

## I. The Flight

- A. Some time ago I was on a long flight. I wanted to pop in my earbuds and stare at the clouds.
- B. The man next to me had other ideas.
- C. He was a commercial airline pilot. Smart. Friendly. The kind of guy you'd actually want to talk to.
- D. He started telling me about his house in Hawaii. Beautiful location. Incredible views. The more he talked, the more excited he got. I said, "That sounds amazing."
- E. He said, "I really manifested something great there."
- F. I asked him what he meant, and that opened a door.
- G. He explained that everything in his life — the house, the career, his wife — was the result of his intentional practice of projection. A thought or vision he had held, focused on, and released into the universe. Everything he had, he had spoken into being.
- H. Then it went deeper. The more we talked, the more he described the astral beings and angelic entities that guided him. They gave him direction. He communicated with them regularly.
- I. Honestly, I felt the spiritual weight of that. Not because he was strange. He wasn't — that was the point.
- J. He was thoughtful. Successful. A good man. He was clearly a man who had been reaching toward something for a long time, with real intention and real hunger. And I remember thinking: He is reaching for something real. I'm just not sure he knows who he is reaching toward.
- K. Here is the sentence I have been carrying ever since:  
**1. He had real spiritual hunger. He just had the wrong address.**

## II. What This Is About

- A. Welcome to part seven of our summer series: **What's the Difference?**
- B. We've spent several weeks looking at the Christian family traditions. Today we turn to a different category: what gets called alternative or experiential spirituality.
- C. Specifically, we're looking at what millions of people call **New Age & SBNR: Spiritual But Not Religious**
- D. It sounds like this:
- E. I believe in something beyond the material world. I just don't believe in organized religion. I have my own spiritual path.
- F. This is not fringe. Pew Research found that 70% of U.S. adults describe themselves as spiritual in some way — and 22% call themselves spiritual but not religious. That's tens of millions of people. That's your coworker, your daughter, your neighbor, maybe you.
- G. This spirituality shows up in four main expressions:
  - 1. The New Age Movement
  - 2. Astrology
  - 3. Manifestation culture
  - 4. A Course in Miracles
- H. Here is what I want you to hear before we go any further:
  - 1. The spiritual hunger underneath all of this is completely legitimate. Every human heart longs for transcendence, for wonder, for something that cannot be weighed or marketed or explained.
- I. But here is where every one of these systems goes wrong:
  - 1. Every answer the New Age world offers moves upward — by human effort, spiritual technique, personal awakening — toward a divine reality that turns out, at the end of the road, to be you.
  - 2. The Gospel moves in exactly the opposite direction. Downward. God coming to find you.
- J. Let me show you what I mean.

## III. What They Get Right

- A. Before I show you where this worldview goes wrong, I want to be honest about what it gets right.
  - 1. **First: it refuses to flatten reality into matter and molecules.**
    - a) When a twenty-two-year-old opens her astrological birth chart instead of her Bible, she is doing something honest. She is refusing to accept that the universe is nothing more than atoms and neurons and quarterly earnings reports.
    - b) She is right about that.
    - c) The cosmos is not flat. It is layered with meaning. The Psalmist said it: "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.*" (Psalm 19:1) The stars do mean something.
  - 2. **Second: it recognizes that human beings ache for transcendence.**
    - a) The hunger for something that cannot be weighed, measured, or bought. That is one of the most human things about you.
    - b) Augustine put it in a sentence that has never been improved: "Our heart is restless, O Lord, until it rests in Thee."
    - c) That restlessness is not a malfunction. It is a homing signal.
  - 3. **Third: it knows that something in us is broken and desperately needs restoration.**
    - a) The longing for wholeness is honest. The diagnosis that the world is not as it should be — and that we are not as we should be — that is correct.
    - b) Something is wrong. Something needs to be fixed. New Age spirituality does not invent that intuition. It inherits it.
- B. Those three instincts are not wrong. The problem is the address where that hunger tries to get filled.

