

Bruce Wilkinson as

THE WIZARD of ODD

"Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Scripture anymore!"

by G. Richard Fisher

In 1976, as a weekend hobby, Bruce Wilkinson began to offer classes on how to read and study the Bible. He titled his seminars "A Walk Thru the Bible." As his endeavors met with great response and success, he founded Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, which grew into a multi-million dollar organization. More recently, however, those who read his books will no longer find themselves walking on the lighted path of Scripture, but rather on Wilkinson's yellow brick road of miracles and money. For example, Wilkinson tells us, "God loves to initiate miracles with money. ... I want to introduce you to one of my favorite practical tools for inviting financial miracles."¹ Yet the Apostle Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none" (Acts 3:6).

Wilkinson is probably best known for his book, *The Prayer of Jabez*. It was a publication that was packaged, re-packaged, and marketed in a variety of ways — from a teen version to a devotional to a Bible study. The popularity of *Jabez* merchandise soared like a rocket before falling like a rock. It is not uncommon to see a stockpile of the small original hard-back volume, which originally sold for \$10, at the local dollar store.

Working off the success of *Jabez*, Wilkinson then, along with co-author David Kopp, offered us a way to find and fulfill our dreams in their book, *The Dream Giver*.² This was, in fact, a

self-help book lifted straight from the ideas of secular self-help guru Tony Robbins. The verbiage was identical to Robbins' writings. PFO spoke to Kopp by phone and asked him about the resemblance between the two. Kopp attributed any similarity in it to common language in the world of self-help books and the life coach fad. Kopp's admission affirmed that the book's contents did not really come from the Bible, but from the secular world and what was popular at the time. Currently, people are not so much looking for a life coach, but rather a spiritual formation coach. It is sort of the same fad with a few Bible verses attached to it.

Ironically, these two books (*The Prayer of Jabez* and *The Dream Giver*), while earning their authors and publishers a hefty profit, did not appear to provide a scenario which personally worked for Wilkinson. He lost friends, funds, and reputation in his failed "Dream for Africa" scheme in 2005. Reports appeared in various news sources and magazines telling about the unraveling plan that crashed and burned:

"Early in July 2005, after three years based in Johannesburg, South Africa, well-known American author and theologian, Dr. Bruce Wilkinson, moved to the land-locked kingdom of Swaziland, a former British colony, to give practical expression to his

'Dream for Africa.' ... As a very able, influential and wealthy man, Bruce decided to lend a helping hand and soon devised a grand scheme for the upliftment of destitute communities and individuals on the underdeveloped continent. He had a dream, a vision, an ambitious plan, to channel vast humanitarian aid from the US to communities in Africa where it is most needed. He selected the poverty-stricken, former British colony, Swaziland, as a role model for the rest of Africa on how to successfully change lifestyles and eradicate poverty and suffering. ... Bruce secured an extensive support-base among private companies and churches, and also received a large grant from the US government to combat AIDS in Africa. ... What went wrong? On 19 December 05 the *Wall Street Journal* published a lengthy article on how the African dream of Bruce turned into a nightmare. The article is titled: 'Unanswered prayers: In Swaziland, US preacher sees his dream vanish.' In this article it is also related how Bruce acted against the advice of the US ambassador to Swaziland."³

Wilkinson, against U.S. Ambassador Lewis Lucke's advice, proposed what he called Dream Village. He wanted large tracts of land from the local

government which did not sit well with the ruling body of Swaziland, and he also proposed moving orphans out of their villages into the yet-to-be Dream Village. Disconnecting the orphans from their social network, kinships, and community was deemed unwise by both the U.S. Ambassadors and local officials. Communities there care for their orphans, unlike those in other parts of the world. Wilkinson pulled up stakes, leaving many in the church and local pastors in trauma because of the unfulfilled grandiose promises. The scars remain.

BORN FOR THIS?

Now Wilkinson and his co-author, Kopp, have risen again with the new book, *You Were Born for This, 7 Keys to a Life of Predictable Miracles*. The title itself is a contradiction because for a miracle to be a miracle it cannot be programmed, predicted, orchestrated, or scheduled. God is never on our timetable.

Wilkinson's latest book reads like "Jabez meets Norman Vincent Peale" or "The Dream Giver meets Benny Hinn and Joel Osteen." *You Were Born for This* is just another self-help book coupled with positive wishful thinking, personal revelations, and watered down Word Faith teaching packaged in a single volume. Wilkinson and Kopp (and their publisher) certainly know what Americans want and what they will buy. The marketing of miracles is becoming a worn out but lucrative occupation.

Wilkinson clearly states the thrust and goal of the book:

"Are you beginning to see why you can be a part of as many miracles for God as you want? ... you'll find helpful teaching on miracle-specific signals from God, from others, and even from yourself. By learning to read the signs effectively, you'll learn to be a living link between Heaven and earth, recognizing a miracle opportunity right in front of you where others see nothing at all."⁴

So there it is — "as many miracles from God as you want." This is snake

oil and delusion in a small but expensive package.

