], so that you will know . . ." (Ephesians 1:18 AMP). This is a prayer we can also pray for ourselves—that our eyes would be opened, and that we, too, would know what is happening in the spiritual realm and would respond accordingly.

Afraid of the Israelites, Balak, a Moabite king, hired Balaam to curse them. Balaam waited on God for permission to curse them, but God instead said that He had blessed them. King Balak was persistent, however, and summoned Balaam to a meeting to try to change his mind. As Balaam traveled on his donkey to meet with the king, the angel of the Lord stood in his way to oppose him. Balaam's donkey saw the angel, but he did not. The donkey then stopped cooperating with Balaam, and Balaam punished his donkey severely enough that

the angel intervened. The Lord caused the donkey to speak like a human and to argue his case with his master, and He also finally opened Balaam's physical eyes to see the angel as well. This sight is what led to Balaam's repentance (although short-lived), and he did not proceed in cursing the Israelites. Once Balaam saw the spiritual realm, he could see things properly. What he saw changed his direction (see Numbers 22).

Have you ever had your eyes opened to the spiritual realm in a way that radically changed you? There was a young hippie by the name of Lonnie Frisbee who was on one of many LSD acid trips, this time in the Tahquitz Canyon in Southern California. While high on LSD, he had a life-changing vision where he saw himself evangelizing a sea of people who were crying out to the Lord for salvation. Much like the apostle Paul's Damascus Road experience and subsequent conversion, what Lonnie Frisbee saw in the spiritual realm—namely a vision of himself as Jesus intended him to be—changed the course of his life. He converted to Christianity and became an unusual evangelist who helped birth two major Christian movements, the Jesus Movement and the Vineyard Movement. (You can watch his full story in the movie *Frisbee: Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher*.[2])

Through the gift of discerning of spirits we will see angels, visions of Jesus and even the Lord through signs in nature. When Jesus was born, for example, a new star rose high in the sky. Three kings from the East, astrologers according to tradition, saw the new star and came to Jerusalem in search of Him. They asked King Herod, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2). They discerned a sign in nature and through it found their King and worshiped Him, offering gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Have you ever noticed something in nature and wondered if God was trying to show you Himself? I have experienced this over and over, from rainbows to cloud shapes to insects, birds and more. He opens our eyes to distinguish the spiritual realm, both good and bad, by causing us to see it in nature. The summer before the 2016 election, for example, I distinguished such a thing. It was just after 3 a.m., and I was walking up to my front porch, having just completed a night-watch prayer shift at our church. The Lord had been speaking to my heart all week about "change," only I did not know what He was referring to. As I headed toward my porch, my eyes gazed down to the ground and to a dragonfly lying on the pavement. I thought it might be dead and gave it a little nudge with my foot. Apparently, it was only napping, and it gave me a loud, angry buzz in response. Strangely, I felt the anointing of God in that moment. I rushed inside my home and googled the symbolic meaning for *dragonfly*. I was pleasantly

surprised to discover that this beautiful insect was often a sign for "change." I distinguished God's heart through interaction with His creation. He was saying that we needed to prepare for significant change. Looking back, I believe He was pointing to the 2016 election.

We also will distinguish demonic spirits through sight, often as shadowy shapes, dark mists or actual demons. When this happens, don't be afraid or overwhelmed, and always remember your spiritual authority. As a new Christian, I would see demons in and around my church almost every Sunday. When I say that I could see demons, what I mean is that I could see our natural surroundings, but also our spiritual surroundings at the same time. These spirits were typically about two feet tall, hideously ugly and obnoxious in countenance, and they would hide behind stairwells, inside closets and underneath furniture. I tried to warn our pastor about this, but it only irritated him. At the time, his reaction was hurtful to me, but now I understand why he reacted that way. He did not need me to tell him there were demons in and around the church all the time. For most leaders, hearing that is distracting and very discouraging. He needed me to pray discreetly and use my God-given authority to command these spirits to leave the premises—something we all have the authority to do as believers in Jesus Christ (see Mark 16:17).

When we surrender our inner eyes and physical eyes to the Holy Spirit, He will flood them with light and we will see beyond, into what is imperceptible to the natural eye. Sometimes we will see something in our mind's eye that is crystal clear and applicable to the situation. Other times, we will just see a glimpse of something in our imagination and almost miss it. These sightings should always draw you into dialogue with the Holy Spirit, who will joyfully teach you how to respond.

What do you hear?

Just like our eyes, we also will discern the spiritual realm with our inner and outer ears. What I mean by this is that sometimes you will hear the spiritual realm as a sound or a voice, perhaps, but you may hear it internally or you may hear it audibly, outside yourself.

The young Samuel was sleeping in the house of the Lord, where the Ark of God was. Three times he heard a voice call his name in the night. Each time, he woke up, found the priest Eli and asked him, "Did you call me?"

Eli had not called the boy but realized what was happening, so he told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is

listening’” (1 Samuel 3:9). The Lord called out to Samuel again, and Samuel, now able to distinguish His voice, responded as he had been instructed. God spoke to Samuel even further, telling him the things to come in regard to both Eli and Israel.

Many people have experienced what Samuel experienced. They have heard the invisible, and they have even heard someone call their name. Or they have heard other things such as doorbells, a telephone ringing or bells sounding, only to be unable to find the source of the sound upon investigation. These sounds are typically a call to you from heaven to listen further. The Holy Spirit has something more to say to those of us who have the spiritual ears to hear (see Revelation 2:7, 11).

Other biblical examples of hearing God’s voice include Moses, who heard God speak to him from the burning bush (see Exodus 3). This is another example of discerning the supernatural in nature. We then read about Ezekiel, who heard the mighty sound of angel wings, and Elisha, who supernaturally heard the secret plots of an enemy king against the nation of Israel (see Ezekiel 10:5; 2 Kings 6). Mary, the mother of Jesus, saw an angel and heard the angel’s voice (see Luke 1:26–38). The disciples heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind in the Upper Room in Jerusalem (see Acts 2:2).

One woman in our church learned to discern the spiritual realm by what was actually happening to her ears. When her ears would ring in a certain way, it meant there was the presence of an evil spirit. This kind of thing was something she originally mistook for tinnitus, the medical condition of hearing ringing in the ears, before she received clarity from the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, when her ears had the sensation of popping open, she discerned this to mean there was the presence of an angel.

What do you taste?

Discerning spiritual realities through our sense of taste, although biblical, is probably a new concept for many and one in need of more exploration. King David exhorted us to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Psalm 34:8 NKJV). We can readily accept “seeing” His goodness, but “tasting” His goodness? How does that work?

Whenever we discern something good or bad by the Holy Spirit, even if we have discerned it through taste, we have received knowledge from His treasury of wisdom. That is always His goodness being revealed to us. I have heard some people, myself included, describe how they have identified the presence of the

Lord through a sweet taste in their mouth. This experience has biblical precedent. The Lord instructed the prophet Ezekiel to eat a scroll with prophetic writing on it. Ezekiel described the scroll as tasting sweet, like honey (see Ezekiel 3:1–3). The apostle John experienced something similar. An angel gave him, too, a scroll to eat. John said, "It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour" (Revelation 10:10). I don't know of anyone whose stomach turned sour after tasting the sweetness of God, but it is something to note.

On the negative side, perhaps you have experienced an unsettling situation that "left a bad taste in your mouth." That, too, is a point of discernment, even if it seems obvious. Others have discerned heart issues in people through a bitter taste. For myself, I have identified the spirit of violence in people and in certain cities through a metallic, gunpowder-like taste in my mouth.

As an activation exercise, I once asked a group of people to partner with another person in the group and discern through their sense of taste something about their partner. One woman shared how she distinctly tasted wood oil in her mouth. She discovered how accurate that was once her partner revealed that he was a wood sculptor.

What do you smell?

Have you ever been in worship before the Lord, only to be overcome by the distinguishable scent of His fragrance? This experience is a common one for discerners and is a tangible expression of this gift.

Cari Perazzo, for example, who attends our church, had a powerful experience during a prayer service with our ministry leaders. "As we prayed together in the Spirit, all of a sudden this heavy scent fell down," she said. "It was musky, like a frankincense and myrrh blend, and it lingered in the air."

Others have discerned the Lord's presence as the scent of roses (i.e., the rose of Sharon in Song of Solomon 2:1). Still others discern His presence as a sweet fragrance, like the smell of fresh-baked cookies (see 2 Corinthians 2:14–15).

The demonic realm has often been distinguished supernaturally through the smell of death, sulfur, rotten eggs, rotting garbage and dirty laundry, just to name a few. These odors are clues to help us identify what spirit we are dealing with, so we can respond in prayer and bring deliverance to those being affected. Maria Carlson from Ohio, who formerly interned at our church, had such an experience. She and her family encountered an obnoxious smell in their home, and it seemed to jump from one family member to another. They believed it was

physiological and genetic. Maria described the smell as “extreme halitosis mixed with bad body odor and burning plastic.” She added that it was an odor that filled the house even with the windows open. Finally, Maria discerned that this was not a bodily malfunction, but a demonic spirit. After a lifetime of harassment, Maria and her family commanded the spirit to leave their home “in Jesus’ name,” and the smell left.

Other points of discernment that help identify how to minister to someone could be the smell of something familiar to you, such as your grandmother’s perfume. Is there something you recall that was notable about your grandmother? Or was there something she specifically struggled with? If you are with someone and this happens to you, ask the person a few questions and you will most likely discover why you smelled that scent. In this case, you are discerning a heart issue that the Holy Spirit wants to highlight or heal in that person through an odor already familiar to you.

What do you feel?

This area of the gift of discerning of spirits is actually twofold in its function. You can discern the spirit of something through physical touch and external sensations, or you can discern spiritual information through your emotions.

There was a new family attending our church, and the father came forward for prayer and ministry. I greeted him by first shaking his hand before asking him what he needed prayer for. When my hand made contact with his, I discerned something that I have never discerned before or since. I distinctly felt the presence of money in his hand, except there was not any. To test my experience, I took my hand away and then grabbed his hand once more. There it was again! Here I blurted out, “Ooh! I can feel money in your hand!”

Thankfully, this man was a strong intercessor and fluent enough in the gifts of the Spirit to receive my random behavior. He was also a businessman. The following week he had a business deal go through, something he had been waiting on for months. Only what took place for him in the natural realm had already taken place in the spiritual realm. That is how I could discern the presence of money in his hand before he physically had it.

Pasqual Urrabazo, a pastor at the International Church of Las Vegas, described an encounter he had while ministering at a conference in Texas. He grabbed hands with a man in order to pray for him, and when he did, they both discerned something powerful from the Holy Spirit. The man being ministered to made this comment to Pasqual: “You see with your hands, don’t you?”

Pasqual replied, “You do, too! I can feel it!”

Both this man and Pasqual had the same ability to discern by what they felt in their hands. Pasqual often discerns physical and emotional pain just by laying his hands on someone. He can also feel through his hands if there is the presence of demonic spirits or not, and he has delivered many people from demons as a result.

Scripture shows that both good and evil can be discerned by touch. Peter saw, heard and felt the presence of an angel. An angel appeared in his prison cell, striking him on the side to wake him and saying, “Quick, get up!” (Acts 12:7). Eliphaz the Temanite encountered a spirit that made the hair on his body stand up (see Job 4:15). A young boy possessed with a deaf and mute spirit manifested physically at the sight of Jesus (see Mark 9:19–26).

Shaking, tingling, heat, cold, pressure and the like could all be connected to something spiritual. I have felt the playful poking of angels before, and I have felt the brush of their wings. I have also felt the headache and nausea that come when someone is operating in a spirit of religion or has a hidden vice. You can discern spiritually through touch and physical sensation. Pay attention to what you feel, take note of patterns, and ask the Holy Spirit for clarity.

You can also discern the spiritual realm through your emotions. Jesus was touched with our infirmities, and we, too, will be touched with what others are feeling as an extension of His ministry on the earth (see Hebrews 4:15). This method of discernment requires patience, emotional stamina and some getting used to, because it is not the “feel good” part of the gift. It also requires much practice to sort out which emotion is yours and which is someone else’s.

Elaina Ayala, my personal assistant and also one of our campus pastors, learned she had the gift of discerning spirits when she began to struggle on her ministry outings. She was a new Christian and was part of an internship program. On ministry days, the team would begin with powerful worship and testimonies in one city to prepare themselves. As they traveled to their target city, however, Elaina would shut down with anxiety, nervousness and foreboding thoughts. Her pastor began to notice her repeated pattern, since she only did this when they ministered in one particular city. He clarified to her that she was reacting to the spiritual atmosphere of the city inside her own emotions. He then taught her to stand in her identity in Christ, and to pray, minister and prophesy in the opposite direction of what she was discerning.

Do your emotions and thoughts seesaw depending on where you travel and what crowd you associate with? Pay attention to your emotions, thoughts and the short movies that play inside your imagination. You might be discerning much more than you think.

Anointed to Discern

What God appoints you to do, He will also anoint you to do. To be anointed means to be given supernatural ability from the Holy Spirit. This is what happened to Jesus when the Holy Spirit fell upon Him like a dove after John the Baptist baptized Him in water. Here, Jesus was anointed for ministry. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38). This same anointing is available to you. Jesus said we would do greater works than even He did, and that we, too, would be given power by the Holy Spirit to do just that (see John 14:12; Luke 24:49). God will anoint you to establish His Kingdom in the places where you have influence and to heal those who are demonically oppressed. He will anoint you with the gift of discerning of spirits so you can see and discern spiritual conditions in order to be more effective.

Mavis, a Christian and former emergency room nurse, noticed a pattern in our city in regard to patients coming in for emergency care. She noticed that on any given day, there would be one highlighted kind of injury or emergency. For example, there would be a run on head injuries one day and then a run on broken fingers the next. She discerned this as being the “demonic assignment of the day” and would take this to prayer the moment she identified it. Her prayers targeted the unseen demonic powers trying to steal, kill or destroy the city residents. Recognizing her powerful assignment, she also took much opportunity to share her faith in the emergency room, even calling in reinforcements at times from our church to help her minister to certain patients and their families.

My friend Edwin Smith shared with me how he had experienced a flood of overwhelming concern for a young woman in the youth group of his church. “I discerned the spirit of suicide,” he told me, “even feeling her anguish and that it was something planned out.”

Edwin went to the youth pastor, pleading and crying for him to contact this young woman. Thankfully, the youth pastor acted on Edwin’s discernment. He met with her and her mother, with the young woman tearfully admitting her plan to kill herself—a plan that was intercepted. The gift of discerning of spirits saved her life.

At my last secular job before being hired at my church, the gift of discerning of spirits operated many times to bring divine intervention to problems in my workplace. Once, I was in my personal prayer time at home when I felt a distinct jab in my right eye. It was an unusually sharp and painful jab, and through this I knew I was discerning something spiritual. I asked the Holy Spirit for clarity,

and that night I had a dream. The dream showed me two people at my job who were planning to stir up trouble and involve me in it somehow. I also saw in the dream that their plans would just blow over and that there was nothing to worry about.

That week, my direct supervisor became very agitated and was communicating excessive rules to the staff about things that you would say and implement to protect yourself from false allegations. When I saw this happening, I explained to him that I had already discerned the matter, prayed about it and then had a dream. I even told him who was behind the false allegations, which confirmed for him that I really did hear from God. (My boss was already aware of the people involved, of course, but he could not identify them to us. What I revealed was just confirmation of my discernment.) I then assured him that it would all blow over. Later, I had the privilege of leading one of those persons to Christ.

Receiving the Gift

Is your heart being stirred for this gift? Do you want to become anointed with the gift of discerning of spirits? Or if you already have this gift, do you want it to grow stronger in your life? Here are a few things to help:

1. Desire the gift

God partners with our desires. If you are one who desires the gift of discerning of spirits or a stronger form of it, the Holy Spirit is eager to anoint you with it. If, perhaps, you are concerned that you are being prideful or grandiose in desiring this gift, you are not. We are strongly encouraged to desire spiritual gifts, and God promises to give us the desires of our heart (see Psalm 37:4; 1 Corinthians 14:1).

2. Ask for the gift

James teaches us that we don’t have something because we have not yet asked God for it (see James 4:2). Ask God to anoint you with the gift of discerning of spirits. Ask for more of it! That is a prayer He most definitely will answer,

because “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13).

3. Have someone with the gift lay hands on you to receive it

This is often called the prayer of “impartation” and implies the divine ability of someone to give, share or bestow what he or she has to another person, typically through the laying on of hands. For example, I could “impart” this gift to you by placing my hands on you and praying for you to receive the gift, and then by faith you would receive it for the first time (or receive even more of it). Through the laying on of hands, Joshua received an anointing from Moses, and the believers received the Holy Spirit through the apostles (see Numbers 27:18–23; Acts 8:18). The apostle Paul imparted spiritual gifts to Timothy in the same way and told him, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6).

4. Steward the gift

Stewardship involves studying the gift, using and practicing the gift, and being accountable for the things we discern. Reading this book, for example, is a form of stewardship, and you will see this gift activate and expand as a result. It is one thing to ask for the gift and receive it through the laying on of hands. It is an entirely different thing to apply it and develop in it. Peter teaches us to “use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10). Through stewardship, we fan this gift into flame and become powerful servants to others.