## IV. THE ENGINE

- A. Before we look at the four expressions, I need to show you the engine.
- B. In the Garden of Eden, when the devil tempted Eve, he made one promise:
  - 1. "*For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" (Genesis 3:5

- a) “You will be like God.”
- C. That is the engine.
  - 1. You will be like God.
  - 2. Not: God will come to you.
  - 3. Not: God will scoop you into a relationship.
- D. This was fully on display when St. Paul walked into Athens around 50 AD.
- E. He ran into the Stoics.
  - 1. **The Stoics believed:**
    - a) That a universal rational principle saturated the cosmos.
    - b) That the human spirit participated in this larger divine order.
    - c) That salvation — if you could call it that — was alignment with that cosmic reality.
    - d) That the divine was not a person but a pervasive, impersonal force.
- F. Change the vocabulary. Add an Instagram gradient and a healing circle. The mood feels very familiar.
- G. This is why Paul’s warning lands so close to home:
  - 1. *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”* (Colossians 2:8)
- H. He was not writing about a cult in the desert. He was writing about something mainstream.
- I. Just a few verses later, Paul says:
  - 1. God has... *“wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us... having nailed it to the cross.”* (Colossians 2:14)
- J. That is the center. Not energy. Not awakening. Not alignment. Not inner divinity. The Cross.
- K. At the Cross, Jesus did not give you a technique for climbing toward God. He carried your sin, canceled your debt, absorbed your judgment, and opened the way home.
- L. A crossless spirituality is a trip to the wrong address.
- V. Four Expressions
  - A. **THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT**
    - 1. Wrong address: God becomes an energy field.
    - 2. At its core, the New Age Movement holds these beliefs:
      - a) God is an impersonal force — an all-surrounding energy field that permeates everything.
      - b) The Holy Spirit is an energy that can be tapped and directed.
      - c) Jesus was a spiritually advanced teacher who successfully tuned into the universal Force — not uniquely divine, just successfully awakened.
      - d) Humanity is divine, here to realize its own godhood.
      - e) Salvation is the use of techniques — yoga, crystals, visualization, meditation — to become fully aware that you are a god.
      - f) Sin is simply not knowing you are a god.
      - g) Death is the moment you blend back into the cosmos.
    - 3. In New Age spirituality, God doesn’t transcend the universe. God is the universe and everything in it, including you.
    - 4. It’s the wrong address.
    - 5. So what does the Gospel say?
    - 6. Something is missing from that entire system, and the omission is shattering:
      - a) Missing: a Crucified Savior.
    - 7. An impersonal force cannot love you. It vibrates. It attracts. It resonates. But it cannot bleed for you.
    - 8. The Bible does not merely say God is love. It shows you love with nails through its hands.
      - a) *“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8)
    - 9. At the Cross, God did not send a vibration. He sent His Son. He did not give you energy. He gave you blood-bought mercy.
  - B. **ASTROLOGY**
    - 1. Wrong address: Revelation moves from God’s Word to the stars.
    - 2. This is not fringe. One survey of young Americans who already embrace or relate to astrology found that 72% say they rely on it to make important life decisions — romance, career, health.
    - 3. This is a billion-dollar industry built on the belief that the stars determine who you are, what you should do, and when you should move.
    - 4. Here is the theological problem, stated plainly:
      - a) Astrology moves the authority question from God to the stars.
    - 5. The question is no longer What does God say about who I am? It is What do the stars say?
    - 6. That is not self-discovery. That is a rival revelation.
      - a) Wrong address.
    - 7. So what does the Gospel say?
    - 8. God addressed it Himself, speaking from the whirlwind in Job 38, where he mentions constellations and stars by name:
      - a) *“Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the belt of Orion? Can you bring out Mazzaroth in its season? Or can you guide the Great Bear with its cubs? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you set their dominion over the earth?”* (Job 38:31-33)
      - b) The point is unmistakable: the stars answer to God. God does not answer to the stars. And only He has the power, the right, the wisdom, and the LOVE to tell you who you really are.