SOME WHEAT AND LOTS OF CHAFF

It's not that everything Wilkinson says is wrong. It could be helpful for some to know God is at work in the mundane areas of our lives, even when we don't know it. The questions Wilkinson suggests to ask others may be helpful in some situations to open a conversation for witnessing. However, any element of truth suggested by him is layered with so much error that the truth gets buried and lost. It is good that he urges good works and the doing of good things — that is, to be other-focused — but one must filter out a lot of error in the process.

For example, in the opening pages Wilkinson describes what he calls "a mysterious encounter."⁵ He then says he "felt unexpectedly nudged by Heaven"⁶ to give a waiter named Jack \$100 and later \$200 more. Jack had been praying about his depleted alimony account (so Wilkinson says) and was asking God for \$100.

In Wilkinson's universe, giving people money qualifies as our and their miracle. He claims it was "clearly miraculous to everyone involved."⁷ A careful and close examination peels away the claims of miraculous. Many who are waiters and waitresses are dependent on tips and most probably struggling financially. They are one group of people who quite often earn only minimum wage. It takes no nudge from God to realize that. Tips are their life's blood. And we have ample Scriptures about helping the poor or those in need (Proverbs 3:27-28; 14:21, 31; 19:17; 22:9; 28:27; James 1:27; 2:15-16). We do not need theatrics and dramatic stories to embellish what Scripture commands and we should be doing routinely. Obedience, not nudges, is what is required. In other words, just do it and without fanfare.

STORIES AND SECRET KEYS

One thing Wilkinson has in abundance in the book is stories — more specifically, stories about himself. These stories always turn out well

and have a happy ending even though in real life Swaziland did not. Wilkinson presents himself as the lead actor in a cosmic drama and for the price of \$22.99 (\$27.99 in Canada) he will let readers in on the secret of how he does it and in turn how they can do it. Wilkinson says that his ideas are "based on the teaching of Scripture,"⁸ which really is not true. He has some misinterpreted verses, taken out of context, with no real biblical exposition. What is true is his admission that his teaching also comes out of his "own ministry experience."⁹ It is his own experience and his interpretation of his experiences that he relates in the various personal stories in the book. It is a stacked deck from the very start. His stories are selective, may be embellished, and are taken in the direction he desires, and there is no real verification or documentation of any of the details or if these are real people.

Wilkinson appears to believe and teach an almost Gnostic or Mind Science concept in that he has embraced a formula that anyone can use to create everyday miracles. He tells his readers about "four keys to a life of miracles."¹⁰ These four keys are: "make a very specific, urgent request; understand and accept His miracle agenda for you; know how to partner with an unseen power; take a promising but life-changing risk."¹¹

There is a major problem with Wilkinson's premise of four keys. His reference to God as "unseen power" is troublesome enough, but his formula leads toward creation of a false God. Approaching God in this way is like approaching a vending machine. Put in the right coins, press the right buttons or pull the right levers, and we get what we want. The formula promises always getting results of some sort if it is done right. Wilkinson assures us:

"All seven miracle keys I talk about in *You Were Born for This* describe specific actions that unlock the miraculous in our lives. ... Taken together, these first four keys unlock a life of miracles. And by the time you combine these principles with the practical

advice of parts 3 and 4 of this book, you'll have everything you need to begin delivering personal miracles."¹²

Any discerning Christian should always be leery of any person (or group) who makes claim to special insights and the assertion that they have found keys or secrets that finally unlock special truth or new insights. Inside information is one of the hallmarks of a cult and special discoveries a mark of the occult. Dave Breese was spot-on when he wrote:

"The careful teacher of sound doctrine is rarely as electrifying as the mysterious religious promoter who usually for a price, will let us in on his 'secret.' Under the spells he casts, we are often tempted to forget that the best things in life are not only free, but they are usually obvious."¹³

The "secret" of the Gospel has been out for a long time. The key to salvation is clearly Jesus. The miracle of the new birth (the greatest miracle) is for all who receive it.

Wilkinson and Kopp may need to be reminded that God is the Almighty Creator God and not a delivery boy who produces on demand. They also may need to be reminded that creating false images of God's character and work is frightening business. Exodus 20:2-3 warns, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me."

Another faulty aspect of Wilkinson's teaching is the idea that *anyone* can work the formula and produce miracles. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul asks the Corinthians a number of rhetorical questions. These are questions that do not require a verbal response and the answer is so obvious everyone knows it. As Paul deals with the Holy Spirit's distribution of various gifts to various individuals, he establishes that this distribution is sovereign and that not all are gifted alike. He asks, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of

miracles?" (v. 29). The expected answer is a resounding *No, No, No!* Does Wilkinson know better than the Apostle Paul? He says all his readers can work the formula and "begin delivering personal miracles."¹⁴ Our response to Wilkinson's claim should be a loud, "No, I really don't think so."

Scripture is clear (Wilkinson notwithstanding) that not all are workers of miracles, and neither are they expected to be. In fact, one of the most outstanding men in Scripture, John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, did no miracles. As Jesus went beyond the Jordan to where John was baptizing, "many people came to Him. They said, 'Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true.' And in that place many believed in Jesus" (John 10:41-42, NIV).

It is hard to see any real distinction between what Wilkinson is promoting and what Word Faith teachers encourage. It all boils down to what people want on demand. "On demand" may work with satellite television, but not with God.