The gift of discerning of spirits is amazingly multifaceted in its expression and function. We miss points of discernment most often because we don’t recognize that we are discerning anything. We think it is just us, or we dismiss spiritual information because it does not make any sense. Once we connect the dots about how this gift can operate, however, we will find new opportunities for ministry. We also will discern spiritual atmospheres, both good and bad, which is the subject of the next chapter. Discerners act as watchmen and gatekeepers to such things, opening the spiritual gates to the right things and shutting them to the wrong things.

Kingdom Principles

1. Once you realize how much spiritual information you perceive through your senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste or feeling), you begin to examine your senses more carefully for spiritual possibilities.
2. Discerning through sight involves our inner eyes, also known as the eyes of our heart, as well as our two physical eyes. We might see angels, visions of Jesus or signs in nature. We might distinguish the demonic as shadowy shapes, dark mists or actual demons.
3. When you discern the supernatural through hearing, you will hear either internally or outside yourself. Some hear the voice of the Lord or an angel; others hear the voice or thoughts of an enemy. Still others hear common sounds such as bells, doorbells, door knocks, etc., but the sounds are actually spiritual sounds and not natural ones.
4. You can discern good or bad through your sense of taste or sense of smell. The presence of the Lord is commonly discerned as a sweet fragrance or taste. The demonic might be discerned as the smell of death or something dirty, or it leaves a bad taste in your mouth.
5. Many discern the presence of the Lord through sensations on their skin or within their emotions. They feel goose bumps, electricity or overwhelming joy or peace. Others discern the demonic or a negative situation through a gut feeling, foreboding thoughts or through identifiable physical discomfort.

Thoughts for Reflection

1. Have you knowingly discerned the presence of the Lord before? How did you know it was the Lord?
2. Could your random thought patterns, thoughts that come into your mind seemingly from nowhere, be a point of discernment? How would you know, then, what thoughts are yours and what thoughts are not?
3. When you discern the demonic realm, does it leave you fearful or with a sense of defeat? What is the Holy Spirit saying about that situation, and how, then, should you pray?

4. Through which one of your senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste or feeling) do you sense the supernatural the most and with the most accuracy?
5. How has the gift of discerning of spirits released ministry through you? Were you able to help someone else because of what you discerned?

4

Discerning Spiritual Atmospheres

It was payday, and I rushed to the bank during my work break to deposit my check. I did not tell anyone where I was going, knowing my personal errand would only take ten to fifteen minutes. Once inside the bank, I found myself nervously looking around the interior. I thought to myself, *I hope the bank doesn't get robbed while I'm here. I would be late getting back to the office!* That was a strange, irrational thought that came out of nowhere, and I dismissed it as soon as I had it. Over the next month or so, I went to the bank three more times. Each time, I had the same bizarre thought that I needed to get out of the bank as soon as possible in case it got robbed. I still did not catch on that I was discerning something in the bank's atmosphere, until I read about it in the newspaper. The bank actually was robbed! I was still learning, through this experience and many others, that when you discern something through your emotions, you can miss what you discern because it seems as though it is your feelings and is not rational enough for you to validate.

My friend Mary had a similar experience, but with a better outcome. One day she noticed what she described as an "odd, unsettled feeling" descending on her like a dark cloud. She knew by the Holy Spirit that she was discerning something in the atmosphere of her neighbor's home, but she could not put her finger on it. As the day wore on, Mary became more and more preoccupied with her neighbor's house, getting up several times to look at it through her window.

"I had no idea what I was watching for," Mary explained. "I began to intercede for my neighbors, while still looking through my window to try to identify what was bothering me."

Finally, Mary saw with her physical eyes what her spiritual eyes were discerning. That evening, she saw a man walking along the street. He made a sudden turn into her neighbor's yard and onto their porch. Within seconds a light went on in their living room, then in a bedroom, and then in the back room of the house. Mary's husband called 9-1-1, and the man was arrested for breaking and

entering as he walked out the front door of the house. It turned out this was the same man who had robbed Mary's home a month prior.

Have you ever noticed an intrusive feeling or thought such as what Mary and I experienced? Did you doubt it was real, or did you dismiss it as being too irrational? When you operate in the gift of discerning of spirits, you will discern spiritual atmospheres through your senses, often through the vehicle of your thoughts and emotions. It is something you have to catch on to, because it is not logical or rational at all. These thoughts and feelings just show up, rather disconnected and unattached to any reality. Once you catch on to it, however, you can ask the Holy Spirit for more clarity.

An atmosphere can be defined as "a surrounding or pervading mood, environment, or influence."[1] A spiritual atmosphere is created by the outflow of the human spirit(s) and by the presence of spiritual beings, whether divine or demonic. Atmospheres have distinct and identifiable feelings attached to them. Those can be feelings like joy, generosity, hospitality and worship, or they can be depression, anger, greed and fear. You can sense and discern the atmospheres of homes, churches and cities, for example, and much more. Spiritual atmospheres affect your thoughts, feelings and actions, and negative atmospheres are something you have to guard yourself from yielding to.

Whenever I travel to minister, I distinctly discern each city's spiritual atmosphere in my thoughts and emotions, and even in my dreams. In one city I might discern an atmosphere of witchcraft, but then discern violence and murder in another. In still another city it will be homosexuality, and in another it will be a spirit of unbelief in God. In one city in particular, I discerned its spiritual diseases in a dream as if they were my own—gambling, pornography and addiction—and I woke up grateful it was just a dream and not really part of me! That can be unnerving if you don't understand why you would have a dream quite like that.

Overseas travel often involves a much stronger sensory experience for someone with discernment. In China, for example, I will encounter unusually perverse thoughts, but then in Central Asia I will discern deep anger and rage. Those who travel with me have similar experiences because we are discerning the same atmospheres. We have also encountered places that host the glory of God and His angels, and such atmospheres are always refreshing!

Discerning different atmospheres happens in different ways and varies from person to person. For myself, I often discern the spiritual atmosphere of a city by what I spiritually see and feel on the land. Where there is a strong local church, cities will host the peace of Jesus in such a way that you can feel it coming off the ground and in the air. I have even sensed that same feeling of peace while

driving through certain cities, which tells me even before I have any tangible evidence for it that the Church of that city is strong. I have also heard testimonies from incoming travelers to my city, Turlock, who say they feel the tangible presence of God when they enter the city borders.

Cities that lack a strong local church will come under the influence of a demonic atmosphere, and this will show up in the personality of the city. This is why some cities become labeled with derogatory nicknames such as "sin city," "drug capital of the West," "religious city" or "party town." These labels are actually the personality of the demonic spirit ruling the atmosphere, "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2 NKJV).

I once ministered in a city that was so bound to witchcraft that I could see with my spiritual eyes endless numbers of snakes coming out of holes in the ground. I spoke at a conference there, but I struggled emotionally and mentally throughout because of this issue. I know how to overturn that kind of spiritual problem in prayer and through other biblical methods, but this was such that it would require going back to that city several times to uproot it successfully. Likewise, I was ministering in a small city in the Midwest and noticed how many of the church people's children were in bondage to or were in jail for drugs, alcohol-related crimes, theft, etc. It is not normal for so many "church" children to be in jail, be unsaved and be in that much trouble. The Bible promises us a much better outcome (see Psalm 115:14; Acts 16:31). Yet this was their normal because this was the spiritual atmosphere of the city, and the Church there had not yet defeated it.

Spiritual atmospheres are real, and we discern through our senses what God and His forces are doing, as well as what Satan and his forces are doing. This is always a call to prayer. In her book *Unlocking the Gift of Discernment*, Australia's Helen Calder, founder of Enliven Ministries, put it this way:

> If we stayed in a place in Asia where strange spirits were worshipped, I encountered them in my dreams. If we ministered in a region or church where spiritual warfare was occurring, I felt the battle acutely.
>
> We were often led to wage spiritual warfare or intercede through my sensitivity to the spiritual realm.[2]

The Role of Discerners

Discerners are spiritual watchmen and gatekeepers. The Bible talks about the role of watchmen and gatekeepers in a very practical sense. In ancient times, watchmen were guards who would watch from high towers and walls over their grain fields and cities. One of the Hebrew words used for watchmen is the word *shamar*, which means to watch, protect, keep and guard.[3] Watchmen would watch for any sign of danger from potential trespassers or enemy armies who would want to invade, rob, spoil and destroy the fields or the city. Gatekeepers were attendants at the city gates or other designated gates who would control access to the city and other important places. Watchmen, then, would work with the gatekeepers to keep the gates shut and guarded at any sign of danger.

Those with the gift of discerning of spirits are both spiritual watchmen and gatekeepers for their church and city and beyond, as the Lord directs. They "*shamar*" the land and genuinely discern spiritual enemies, what they are presently doing or what they are about to do. Several years ago, our head usher had become agitated at a male visitor who had dropped off a young boy at our children's service. He began questioning the visitor and asking him the nature of his relationship with the young boy. Everything seemed to check out, but our usher could not get over it. He became so agitated that he asked the man to leave the church campus, which is something we never do without a tangible reason. I was really taken back by our usher's behavior and debated this within myself. Not long afterward, however, Megan's Law was passed, allowing the public to look up sex offenders by city on the Internet. Would you believe that the man who brought the boy was on the list? Now I understood the "*shamar*" reaction that our usher had, although it did not make sense at the time.

Several years after this incident, I had a dream of a very good-looking man asking me—more like begging me—for permission to come through my city. Remember that the gift of discerning of spirits also works inside our dreams. Through this gift, I knew that this charming, good-looking man was actually some kind of serial killer. He kept asking me for access through the city, and I kept saying no. He finally gave up asking, and the dream ended. A few days later, I read in our local newspaper that members of a terrorist sleeper cell had been caught and arrested in a nearby city. I also had the distinct impression that, by the grace of God, my dream and what happened with this terrorist cell may have been connected. In the dream, I refused to open the spiritual gates of our city to a serial killer looking for access. What was handled in the spiritual realm was immediately revealed in the natural realm. Through my gatekeeping and likely the similar efforts of some other such gatekeepers throughout the city, a religious enemy, an actual "serial killer," was not only locked out, but was also shut down.

Not only do discerners shut the spiritual gates to the wrong things; they also open the gates to the right things. Cindy Jacobs, founder of Generals International, and her companions were attempting to pass out Russian tracts in Moscow's Red Square. "To my amazement no one would take them," she wrote in her book *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy*. "In fact, they ignored me, staring straight ahead as though they had not heard or seen me." [4]

Cindy discerned that they had entered the territory of a spirit controlling Red Square, and that it was blinding the eyes of people to the Gospel (see 2 Corinthians 4:3–4). Cindy and her team used their spiritual authority to bind Satan in the name of Jesus and command spiritual blindness to fall off the people in Red Square. Then they prayed for God to open a door for them to share the Gospel. They saw results immediately! People readily received their tracts, even asking for more.

As spiritual watchmen and gatekeepers, discerners often become great intercessors. An intercessor is one who advocates in favor for another, and discerners passionately advocate for people and for their cities in prayer. What drives them so fervently into prayer is often the pain and discomfort they experience as they discern the spiritual realm through their senses.

Henry (not his real name) was working in an assisted living facility that had a separate locked unit for patients with Alzheimer's and dementia. Every time he worked that floor, he experienced tormenting fear in the atmosphere and was petrified even to be there. He also noticed a distinct change in a certain patient who had been transferred to that unit. The patient became deliriously afraid and tormented, and then quickly died. Then another patient kept saying over and over, "There's a spook in here!"

Henry finally clued in that he was discerning a spirit of fear in the Alzheimer's/dementia unit (see 2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV). He began to pray and command the spirit to leave. Thankfully, there was a quick turnaround. That oppressive fear no longer afflicted him as he worked the floor, and the patient who saw the spook, which was probably a demon, stopped seeing it. Again, this is the "not so great" aspect of this gift, but those who discern in this manner will pray diligently to get relief both for themselves and others.

Managing Overwhelming Discernment

It is one thing to be sensitive to spiritual atmospheres and quite another thing to be overwhelmed by what you discern. What I mean by that is that some people

have been anointed so strongly with this gift that what they discern can become too painful to carry or too overwhelming to allow them to function. And when they don't know they have this gift, all too often they end up on medication and in psychiatric facilities, falsely believing they are going crazy. I have recovered many such persons to their place in the Body of Christ, helping them learn how to manage their discernment. They are shocked when they discover how strongly they are gifted, soon realizing that they pay a higher price for what they have been privileged to discern about the spiritual realm.

There was a widely spread news report about a South African sign language interpreter who was assigned to former President Barack Obama at South African President Nelson Mandela's memorial. As he signed Obama's speech, Thamsanqa Jantjie, 34, claims that he "lost concentration, and started hearing voices and hallucinating," according to Johannesburg's *The Star*.[5] Upon investigation, it was discovered that Thamsanqa reportedly suffered from schizophrenia and would see visions of angels. He also had some history of turning violent.[6]

Thamsanqa became widely criticized in the media, being labeled as a "fake" interpreter. I cannot argue for or against this man's credentials, as I have no knowledge of the situation beyond the media reports. I did watch his videos, however, both on and off stage. Since I have walked this kind of thing out personally and with others and I know what it looks like, I would like to suggest an alternative. Is it conceivable that Thamsanqa was not crazy, but had a gift from God? Could he possibly have had the gift of discerning of spirits instead?

People like Thamsanqa are often connected to the spiritual realm, but they don't know why. This is intended to be a blessing from God, but it becomes a point of defeat until you learn how to control it. Instead of discerning through your senses, it feels more as if you are being ransacked in your senses. You see apparitions, you hear voices, and it is overwhelming on your emotions. Nothing is yet filtered through the Scriptures, and you are therefore not exercising wisdom and self-control about it. This unfortunately brings disruption to your world, until you know what you have is a gift and you learn what to do with it. To make matters worse, the way this gift often manifests can be mistaken for symptoms of schizophrenia and bipolar disorders.

Jami Redman from Bozeman, Montana, believes she has had the gift of discerning of spirits her entire life, but did not know it or understand it. She said that when she gave her life to Jesus, her sensitivity to the spiritual realm then escalated beyond what was manageable. She thought she was cursed, crazy and schizophrenic. She was volatile with explosive rage because of the "voices." Totally desperate, Jami attended a conference where I was teaching about this

gift. Hope filled her world again as she realized she was not crazy, but needed to learn how to manage and control her strong discernment in the context of a healthy church community. Jami still sees and senses things very strongly, but steadies herself through promises in the written Word and in prayer. She has also learned to look for ministry opportunity when she has had a rough day filled with overwhelming discernment. She knows that someone nearby is suffering with what she just walked through, or that she has experienced an atmosphere that needs her prayerful intervention.

Like Jami, Michael (not his real name) could see and sense the spiritual realm for as long as he could remember. His traditional parents, however, believed that what was happening to him was demonic and did their best to shut it down. Left without help, Michael was unable to process all the spiritual information he was absorbing. This left him severely depressed and overwhelmed as a teenager and young adult.

"I turned to psychiatric medication and alcohol to try to get relief, but couldn't get a grip on myself most days," he explained.

Michael climbed out of his severe depression when he broke rank to attend a charismatic church that believed in all of the gifts of the Spirit. Finally, he found acceptance for his unusual spiritual package and a healthy place to process the myriad of things he was discerning. Michael often discerns what is going on with people without having been told, and then he ministers healing and deliverance out of that supernatural knowledge. He also discerns spiritual atmospheres in his church, his city and his travels.

"It's still overwhelming, but now I have context," he shared. "I can usually pray through it and get to the other side, or I can get help when I need it."

I shared with you in the first chapter about how I have had supernatural experiences my entire life. These experiences would have been misdiagnosed as a mental disorder if I had ever talked about them. And the symptoms only escalated after my deliverance from demonic oppression, instead of diminishing. Having an extensive family history of schizophrenia, I naturally wondered if I were losing my mind. My late great-aunt, for example, spent the last years of her life in a mental institution with this diagnosis. Her religious denomination had made no room for the supernatural. If her schizophrenia was truly a medical condition, her church was not looking for supernatural healing for her (see Mark 16:17–18). If it was a misdiagnosed gift from God, her church could not redirect her. She was imprisoned for the rest of her life because she had been denied the freedom in her church to learn about the Holy Spirit and operate freely in His gifts. How sad and how true for so many people.

The Holy Spirit graciously taught me through the Scriptures and through His voice that I was not crazy, but had a gift from Him. He then began to teach me how to walk out this powerful gift in a way that was a blessing to me and to others. It has been a long road of discovery, with plenty of mistakes and victories along the way. I also learned that the things we discern are not the end of the story. We discern so we can respond. When we discern the presence of the Lord, we can worship. When we discern a demonic atmosphere, we can change it. We are supposed to change it.

Changing Spiritual Atmospheres

Jesus stood in a boat off the shore of Galilee and taught the multitudes until evening. He then told His disciples, "Let us cross over to the other side," and they got in their boat and left (Mark 4:35 NKJV). You probably know the story, but a terrific storm emerged along the way, making it appear as if the boat would capsize. The disciples panicked, while Jesus slept peacefully in the boat's stern. When they finally woke Him up, Jesus "rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm" (verse 39 NKJV).