## C. MANIFESTATION AND THE SECRET

1. Wrong address: Providence gets replaced by personal control.
2. Rhonda Byrne published a best-selling book called **The Secret** in 2006. Thirty-five million copies sold. Fifty languages.
3. It packaged a century-old tradition called New Thought: God is a universal Mind, your thoughts participate in that Mind, and like attracts like.
4. Beneath the motivational language, The Secret teaches this:
  - a) God is "One Universal Mind" that pervades all things.
  - b) Your thoughts are magnetic frequencies.
  - c) You are the co-creator of your reality.
  - d) Jesus was not a Savior — He was someone who achieved "Christ consciousness," a state anyone can reach through right thinking.
  - e) Sin does not exist.
  - f) Bad things come from negative thinking, not moral failure before a holy God.
  - g) Wrong address.
  - h) So what does the Cross say?
  - i) **Manifestation produces a new law. When something bad happens, the logic is inescapable: I attracted this. I must have been thinking negatively.**
    - (1) That is not liberation. That is condemnation no matter how many crystals you vibrate.
  - j) But at the Cross, Jesus does not hand you a new law. He takes the curse of the law onto Himself.
    - (a) *"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us."* (Galatians 3:13)
    - (2) Your suffering is not proof that you failed to manifest correctly. Your pain is not evidence that God has abandoned you.
    - (3) And though suffering remains a great mystery, one thing we do know.
    - (4) The Cross says God entered the place of suffering, shame, sin, and sorrow to bring you safely home.
5. Manifestation feels empowering until life breaks your heart. Then it becomes cruel.
  - a) Because if your thoughts create your reality, then your suffering becomes your fault. Your painful losses. Your sickness. Your betrayal. Your depression. Your unanswered prayer. Suddenly you are not just hurting — you are guilty for hurting.
6. The Gospel does not do that.
  - a) **You are not held together by the quality of your thoughts. You are held together by the mercy of your Father.**
7. The Gospel says suffering is real. Evil is real. Sin is real. And God enters the wreckage rather than blaming you for failing to vibrate correctly.

## D. A COURSE IN MIRACLES

1. Wrong address: Sin gets renamed as illusion, so salvation becomes self-realization.
2. This is the graduate-level version of The Secret.
  - a) **In 1975, Helen Schucman — a Columbia University professor of medical psychology — claimed to receive this text by dictation from an inner voice she identified as Jesus.**
  - b) Popularized by Marianne Williamson and Oprah's spiritual platform.
3. Its core claims:
  - a) The physical world is an illusion, born of separation from God.
  - b) The ego is the source of all suffering.
  - c) Sin is not real — it is the ego's projection. Your true self is already divine and complete.
  - d) Jesus is not a Savior — He is an elder brother who completed the curriculum. A model, not a mediator.
4. A Course in Miracles uses Christian language — Jesus, Holy Spirit, forgiveness, salvation — while systematically redefining every single term.
5. People leave church, find A Course in Miracles, and say: This is so much more loving.
6. **It feels loving because it resolves guilt by declaring guilt an illusion. But anesthesia is not healing.**
7. Wrong address.
8. So what does the Gospel say?
9. If sin is not real, the Cross is unnecessary. If the Cross is unnecessary, you have no Savior. You have a curriculum. And no curriculum can run to find you when you are lost.
10. **The Cross is proof that God took your guilt more seriously than you do — and loved you more deeply than you dared imagine.**

## E. The Architecture Underneath

1. Those four look different on the surface. Underneath, they share one architecture.
  - a) Every expression of the New Age world asks the same question: How does the human ascend to the divine? Through technique. Through awakening. Through manifesting. Through ego dissolution. **The human is the active agent, moving upward.**
    - (1) The Gospel asks the opposite question: How does the divine descend to the human? And answers: through the Cross. God moves downward. God is the active agent.
2. **One gives you a ladder. The other gives you a Savior.**
3. No birth chart, no manifesting practice, no Course in Miracles curriculum can give you this. Listen:
  - a) *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,"* (1 Peter 3:18)

4. You don't bring yourself to God. Jesus did what you could never do.

#### VI. PAUL IN ATHENS — ANSWER

A. Back to Paul.

B. He walked through a city full of altars. Then he stood up and said this:

1. *"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things... He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being."* (Acts 17:24-25, 27-28)

C. Five moves. Watch them.

##### 1. **First, the invisible Creator God made the world.**

- a) He is not the world. He is not contained in crystals or birth charts or chakras. He made those things.
- b) The New Age world collapses the distance between Creator and creation — God becomes the energy that flows through everything.
- c) Paul will not allow that. This God stands outside what He made and calls it His.