PUTTING WORDS IN GOD'S MOUTH

Another critical flaw of the book is the cavalier use of Scripture. In one instance Wilkinson goes beyond even paraphrasing Scripture, and in many other cases he uses Scripture out of context for his proof texts. He ultra-paraphrases and renders Mark 16:15 ("Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature") as "Go into all the world for Me ... and do the impossible."¹⁵ Jesus did not say "go into the world and do the impossible." How can Wilkinson put words in Jesus' mouth and not tremble at commands such as Deuteronomy 4:2 and Revelation 22:18 and the judgment attached to tampering with God's Word? Moreover, further demonstrating his sloppy handling of Scripture, he wrongly attributes the words to Matthew.

Wilkinson consistently distorts verses and makes them say whatever he wants or needs them to say regardless of context. He misleads readers

by citing the story of Isaiah in Isaiah 6 as if it backs up and lends credence to his premise of miracles through formulas. Isaiah's narration is an account of deep brokenness and repentance. It is about the prophet's willingness to serve God even though his ministry will be difficult, unrewarding, and even heartbreaking. Isaiah did no miracle, but was faithful in his preaching even when his people would not respond. Isaiah had to minister in a very dark period of Israel's history and many of his messages were about judgment. The book of Isaiah is about perseverance and long-suffering, not the miraculous. It really shows the opposite of what Wilkinson is alleging.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Wilkinson degrades miracles by making everything a miracle. For example, he paid tow truck fees for a man in a turban whose van had broken down on the freeway. He says it was a "miracle appointment."¹⁶ One can't help but wonder if the man needed the Gospel or a solid witness, along with the financial help. In another story Wilkinson advises a man on a plane regarding his construction company. These are normal everyday occurrences, so it strains the imagination to label such routine events as miracles. If everything is a miracle, then nothing is a miracle. God may be in what we think are chance encounters, but these events cannot technically be defined as miracles.

What then is the problem? The reason for Wilkinson's confusion is that he is mistaking providence for miracle. According to one Bible encyclopedia, "providence" concerns:

"God's support, care, and supervision of all creation, from the moment of the first creation to all the future into eternity. Jesus Christ said, 'My Father is working still, and I am working' (John 5:17). Providence is God's activity through His unlimited power and knowledge to fulfill His purpose for the whole creation, including man. ... Two points are to be observed in the study of providence. God's control is all-

inclusive and certain, yet God does not violate the freedom of rational and moral creatures. It may be hard to understand how this can be because there are no personal experiences to which one can compare God's providential working, but the Scriptures clearly teach both these points. Joseph insisted that God had sent him to Egypt, and indeed this confidence had doubtless supported him through all his adversity. Yet he said 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt' (Gen 45:4). ... Very specifically Peter said that Christ 'being delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men' (Acts 2:23)."¹⁷

Every believer can and should find opportunity for witness or good deeds all around us in everyday life. Each day we can find opportunities to help those in need. God allows these opportunities and situations because of His *providence*. To refer to them as a miracle is to evidence fundamental confusion and a misunderstanding of biblical categories and doctrines. Wilkinson does not know or does not care to distinguish absolute miracle from that which is providential. This important distinction apparently eludes him. *True miracles had a time, a place, and a purpose.* They were extraordinary manifestations of divine power given to a select few in order to attest, confirm, and mark out that which God was doing. A survey of the whole counsel of Scripture reveals they were primarily used to manifest direct divine revelation in establishing the Law (Moses), the Prophets (Elijah), and the New Covenant and the Church (Jesus and the apostles).

The details of these divine inbreakings are recorded in Scripture. Miracles such as stilling the storm, raising the dead, turning water to wine, or healing a leper were brought about by the immediate agency and intervention of God and superseded all natural law. As Paul stated in Corinthians, and as the Bible clearly

shows, miracles were not for all. However, God's providence is at work for all and comes through secondary causes. All of Wilkinson's stories may show providence, but not necessarily miracles even though that is the way he wrongly interprets them.

Theologian Charles Hodge eloquently describes God's providence in the world today:

"The Bible, however, clearly teaches, and all men instinctively believe in a special providence. That is, that God uses his control over the laws of nature, to bring about special effects. Men in sickness, in danger, or in any distress, pray to God for help. This is not irrational. It supposes God's relation to the world to be precisely what it is declared to be in the Bible. It does not suppose that God sets aside or counteracts the laws of nature; but simply that He controls them and causes them to produce whatever effects He sees fit. The Scriptures and the history of the world, and almost every man's experience, bear abundant evidence to such divine interpositions. We should be as helpless orphans were it not for this constant oversight and protection of our heavenly Father. Sometimes the circumstances attending these divine interventions are so unusual, and the evidences which they afford of divine control are so clear, that men cannot refuse to recognize the hand of God. There is, however, nothing extraordinary in the agency of God. It is only that we witness on these occasions more impressive manifestations of the absolute control, which He constantly exercises over the laws which He has ordained."¹⁸