Here we see the disciples becoming overwhelmed by an atmosphere. This atmosphere was a storm, but it was not just any storm. When Jesus told them, "Let us cross over to the other side," it was because they were on divine assignment. On the other side of the sea was a man possessed with a legion (thousands) of demons, a man Jesus would fully deliver. I believe these spirits sensed Jesus coming toward them and sent a killer storm to try to stop His arrival. Jesus shifted the atmosphere, however, by speaking to it. His disciples were in chaos, but He declared His peace to the storm. We can do the same.

When you encounter a demonic atmosphere, you, too, need to speak to it. You speak to the atmosphere out loud and with authority, going in the opposite spirit of what you have discerned. We read in Scripture, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21 NKJV). We are also exhorted that if something is standing in our way, we can speak to it and it has to move (see Mark 11:23). God uses His words to give life to the dead and call things into being that are not (see Romans 4:17). Being created in His image, you and I will also use our words to change what needs to be changed.

David Jenkins, from Texas, served as an on-site intercessor at a men's retreat in Colorado. His job was to pray over the facilities prior to the arrival of the

retreat guests, since many groups had used the location for different purposes. As he entered the various buildings and rooms, he would typically experience a wave of feelings, usually negative.

"It was fairly simple to remedy once I discerned it," David said. When he discerned hopelessness by feeling it within himself, for example, he spoke to hopelessness out loud. "Hopelessness, go away!" he commanded. "I release hope and faith instead."

He did this with many more issues as he discerned them. David was amazed at how his thoughts and feelings instantly changed from room to room, corner to corner, and even bed to bed. As he spoke to these issues, he could feel darkness shifting and being replaced by light.

Another way to purge an atmosphere is through praise and worship. Bible teacher and evangelist Perry Stone shared about the spiritual struggles he experienced while traveling around the country in his early days of ministry. He wrote in an article for *Charisma* magazine that he and his wife would have bizarre and disturbing experiences in hotel rooms, accompanied by strange and demonic dreams. He learned, however, that he could change the atmosphere of his hotel room if he would play praise and worship music in the room continuously.

"In Scripture, David's music brought refreshing and peace to a tormented king (1 Samuel 16:23)," Perry wrote. "If music had this effect in David's life and ministry, why would it not have the same effect today?"[7]

It sure did! This changed the atmosphere of his hotel room every time and made his stay much more peaceful.

Dr. Violet Kiteley, the late pastor of Shiloh Christian Fellowship in Oakland, California, discovered the impact of praise and worship on her troubled city when the police called on her, as well as on her church, to "do something" about Pleitner Avenue. At the time, Pleitner Avenue was notorious for gangs, drugs and prostitution; it was one of the most dangerous areas of the city. Dr. Kiteley and her congregation understood that this was first a spiritual problem and needed a spiritual solution. In Psalm 149, we read that the high praises of God work to bind kings and enemies. With that in mind, Shiloh Church held a block party on Pleitner Avenue for three weeks in a row. This block party included a barbecue and giveaways, praise and worship according to Psalm 149, and an evangelistic message. The results were so incredible that the police notified the media of the good news—70 percent of the drug pushers moved out of Pleitner following Shiloh's praise party that shifted the atmosphere.[8]

Spiritual atmospheres can and do shift instantly, such as in the case of David at the retreat site. Or a shift can occur in a matter of weeks, such as in the case of

Dr. Kiteley. And then some shifts require much more. God called Ron and me to repurpose a difficult church environment in a historically "religious" city. Not only were we battling a demonic spiritual atmosphere; we were also dealing with strongholds of thinking and an inflexible culture. As a strong discerner, I suffered week after week in the atmosphere of my church. It was a cold, strife-filled atmosphere with a heavy, oppressive feeling. If you were to look at the congregants on Sunday, they, too, looked sad, bored or angry underneath their plastic smiles. Prayer continued to be my lifeline, because in prayer I could breathe in the heavenly atmosphere, which is peace, joy, love, etc., and in prayer I could get my feelings straightened out. That is, until the next church service, where the battle inside would start all over again. Shifting this atmosphere would need much more than a few one-time commands or a few weeks of praise and worship. We were engaging in a top-to-bottom spiritual overhaul, which largely began with discerning who was for us and who was against us. That will be our topic in the next chapter.

Kingdom Principles

1. When you operate in the gift of discerning of spirits, you will discern spiritual atmospheres through your senses, often through the vehicle of your thoughts and emotions. We often dismiss what we discern, though, because it is not rational enough.
2. Spiritual atmospheres are real, and we discern through our senses what God and His forces are doing, as well as what Satan and his forces are doing. It is always a call to prayer.
3. Discerners are spiritual watchmen and gatekeepers who shut the spiritual gates to the wrong things and open them to the right things.
4. The things we discern are not the end of the story. We discern so we can respond.
5. We can change most spiritual atmospheres through our words and with praise and worship.

Thoughts for Reflection

1. Have you ever noticed an intrusive feeling or thought that seemed out of place, only to discover you were discerning something real in the atmosphere?
2. Do you experience distinct shifts in your thoughts, emotions and dreams, depending on your location?
3. How have you acted as a spiritual watchman, opening or closing spiritual gates, depending on what you were discerning in the atmosphere?
4. Have you ever struggled with overwhelming discernment? If so, how are you learning to manage that?
5. Are you noticeably aware of how your words and your praise and worship change atmospheres?

5

Discerning Who Is for You and Who Is against You

I knew it would happen eventually, but we had been together only a few years when our pastor flew the coop.

“I’ve had enough!” he said. “I’m going to minister at another, much healthier church.”

And that is exactly what happened. He returned to the church he had planted in another city, but this time as an associate minister. His sudden departure left Ron and me with that weird “dangling” feeling and the insecurity of not knowing what to expect next.

To my shock, the church board quickly turned to my young husband, asking him to become the interim senior pastor. It did not take long, however, for the board to fall into disunity over my husband’s future with this church. As arguments began to stir, my husband sensed the tangible presence of the Lord enter those tense meetings. Again, this is the gift of discerning of spirits in operation. Ron described how the “felt peace” of God filled the room more than once, and those at odds with each other then would supernaturally come into agreement. The plan was for Ron to serve as interim pastor for a year, but within a few months the board invited him to take a more permanent role. Ron, at age 27, became the youngest senior pastor in the church’s 80-year history.

God’s word to us about leading this church had finally come to pass, but now we had a new word: “For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9 NKJV). It would be years before we understood how this little church in a small town could ever become a great and effective door of ministry. It did not take long, however, to realize that our adversaries were many and they often came in disguise. What I mean is, our adversaries did not look like adversaries. They looked like ordinary people who could quote the Bible, pray and worship in church on Sundays. If we were going

to thrive in this assignment, then, we had to see behind the masks. We had to know who was for us and who was against us.

The gift of discerning of spirits will reveal people's heart motives, whether they are sincere and genuine or evil and deceitful. To be honest, I have found that most people are somewhere in the middle. They are not all sincere, but neither are they all deceitful, and we can still have a relationship with them and they with us, knowing that we all are a work in progress. At the same time, there are those who are really, really deceitful and have evil agendas. They don't want you to succeed, or they want to take something from you. Some even want to destroy you. The gift of discerning of spirits is God's security system to let you know who is really who.

At first, this gift worked to reveal and expose malicious gossip that was rampant inside our leadership and fellowship. Some of that, of course, was exposed naturally as people came forward about it. Other times, Ron would rub his head as if he were feeling a headache and say by the Spirit of the Lord, "Mr. and Mrs. So-and-So are stirring people up over the change we made last week. I can feel it right here!"

Ron would discern rebellion and manipulative speech through a particular feeling of pressure against his mind. He even knew in his spirit who was involved and what it was about. This was his alert from the Holy Spirit to pray for the rebellious gossip to surface so he could confront it.

"I was confronting men and women who were two and three times my age on the sin of gossiping," Ron said of that time. "I had to call some of them into my office almost weekly until they stopped or left the church."

Backbiting is what had fueled devastating strife in the past, and it was strife that was being uprooted from the church in this season. The gift of discerning of spirits revealed it so we could deal with it. More than once, the gift of discerning of spirits revealed men and women sent on demonic assignment to harm my husband or me.

I need to point out here that there is a difference between a person sent against you by Satan and a person who is very broken and acts out of his or her brokenness. It can look the same on the surface, but the gift of discerning of spirits will reveal the truth. Discerning an actual demonic assignment against you can be alarming within your emotions, and you need wisdom and patience, not reactiveness, to handle it properly.

There was a middle-aged woman who began attending the church soon after my husband became senior pastor. She was eager, energetic, and had expressed her desire to be more involved in the ministry. I did notice some strange behavior on her part, however. She appeared to create situations on purpose that would set

people up to be disappointed with me. She struck me as possibly having a divisive spirit, but then, like an alarm going off, I discerned her real motive. I said to Ron, “She’s here on demonic assignment to destroy me! Please do something—anything!”

It sounded crazy, but I wanted her out of the church right then and there, and I did not care how that happened. You see, when you discern something that sinister, it causes panic and an inappropriate reaction inside you, until you become more experienced. If you are not careful, you might initiate a strong defensive action against someone without any tangible evidence for doing so. That is almost always the wrong thing to do. My husband, being the voice of reason, convinced me just to stay calm and wait it out. Not too long afterward, she popped up on a leadership team in one of the church’s long-standing ministries. This ministry had neglected to check in with Ron or me before they appointed her, and it turned into their big mess. I also knew by the Holy Spirit that she wanted to lead this particular ministry so she could gain more power through that position. She became so bitterly divisive within that team that she was invited to leave the church.

The gift of discerning of spirits also sifts out the highly deceptive who see the church as a means for personal gain. A board member and his wife introduced one family to us who began attending our church. They acted very charismatic and quite “churchy.” I never felt quite right about the guy, and one day in the hallway I just asked him flat out, “How do you make your money?”

I asked him that because I noticed his peculiar behavior when we received offerings during the church services. He would flamboyantly pull out of his jacket a large, folded stack of cash and then drop several large bills in the offering bucket in an almost choreographed fashion. When he shared with me how he earned his income, it sounded like garble and nonsense words. He did not make any sense! I knew I was discerning a lying spirit with a wicked financial motive. Soon enough, he began his “presentations” to others and to me about a hot investment, an investment that, thankfully, no one gave him money for.

I felt as if we were in a living Whac-A-Mole game. This is a game in which plastic moles mechanically pop up through a game board, and then you hit the moles down with a hammer. The game itself is pretty satisfying because you can usually hit down all the moles. In the church, however, we would take care of one spiritually motivated problem, only to have two more pop up. That is because we really were not fighting with flesh and blood, as the apostle Paul described the battle, but “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly

realms” (Ephesians 6:12). At the same time, we faced unusual spiritual warfare, the kind you would hear about in foreign countries but not expect in your own conservative city. In response, we became very diligent and militant in prayer, and God answered us again and again.

The Tension of Two Extremes

During a conference in another town, I requested a private meeting with one of the speakers. The speaker was connected to a strong and impactful movement, so I trusted this person’s perspective more than my own. I simply wanted counsel on how best to handle the high level of spiritual warfare we were dealing with in our church and city.

The counsel I received was that people such as those in my church and me, people who “see too many demons,” are most likely out of balance. I was told that if we wanted to be spiritually effective, then we needed to look for God—Him only—and not be looking for demons. That thinking also needed to carry over into how we saw and ministered to people. We needed to “look for the good or positive” in people and not fixate on the negative.

I interpreted this counsel to mean that we should not actively look for demons in people. This sounded like solid advice and struck me as a much better option than what we were presently doing. It is true that we had become pretty negative and did see a lot of demons both spiritually and in people, and I was desperate to find a more comfortable balance.

The speaker also introduced a new model of prayer at the conference and called it “soaking prayer,” which is quite different from intercessory prayer. Soaking prayer is an act of entering into the presence of God solely to experience His love and His voice. Intercessory prayer, on the other hand, is passionately advocating, keeping watch and enforcing God’s promises on behalf of another. I noticed that many people around the conference room engaged in soaking prayer by casually lying down on the chairs or on the floor, as if asleep. It looked like a very peaceful experience.

I reasoned, then, that these concepts were exactly what we needed and began to teach them to my church and to our intercessors. I communicated how I felt that we had become spiritually out of balance and needed to look for what God was doing instead of what demons were doing, both in prayer and when we ministered to people. I then reconstructed our prayer services to look more like

soaking prayer instead of intercessory prayer—again, just trying to balance everything out.

Seeing Only What We Wanted to See

It did not take long to realize what a mistake I had made. In trying to look for what God was doing, and Him only, we stopped discerning the hearts of people and the very real plans of the enemy. Rather than flowing in the gift of discerning of spirits, we began controlling the gift to see only what we wanted to see, instead of what we needed to see. And because we were mostly "soaking" in prayer instead of interceding in prayer, our spiritual hedges went down. A hedge is defined as something that provides a defense or protection. Job had such a spiritual hedge, lost it and then got it back (see Job 1:10). When he had this hedge, Satan could not touch him. When he lost the hedge, Satan did all but kill him. We had lost our hedge because we were no longer seeing and interceding. I saw more evil come into our church during this time frame, in the form of people and spiritual attacks, than in any other time frame. It was a hard but valuable lesson.

Through this I learned that the truth is often found in the tension of two extremes. What is right for one church is not always right for our church. Remember, the apostle John in the book of Revelation gave seven different sets of instruction to the seven different churches. If these churches did not receive the same instructions, neither will we.

I am not saying that "soaking prayer" is a wrong kind of prayer or that we should stop seeing the positive in people. I am saying that our church was in a unique spiritual battle and needed the right strategy for what we were dealing with. We had stopped discerning our enemy, thinking this other strategy was the right thing to do. In so doing, we inadvertently had laid down our swords.

With that said, we reopened our eyes and hearts to see what the Holy Spirit wanted us to see, without filtering anything out. We had been trying to set the balance for our church, when God is the One who sets the balance. With swords back in hand, we were mindful again to keep watch over the gates by discerning who was for us and who was against us.

Discerning the Motives of the Heart

If you are new to the gift of discerning of spirits, here are some points to help you begin to identify who is for you and who is against you. Remember, this is a supernatural ability that goes beyond natural perception. You are not just reading people or their behavior. You are discerning by the Holy Spirit what the natural eye cannot see.

1. Pay attention to your "knower"

"I just know that I know," said Charlene, my external ministry administrator from Ceres, California. "It's never been that hard for me to know someone's intentions."

That is because Charlene has learned to pay attention to her "knower," that internal barometer that tells her whom she can trust and whom she should avoid. Some people call this intuition, a gut feeling or instinct. It is really the Holy Spirit's gift of discerning of spirits. Char once had a "knowing" about an event she planned to send her teenage daughter to. At the last minute, she decided to keep her daughter home because she knew in her knower that something about the event was deceptive. She found out a few days later that the event was closed prematurely due to the inappropriate behavior of an adult chaperone, which led to his arrest.

Nathan, a program specialist for an adult day program, also pays strong attention to his knower. "It can be difficult at times to explain how I discern if someone is for me or against me," he said. "I just know inside. My spirit is either drawn to them or repelled by them."

Still, Nathan tests his feelings with physical observations and observes a person over time to substantiate his initial reactions. Once, he even identified a witch masquerading as a Christian in his church fellowship. He identified her as such in his knower, but waited for evidence before he said anything. The evidence came soon enough, and she was revealed as a notorious witch, one who habitually infiltrated churches to stir up trouble.

Jennie, a parishioner also from Ceres, California, shared about the first time she met her best friend. "I had never felt such a sweet and gentle spirit before," Jennie explained. "I thought how strange it was to feel this good about someone whom I had just met."

This was significant for Jennie, because she does not trust people that easily. She knew in her knower, however, that she had met a real friend, and they have had a relationship that she has since enjoyed for many years. "God had genuinely put someone in my life to be the friend that I really need," Jennie said.

2. Pay attention to your imagination

When Rose (not her real name) meets new people or is introduced to them, she takes note of the movies that begin to play inside her imagination. If she sees a good movie begin to play involving both her and the person she just met, then she has learned through repeated experiences that the person is someone she can trust. If she sees a negative movie, however, she takes note of it and stays guarded until she can prove out what she just saw in her imagination. Rose is aware, however, that if she is not in a good frame of mind, she does not discern as accurately. Those movies will still play, but she will impose her own vulnerability or distrust onto someone, which is false discernment, not true discernment.

When Alli, an esthetician and graphic designer for our church, meets new people, just like Rose she sees movies play in her imagination. She has learned over time to accept this as her "heads-up" from the Holy Spirit. "It's great when it's positive," she said. "But when it's negative, it's hard to accept."

Alli explained that a movie will start with a thought and then turn into a story in her mind. She clarified that these movies in her imagination are not accurate in their details, but are how her mind processes information that she has just discerned. She once met a woman who was married, and a random thought popped into her mind: *She's not being faithful*. And then the thought turned into a movie in her mind, and Alli watched a quick movie of this woman not being faithful. Alli did not say anything about it, but she also declined all the woman's social invitations.

"Over time it all came out," Alli remarked. "She was caught red-handed, cheating on her husband."

3. Pay attention to your peace

Jesus taught His disciples a supernatural way to discern the intentions of people, in one case the intentions of strangers who offered to house them as they traveled. He told them, "If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you" (Matthew 10:13). His disciples, then, would know who was for them or who was against them simply by paying attention to their peace.