##### 2. **Second, this God needs nothing from you.**

- a) An energy field needs you to vibrate at the right frequency. A law of attraction needs you to think the right thoughts. A manifesting practice needs you to script and visualize and hold the feeling.
- b) That thing you're looking for...
  - (1) Under every human system, you earn it.
  - (2) Under God's system, He gives it.
- c) This God gives to all life, breath, and all things. He is the giver, not the receiver. He is not waiting for your frequency to be high enough. He acts out of His own character — freely, fully, without conditions.

##### 3. **Third, this God made you.**

- a) "In Him we live and move and have our being."
- b) You are not a divine being who forgot your godhood. You are a creature who bears the image of God, but you are not God.
- c) Your dignity is that you were made in the image of the God of power, justice, mercy, and boundless love.

##### 4. **Fourth, this God is close.**

- a) Paul says He is not far from each one of us. He is not a distant force requiring the secret techniques to access.
- b) He is not reached by meditation or raised vibration or accumulated spiritual practice. He is near. He has been near the whole time, on the basis of the Cross, and is accessed through faith so simple a child can do it.

##### 5. **Fifth, this God rose from the dead, shattering the barriers of time, human limitation, and transcendent existence itself.**

- a) Not a metaphor. Not a spiritual awakening used as a teaching illustration. A datable, historical, empty-tomb event.
  - (1) *"He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."* (Acts 17:31)
- b) Energy fields do not rise from the dead. And that changes everything.

#### D. **Paul walked through Athens and found one altar that stopped him.**

- 1. The inscription read: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.
- 2. The most honest thing in the whole city. In the middle of all the systems — all the philosophies, all the techniques, all the spiritual addresses — one altar that simply admitted: we haven't found it yet.
- 3. Maybe that's you.
- 4. You've done the work. You've read the charts. You've scripted your manifestations. You've meditated. You've followed the accounts, done the healing, held the crystals.
- 5. And something in you — quiet, persistent, honest — still says: I haven't arrived. There is still something I haven't found.
- 6. That part of you is the most honest part of you.
  - a) That is your Unknown God altar.
  - b) And the God you have been reaching for is not an unknown force. He is a Father who has made Himself known in Jesus Christ, and we want to help every hungry soul find Him.

#### VII. Conclusion

- A. Let me say this: what I've shown you today is the surface.
- B. The manifestation coaches, the astrology apps, the channeled texts — these didn't originate with social media.
- C. They go back further. Much further. To the mystery religions of the ancient world. To systems that Paul walked into, that the New Testament writers named directly, and that the Bible says are not merely human invention.
- D. Next week we go behind the curtain. Where these ideas actually come from. You won't want to miss it.
- E. But before we go there — we need to come back here, to that pilot who manifested such great things.
- F. I never got to finish that conversation. But here is what I would have said.
  - 1. In the New Age telling, the story of the Prodigal Son ends like this: the son comes to himself in the far country, realizes that he is the father, wakes up from the illusion of separation.
  - 2. Self-realization. He was never really lost. He just forgot who he was. The robe and the ring were always his. He just needed to remember.
- G. That is not what the story says.
  - 1. *"But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."* (Luke 15:20)
- H. The father was watching the road.

- I. He saw his boy a great way off — which means he had been watching. Every day. Scanning the horizon. Waiting for the silhouette of the son who had wasted everything.
- J. And when he saw him — this broken, pig-smelling, out-of-excuses failure of a son — he did not wait for the boy to remember his own divinity.
- K. He ran.
- L. The only reason a man like that runs is if love has completely overwhelmed dignity.
  - 1. He ran.
  - 2. At Pathway, we are here to join that running, to call the wandering home, and to help every person groping in the dark find the wonders of salvation in Jesus Christ.
- M. **We proclaim a message of a Great Creator God who presents himself as an ideal Father who runs to embrace you, just as you are.**
- N. And the road the Father ran down leads all the way to Calvary, where the Son was pierced so prodigals could come home.
- O. What's the Difference? That is the difference.
- P. We will not stand back while people grope in the dark for what only Jesus can give.
  - 1. We have seen the Cross.
  - 2. We know the way home.
  - 3. We know the Savior who forgives guilt, breaks lies, and runs to prodigals.
- Q. So we will speak, pray, work, invite, and go. Not with contempt, but with compassion. Not with theories, but with Christ.
- R. Our neighbors are starving, and the answer is not a vibe, a chart, or a technique. The answer is Jesus. Join the mission. Help bring the lost home.