F. E. Hamilton and R. L. Harris concur and inform us:

"The Scripture speaks of 'signs and wonders and mighty works' (2 Cor 12:12), which may be classed under the term 'miracles.' Strictly speaking, however, it seems better to limit the term 'miracle' to the *change in the mode*

of God's activity apart from means."¹⁹

But why is it so important that we distinguish miracles from providence? Isn't that just splitting hairs? It may seem unimportant to some, but imprecision is often the beginning of heresy. To confuse any aspect of Scripture starts us down a road where we can define anything in the Bible in any way we want. A clear example of this is Gregory Boyd, whose ambiguous understanding of why evil is permitted to exist helped lead him down the path into open theism. Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Bart Ehrman all have taken similar drifts into heresy. To create one's own subjective dictionary for Bible terms is the epitome of pride and the path to cultism:

"One of the very fascinating characteristics of the cults is the interesting and sometimes hilarious changes of doctrine through which they pass. Their doctrines are being continually altered in order to adapt themselves to new situations, arguments, or the whims of their leaders. They know nothing of the command of Scripture, 'That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive' (Eph. 4:14). Scripture is clear that craftily changing doctrine is a cunning device used by those who prey upon the unwary. ... The Word of God is therefore very careful to avoid ambiguity."²⁰

GETTING A NUDGE

Creating "miracles," according to Wilkinson, is based on inclinations, or more specifically what he labels as "Heaven's nudge."²¹ Wilkinson never quite fully explains the concept, but it appears to mean a feeling or subjective urge in a certain direction, or something like that. In one of his appearances, Wilkinson asks a man named Owen (part of the audience) if anything unusual is going on in his life. Owen replied, "No," but Wilkin-

son relates that he received another “nudge” regarding Owen.²² Wilkinson tells Owen that he was not telling the truth and Owen then confessed to being on the verge of quitting his ministry because he was \$16,000 in debt in efforts to keep the ministry afloat. According to Wilkinson, Owen decided to stay in ministry and all the attendees at the conference then gave Owen money to the tune of \$16,000.²³ Happening the way Wilkinson describes is certainly wonderful and unusual, but not a miracle. Providential yes, but for it to be a true miracle it would be Wilkinson changing blank white copy paper into 160 genuine \$100 bills.

Some may say that if the story is true and Wilkinson had no awareness of Owen’s difficulty (and original lie) that Wilkinson might be psychic, or he is just playing the law of averages by doing cold readings as most anyone at a seminar could say that something unusual was going on in their lives. Such prophetic words usually are generic enough that they will describe almost anything in our experience. Another concern that may be argued, however, is that Wilkinson is clairvoyant and involved in something that might be occultic. Clairvoyance is an occult power claimed by some. So-called fortune tellers claim this ability and allege they are able to divine people’s thoughts and futures. Wilkinson may try to sanitize it by calling it a “nudge” from God, but the New Testament offers no such psychic or revelatory gift.²⁴ So at best this whole practice is guess work, a shot in the dark, or cold reading; and at worst, fortune-telling.

Wilkinson says that while he was stuck in traffic in route to the airport, his prayer delayed his departing flight. Along with that, he claims to have known he would be seated next to a certain lady whom he engaged in conversation before they boarded.²⁵

ON THE DARK SIDE?

An earlier generation of Christians knew exactly what clairvoyance was and with what it is associated. Merrill Unger, over 50 years ago, defined it as:

“A whole complex of phenomena, purportedly tried and proved, was advanced as the result of the widespread activity in psychical research and experimentation with mediums: such as telepathy, spirit-rapping, trances, luminous apparitions, automatic writing, inspiration, clairvoyance, oral and written spirit communications, mediumistic drawings, materializations, levitations, physical healings, and others, and these form the basis of the new belief in spirits.”²⁶

Wilkinson tries to employ artful language when he says, “We don’t have to look inside for a special emotion or inner voice.”²⁷ Yet this is hard to square with what he calls “nudges.” When he speaks of sensing things or trusting the nudge,²⁸ it sounds as if he is exercising special emotion or an inner voice or prompting. His disclaimer is hollow.

Wilkinson quotes Psalm 32:8, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye,” as if it supports his premise of nudges. The basic question which must be asked is: How does God guide us? Guiding us with His eye means His eye is always on us, but He obviously instructs us and guides us through the clear teaching of Scripture, not inner urges and nudges. Psalm 1 speaks of the man who delights in the law of the Lord, assuring that if we meditate on God’s Word we will prosper. Psalm 32 is not addressing subjective, inner guidance. Many other psalms, including Psalm 119, make clear that objective guidance is through the Word.

THE FORCE OF FAITH

God is the initiator of miracles. They are sovereignly dispensed. To the contrary, Wilkinson teaches, “I hope you are beginning to grasp the indispensable part you and I play in whether or not a miracle will happen. The amount of our faith — and the actions we take as a result — can either limit or release God to act in a miracle situation.”²⁹ Such a premise is directly out of the Word Faith handbook. To say that we can “limit or

release God” makes us in one sense as powerful as (or even more powerful than) God. It sounds like God is putty in our hands. It is a jarring and shocking statement.