Peace does not always reveal what the issue is, but it does reveal when there is one. It is like an internal red light or green light that lets us know if we should move forward with someone or move away from the person. Jesus gave us His

peace, and His peace leads us and rules our hearts (see Isaiah 55:12; John 14:27; Colossians 3:15).

My first job after college was in the marketing department of a large company. The manager of that department convinced the company to outsource all the marketing to him so he could start a personal business. He invited me to join his new business, which made sense since I would no longer have a job after the contract went into effect. Only I did not have a peace about it. In my excitement for this new adventure, I ignored what I felt and then regretted every moment of it. My boss turned out to be a classic narcissist, and I could not escape fast enough.

I have learned since then to be led by God's peace, and it has never failed. My first trip to China was a test of my faith and being led by peace. The Holy Spirit could not have been more clear in what He said: *Go to China!* I just could not make the right connections inside that nation. And all my Chinese missionary contacts told me not to come because it was too dangerous. To make a long story short, the Holy Spirit miraculously connected me with a young man who seemed to have all the internal connections that I was looking for. Still, it was risky because I did not know this young man at all.

Once inside the nation, we decided to minister at an orphanage located outside Beijing. My team and I, mostly young females, got into an unmarked van and drove off to who knows where. As we drove, my mind began to panic, realizing we could be kidnapped, sold or worse, and no one would be able to trace our whereabouts. I still had tremendous peace, however. That peace told me we were safe and with people we could trust.

Have you ever noticeably discerned something happening in your knower, in your imagination or through your peace before? Were you able to distinguish who was for you or against you as a result? Again, the gift of discerning of spirits comes with a learning curve, and we learn through practice to discern good from evil. My prayer is that this short list of paying attention to your knower, paying attention to your imagination and paying attention to your peace will raise your spiritual awareness enough to bring the right people into your world and keep the wrong people out.

Discerning the Enemy Within

There are still those, however, who seem to avoid detection even by the most sensitive discerners. That is because they are empowered by a demonic spirit

that is an expert at disguise. This demon is known as a “religious spirit,” and it sits in our churches each and every Sunday going undetected—that is, until it rears its ugly head.

Jesus asked His disciples a question: “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:15–16). Jesus blessed Simon powerfully for his words, even using his name, Peter, which is a Greek word for “rock,” to describe the unconquerable strength of His Church: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades [hell] will not overcome it” (verse 18).

Afterward, Jesus gave His disciples fair warning about what to expect in the near future. He told them that He would suffer greatly in Jerusalem at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders (the Pharisees and the Sadducees), would be killed by them and then would be raised to life again.

Peter, who was previously so full of heavenly revelation, took Jesus aside and rebuked Him: “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” (verse 22).

In response, Jesus gave Peter a shocking rebuke: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me . . .” (verse 23).

Was Peter really Satan? No, but his words revealed to Jesus that he was acting from self-interest. When people speak and behave from a selfish agenda, they are never in the will of God. And if Peter was standing against the will of God, like Satan, he had made himself an enemy of God, even if it was just for that moment. The well-deserved rebuke from Jesus was intended to shock him back into alignment, which meant he must deny himself, pick up his cross and follow Christ (see verse 24).

Have you ever acted in self-interest, ahead of God’s interests? I believe we all have. Community and healthy accountability with other Christians should generate those needed rebukes when we go offtrack like that. Where there is no rebuke or when a rebuke goes ignored, that creates conditions for people unwittingly to be used by Satan to fight against the things they are supposed to fight for. This is what happened in Jesus’ day with the religious leaders, the very leaders who crucified Him. They fought against the One they were supposed to embrace, all because of jealousy and self-interest.

The Pharisees and Sadducees demonstrated a spirit, attitude and behavior that undergird what is commonly known as a religious spirit. I believe Peter was teetering along the same line, except that Jesus rebuked him back into a right spirit. What began to happen to Peter, then, is a warning to us all. A religious spirit does a lot of evil things in the name of God, even murder, but God has nothing to do with it. It is legalistic and power seeking, and it uses religion to

suppress or even kill off anyone genuinely moving in the Holy Spirit. This was the supernatural power source behind the majority of opposition we had been experiencing within our church. It was a spirit now being discerned, confronted and uprooted in order to make room for the Spirit of God.

My husband had greeted a long-standing church member, at least fifty years in attendance, just before a church service. She always sat in the same seat, and she would come early, sit down, fold her arms and frown the entire service. She habitually complained about the worship leaders, too, the new music and the music volume. When my husband greeted her, she said quite venomously, "I am praying for the worship leaders to leave!"

In true Jesus style, my husband rebuked her and said, "That is not the Spirit of Christ."

I wish it had ended right there, but I have learned over the years that those who pray are powerful, even when they pray the wrong things. This is why Jesus instructs us to bless and not curse, because we have the power to do both (see Matthew 5:44 NKJV). What ensued was a horrible sin, with a resulting divorce and the loss of two families from our fellowship, which included our worship leaders. While the people involved were ultimately responsible for the choices they made, looking back, we should have taken this woman's curse against our worship leaders more seriously. That kind of prayer can empower demonic spirits to attack people and is fueled by the spirit of religion. What happened naturally, I believe, was a reflection of the battle happening spiritually—a battle that might have been prevented if only we had understood what we were dealing with.

I know of a pastor of Middle Eastern descent who began having terrible issues with his church board and some of his ethnic congregants. Not only would they not allow him to lead as the Holy Spirit was directing him, but they also challenged his leadership at every turn, even in the middle of his sermons. Remember that a religious spirit will go so far as to murder you if it can. Because this pastor was in the United States on a work visa, his dissenters threatened to fire him and thus force him back to his native land if he did not do what they wanted. Going back to his country meant jail and death for him and his family. This is a religious spirit at its worst. Thankfully, another church intervened and took this pastor on staff to prevent the worst from happening.

Verna Brown, senior pastor of Soul Harvest Worship Center in Modesto, California, also encountered this kind of spirit in some of her congregants, one person in particular. "It's so deceptive," Verna said. "It looks like a Christian, worships like a Christian and even performs signs and wonders!"

Verna had inadvertently allowed a woman with a religious spirit to come into her church and even join her leadership team. The woman pretended submission to her leadership, but really had a hidden agenda to divide and conquer, saying it was all "Jesus." Verna admits she missed a clear point of discernment, the manifestation of a spiritual scent she described as "the smell of a dirty diaper." She thought the smell indicated a plumbing issue in her church and kept using air fresheners to try to remedy it. That smell was not the bathroom, however, but was an actual spirit attached to this person with a religious spirit. The same identifiable smell was on every person she had infected. In the end, this woman took several people out of Verna's church to herself.

The good news is that another woman showed up at Verna's church around this time, but did not have the kind of smell associated with her that the previous woman had. Actually, this time it was a taste so distinct that Verna knew she was discerning a friend and an ally in the new woman. Verna tasted honey, like candy, in her mouth. It proved to be true. This new woman and her family have become strong pillars in her church, and Verna could not be more grateful.

The gift of discerning of spirits reveals people's hidden heart motives to us, for better or worse. This gift is like a Holy Spirit security alarm that tells us when people are safe or not, or if they are somewhere in the middle. There are some spiritual conditions that are harder to discern than others since they are extremely deceptive. We learn to distinguish the "hard to discern" by studying the nature of spiritual beings, both the angels and the principalities and powers. That is my next chapter's topic.

Kingdom Principles

1. The gift of discerning of spirits will reveal people's secret heart motives, whether they are sincere and genuine or evil and deceitful.
2. When you discern a demonic assignment against you, it can be alarming within your emotions. You need wisdom and patience, not reactiveness, to handle it properly.
3. We will discern both kingdoms, not just one or the other. We don't shut our eyes to the demonic kingdom out of personal preference. We need to know what God is doing, as well as what Satan is doing, so we can respond responsibly.

4. We can begin to discern the motives of the heart by paying attention to our knower, our imagination and our peace.
5. A religious spirit can go undetected, even by the most sensitive discerners, because it is an expert in disguise.

Thoughts for Reflection

1. Have you ever overreacted to someone you have negatively discerned? What did you learn from that episode?
2. Which kingdom, God's or Satan's, do you discern more? Has God set the balance in what you discern, or do you notice tendencies to see only what you want to see?
3. Have you ever noticeably discerned something happening in your knower, your imagination or through your peace? As a result, were you able to distinguish who was for you and who was against you?
4. Many confuse reading a person's outward behavior for the gift of discerning spirits. When have you supernaturally discerned someone's motive, a motive imperceptible to the natural eye?
5. Has the behavior of someone with a religious spirit ever caught you by surprise? If so, looking back, what were some points of discernment that you missed, if any?

6

Discerning the Angels

As I sat to write this chapter, I began to study about the element of faith needed to discern the presence of angels. The Bible tells us, "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him [with awe-inspired reverence and worship Him with obedience]" (Psalm 34:7 AMP). Do you fear and reverence Him? I sure do! We know, then, that the angels are right here with us. The apostle Paul prays, "And [I pray] that the eyes of your heart [the very center and core of your being] may be enlightened [flooded with light by the Holy Spirit], so that you will know . . ." (Ephesians 1:18 AMP). This prayer was not only for the Ephesians, but was a prayer that extends to you and me. This is what the prophet Elisha prayed for his servant when their lives were threatened. He prayed that the servant's spiritual eyes would open to see the angels protecting them (see 2 Kings 6:17).

Author and minister Bobby Connor once said that we need to "invite the angels to make themselves known." I want to encourage you, then, to go ahead and ask the Lord to open your eyes to see the angels who are with you. Allow your faith to lay hold of God for this, knowing that your eyes are blessed to see (see Matthew 13:16).

This is how I prayed as I began this section of the book: I asked the Lord to allow me to see His angels, knowing from His Word that they were nearby. Almost immediately, I saw an angel standing to my right, floating up in the air. He was about six feet tall, and I could feel God's light and heat radiating off him. I even went so far as to ask him, "Why are you here?"

He replied, "I'm here to help you!"

You and I both know that was a biblical response, and I was highly encouraged, to say the least (see Hebrews 1:14).

Why is it important to see and discern the angels? There are several reasons, but the most important is that angels give us an idea of what God is doing. Angels are servants of God and of us, and they do a lot of things, such as help us, protect us, guide us, and more. Yet they function primarily as God's

messengers, something I understand to mean that angels will communicate a message both verbally and even indirectly by their actions (see Psalm 104:4; Hebrews 1:7).

I once saw four angels come and stand on our church platform, and I discerned by the Holy Spirit why they had come. These were angels on assignment from God for provision. God provides for us, but it is the angels who facilitate His provision (see Genesis 24:40; 1 Kings 19:5). These angels remained motionless until after we received the Lord's tithes and gave our offerings—an offering I made sure to give to once I saw the angels. After the offering they left very quickly, I believe to cause the Lord's provision to come. When we understand the message of the messengers, often observed in their actions, then we can co-labor with God and complete what God has already initiated in heaven.

How to Discern the Angels

I have discovered that there are a few specific ways in which you will discern angels. These are that you will see them, you will feel them and you will hear them. Let's look at each of these ways in a little more detail, along with some specific examples of them taking place, so that you are more aware of how they might occur.

1. You will see them

After Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal, his nemesis, Queen Jezebel, threatened his life, so he ran for cover. Exhausted and emotionally spent, Elijah asked God to take his life. He then fell asleep, only to be awakened by an angel —an angel he saw with his own eyes! Surprisingly, the angel made him food to eat before telling him it was time to get up and go (see 1 Kings 19:1–7). Isn't that amazing?

Over and over again, we read about angels being seen by people in both the Old and New Testaments. Angels appear in the Bible 273 times. In the New Testament, an angel appeared to Zechariah to announce the miraculous birth of his son, John, and then the same angel appeared to the virgin Mary to announce that she would become pregnant with Jesus (see Luke 1:5–31). In John 5, we read about a very special angel who "went down at a certain time into the pool

and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had" (verse 4 NKJV). Later, we read about the angel who woke Peter up from sleep in prison, told him to put on his clothes, sandals and coat, and then supernaturally escorted him out to freedom (see Acts 12). I believe the disciples and other converts were so accustomed to angels that when Peter showed up at Mary's home, they did not believe it at first, thinking it must be Peter's angel and not really Peter himself (see verse 15). My point is that as New Testament believers, we should think of seeing and discerning angels as normal, not weird or "out there."

Many people have seen angels as quick flashes of light in their peripheral vision. I have seen them this way as well. They look like a quick flash of small blue lights, and I will see them for a month or so and then they will stop. Other people have told me they have seen the same, only as white or gold lights and some other colors. Although there are different interpretations for the meanings of these colors, I learned from John Paul Jackson that the color blue usually means revelation and communion. When I see the blue flashes of light, then I co-labor with what God is doing and pray for deeper revelation and deeper communion, knowing the angels have been sent on assignment for this. Although this phenomenon of seeing lights peripherally might signal a possible medical issue for some people, as with many things, I believe that more often than not we have rationalized the supernatural with this explanation. The last time I posted a description of this way that we might see angels to my Facebook page, I received 155 comments, almost all from people who have seen angels just the same way, as flashes of light.

We seem to have a lot of different angelic activity in and around our church platform areas. Twice I was told about an angel with a harp standing on our downtown campus church platform. The two persons who saw this angel both told me about it the same week, but neither had talked to the other person about what he or she had seen. We do know from the Bible that angels play musical instruments; specifically, we know they play trumpets, which again fits their messenger role (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16). Although it was not perfectly clear why the angel on our platform appeared with a harp, we see in the book of Revelation that harps can be connected to intercessory worship and deliverance (see 1 Samuel 16:23; Revelation 5:8). I believe this angel came for one or both of these purposes.

During our New Year's Eve prayer service, one of our congregants saw angels coming down from heaven, carrying large baskets that were illuminated with light. She said the angels set the baskets at the front of the platform and then went back up. She peeked inside one of these illuminated baskets and saw

kidneys, pancreases and fingers! She did not look in the other baskets but knew that they, too, were filled with body parts from heaven. She said, “They were there for the taking for all who had faith to receive them.”

Brenda Crouch, married to Paul Crouch Jr., shared with me a powerful story about seeing an angel. Brenda was raised in a strong Christian home in Turlock, California, and had been taught well about the source of her help and protection. Growing up, Brenda had been elected by the student body as a cheerleader and was eager to fit in with the cool kids. She had been invited to a birthday party of another cheerleader and was excited to be included, although she had never attended any of their “parties” before. She assumed that a parent would be around when her parents dropped her off, but to her surprise, there were none. As the evening progressed, she learned that the single mother of this home was a practicing witch, heavily involved in the occult, and that her daughter had learned many of her mother’s incantations and séance practices. There was a shift in the evening when these fellow cheerleaders began casting spells on other kids, including some of the “jocks” (athletes). Brenda witnessed these girls’ eyes turning black and their odd behavior, as if they were out of their bodies, which immediately brought fear into the room. The leader of the pack called everyone to order and started a séance, lighting a single candle.

“Some kids were laughing nervously, while others played along,” as Brenda described it. “I chose to abstain and sit in a chair outside the circle instead of on the ground with them.”

As the leader tried to summon spirits, Brenda prayed silently, asking God to shut it down and protect her from any harm. At that moment, she felt the wings of a *huge* angel envelop her like a shield and the presence of the Lord fill her with tremendous courage.

Right then, the leader got frustrated and barked at everyone, “*Someone* is not cooperating, and the spirits won’t reveal themselves!”

Brenda spoke out and told them it was the power of God against the powers of darkness, and that the demons had to flee in the name of Jesus. “Through this I was able to witness about the saving grace of Jesus to a few of my classmates,” Brenda said. “I was marked as ‘different’ from that point on, though.”

Brenda believes this was a manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s power at work in her life and her call to trust in a big God!

2. You will feel them

Have you ever felt a wind blow against you, only to realize that you were indoors? It was not the air conditioner, and that windy presence was, well, impossible. That wind was most likely an angel. Angels are described in the Bible as winds or flames of fire, and they can be felt as such. "And concerning the angels He says, 'Who makes His angels winds, and His ministering servants flames of fire [to do His bidding]'" (Hebrews 1:7 AMP).

I once felt an angelic wind in a church service during an unusual time of ministry. When my husband and I stretched out our hands toward a group of people standing in the altar area of the sanctuary, we felt a strong wind come into the room. This angelic wind blew an entire section of people at the altar to the ground.

Another time, I felt two distinct winds blow through the window of my home. I am not sure how to explain this part, but I knew these angelic "winds" were from Central Asia. The following month, two women all the way from Central Asia requested to stay with us for a month. I believe their angels had gone before them to prepare the way.

I have also heard many testimonies over the years from those who have felt intense heat come upon their hands from time to time. Did an angel cause this? Most likely, again based on the Scripture stating that God makes His ministering servants flames of fire. These people also believed it was a sign to them to lay their hands on others for personal ministry and physical healing. Along this same line, Alisa Cooper, one of my interns, explained how she sometimes feels "flames of fire in the atmosphere." She has learned through repeated experiences that this feeling means someone is going to be delivered from demonic spirits.