God is unlimited and there is nothing that can thwart His ultimate purpose and plan. Wilkinson has lost an understanding of God’s omnipotence and all that it means. Henry Thiessen instructs:

“By the omnipotence of God we mean that He is able to do whatever He wills ... God can do what He wills to do; but He does not necessarily will to do anything. That is, God has power over His power.”³⁰

God’s sovereignty and omnipotence are expressed throughout the Bible. Even a pagan king realized this: “All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Daniel 4:35). The Apostle Paul assures us that God is the One “who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11). One could not imagine, for instance, God waiting on Moses to release Him so He could deliver the children of Israel from Egypt. God used Moses, not the other way around. It is foolish and mistaken to think that we can “limit or release God.”

Even a first-year Bible student would be familiar with the doctrine of God and His omnipotence. William Evans writes:

“The Omnipotence of God is that attribute by which He can bring to pass everything which He wills. God’s power admits of no bounds or limitations. God’s declaration of His intention is the pledge of the thing intended being carried out. ‘Hath he said, and shall he not do it?’”³¹

INSIDE LANGUAGE

Cults thrive on inside information and esoteric vocabulary. Wilkinson creates his own lingo and promises miracles if we can recognize the “five

miracle-related signals.”³² No one would ever find these just by reading the Bible. No one has suggested them throughout the history of the Church, that is, until now. Wilkinson does not elaborate on where and how he found these “miracle-related signals,” but he does admit that they “will probably be a new experience for you.”³³ Wilkinson specifies his five “miracle-related signals” and their importance:

“... a nudge, a cue, a bump, a prompt, and an alert. ... Once you put them to work in your partnership with God, your success rate as an agent for the miraculous will rapidly increase.”³⁴

Wilkinson’s ideas mirror the teaching of an organization founded in 1929 in Idaho by Frank B. Robinson. He called the religion Psychiana. It is reported that over a period of 15 years, Robinson had a million people reading his books and lessons. The *New 20th Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* reveals:

“Robinson’s was the typical New Thought emphasis on health, prosperity, and happiness. He stressed the theme of the availability of God’s power to every man. There is nothing needed by a person, he declared, which the power of God cannot bring if one will meet the conditions.”³⁵

The entry level for miracles is the nudge, which is defined by Wilkinson as “an inner push that directs us toward a person, a place, or an action. ... On rare occasions He also uses dreams, visions, angels, and other individuals.”³⁶ The best we can understand is that a nudge is an interruption to our regular train of thought and is “something you don’t want to do.”³⁷ All in all, it is not very clear but we move on to the next signal, which is a cue. A cue is “a signal that comes from another person. It is communicated, often unknowingly, by someone’s words or body language.”³⁸ All of this sounds more mundane than miraculous. Wilkinson admits that we can practice and improve the skill of reading body language and advises that we “practice reading cues anytime you’re around other people.”³⁹

To the critical reader, the book sounds less and less miraculous as one goes on. The next signal then moves onto the bump which is defined as “something you do to another person to surface or confirm a need. ... the purpose of a bump is to help us gain more insight into a person’s need. We gently gather the needed information by asking the right questions.”⁴⁰ Perhaps a more honest and less spectacular way to describe it would be information gathering or getting a person to open up. Wilkinson spends a few pages trying to train us in asking the right questions, which makes his claim of miraculous seem even more hollow. He further suggests questions to try to get the bump underway. All of this instruction appears more about human skill and maybe even manipulation.

The prompt comes next. This is said to be “sudden insight about the person you are seeking to help.”⁴¹ With all the body language clues and all the probing questions that we are asking, it would only follow that we would form some conclusions about the person with whom we are interacting. One keeps asking, “What is so miraculous about this?”

Wilkinson is not selling inside information about miracles; he is *selling techniques*. He admits that fact when he states:

“I said, no previous experience was required. No special degree, talent, or qualification either. But for that to be true, wouldn’t there have to be skills we could learn and an approach that would bring success — not just once but regularly — in our new life in Everyday Miracle Territory? Of course, Heaven’s part in delivering miracles would still be full of mystery, just as you’d expect, but our part would have to be very down-to-earth. Thankfully, a simple, self-evident approach to delivering miracles does exist. In fact, the ideas can be understood by a ten-year-old. ... In the next section of the book, which deals with three special delivery miracles, the sequence of the steps becomes even more impor-

tant. When taken in order, they will help you guide a conversation toward a specific, known miracle outcome.”⁴²

That is not exactly what Paul told the Corinthians. He never gave out keys, steps, and techniques for miracles, but did remind them that God sovereignly distributes gifts according to His will. If Wilkinson were honest, he would title his book, *Techniques and Keys To Manipulate God and People — Cold Reading Made Easy*.

TRYING TO KEEP TRACK OF THE KEYS

The last miracle-related signal is the alert, which Wilkinson labels a “fear alert,” defined as “a signal you receive from yourself.”⁴³ The fear alert seems to be one questioning himself and the signals he is getting. In the end, Wilkinson admits that reading these signals is “a natural and immediately usable skill.”⁴⁴ That should really seal the deal, but as television marketing pioneer Ron Popeil always said, “But wait! There’s more!” Wilkinson presses on to elaborate on “Five Steps That Lead to a Miracle Delivery.”⁴⁵ He will then move on to “Three Keys To Special Delivery Miracles.”⁴⁶ Wilkinson and Kopp have more keys than a locksmith. This system becomes so complex and wearisome, it makes the Bible seem all the more simple and refreshing.