In the past, I have felt angels tap me on the arm and shoulder in an almost playful, curious fashion. It has always happened in church, and it took me a while to catch on. When it happened, I would turn to the right and the left and ask everyone around me, "Did you touch me?" I finally figured out that what I felt was not a human touch, but that of an angel, and angels often reflect the joyfulness of heaven.

Pastor Oscar Caraballo, a pastor from Puerto Rico living in Vermont, noticed after a powerful angelic visitation how the angels kept touching the sweat on his forehead. He said, "They always make an effort to touch the sweat of God's children because it is so wonderful to them."[1]

Angels also help "lighten" heavy atmospheres. Have you ever noticed in a worship service that it might begin with a stale, sometimes heavy feeling, but then it will lift and brighten quite noticeably? Angels forever worship Jesus, and being attracted to our worship, they will join in with us. Worship leader and songwriter Angel Ladd shared with me how she navigates heavy atmospheres: "I

just keep pressing through it in praise and worship. I focus on what heaven is doing and saying, and I worship and declare from that place. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom," Angel said. "I lift high the name of Jesus and watch as the heaviness leaves the room and falls off the people."

I believe this is the working of angels, and it is very discernible. The Bible says that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (see Matthew 11:30). I am not sure how they do it, but angels help lift these yokes and burdens from us so we can worship Jesus without restraints.

Finally, angels will strengthen us noticeably. Just before His crucifixion, Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives with His disciples and began to pray deeply. As He did so, an angel appeared to Him to strengthen Him. He could then pray even more deeply, being in such great anguish that His sweat was falling like drops of blood to the ground (see Luke 22:39–44). I have discovered that this kind of angelic strengthening is something you can feel and identify. Scheduled to minister at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, California, I had become ill a month before the event. It felt like a bad flu. I could not catch a full breath for days; neither could I recover my strength. I had several people praying for me, but I was not overcoming it. As I sat on the platform, still struggling just minutes away from speaking, I felt a tangible strength enter my body. It was sudden and dramatic, and I was healed at the same time. The Bible says that God is our strength (see Psalm 118:14), and I believe what happened to me was the work of an angel He sent. You can feel it that distinctly.

3. You will hear them

We can discern angels by their distinct sounds, but when we hear them, we most often will hear a message from them. By the meaning of their name, *angel*, which is *mal'ak* in Hebrew, we understand that their main role is to act as messengers. The Hebrew word *mal'ak* comes from a root word meaning to be dispatched "as a deputy; a messenger; specifically, of God, i.e. an angel . . ."[2]

Philip heard an angel say, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza" (Acts 8:26). Philip did as the angel told him, and he shared the Gospel with an important Ethiopian eunuch as a result. When Hagar had lost all hope and believed her son, Ishmael, was going to die, she heard an angel speak from heaven and say, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation" (Genesis 21:17–18).

God then supernaturally provided for Hagar and watched over Ishmael as he grew up (see Genesis 21:19–20).

One night as I was typing away on my computer, without warning I found myself gently laid down face first into my keyboard. Then I heard the voice of an angel, and he said this to me: “It’s time to connect with the South.”

By the way, I did not see this angel. I only heard him. I also realize his message to me may sound very cryptic to you, but I knew exactly what it meant. It meant I needed to connect a key person in Central California with a key person in Southern California, and there is quite a long story behind it. There was only one problem. I did not personally know this key person in the South, and unless an angel went before me to prepare the way, this meeting would not take place.

I thought to myself, *Let’s test this and see if I really heard the Lord or not*. So I sent a very unassuming email to the general inbox of this person I did not know and said something like, “Hi! You don’t know me, but my husband and I would like to take you and your wife to dinner, and we would like to bring some friends.” I named the friends, knowing we would still need divine intervention in order for the meeting to happen.

Would you believe I received an immediate and favorable response? We all went to dinner, and the South “key” said he had agreed to meet us because he “felt the presence of God” on the invitation. This all took place when I discerned the voice of an angel.

We also can discern angels by their distinct sounds. The prophet Ezekiel encountered some very unusual angels and wrote about their sounds: “When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise of an army” (Ezekiel 1:24 NKJV). Our associate pastor, Tom Hammond, would often hear wind chimes as a young child, but could never identify their source. Once he began having angelic visitations as an adult, Tom finally figured out these sounds were angels. Judy Harrill, another of our congregants, also heard the sounds of the angels upon the passing of her grandmother. She said she could hear beautiful singing and the sounds of harps playing in the hospital room.

As I said earlier, seeing and discerning angels should be common and expected for us as New Testament believers. Still, not many people can say that they have encountered angels all that much, if at all. There is an element of faith needed to discern these angelic beings. That might be one reason for it. At the same time, we will not encounter angels until we are aligned to what God is doing.

To the Angel . . .

One day I saw it in the written Word that because of the angels, a church assignment is also a city assignment, and a city assignment is also a church assignment. I will explain that more fully in a moment. In fact, Ron and I are an example of it. We were not only going to Turlock to minister at a notoriously "religious" church; we also were on assignment to transform an even more "religious" city. As a matter of fact, you and I both have a similar purpose—to transform both Church and city—but this is something we can accomplish only with the help of the angels.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus revealed to the apostle John His solemn and weighty instructions to seven different churches, each identified by their respective cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Each letter of instruction also contained an unusual preface that read like this: "To the angel of the church in [city] write . . ." (Revelation 2; 3). Let's break that phrase down and look at it more carefully.

Jesus told John to write specific instructions, addressing them first "*To the angel* . . ." We know that angels are powerful created beings assigned to serve God in heaven and to help the heirs of salvation on earth—you and me (see Hebrews 1:14). Angels also have specific assignments. Just to name a few, Michael the archangel specifically protects Israel, there are angels commanded to protect us personally, and there are angels assigned to children (see Daniel 12:1; Psalm 91:11; Matthew 18:10). Here in Revelation chapters 2–3, we see that an angel is assigned to the church of a specific city and that Jesus might even communicate His instructions, at His choosing, to these angels through His designated representatives, in this case John the apostle.[3] This also shows us that angels are the spiritual administrators of the directives of God.

Jesus then added, "To the angel *of the church* . . ." The word *church* in the original Greek language is the word *ekklēsia,* which is defined as a local Christian assembly. I have heard some define the word *ekklēsia* differently, even removing the thought that it is an assembly, and a local one at that. Although the word can definitely imply the Church at large, a word study of *ekklēsia* throughout the New Testament clarifies that it most often refers to a local assembly. Regardless, the Church is people and not a building, although the Church fails to be the Church if it never gathers together.

In other words, amongst other things, these angels watched over and spiritually administered the regular gatherings of the believers as they worshiped Jesus together and ideally were equipped and released for ministry (see

Ephesians 4:11–12). In these letters, Jesus addressed the churches before their respective angels, commending their strengths and righteous acts, as well as their sins and shortcomings. He also sternly warned the local *ekklēsia* of their potential removal if they did not change their ways—something the angel would facilitate if matters came to that.

Finally, He added, "To the angel of the church *in [the city]* . . ." The city, then, would be the geographical borders of influence given to the designated angel and the local church. Here is where we see the local church and city as divinely intertwined because of an angelic being, and we see how the local *ekklēsia*, both individually and corporately, is the designated catalyst for city transformation.

In a City on Purpose

Do you wonder why you live in the city or town that you live in? God is behind such matters, much more so than we think. Our heavenly Father is the original inventor of cities. You could say that the first city was the Garden of Eden, and the last city, of course, is the New Jerusalem. He places people in cities, such as He did with Adam and Eve, and even calls people out of cities, such as He did with Abraham and Lot. For that reason, I believe that God has ordered your steps and placed you in your town or city on a divine assignment. You are there to bring His Kingdom, and you are there to destroy the works of darkness.

A woman named Carol came to a recent prophetic institute at our church. She came to learn, but also to receive an anointing to see and discern the spiritual realm so she could be more effective. Carol had been divinely called out from her home in Houston, Texas, to the city of San Francisco. Her assignment? To pray for and love people and show them who Jesus is. A business owner, Carol had been visiting San Francisco when she became overwhelmed with the sound of crying and weeping while she was driving around the city. She investigated the sound but could not pinpoint it. Finally, she discerned it by the Holy Spirit. As she stood on a beach, she knew the cry was coming from the land, and it felt like an inner cry from people's hearts. When she identified it, the anointing of the Holy Spirit came tangibly upon her. "It felt like honey, very thick and sweet," she said. "And I can still feel it when I share this story."

After this experience, Carol spent a week in San Francisco to seek the Lord's direction, and then she spent another month in the city to confirm it. God gave her a specific dream and a Scripture confirming her call to a city known as the "least churchgoing metro in America," to bring His Kingdom there. Carol now

engages in “friendship evangelism” and shares Jesus in the context of her many friendships with atheist and other-religion friends. She said her next assignment is to gather people to pray for San Francisco and begin the process of healing the land, as the Holy Spirit directs her.

When God called Ron and me back to Turlock, California, His plan was to transform a city by first transforming the local church. City transformation God’s way would only happen through His repurposed Church, which then would reactivate the angelic assignment. God’s purposes—and this includes the angels assigned to His specific purposes—will not happen past the faith of His Church on the earth. We can and often do limit God by our disobedience, which in turn restrains His angelic helpers (see Psalm 78:41 NKJV). This is true of any city. Ian Carroll, senior leader of Greater Chicago Church, shared a similar thought after he saw the “angel of Chicago.” He said the angel had remained dormant for decades, but was reactivated in his assignment in 2011, in response to the fervent prayers of the local church for the city (his church, as well as others).[4] I have experienced something similar. I have seen the “angel of Turlock,” and it is my belief that God reactivated this city’s angel to his assignment once the local church stepped back into its purpose for our city.

I believe the absence of angels is due largely to the Church, both individually and corporately, not being aligned to its proper assignment. Angels come to help us as we obey the Lord, not as we carry out our own whims. That is a tough pill to swallow, but discernible angelic activity tells us where God is and what He is doing.

I once was in Tiānfǔ Square in Chengdu, China. (Our interpreter translated *Tiānfǔ* as “heavenly government.”) The square was heavily saturated with police, and you could feel the unrest on the land. I was told that radical Buddhists had used the square as a continual place of government protest, with some setting themselves on fire to make their point. As we prayer walked the square, I became quite irritated when I discerned the lack of angelic presence. I thought to myself, *Why are there no angels?* The lack of angels was a message that something was amiss. I expressed my irritation to our host, and we began to pray for God to release His angels to that place (see Matthew 26:53). As we continued walking the area, I was amazed and surprised to see a pillar erected to the “Angel of Harmony.” That was a powerful confirmation! God had already built His strategic plan into the land, even giving title and description to what He wanted established. Nevertheless, it needed the local church to come into alignment with His plan for the city if the angels were going to be released.

As an individual, you will be most effective in your purpose when you understand the city-church-angel connection and align yourself with it. In

response to your alignment with your city assignment, God will release and activate the city angels to their assignment. You can discern the difference as an increase in angelic activity, just as the lack thereof also tells us where things stand. That does not mean you will not have any ministry or angelic help past your city borders. I just shared with you my own experience in Chengdu in this regard. Still, God has ordered your steps on purpose, and you are in your city for a purpose.

Test the Spirits

When my immediate family and I became Christians and officially left the LDS church, we had one relative consider making the same decision. This relative, too, was in the LDS church and was clearly being drawn away from its control by the Holy Spirit. That is, until a deceiving spirit disguised as an angel appeared to the person in the middle of the night, telling her to remain in the LDS church. Keep in mind that Mormons actively believe in angelic messengers, and they take the appearance of an angel to heart. They also don't know that they should test the spirits, nor would they know how. As a result, this relative remained in the LDS church and closed her ears to the truth from then on.

The apostle John wrote this: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). When angels appear, test them. And when someone tells you he or she has seen and heard from an angel, be prepared to put that person's words to the test. The success of the gift of discerning of spirits is not that you have just discerned something, but that you have discerned it well. You not only saw or discerned an angel, but you also tested the spirit and found that the spirit passed the test.

The apostle Paul wrote, "By this you will know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (1 John 4:2 ESV). How, then, do you test the spirits? I have read some authors' very long lists of spiritual tests for such things, but my main test—actually, my only test—is to determine if the angelic experience is in agreement with the Bible. As the apostle Paul wrote, "All Scripture is God-breathed . . ." (2 Timothy 3:16). Did you read that? *All* Scripture is God-breathed; therefore, we can bank every encounter against the written Word of God to see if it holds true or not.

In Paul Cox's book *Unwrap the Gifts*, I read the story about Christina, a professing Christian who was searching spiritually after a near-death experience

involving her brother. He appeared to her in a dream while he was in a coma, and when he came out of the coma, he somehow repeated the details of the dream to her. This strange spiritual experience opened Christina's heart to search out more information about such things, especially things involving near-death experiences, mediums and communication with deceased loved ones.

"I had communication with what I thought was an angel," Christina said. "The angel was a comfort. It felt caring. It came to me first with words in my spirit, speaking in my mind."[5]

Christina grew to depend on "her angel," even asking this angel for help. Soon, however, she began to be tormented, hearing evil voices and seeing ugly creatures. Repeatedly, she was physically attacked, with red marks to show for it, but nothing physical ever touched her. She sought help from some mature deliverance ministers, who figured out that the angel she was so attached to was really a demon, a demon that was eventually broken from her life.

Christina became deceived because she did not understand the Scriptures. We don't rely on angels more than we rely on God; this is what opened the door for Christina's deception and possession. We don't reach for the angels for comfort; we reach for the Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

Joseph Smith, founder of the LDS religion, was born in Sharon, Vermont, and then moved with his family to western New York, a place of religious revival during the Second Great Awakening. Smith supposedly began having visions of God, including a visitation from an ostensible angel named Moroni. The angel directed him, Smith said, to a buried set of ancient gold plates containing the Christian history of ancient America. These plates Smith translated into the Book of Mormon.[6] I believe Smith's claims could have been falsified; rather than seeing some vision he thought was from God, he might even have made up the whole angel story. But Mormons are taught this history as absolute fact. Regardless, the Bible says clearly that we are not to add to the words of Scripture (see Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5–6; Revelation 22:18–19). Any angel directing you to find so-called "lost" Scriptures is therefore not an angel, but a demon.

Louis (not his real name), age 21, was disillusioned with church and struggling in his marriage. He was the product of a divorce and had been raised by an emotionally unattached mother who did not demonstrate any verbal or natural affection toward him. Louis was passionate about the things of the Spirit, already showing signs of a prophetic gifting, but frustrated that he had nowhere to develop it. As his marriage was struggling, Louis began to fill his lonely places by watching dark spiritual shows on television at night and listening to dark, somewhat occult music.

“At night I began to feel a spiritual presence,” Louis said. “A dark, motherly angel would come in and comfort me at night so I could sleep peacefully.”

This brought Louis a comfort he had missed his entire life, but only for a season. Louis began to hear the voice of this spirit in his mind—soft words that would turn into swear words and then explosive anger. As the spirit began to take over his personality, he realized that a false angel had deceived him. He began praying with an intercession team weekly, and the spirit began to lose its grip on his mind, until he was finally delivered of it in a prayer service. “I could hear the Holy Spirit so clearly once it left,” he said.

The gift of discerning of spirits allows us to discern the angels. I believe this is meant to show us what God is doing so we can more specifically co-labor with Him. The angels are servants of God who do His bidding. God is behind it when angels are present and active. He has sent those angels personally on a specific assignment, or they are there from Him to facilitate an answer to someone’s prayers. God can also activate them in response to someone’s prophetic decree, which is a word from Him spoken through one of His earthly representatives (see Psalm 103:20).

As much as we need to discern what the angels are doing, we also need to discern what Satan is doing. We are in a battle to advance Christ’s Kingdom on earth, which ultimately leads to the displacement of satanic henchmen and strongholds. We cannot win our battles until we know what we are fighting against. We cannot distinguish or discern an enemy that we have not studied. In the next chapter, then, let’s discuss the key players in Satan’s army.

Kingdom Principles

1. The reason we need to discern the presence of angels is that angels give us an idea of what God is doing.
2. Angels do a lot of things, but they function primarily as God’s messengers. They will communicate a message verbally, or even indirectly by means of their actions.
3. When we understand the message of the messengers, often observed in their actions, then we can co-labor with God and complete what He has already initiated in heaven.
4. You will discern angels most often by seeing them, feeling them and/or hearing them.

5. As an individual, you will be most effective in your purpose when you understand the city-church-angel connection and align yourself with it. In response to your alignment with your city assignment, God will release and activate the city angels to their assignment.

Thoughts for Reflection

1. Have you ever discerned the presence of an angel? How did you discern it?
2. Is it common for you to be aware of angelic activity, or not very common? Why do you think that is?
3. How would your awareness and obedience to your God-given assignment prompt God to activate the angels in your midst?
4. What is your purpose in your city? How might God ordain the angels to help you accomplish your purpose?
5. Why do people fear or reject the active, discernible presence of the angels?

7

Discerning the Powers and Principalities

Adam and Eve failed to discern their enemy. Do you ever wonder how that happened? Do you ever question why they missed the obvious? Satan came to them in the form of a snake. Was it that normal for snakes to talk? And then he convinced Eve, who convinced Adam, to disobey the one clear command of God: "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Genesis 2:17). Neither of them could discern the truth from the lie. Consequently, the entire human race fell.

The Bible tells us that Satan works to blind our minds from the truth. "Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see . . ." (2 Corinthians 4:4 NLT). We have all experienced this in some form or another personally, and we have also seen the spiritual blindness of others. I am amazed at those who have witnessed the hideous acts of cruelty and extremism of ISIS and still leave everything behind to join its ranks. I have watched the Chinese make offerings and bow before ginormous statues in their temples. These idols look like nightmarish demons, by the way, yet they still worship them!

Jesus referred to the Pharisees as blind guides. "It wasn't that they would not believe, they simply could not believe," wrote Dave Williams, minister and author, in his book *Skill for Battle: The Art of Spiritual Warfare*. "The god of this world had blinded their 'spiritual' eyes and they could not see the truth."[1] Dave further explained that the blindness of the Pharisees then spread to the people. The very people Jesus taught and healed for three years suddenly turned on Him, shouting, "Crucify Him!"

Spiritual blindness can only be overcome spiritually. People will not turn to Jesus until the prayers of the Church have bound the blinding demonic spiritual powers. When the Holy Spirit fell upon the praying disciples in the Upper Room, the scene was so supernatural that it caught the attention of the entire city

(see Acts 2:1–12). Peter then spoke to the crowd—the very same crowd who had condemned Jesus—and the Holy Spirit opened their eyes to the truth. They saw their sin and made a full U-turn to Jesus Christ!

When Scripture says that Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers, understand that Satan has a rank-and-file army of dark angels who facilitate his evil wishes. In Ephesians 6:12, Paul wrote about what appears to be an organized hierarchy of beings in the demonic kingdom: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." These spiritual beings are not Satan himself, but they serve his wicked schemes against mankind. And they are not just spirits that possess people on an individual level. They actually work in the spiritual atmosphere of a city, region or nation to blind every person under their influence.

I talked previously about the behavior and deceptive nature of a religious spirit. I also mentioned that a city will take on the personality of the demonic power that controls it; that is, until the Church overcomes it. Until then, the resident souls of those who do not yet know Christ hang in the balance. It is not that they don't want to see the truth; they actually cannot see the truth because they have been blinded by a demonic ruler.

In descending order, let's consider our discernible enemies:

1. The rulers, also translated "principalities" (Greek *archai*), are most identifiable as high-ranking spirit princes, such as the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece, who were both mentioned in the book of Daniel (see Daniel 10:13, 20).

2. The authorities (Greek *exousia*) are spirits that stand behind human authorities to oppose the work of God. Elymas the sorcerer, for example, was someone who appeared to stand under demonic authority as he attempted to oppose the work of God in order to retain control of Sergius Paulus, the governor, and the island of Patmos (see Acts 13:4–12).

3. The powers of darkness (Greek *dunamis*) work culturally and philosophically to bind people groups from seeing the Lord. Examples are false religions such as Hinduism, philosophies such as humanism, and political ideologies such as communism and all the other "isms" that deny the expression of God.

4. The spiritual forces of evil (Greek *kosmokratoras*) are the lower-ranking spirits that afflict people through infirmity, fear, rebellion, deception, divination, complacency and the like.[2]

In order to discern and overcome our spiritual enemies, we first have to study them. If we fail to recognize them, then we will come under their spell, so to speak, and be harmed. We understand this principle naturally. When I was in elementary school, for example, we were taught what behaviors to look for in strangers in order to identify them as dangerous or not. And then we were taught how to get out of danger. This instruction may have saved my life as a fourth grader, when I was walking home alone from school. A car with an older man inside began slowly circling up and down the block where I was walking. About the third circling, I identified the behavior as dangerous and quickly turned into the sheriff's home on the block. Today, I thank God that He directed me to the sheriff, and that the sheriff was home! He let me come inside, and he reported the stranger before walking me to my house.

Just as I was able to identify this stranger as evil, the Holy Spirit is also training our spiritual eyes to identify evil powers and principalities. Let's now look at some of the most common powers and principalities that afflict and deceive cities, regions and nations, as well as persecute the Church.

Belial

Belial is a spiritual power that works to make your life worthless and barren through idolatry and self-sabotaging behaviors. Its name, Belial, means exactly that—without profit, worthless, wicked, ungodly and evil. It is the antithesis of Christ and His righteousness. "What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:15).

Belial works to ensnare people into distinct sins so their lives are unfruitful and wasted. It partners with spiritual forces of wickedness to infect its territory with unrighteousness. It does not only entice those who don't know Jesus; it also works to entice Christians who will allow its deception. Either way, it is a reducing spirit that skillfully crafts worthlessness into the lives of its victims.

The first characteristic of Belial is idolatry. "Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known"

(Deuteronomy 13:13 KJV). Whole cultures have come under this deception, worshiping false gods and statues, and engaging in religiously false systems. I have also encountered far too many Christians who still pray to others in addition to God, read their horoscopes, do traditional yoga and/or burn sage and other herbs to keep evil spirits away, just to name a few such practices. This is the spirit of Belial at work, enticing people into idolatry, thus shutting the door to the Holy Spirit and drawing devotion away from Christ.

The next characteristic of Belial is sexual sin. Sexual sin, which is sex in any form outside marriage, has devastated the lives of individuals and entire cultures since ancient times. The Bible says, "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality" (Ephesians 5:3). Sexual sin has crept into Christendom in the forms of tolerance and acceptance of premarital sex, homosexuality and even open marriages. The Bible makes reference to the sons of Eli the priest in this manner: "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD" (1 Samuel 2:12 KJV). Why were they considered sons of Belial? If you read further in the passage, they committed unauthorized worship and routinely had sex with ungodly women in the Temple. While visiting one California city in particular, I was shocked at how many churches displayed the rainbow flag as a statement of their acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle. The Bible is clear about homosexuality, but still some churches have blatantly deviated from this truth. This is the spirit of Belial (see Judges 19:22).

Another characteristic of Belial is drunkenness. We see this connection between the spirit of Belial and drunkenness when Hannah was at the Temple, praying in deep anguish for God to give her a son. As she prayed and wept bitterly, Eli the priest observed her, and instead of consoling her, he accused her of drinking too much wine. She retorted, "Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial" (1 Samuel 1:16 KJV). In other words, drunkenness can be connected to the spirit of Belial.

Finally, those under the spell of Belial have no respect for authority. Nabal, also referred to as a son of Belial, would not honor David's request for sheep, even though David and his men had voluntarily protected him and his flocks from outside harm. Nabal angrily refused David's request for help, even pretending ignorance by saying, "Who is this David?" (1 Samuel 25:10). Then later, Sheba the Benjamite, also "a man of Belial," worked to divide David's kingdom (2 Samuel 20:1 KJV). When opportunity presented itself, Sheba blew the trumpet in rebellion against David and called every Israelite to himself.

What is the penalty for Belial? You become marked for destruction! The Bible says that Nabal was struck by the Lord and died (see 1 Samuel 25:38). And Sheba's plan turned against him, forcing him to hide out in a city from Joab, the

captain of David's army. When Joab put the city under siege to force him out, an old woman convinced the city to execute Sheba and thus end the siege (see 2 Samuel 20:21–22).

There was once a man I knew of who stood firmly against a new pastor's leadership in his church. This man would be a modern-day "son of Belial." As he actively campaigned against this pastor, he became afflicted with cancer. While receiving treatment, he humbly repented of his rebellion, and the cancer went into remission at the same time. As soon as he felt better, he reverted back to his divisive behavior even more forcefully. Would it surprise you, then, that the cancer returned? At this point the Holy Spirit spoke to the pastor that if the man did not repent, he would die within three months. Sadly, he did not repent, and he died, just as the pastor was told.

Leviathan

Leviathan is a spirit principality, also known as the king of pride. Job 41 describes it in detail, starting out by asking, "Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook . . .?" and ending with "He beholds every high thing; he is king over all the children of pride" (verses 1, 34 NKJV). Pride is an attitude, but it is also a spirit. This spirit wants altitude and seeks to invade the high places. It wants to infect people in the high places because it is a glory stealer. It steals the glory that should go to Jesus Christ.

Pride comes in a lot of forms. There are proud eyes, which is a haughty look; a proud heart, which is a hard heart; a proud spirit, which is an impatient spirit; and proud speech, which is the mouth that boasts and puts other people down (see Proverbs 21:4; Ecclesiastes 7:8; 2 Peter 2:18). People infected by Leviathan will act higher, better and more superior than you. They will have a high-and-mighty attitude. They will fight unusually hard to be right at your expense. That is the nature of the spirit of Leviathan.

James 4:6 says God resists the proud, but He honors the humble. Luke 14:11 says He actually exalts the humble. God wants His humble people in the high places, not those people who are ruled by pride.

The spirit of Leviathan is often referred to as a water serpent: "You, O God . . . split the sea by your strength and smashed the heads of the sea monsters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan and let the desert animals eat him" (Psalm 74:12–14 NLT). I believe this means that this demon likes to be around the water, namely the river of the Spirit, to look for a victim. The closest word picture in

the Hebrew for Leviathan is the crocodile (see Job 41:12–16). A crocodile will get you in its jaws and thrash you until you are too tired to fight. It tosses you back and forth, one way after the other, to make you give up.

When it attacks you, this spirit will also try to confuse you. How does that happen? Leviathan is described as multiheaded. That means it is divisive, it speaks out of both sides of its mouth, and it twists the truth (see Psalm 74:12–14; Isaiah 27:1). For example, you will say something and another person will hear it completely differently, resulting in strife. Or a person will change his or her story several times and then not acknowledge it when confronted.

In the first seven verses of Job 41, the Lord asks Job several questions about Leviathan, and to sum it up, I believe these questions reveal man's inability to surface and conquer pride without God's intervention. When you are dealing with Leviathan, when it attacks you, it feels as though you cannot get a grip on it to defeat it. It twists, hides and goes under the water.

I once had a ministry leader exposed for having the spirit of Leviathan. I did not catch on for a long time, but she had a trail of broken relationships and an airtight story about each one. She was always the victim in each situation, and the other people were always at fault for one reason or another. Finally, she got caught in a truth-twisting situation, and when confronted, she became demanding and reprimanding, with nonstop finger-pointing for months to try to wear down everyone involved. When that did not work, she would feign submission just long enough to make you believe she was changing her destructive patterns. And then the truth-twisting, finger-pointing behavior would start all over again.

The way to counter the spirit of Leviathan is by humbling ourselves before God. How then do we humble ourselves? We humble ourselves first by prayer and fasting. Jesus taught that there are some spirits that only go out by prayer and fasting, such as the spirit that afflicted the young boy in Mark 9:17–29. I believe the spirit of Leviathan is one such spirit. You have to have enough humility within yourself to defeat it. You cannot fight pride with pride, but humility partners with the Holy Spirit to bind this spirit and cast it out.

Mammon

"All money has a spirit on it," said Pastor Robert Morris of Gateway Church in Southlake, Texas. "It either has the Spirit of God on it or it has the spirit of Mammon on it." Morris further explained in his teaching about the spirit of

Mammon that the way you get the Spirit of God on your money is to give the first 10 percent, the "tithe," to the house of God. The tithe brings God's blessing and redemption on the rest of your money and thus protects it from the spirit of Mammon. "Once you tithe, your money can't be devoured by the devourer because God's Spirit is on it," he said. "Your money is then blessed by God and has the ability to multiply."[3]

Have you ever considered that money carries a spirit with it? I have actually felt and discerned the spirit on money now and again, sensing the blessing of God on it or the filth of Mammon on it. What, then, is the spirit principality of Mammon? *Mammon* is a Chaldee or Syriac word meaning wealth or riches. It is also the name of the "god of riches."[4] The spirit of Mammon has its roots in Babylon. Babylon came into existence with the incident of the Tower of Babel, as told in Genesis 11. Here we read that all the people had one language and decided to build a tower to heaven on their own. They wanted to create their own way to heaven, which is a reflection of an arrogant spirit that denies any need for God. When the Lord saw their ambitious plans, He confused their language and caused them to scatter all over the earth. Thus *babel* means confusion, and Babylon, then, has its roots in confusion. Babylon is historically known for its pride, idolatry and cruelty, and it is prophetically known to become an economic stronghold in the earth in the end times.[5]

Although money in and of itself is not evil, the Bible instructs us that the love of money is "a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). It is the love of money that causes people to subject themselves to the evil principality of Mammon, either knowingly or unknowingly. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24 NKJV). Mammon is looking for devotees and promises to provide identity, security, influence and power for their perfect devotion; only it forbids devotion to Jesus Christ. This spirit is also a great intimidator of Christians, telling them they cannot be generous or give to God because they don't have enough. Those who follow the dictates of Mammon, however, will eventually receive a visit from this deity. It always demands payment from its followers in one way or another and is a destroyer.

World MAP founder Reverend Ralph Mahoney has spearheaded training events and provided training resources to hundreds of thousands of indigenous pastors in pastoral leadership and evangelism around the globe. In Dave Williams's book *The Road to Radical Riches*, Mahoney shares a story about a South American town whose residents were taught how to bind their souls to the spirit of Mammon in exchange for wealth and riches. Those who made the vow

to this deity quickly acquired more wealth than the average citizen and could be seen arrogantly driving around in their luxury cars and wearing fashionable clothing. In their false security of wealth, each of them became blinded to the hellish scene that eventually awaited them. Reverend Mahoney witnessed something horrific happen to each person who pledged his or her soul to Mammon. Between the ages of 40 and 45, each devotee, without exclusion, would swell up in unbearable pain. As their bodies became painfully bloated, they would shriek and scream, begging the deity for their lives. This merciless spirit gave them no reprieve before they exploded wide open, with slimy, slithering worms crawling out of their dead bodies.[6]

Mammon tries to tear down the Church by destroying its economy. Money in the hands of God's people translates into souls. It takes money to reach people with the Gospel, and for that reason this spirit works overtime to bind churches financially. You can hear this spirit talking to you whenever a church receives the tithes and offerings. It says things like, *All that preacher wants is your money*. Or, *You better not give. You won't have enough for yourself*. It also creates theological lies to convince you not to give your tithes, saying things like, *Tithing is for just the Old Testament. In the New Testament, you can give whatever you feel led to give*. Only most people rarely feel "led" to give.

Mammon also threatens pastors to do its bidding through wealth-controlling parishioners. These parishioners try to stop the move of the Holy Spirit and anything deemed "too radical" or "undignified" by threatening to withhold needed financial resources. Mammon has also gripped many pastors who have diverted the tithes and offerings to their own personal greedy use, which is robbing God. It puts them under a curse (see Malachi 3:8–9).

On one occasion, a church I know of discovered that someone was stealing from the Sunday offerings. That is always the spirit of Mammon at work. This church had a very tight system of checks and balances, but still, no one could identify the thief. As the theft continued, leadership prayed for the thief to be caught, also knowing the principle of God's Word. The Bible says in Malachi 3:8 that stealing the tithes is the same as stealing from God, which subjects you to the curse. The leaders also knew that Mammon always comes to collect. Soon enough, one of the ushers fell under the judgment of God and the penalty of Mammon. In just a matter of months, the usher's entire household fell apart due to drugs, jail, theft, prostitution, adultery, rebellion and divorce. Through this, the church leaders were able to identify the thief, and sadly, neither the thief nor the household has ever fully recovered.

Jezebel

Years ago, there was a moral failure on our pastoral team. It was devastating, and the circumstances of the extramarital affair were hard to accept. There was also a woman who orchestrated the adulterous relationship behind the scenes. She did not have the affair, but she helped bring it together. This woman appeared very spiritual, prayerful and even prophetic, which was quite confusing at the time. I learned after some research that she fit the classic definition of a person under the influence of a Jezebel spirit. I also vilified her as an evil person in my mind for years and never considered her worthy of redemption because, after all, she was a *Jezebel*!

Much later, I wondered about the root cause of her actions and if change would ever be possible. I have dealt with others who seemed to fit much of the classic description of a Jezebel spirit, or at least parts of it. It is a spirit that is controlling, manipulative, falsely prophetic, prideful, seductive, intimidating and deceptive, with a hatred for authority. Most of the people affected are women, but not all of them. I was also frustrated that I had never successfully cast out a Jezebel spirit from a person, and neither had our deliverance teams. When we told that spirit to go, it did not go! Instead, the person had to go if the church was ever going to be rid of it.

I believe that I have finally figured out why. Notice that Jezebel is a spiritual power that received its first mention in the Bible as a human being—actually, two women with that name. Yet the behavior of those two people has become a spiritual reference point long after they are gone. It is not just that someone is acting like Jezebel, but that someone has succumbed to the spirit of Jezebel.

Jezebel is not a human spirit who has gained some type of cosmic evil power. Not at all. It is a demonic spirit that first became personified in the actions of an actual person, and has since continued its evil influence as a territorial type of demon. One of the women by the name of Jezebel in the Bible was in the Old Testament, and one was in the New Testament. There was Queen Jezebel, Baal worshiper and wife to King Ahab, and then Jezebel from the church of Thyatira, an idolater and self-proclaimed prophetess (see 1 Kings 16:29–31; Revelation 2:18–29). These are not the same woman, but two different women having similar sins and evil behaviors such as those I just described. I don’t believe this is a coincidence. Then we read about a demonic principality, the “great harlot” in Revelation, and how it promotes in the nations the exact behavior we find in both Jezebels and in those we know who act like them (see Revelation 17). I

believe the “great harlot” is one and the same as the spirit of Jezebel. It is an evil principality that exerts influence over people and entire nations.