Everything is orchestrated, even to the point of doing certain things to “Open the Heart,” that is “preparing another’s heart to receive what God wants to do.”⁴⁷ This is done with various techniques including: “Maintain eye contact. ... Soften and lower your voice. ... Slow down and practice pausing. ... Relax your posture. ... Invite more heart sharing. ... Practice empathy.”⁴⁸ However, we’re not quite done yet. Wilkinson has a further list of seven leading questions to ask the person,⁴⁹ and then introduces another set of “keys” for special delivery miracles. These are “The Money Key ... The Dream Key ... The Forgiveness Key.”⁵⁰

Wilkinson’s system becomes so cumbersome, so dense, so detailed, that the average person will surely get bogged down with keys, nudges,

bumps, prompts, body language, and questions to ask — all to the point of total confusion. Rather than trying to remember and employ all these signals, the Christian would be better served using the time and energy to memorize Scripture.

THE GOD POCKET AND PHARISEES

Next, the reader is introduced to “the God pocket,”⁵¹ which is a place in the wallet or purse where money is kept that is to be given away. This would exclude a large number who live paycheck to paycheck, but perhaps could include those who have made hundreds of thousands of dollars (perhaps even millions) from royalties of best-selling books like *The Prayer of Jabez*.

Wilkinson writes of the various episodes where he gave money to people out of his God pocket. Wilkinson discusses Matthew 6:1-4, regarding a believer doing charitable deeds in secret, but he never quite sees or understands the relationship to himself.⁵² Exalting and memorializing what one has given away by writing a book about it is one of the very things Matthew 6:1-4 is addressing. Wilkinson zeros in on the verses with fancy footwork:

*“Aren’t we supposed to give money in secret, not in public as with the God Pocket? I applaud people who are honestly trying to live by Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:1-4 about giving in secret. But this advice was aimed at people who were selfishly motivated to get the most public recognition possible for their giving. Jesus was confronting the prideful model offered by the religious sect known as the Pharisees, who were deliberately ostentatious in their giving.”*⁵³

Wilkinson tries to shift this precept onto the Pharisees and suggests that to publicly display giving (as he does) only speaks to motive. He is wrong. The prohibition about public recognition may speak to motive by extension, but Jesus is speaking to the practice of the public display of giving and amplifies His intent by adding

“that your charitable deed may be in secret” (Matthew 6:4). Not parading our piety is the obvious point, and it is not limited to the Pharisees. This specifically has to do with publicly viewed alms-giving, which is the kind of giving described by Wilkinson with his God pocket. We know that another biblical category of giving is the weekly offerings at Church (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). That is another way we give and is obviously public to a degree and technically not covered in Matthew 6 because the Church and its structure would be years away when Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount.

Charles Ryrie adds another very interesting point regarding alms giving and Matthew 6:

‘Jewish tradition said that there was in the temple a ‘chamber of secrets’ into which the devout used to put their gifts in secret so that the poor could receive support therefrom in secret.’⁵⁴

Many do not have money to throw around. Even fewer can afford to give waiters or waitresses hundreds of dollars. When Wilkinson is asked about the wisdom of just giving money away and the reality that it may be used for drugs or alcohol or wrong things, he seems unaffected. He says “it’s much rarer than you might fear.”⁵⁵ How does he know that? Wouldn’t that depend on the area where the money is being distributed? There are some parts of some cities where one could almost guarantee the wrong use of the money. It is not unheard of for con artists, drug addicts, and others with dishonest motives to exploit churches and their members. While the Bible does declare, ‘blessed is he who is kind to the needy’ (Proverbs 14:21, NIV), it nowhere affirms a “God pocket.” In fact, the Word advises wisdom and serious thought as far as giving, “A good man deals graciously and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion” (Psalm 112:5).

The word *discretion* carries the idea of managing with judgment and being wise in the use of money. We need to be sure that people are really

needy and that we are not endorsing and supporting their sin or addictions.

DREAMS AND DELIVERIES

Wilkinson moves on to his “Dream Key.”⁵⁶ This chapter is the “Reader’s Digest version” of Wilkinson and Kopp’s *The Dream Giver* book. It combines positive thinking with wishful thinking. Somehow when one pursues a big dream God does miracles, or so Wilkinson says. The authors wrongly quote Ephesians 2:10 — which has nothing to do with dreams or miracles. To suggest it does is a gross distortion. The verse reads that “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” Those good works are laid out clearly all through the Bible. They are practical things as clearly enunciated in Ephesians and the other Epistles. Things such as working on one’s marriage, separating from evil, redeeming the time, not grieving the Spirit, putting away bitterness and evil speaking, forgiving one another, and demonstrating kindness (Ephesians 4-5) are all clearly laid out. And that is only the beginning. Nothing about miracles, but a lot about how to live a life God’s way is described in the Epistles. Delivering a dream is very complex and hard to follow, but Wilkinson plows on and lays out another “five-step delivery process.”⁵⁷

The next key is “The Forgiveness Key.”⁵⁸ This chapter is a dense conglomeration of steps to follow and questions to ask to help deliver people from their unwillingness to forgive. It is an exercise in the old Rogerian techniques of non-directional and non-confrontational counseling. The larger question that is never dealt with is — can we forgive others even if they have not asked us to forgive them? This is something that even God does not do. The belief of God forgiving without repentance is called “Universalism” and rightly labeled heresy.

The Scripture is clear, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9,

emphasis added). If someone does not ask our forgiveness, in the true biblical sense of forgiveness, we cannot and need not forgive them (send away their sin) and reconcile with them. However, what we can do is not dwell on their transgression, give up bitterness, and be willing to forgive if ever asked. Dealing with and vanquishing our bitterness and thoughts of revenge or vengeance is necessary for our own well-being. Jesus made it clear, "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day he returns to you, saying 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4, emphasis added).

Linguist W.E. Vine probes the depths of the Greek word for forgiveness:

"APHIEMI ... primarily, to send forth, send away ... Human forgiveness is to be strictly analogous to Divine forgiveness, e.g., Matt. 6:12. If certain conditions are fulfilled, there is no limitation to Christ's law of forgiveness, Matt. 18:21, 22. The conditions are repentance and confession, Matt. 18:15-17; Luke 17:3."⁵⁹

Wilkinson's version of forgiveness without any repentance or condition opens a number of interesting questions. What do we do about church discipline and unrepentant church members in gross sin? Do we just forget about it and look the other way? What about a pedophile who has abused a child in a local church? Do we just "forgive"? Forgiveness is a transaction, something that Wilkinson apparently misses. And it is not as simplistic as he makes it.

NOT CORRECTABLE

Apparently Wilkinson is not open to correction or adjustment on anything he has written. He is bold to say, "Some may debate the terminology in the book or take exception to my interpretations. But that doesn't bother me much."⁶⁰ He already knows some will rightly object to his unbibli-

cal terminology but he says in effect, "Who cares." His pride is also staggering:

"I used to see *myself* as someone who might experience a miracle someday. Now I see that God is ready to do miracles through me regularly to meet important needs for others. (And I'm on Heaven's list of reliable miracle delivery agents.)"⁶¹

Wilkinson addresses pastors and asks them to "consider preaching through these topics to further equip your congregation to live in a miraculous partnership with the Spirit."⁶² He teases ministers by suggesting if the pastors get the people into his miracle program, their "church would be bursting at the seams with people who have witnessed what God can do through them and who can't wait to learn more."⁶³ He does not mention that the cost is really high and is a lot more than just the \$22.99 spent to purchase his book. The cost is standing in the pulpit without the Bible and preaching Bruce Wilkinson and his experiences and stories. In effect Wilkinson is saying, "Preach me and my undocumented stories, not the Scripture, for church growth."

While reading through *You Were Born for This*, one might hear the words from the old Superman television program: "Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. ... It's Superman!" Yet one may more suitably recall Dorothy's disappointment that the Wizard of Oz turned out to be a mere fallible man behind a curtain operating levers and not a miraculous wonder worker. And then there was also Professor Marvel, the Wizard's pre-Oz character back in Kansas, who in Wilkinson-like fashion "nudged" young Dorothy Gale to go back to her home to Auntie Em and Uncle Henry with cold readings and information gleaned from mundane and underhanded means.

The knowledge that God is somehow at work in all the events of our lives, however mysterious, is a comforting thought (Philippians 2:13). That we know God is working all

things together for our good to conform us to Christ's image (Romans 8:28-29) is doubly comforting. That His plans and purposes will never be thwarted is an antidote to discouragement (Isaiah 46:10).

But in Wilkinson's parallel universe, the English language is made to stand on its head. Human techniques that anyone can learn and use are called miracles and everything is ratcheted up to amazing extremes. Wilkinson looks more like the man behind the curtain when put under biblical scrutiny. In his world, giving away money is deemed miraculous. Cold readings (and perhaps clairvoyance) are characterized as miraculous. Words are coined and called part of the miracle process. A maze of contrived "keys" are constructed and taught and called mechanisms for miracles. No believer should ever be misled like this. We were not born for miracles, but born to know God and Christ, serve Him, and bring glory to His name (Ephesians 3:21), whatever our individual calling.

When Wilkinson and Kopp turn water into wine, raise the dead, still a storm, heal a leper, walk on water, are unaffected by a poisonous serpent bite, or give sight to the blind, then perhaps Christians can accept and acknowledge them as modern miracle men. Until then we should remain skeptical and guarded.

Endnotes:

1. Bruce Wilkinson, *You Were Born for This*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2009, pp. 158, 159.
2. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "The Christianizing of Human Potential Philosophies - Is Bruce Wilkinson's Dream Giver a Borrowed Daydream?" *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2004, pp. 1, 15-24.
3. Prof. John Malan, "Wilkinson's Dream For Africa Shattered," ellipsis and italics in original. Document available at: <http://www.discrimennt-ministries.org/AfricaDreamShattered.htm>. See also, "Dream Taker?," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2006, pp. 3, 27.
4. *You Were Born for This*, op. cit., pg. 41.
5. Ibid., pg. 4.
6. Ibid., pg. 5.
7. Ibid., pg. 7.
8. Ibid., pp. 50-51.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., pg. 16.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., pp. 49, 51.