Consider the deep spiritual dimensions attached to Jezebel’s behavior, and then consider Jesus’ remedy. Unlike with other demonic spirits that afflict people, Jesus does not say to cast out a spirit of Jezebel. Instead, He gives instructions about how to handle Jezebel, also warning her to repent or suffer serious consequences:

> Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways.
>
> Revelation 2:20–22

Why, then, does Jesus emphasize repentance instead of emphasizing casting the spirit out? Biblical repentance means to change your mind. When someone is under the influence of the Jezebel spirit, they are not possessed in the traditional sense. Jezebel in the Bible had to repent because the behavioral strongholds had been craftily built into her mind. She was not possessed by this demonic spirit, but had become like this spirit in her personality and behavior. This typically happens as this principality unleashes sinister and targeted circumstances into a person’s life to create the needed mental strongholds that result in the patterned behaviors. These targeted attacks can be childhood sexual or physical abuse, severe neglect, painful family issues and trauma. Not everyone with a difficult upbringing comes under the influence of Jezebel, but such trauma is intended to create its effects inside a person’s mind. When you encounter a person under the influence of Jezebel, realize his or her wickedness today is a deep-seated response to traumatic conditioning yesterday.

Repentance is not easy, however. Change can feel like a personal death since the behaviors are so deeply ingrained. Catherine, a woman in our church, shared her story with our congregation. “I hated my husband and verbally abused him,” she said. “I finally tried to kill him and ended up in jail.”

Although she was a Christian, Catherine did not fully surrender her life to Christ until she was incarcerated. The root of her behavior was childhood sexual abuse, coupled with strong family matriarchs who taught her never to trust men. “I had to learn how to stop controlling people,” she explained. “It really was all about control rooted in deep emotional wounds and fear.”

Today, Catherine is a medical professional and a powerful speaker, equipper and minister in our church. We have several such stories of women just like her.

These are women who could not control their rage, destroyed their marriages, hated authority, lied compulsively, used sex to get their way and on and on. Every time, these were women who had been abused or traumatized in their younger years. They were set free through personal repentance, the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

If this is you, know that God loves you and has already made a way out for you. You need to be delivered in your soul, but how? The Bible instructs us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind (see Romans 12:2). To renew our mind, we meditate in God's Word. We read, speak out loud, write and memorize Bible verses that reshape our thinking and behavior. For example, "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:1–2 NKJV). As we review these verses over and over and others like them, we will begin to reshape from the inside out. We will change. The Bible says God's Word can divide soul and spirit, meaning it is so sharp that it has a surgical-like ability to cut things out of your soul (see Hebrews 4:12). God also promises to restore your soul (see Psalm 23:3), and restoration happens as you renew your mind with His Word.

If you live with, work with or attend church with a person under the influence of Jezebel, realize that every situation is different and you have to choose your battles. Pray specific and redemptive Scriptures for the person that counter his or her ungodly behavior. For example, if the person is seductive, then pray that he or she would not have even "a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity" (Ephesians 5:3). If the person is controlling, then pray that he or she would have confidence in leadership and submit to their authority (see Hebrews 13:17).

Still, Jesus instructs us not to tolerate Jezebel. In other words, you have to set firm boundaries with those under this spirit's influence. Remember that people under the influence of Jezebel cannot control you, seduce you or bewitch you unless you allow it. In a church, be very diligent when such people begin tearing down leaders behind their backs. Remember, these people hate authority, but this hatred has a root cause. Show a lot of love, but confront them immediately and insist that they right their wrong with that leader. Once they know the boundaries and know they are loved, it creates enough safety for them to start changing. If they are destructive and will not repent, don't feel bad for removing them from your circle or fellowship. If you are their target, however, pray and strategically confront them. Don't be their victim.

Discern and Overcome

The Church will fail to overcome what it fails to discern. If we are going to overcome our spiritual enemies, we have to be able to identify them. Studying our spiritual enemies is not being spiritually negative or out of balance, as some have proposed. Studying our spiritual enemies and knowing who they are and how they attack is necessary, so as not to become deceived by them.

In addition to a religious spirit, Belial, Leviathan, Mammon and Jezebel will continue their sinister attacks until they are discerned and overcome by the Body of Christ. With that said, let's discuss in more depth in the next chapter what to do with the things we spiritually discern.

Kingdom Principles

1. Satan works to blind our minds from the truth (see 2 Corinthians 4:4). Spiritual blindness can only be overcome spiritually.
2. People will not turn to Jesus at the hearing of the Gospel until the prayers of the Church bind those blinding demonic spiritual powers.
3. When the Bible says that Satan has blinded people's minds from the truth, understand that Satan has a rank-and-file army of dark angels that facilitate his evil wishes (see Ephesians 6:12).
4. In order to discern and overcome our spiritual enemies, we have to first study them.
5. The most common powers and principalities that afflict and deceive cities, regions and nations, as well as persecute the Church, are Belial, Leviathan, Mammon and Jezebel.

Thoughts for Reflection

1. Does it frustrate you when people cannot see the truth and continue to ruin their lives and the lives of others through their sin? Have you ever considered it to be spiritual blindness instead of willful blindness?

2. Some believe that putting any focus or study on demons is being spiritually negative. What are your thoughts?
3. Do you recognize the characteristics of Belial, Leviathan, Mammon or Jezebel in your family?
4. Do you recognize the characteristics of Belial, Leviathan, Mammon or Jezebel in your city?
5. Have you ever failed to discern your spiritual enemy and suffered the consequences?

8

What to Do with the Things You Discern

I was on a relaxing vacation with my family when I began to discern a spiritual problem in connection with our upcoming Sunday service. My husband was ministering out of town, which meant that I would be speaking at our home church during the morning services in his absence. I felt anxious and uptight. It began as a gnawing feeling in my gut, which just grew stronger and stronger. I also kept seeing a young man in my mind's eye. This young man was new to our church and was already showing signs of trouble. He claimed to hear God and be prophetic, but he was really overly spiritual and boundaryless. I don't believe he was being led by the Holy Spirit nearly as much as he claimed. And our security team and I had already rebuked him a few times for getting out of hand. The thought that came to me over and over was, *He's going to do something*. Only I did not know what he was going to do.

That Sunday morning, I could not relax at all. I did pray about the situation, but I could not get a grip on it in my emotions. I had become consumed with the thought that this young man was coming to the service to do something disruptive. As I walked from the parking lot into the back room behind the sanctuary, I instructed our security team to be on alert and told them why. As the worship service began, I looked around, and the young man was not even there. Had I made a mistake? Was I falsely discerning something? About twenty minutes later, the young man finally appeared and made his way to the very front of the church with arms wide open, dancing wildly in exuberant worship.

This is where I began to encounter overwhelming discernment. Again, overwhelming discernment is when the feelings associated with this gift negatively control you, instead of prompting you to lead out in a mature response to whatever you have discerned. I turned to my left and spoke to our associate pastor: "I need you to take that man out of here right now!"

Keep in mind that I had nothing tangible to justify my reaction; I only had a strong, overwhelming feeling. And then things got very strange. As I spoke this to our associate pastor, again overreacting and not leading in this properly, I lit up with several hundred tiny, moving lights. These little lights moved all around me, up and down and around my person. They reminded me of the lights you would use on a Christmas tree. Our associate pastor pointed his finger at me and said, "Angels! You've got angels!"

At the same time, another young man standing in my row dramatically lifted his arms and threw his head back in worship to God, as if he had made a sudden and deep spiritual connection. He did not cause a disruption, but I believe he did this spontaneously, in response to the presence of angels.

Right when I lit up with all those lights, the young man in question, whom I had been feeling anxious about, leapt onto our platform, dancing wildly right next to our worship leader. She bravely kept leading worship while he gyrated and intermittently stared in arrogance at the congregation. My associate pastor and our security team responded instantly, escorting him off the platform and into the lobby to sort out the situation. When that happened, I stopped glowing and was able to preach and minister as if nothing had happened. The peace of God really took over.

To distinguish effectively between spirits, we have to remember that this gift is a sensory process before it is an intellectual one. "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14 NASB). The Holy Spirit causes us to discern good and evil through our physical senses—our eyes, ears, smell, taste and touch, as well as through our emotions. Mature believers, through community and accountability, have learned through practice how to sort out accurately what they are sensing so they can respond to the information appropriately.

In hindsight, what I was discerning about the young man was accurate. My response, however, could have been better. I could tell by the activity of the angels around me that I was dealing with something very satanic that was happening with him. Still, I should not have insisted that this young man be escorted from the service without any evidence, even though he did, in my best observation, manifest demonically on the platform of our church. As disruptive as that was, there was no gun, no violence or anything else to prove that I should have had him removed from the service prematurely. This incident, at least, gave us one more window of opportunity to minister some prayers for deliverance to him, as well as to warn him sternly. What I was experiencing was overwhelming discernment, which can lead to an overreactive response. Overwhelming discernment is not wrong in itself to have, but it is our response to accurately

discerned information that makes it either right or wrong. We need to learn from these situations so we can manage our responses better.

What Do I Do?

What do I do with negative information about people? This is one of the top questions I receive from those wanting to know about the gift of discerning of spirits. How do you handle negative information that you discern? The gift of discerning of spirits is a truth-telling gift and a gatekeeping gift. You will supernaturally discern both good and evil. We usually know what to do with the good, but what do we do when we discern evil in people?

The Bible gives us a remedy: "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment" (Philippians 1:9 NKJV). This verse instructs us that love needs to be balanced with discernment, and discernment needs to be balanced with love. This is where we experience true tension. When you have discerned that a deceptive or possessed person has come into your life or your church, what, then, does love look like?

1. Pray redemptively

When you discern by the Holy Spirit something negative about another person, remember that God just told you a secret. Secrets remain in the secret place—meaning between just you and God in prayer—unless God gives you permission otherwise. Remember that God loves that person, even if he or she is demonized, struggling or wicked. There will be times you are called on to deal with the situation more openly, but prayer is usually all that is required of you.

When we pray, then, we are to pray redemptively. Discerning the negative about someone can be disappointing, shocking and sometimes terrifying. To be redemptive means to save someone from error or evil. This means we don't condemn a person in prayer, but instead, we advocate for the person's salvation and deliverance. This can be difficult to do, especially when we have discerned terrible evil in someone. Instead of condemnation, we begin to call out the person's name before the Lord for salvation and/or deliverance. We bind Satan from blinding the person's eyes to the truth, and then, if he or she needs salvation, we ask God to release laborers into this person's path who will present

the Gospel of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 9:38). We then continue to pray until the burden of prayer lifts.

Years ago, I was invited to teach and equip on prayer at another church. Something did not feel quite right, yet I knew the Holy Spirit was telling me to go. A week before the prayer conference, I received a call from the senior pastor there. He shared with me that his wife had been caught in a very scandalous kind of affair. At her husband's urging and to my surprise, she received my invitation for lunch to discuss the matter while I was there. When we met, she was honest and seemed repentant, but still, I discerned two hidden spiritual strongholds. They were rage and a spirit of religion. I discerned these strongholds in my emotions as distinct, lingering feelings that I knew were not mine, but hers. I had also left the door open for her to call and talk if needed, knowing by the Holy Spirit that their marriage would not make it.

I admit that I was very concerned for her soul at this point, but I just kept the matter private and in prayer. I also attempted to follow up by phone with her a few times after I returned home. When the divorce happened, I received a strange message from her husband, who insisted that I cut off communication with her. She had continued the adultery, and he was "turning her over to Satan" (see 1 Corinthians 5:5). That means he planned to exercise his spiritual authority as an apostle and remove her spiritual protection from her so she would be subjected to physical destruction. (By the way, that is a very extreme move and one of last resort. I don't know of anyone who has done it besides this man, or at least done it successfully, and I have only read of it being done just once, by the apostle Paul.) When I did not comply, he cut off communication with me, too.

I am not justifying or excusing her sin for one moment, but I did connect the dots as to the root of her rage. She was reacting to a spirit of religion that had been controlling her through her husband. Religion always tries to kill you when it cannot control you. Still, both husband and wife needed me to pray for them, and to pray redemptively, without reacting to their negative behavior and spiritual conditions.

During a ministry event, Jorge (not his real name) was praying in a side room for one of the conference speakers while the speaker ministered to the conference attendees. As he prayed, mostly in his prayer language, he encountered a sudden jolt within himself. Through this jolt he discerned that the speaker was ill, and not just with a flu or cold, but with something more serious. Jorge was then compelled to call out the speaker's name before the Lord, weeping and crying, declaring the Bible promises about healing for him. He also rebuked the spirit of infirmity several times and commanded it to leave the speaker's body (see Luke 13:10–13 NKJV).

After the conference was over, the speaker shared privately with Jorge about his physical condition. “God already knew he was struggling,” Jorge said. “He allowed me to discern it through that strange jolting feeling so I could sustain him in prayer.”

Jill, an accountant, encountered a problem at work when a man with an evil spirit walked into her office complex. “First, I felt the hairs on my arm go up,” she said. “I knew by this physical sensation that he had an evil spirit.”

Jill then described his behavior as gruff, mean and terse, and she knew that whatever business he came in for was not going to go well. Jill began to pray under her breath for the situation, asking for God’s intervention.

“The man noticeably softened,” she said. “I discerned the problem and then prayer fixed it. I thank God for that!”

2. Know when to address what you discern

When you discern something negative in another person, love not only considers the individual with the spiritual problem and/or evil agenda, but also the impact of that individual on others. In these situations, you might need to do more than just pray. You might need to act on the information you have spiritually discerned. How you address such matters will depend on your level of authority in the situation, as well as the context of the situation and the relationship you have with the individual.

Many times, wives or husbands have identified by the Holy Spirit a person with an adulterous spirit who is getting too close to their spouse. Then they appropriately and privately raise the red flag to one another. Dads and moms, too, have discerned predatory friendships and romantic relationships getting too close to their underage children. Good parents pay attention to their spiritual discernment and will put up the proper boundaries when needed.

Leaders of organizations or churches will often exercise their spiritual discernment in ways that take into account the strength and maturity of those they lead. It is true that mature organizations and churches can much better navigate dealing with people who have come in with evil, demonic agendas. The mature will show more love, patience and spiritual authority when dealing with such people than the newer and less mature can show. Mature leaders also will wait for evidence to substantiate what they spiritually discern when it happens to be negative. They don’t overreact, label or mistreat people because of their discernment, although they will proceed with caution. Like King Solomon, they know how to surface those hidden agendas and motives in people wisely and

lovingly (see 1 Kings 3:16–28). They can lead or pastor an individual through a situation without compromising the entire organization in the process.

If you are not the leader of an organization or a church, but you have spiritually discerned something negative, don't be quick to point it out until you have truly spent time praying redemptively about it. If the matter you are discerning does not leave you or lift off you, it might be appropriate to mention it to whoever is leading, but that all depends on the mindset of that leader and the urgency of the matter you are discerning. Keep in mind that unless leaders really know and trust you spiritually, they most likely will not receive what you have "discerned" because (1) they don't agree; (2) it is the first time they have heard it and they need confirmation and tangible evidence; or (3) they already know it, but it is delicate and they cannot let on that they agree with you. For that reason, more often than not, you will just need to keep the matter in prayer and not speak into it. If you do say something, check your motives first. If you are insecure or spiritually prideful, you might be expecting personal validation from the leader for what you have discerned. Instead, you need to leave it in God's hands and not make the situation personal.

Taylor Bergthold can see and discern a spirit of fear in the people she interacts with on a friendship level, as well as in her role as a pastor's assistant at our church. A spirit of fear, by the way, is a demon and is mentioned in 2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV): "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." Taylor explained how she could see this spirit at times behind people's words. "It can look like insecurity and half-truths, but it's really a spirit of fear," she said.

When this happens, Taylor prays bold prayers for such people in the privacy of her own home. She prays for their emotional healing and also casts the spirit of fear off them.

"Sometimes the Holy Spirit will then nudge me to go talk about it in a conversational, nonthreatening way," she added. Taylor has seen noticeable change in people when she has done this.

One of our worship leaders, Joshua Vera, was leading worship at a prayer gathering when he spiritually discerned a heavy demonic presence on a young man in the room. The young man was new to their prayer gathering, having been invited by one of their regularly attending intercessors. Joshua was troubled by what he was discerning, mostly because he could not distinguish what it was.

The leaders of the prayer gathering, including Joshua, also brought the issue to one another's attention. They, too, discerned the deep spiritual issue with this person, actually distinguishing it as a homosexual spirit. They decided then to watch and wait for an opportunity to minister to him. Through the gift of

discerning of spirits, Joshua and the leadership team were armed and ready to bring counsel and deliverance to the young man, if it came to that.

"We finally did get to pray for him and minister to him," Joshua said. "We only scratched the surface, though, and could not get to the real issue."