13. Dave Breese, *Know The Marks of Cults*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1975, pg. 69.
14. *You Were Born for This*, op. cit., pg. 51.
15. Ibid., pg. 26, ellipsis and italics in original.
16. Ibid., pg. 54.
17. F.E. Hamilton and R.L. Harris in Merrill C. Tenney, *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1976, Vol. 4, pg. 920.
18. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, Vol. 1, pg. 609.
19. *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*, op. cit., Vol. 4, pg. 921, italics in original.
20. *Know The Marks of Cults*, op. cit., pp. 58-59, 63.
21. *You Were Born for This*, op. cit., pg. 45.
22. Ibid., pg. 21.
23. Ibid., pg. 23.
24. New Testament passages which list or name spiritual gifts are Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4:11, and 1 Peter 4:10-11. None of these passages indicate a spiritual gift of "nudging."
25. *You Were Born for This*, op. cit., pp. 93-94.
26. Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology*. Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press, 1952, pg. 161.
27. *You Were Born for This*, op. cit., pg. 87.
28. Ibid., pg. 20.
29. Ibid., pg. 103.
30. Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973, pg. 126.
31. William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976, pp. 31-32.
32. *You Were Born for This*, op. cit., pg. 108.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., italics in original.
35. J.D. Douglas, Editor, *New 20th Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991, pg. 682.
36. *You Were Born for This*, op. cit., pp. 113, 114.
37. Ibid., pg. 114.
38. Ibid., pg. 115.
39. Ibid., pg. 117.
40. Ibid., pp. 117-118.
41. Ibid., pg. 122.
42. Ibid., pp. 131, 133.
43. Ibid., pg. 126.
44. Ibid., pg. 129.
45. Ibid., pg. 131.
46. Ibid., pg. 147.
47. Ibid., pg. 137.
48. Ibid., pp. 138, 139, italics in original.
49. Ibid., pg. 145.
50. Ibid., pg. 150.
51. Ibid., pg. 159.
52. Ibid., pg. 168.
53. Ibid.
54. Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976, note for Matthew 6:4, pg. 1453.
55. *You Were Born for This*, op. cit., pg. 169.
56. Ibid., pg. 171.
57. Ibid., pg. 184.
58. Ibid., pg. 193.
59. W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, pg. 452.
60. *You Were Born for This*, op. cit., pg. 213.
61. Ibid., pg. 215, italic in original.
62. Ibid., pg. 220.
63. Ibid.

2012: A Spaced-Out Oddity

(continued from page 1)

"The newest band of [doomsday] soothsayers is telling us that the world is going to end on or about December 21, 2012. ... The New Age promoters of the 2012 doomsday prophecy got it from their interpretation of the Mayan calendar. Among their other achievements, the Maya — native Americans whose ancestral lands are in Guatemala, Belize, the Mexican states of Tabasco and Chiapas, the Yucatan Peninsula, and the western regions of Honduras and El Salvador — developed a calendar which could accurately track the movements of the sun and the constellations over thousands of years. *Supposedly* (according to the Long Count of the Mayan calendar), the present world cycle, the Age of the Jaguar, began on August 13, 3114 BC, and is due to end on December 21, 2012."³

Christian pastor and author Mark Hitchcock explains: "The Maya weren't just interested in time, they

were obsessed with it. ... The Mayan calendar keepers painstakingly charted the cycles of the moon, the sun, and Venus."⁴ Further, "The Mayan obsession with time can be seen in the fact that they developed approximately 20 different calendars."⁵

Maya expert Mark Van Stone notes:

"Just as we do, the Maya had several calendars to record time. The Maya had very complex and interlocking calendar systems, which were as precise as modern day calendars. In the same way our Gregorian count ties to an important event, —the birth of Christ— the Maya calendar also counts forward from an important 'Creation' date, 11 August 3114 BCE. The Maya recorded time mainly using 3 interconnected calendars — the *Tzolk'in*, the *Haab*, and the *Long Count*. Like us, they kept track of other cycles, but these only appeared in special circumstances."⁶

Van Stone also says:

"...the *Long Count* (the calendar which reaches a critical number in 2012). This is a number, used

similarly to our numerical 'year 2008,' counting 'years' and days since the last Creation in 3114 BC. (The 'years' here counted, called *Haabs*, are only 360 days long)."⁷

He further observes, "Immediately after the Long Count is the *Tzolk'in* date. This is a divinatory calendar of 260 days."⁸ And that "**the ancient Maya were fanatical about situating their events in time.** Often the date on a monument will occupy more space than the event that it features."⁹

2012: DOOMSDAY ARRIVAL OR PARADISE REGAINED?

One source has correctly noted:

"All [the 2012 doomsayers] agree that terrible things will happen to the Earth in 2012, but many also assert that this will be the beginning of a new age of happiness and spiritual growth for the survivors."¹⁰

Indeed, some who believe that December 21, 2012 is significant believe that this date will bring the end of the world. Whereas, others believe that this date will bring about "an era of quantum transformation" and a