I, too, have spiritually discerned negative things about people. One instance in particular involved the theft of some equipment at our church. We had some technical equipment stolen, and the items taken were from places around the building that just happened to be "off camera." In other words, the person who stole the items knew the location of our cameras and was careful not to be seen on video. This caused us to suspect the theft was an inside job. One Saturday afternoon, I came to the church and then walked into the lobby of the sanctuary. While driving just moments prior, I had had a vision that was strong and very clear. In the vision, I saw the face of one of our employees, and this employee said to me in anger, "I'm going to get back at all of you!"

When I walked into the lobby of the church, that same employee just happened to be exiting the sanctuary, even though this person was not on the schedule to work. Here I had spiritually discerned by the Holy Spirit the secret motive of the person's heart. Now, armed with that information, I secretly texted our facility director and requested that someone check all of our equipment, doors, alarms and the like. Sure enough, there was a side door from the sanctuary to the outside that had been left ajar. And later, as you may have guessed, the employee was released from his or her position.

3. Discern the difference between a broken person and an apostate

The Bible instructs us to show hospitality to strangers because they might actually be angels and not mere men (see Hebrews 13:2). Angels can and do appear in the likeness of men. If angels can appear like men, is it possible for a demon to do the same? We already know from the Word and from testimony that a demon can masquerade as an angel of God (see 2 Corinthians 11:14), which, again, is why we need the gift of discerning of spirits and need to know how to test the spirits.

Although I have suspected it once or twice, I cannot say that I have knowingly encountered a person who was a demon in disguise. I can say that I believe I have dealt with persons who are what the Bible refers to as "twice dead" (Jude 12–13). This means they have become apostates of Christ. They have denied and disowned Jesus, and I believe they have thus forfeited their eternal home in

heaven. Jude describes these individuals as “blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm” and “without fruit and uprooted” and “wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever” (verses 12–13).

This is always a touchy subject for believers who have struggled in their faith and might be wondering, *Could this possibly be me?* If you have even asked that question and if you care about the answer at all, then I assure you that this is not your story. And remember the apostle Peter’s dilemma. Peter denied Christ three times, but his denial was considered a crisis of faith and nothing more. Furthermore, his restoration as an apostle and preacher of the Gospel was evidence that he had never really left Christ in his heart. A twice-dead apostate, on the other hand, no longer cares. Such apostates literally have no conviction of sin, yet strangely, they still like to attach themselves to Christians and church gatherings.

My point is that most people whom we have spiritually discerned as deceptive or as having specific spirits driving them are truly broken people in need of salvation and/or deliverance. As much as I lean toward being redemptive in all situations, this gift will reveal the broken people from the apostates, so you can respond appropriately. We don’t treat these two the same. One you will minister to, and the other you will need to remove from your circle or church fellowship.

Let me give you a few examples to help explain the difference. I was ministering at a church one Sunday morning, and as I began to pray before the congregation, I felt the presence of a witch in the room. What is interesting is that I had been at this church before, attending a conference, and the guest minister also sensed the presence of a witch in attendance and even addressed it. When I began to minister several months later, I had honestly forgotten that incident, but I really did discern in my spirit a person in attendance who was involved in full-on witchcraft. How, then, do you handle such a thing? It is very disturbing to most people, as you and I both know that a witch is most likely there on demonic assignment.

In that situation, I felt the leading of the Holy Spirit to say something like this: “For the person in the room who is practicing witchcraft, and you are here on assignment from Satan for this meeting today, I want you to know that Jesus loves you.” I then began to reveal specific details about this person’s life and past, why he or she got involved in witchcraft, and some more prophetic words that revealed the love of Jesus to the person. I also said, “I’m glad you are here! I believe God is going to meet you powerfully today.”

I left it at that, knowing this witch was a broken person who really needed salvation, deliverance and personal ministry. Based on what the Holy Spirit was

leading me to say, this person was not an apostate, but someone still capable of receiving conviction unto repentance.

Only once have I knowingly experienced a person—a self-proclaimed minister, actually—who I believe fit in the category of an apostate. Although I do not believe he was a demon in disguise, I do believe he was definitely an apostate fully given to Satan for his use. Within just a few months of meeting this person, I had such a rebellion in my spirit against him that I knew I was dealing with something I had never dealt with before. I even called out this person's sins prophetically by the Holy Spirit right in front of him, something I have never done to someone before or since. Remember, these are people who in their current state are unable to repent, because they no longer respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They are sinful and divisive, pretending to have visions, dreams and angelic revelations, yet there is no real fruit in their lives. They also can and do carry spiritual power, performing false signs and wonders, because they have been empowered by Satan to deceive.

Sadly, this person has conducted scheme after scheme for years to steal money from his parishioners, other ministers and some very naïve ministerial organizations. There have been lawsuits but no arrests, with sinister and targeted persecution of those who have confronted him and called him out on his schemes. Because this person has wreaked havoc with far too many people and churches, he has since been removed and forbidden from many gatherings of believers. Yet he still continues his schemes wherever he finds an open door, namely in those not yet able to distinguish between a broken person and an apostate. A broken person and an apostate can look the same, but the gift of discerning of spirits will reveal the truth.

4. Learn from your mistakes

As we have seen from Hebrews 5:14, there is a connection between maturity and discerning well. I quoted this verse at the beginning of the chapter, but let's look at it again: "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (NASB). We learn to discern through practice, which implies learning by trial and error, along with a heavy dose of humility.

I have an awesome husband. He is faithful, steady, funny and always reliable. With that said, I have never been suspicious of him or his whereabouts, and I have never doubted his marital faithfulness to me. There was one day, however, when I began to struggle in this area after noticing a change on my husband's

calendar. He had canceled his afternoon appointments, but could not be located at the office or at home. Within a very short time frame, I experienced overwhelming feelings of jealousy that turned to panic and then desperation. These were feelings that came out of nowhere. I was discerning something, but it had turned into overwhelming discernment, and I was losing control. I finally got the courage to send my husband a text message, just to ask him casually where he was and what he was doing.

I thought I was being calm, but my husband could tell by the tone of my text that I was upset about something. He replied, "Why?"

I explained my mysterious feelings of jealousy and then justified them with his sudden absence and canceled appointments. I know he was laughing when he did this, but he texted only a one-word explanation: "Envy."

I shot-texted back, "I know! Now where are you?"

He then sent me a picture of a receipt stamped with the date and time from the store he had just finished shopping in. Can you guess the name of the store? "Envy." I was having strong feelings of envy while my husband shopped in a store named "Envy"!

These were the moments that left me shaking my head and begging the Lord for help. I can laugh now, but it was one of many alarming experiences along this journey of learning how to walk out the gift of discerning of spirits. It is true that this gift can feel as if you have a loaded gun and you are firing it without knowing where the target is. Sometimes you don't even know you are firing the gun! When you are unfamiliar with the operation of this gift and are still learning how it flows through you, it can be quite disturbing and sometimes scary. I was receiving real information from the Holy Spirit about my husband, but I did not know how to process it. I then began walking down the road of false accusation, based on what I was feeling. On top of it, I did not realize there was something supernatural going on. Without consulting the Holy Spirit, strong feelings from nowhere began to drive my emotions, and I did not know how to pull out of it. I learned a good lesson that day about the gift of discerning of spirits. Now that I can recognize overwhelming discernment, I have learned to stop and process these extreme and sudden emotions with the Lord and with other mature Christians to get needed clarity on them. I still experience overwhelming discernment on occasion, but now I know what I am dealing with, and I have learned to wait and not overreact.

Recently, a woman was complaining to me that other people, especially leaders, were not receiving her gift of discerning of spirits as valid. She was a sincere woman, very thoughtful, and came across to me as compassionate about the plight of others. She then decided to share with me some things she was

discerning. What she shared was very negative about someone in my church, as well as about a guest to our church. On top of it, she used highly spiritual, almost cryptic language to describe what she believed she was discerning.

This is a classic example of a person who still needs to practice her gift in a mature community of believers before she launches out in it. We can learn from her struggle, however. First of all, she had no investment in the persons she discerned as having deep spiritual issues. As a leader, I don't entertain such things from outsiders, largely because they have no investment and they don't carry my heart. Their "discernment" is suspect in its source for those reasons.

Secondly, using overly spiritual language does not give us credibility with others. We have to speak plainly and use words that people can understand. This woman used a lot of New Age–sounding words and made reference to some demons that most people don't ever talk about. I am actually versed in those terms and phrases, only because I work with so many who have come out of New Age and pagan communities and into Christianity. I have learned their language, so I can be a bridge to start teaching them mine. Still, we have to communicate points of discernment in plain language, which is easier said than done and takes a lot of practice.

Was anything this woman negatively discerned accurate? Yes! She had a few points of accuracy. On those points, I did lead her in prayer to close some spiritual doors to possible demonic activity. My hope for her is that she will feel safe enough to begin dialoguing through her discernment and get the coaching that she needs in it.

A Word to the Wise

As I conclude this book, I sense such a strong burden to urge you and the Body of Christ not to let this gift of discerning of spirits become diluted, misapplied and misused, or counterfeited. God is releasing this book at this time because of what He is doing in the earth. He is giving us the ability to discern through our senses like never before, because as things get darker and darker in the earth, His Church becomes more and more glorious. We cannot become that glorious Church if we continue to remain blind and deceived regarding spiritual realities. The gift of discerning of spirits is God's way of raising the standard in His Church so that we can victoriously rise above dark deception and successfully navigate what is to come.

You are going to see many books and much training on this subject in the coming days. There will be new books and training from mature and credible leaders who are road tested in this gift. There will also be a rekindling and increased demand for strong deliverance ministry, even in churches that seem more conservative. This gift will be a lead agent for making deliverance ministry more effective than ever.

You will also see a counterfeit of this gift offered to you and others by Satan himself. It will be a perversion of the gift that is more self-centered than God-centered. It will be presented as spiritually opportunistic for personal and even materialistic gain. This counterfeit will downplay the demonic and ignore our mandate to set the captives free. It will appear highly spiritual, but will arrogantly reject the truth and liberate no one. When the counterfeit comes, don't take the bait!

The gift of discerning of spirits comes with a price tag for its revelation. It requires that those who have it be selfless to the core and be co-laborers with Christ's agenda to establish His Kingdom on the earth. As much as I have struggled to walk this gift out successfully, I would not trade the results for anything. I have seen people, places and churches become powerfully liberated largely because of how this gift has operated in me and in others. Are you ready to pay the price for the powerful revelation that this gift offers? I pray that you do. It will be well worth it.

Kingdom Principles

1. We usually know what to do with the good, but what do we do when we discern evil in people?
2. When you discern by the Holy Spirit something about another person, remember that God has just told you a secret. Secrets remain in the secret place, meaning between just you and God in prayer, unless God gives you permission otherwise.
3. Philippians 1:9 instructs us that love needs to be balanced with discernment, and discernment needs to be balanced with love.
4. When you discern something negative in an individual, love not only considers the individual with the spiritual problem and/or evil agenda, but also the impact of that individual on others. A mature leader can pastor

that individual through the situation without compromising an entire organization in the process.

5. Hebrews 5:14 shows us that there is a connection between maturity and discerning well. We learn to discern through practice, which implies learning by trial and error and having a heavy dose of humility.

Thoughts for Reflection

1. When you have discerned that a deceptive or possessed person has come into your life or into your church, what, then, does love look like?
2. Are you able to pray discreetly and redemptively for others, even when you have discerned something evil in them?
3. Have you ever communicated something you have discerned to a leader, only to have it rebuffed? Why do you think that happened? What could you have done differently?
4. Have you ever made a mistake in what you have discerned? What did you learn through that experience?
5. Are you practicing this gift in a faith community? Why or why not?

Appendix

Can a Christian Be Demon Possessed?

As a new Christian, I underwent a very serious deliverance from spiritual bondage in direct connection to my occult past. As I mentioned in chapter 1, a woman at a weekly house prayer meeting I was attending saw a spirit of sorcery standing over me. As soon as she expressed that, something picked me up and threw me against the wall. Next, I went into a grand mal demonic manifestation. I wrote about this incident in more detail in my book *The Intercessors Handbook* (Chosen, 2016), but what happened to me at this prayer meeting was challenging to my pastor and to others in my church. They believed that Christians could not manifest demonically if they truly had the Holy Spirit.

I did have the Holy Spirit, but I still manifested demonically, as those areas of occultism had to be firmly addressed and dealt with. The good news is, I found my spiritual authority in Christ during that season and learned to walk out my freedom.

Since then, I have encountered Christian after Christian needing various levels of deliverance such as what I needed. After hearing my testimony of deliverance, Kyra (not her real name) came forward at the end of a church service to receive ministry from our altar team. She could barely walk forward, however, before she fell to the ground in a strong demonic manifestation. Keep in mind that Kyra is a Christian woman. She has accepted Jesus into her heart, and she has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Still, she manifested demonically and, like me, needed deliverance from her occult past, her issues being caused by satanic ritual abuse as a child.

With that said, it is a huge myth to believe that Christians cannot be demonized. Notice, however, that I use the word *demonized* and not the word *possessed*. This is where most of our confusion has come from. We have confused *possession* with *demonization*, and they are two different things. The late Derek Prince explained his objection to the use of the description *demon possessed* in certain passages of the Bible, claiming it is a mistranslation, such as

in this passage: “That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed” (Mark 1:32).

“The word possessed suggests ownership . . . by a demon,” Prince said. “Now I don’t believe that any born-again, sincere Christian can be owned by a demon . . . but the Greek word that’s used can easily be, and should be, translated demonized.”[1]

He went on to explain that many born-again Christians are still demonized. He said there are areas in their personality where the Holy Spirit is not yet in complete control because there is a demon that has to be dealt with.

John Eckhardt, overseer of Crusaders Church Chicago, wrote something similar in an article for *Charisma* magazine:

> The word “possessed” is an unfortunate translation because it connotes ownership, and we know that the devil cannot own a Christian—that is, have complete control of him. But in the Bible, there is no real distinction between being possessed and being oppressed, digressed, suppressed, obsessed and so forth. All these terms mean that a person is, to some degree, under the influence of a demon.[2]

The question remains, then, How much of a Christian can a demon possibly possess? In examining this, we need to recognize that we are all made up of three parts: spirit, soul and body. When Jesus comes into your life, He comes into your spirit and takes up residence. Paul wrote to the Galatians, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). I believe Charles H. Kraft, president and founder of Deep Healing Ministries, says it best: “A demon cannot live in the Christian’s spirit—that is, the person’s central core, the part that died when Adam sinned, because Jesus now lives there.”[3]

So, then, how does a person know if he or she is under the influence of demons or not? I admit discussions like this can make people doubt their spiritual condition if they are not strong in the written Word and don’t know who they are in Christ. It can also leave us with the impression that deliverance from demons will always be a big fight. The truth—and I hope this gives you reasonable assurance—is that demons will only do what we have allowed them to do. The disciples, too, discovered this when they ministered, and then told Jesus, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” (Luke 10:17).

More often than not, I have known Christians to be delivered with minimal manifestation from spirits in their soul such as rejection, fear, self-hatred, lust, torment and so forth after they repent, renounce whatever it is, and command the spirit to go. If there is a manifestation, there might be a sigh, a cough, a shake or a twitch when the spirit leaves them, which is a signal that they are free of it. Still, there will be other believers who will have a much stronger manifestation,

and we need to be prepared for that without making it a formula for deliverance. Derek Prince, for example, shared about his miraculous healing from bladder cancer. When hands were laid on him for healing, he felt a distinct spiritual battle inside himself, like two cats fighting with one another. He then let out a long, sustained “roar” and was perfectly healed from the spirit of cancer.

Does this reassure you as much as it reassures me? The truth is that you and I are possessed, in a sense, upon our confession of Christ—only not by a demon. The Holy Spirit has possessed us—the Spirit of Christ, who lives and dwells in our born-again spirit. As far as the rest of us, meaning our soul and our body, these are the areas that can come under the influence of demons that have to be expelled. Still, I am confident in the power of God to overcome any such negative influence, should it come, knowing that the greater One lives and dwells inside us (see 1 John 4:4). We will always have a sure remedy in the Holy Spirit.

Notes

Chapter 1: Seeing Both Sides of the Supernatural

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Chapter 6: Discerning the Angels

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2. Blue Letter Bible Lexicon: Strong's 4397, s.v. "*mal'ak*," https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv&strongs=h4397.

3. I give a very thorough explanation of this concept and its parameters in chapter 6 of my other book, *The Intercessors Handbook: How to Pray with Boldness, Authority and Supernatural Power* (Chosen, 2016).

4. Ian Carroll, *As It Is in Heaven: Seven Core Values of a Revival Culture* (Oak Park, Ill.: Ian Carroll Ministries, 2016), 78.

5. Paul Cox, *Unwrap the Gifts: Receive Your Spiritual Inheritance Through Prayer Ministry* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Creation House, 2008), Kindle edition, chapter 1.

6. For more on this, visit https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Smith.

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2. I mention these in more detail in my book *The Intercessors Handbook: How to Pray with Boldness, Authority and Supernatural Power* (Chosen, 2016), but my source for the Greek was Tom White, *The Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare* (Minneapolis: Chosen, 2011), 55.

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Appendix: Can a Christian Be Demon Possessed?

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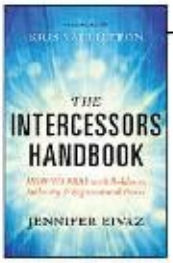
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