



Ilan speaks at the young adults  
"Congregation Dorshey Panav"  
(Seekers of His Face)

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# LEADERS *in the* MAKING

By **Ilan Beckermann** as told to **Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson**

I was living just a few hundred meters from the Gaza border when we were attacked on October 7th. A friend and I had stayed up all night in my yard talking about God and His ways. At one point around 2:00am my friend told me, "You know the atmosphere in your yard is so different than the rest of the village."

At 6:00am we said goodbye and I took a quick shower and crawled into bed. At 6:30am the first sirens went off.

## Point of Origin

Before I tell you the rest, you should know a bit about my background.

I am the fourth out of five children and the first in our family to be born in Israel. My parents named me Ilan (the Hebrew word for a living tree) after the first tree my mother planted when she came to the country. My father then spoke a blessing over me from the first chapter of Psalms.

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Ilan with members of his unit during his service in the IDF

***My time in the army was a mix of opportunity and struggle. Initially tagged for a special ops unit, I was reassigned after they discovered my short temper and tendency for aggression...***

Blessed is the one... whose delight is in the law of the Lord... **That person is like a tree (Ilan)** planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers. (Psalm 1:1-3)

I have kept that scripture close to my heart and seen it fulfilled many times.

Growing up, my father was a pastor of a very conservative congregation and my siblings and I were therefore raised in a very strict household. I always believed there was a God, but I never saw myself as a true believer like them. My mother would say I was a good, quiet child. In reality, I simply figured out early on how to keep my “other life” outside of the house—or at least away from my father.

Life for me was always about give and take. What can I give and what can I get for it? How can I overcome

something that was difficult for me by leveraging something that was easier for me? For example, in school I was really good at math so I would do someone else’s math work and in exchange, they would do my history, etc.

Once when I was in grade school, I asked my dad for some shekels to get a slice of pizza. He answered me jokingly, “Go get a job.” I didn’t know he was joking and I really wanted pizza. So I turned around, went down to the local market and asked the guy at the vegetable stand if I could work. He paid me 30 shekels for 3 hours of peeling garlic.

This was a turning point for me. I felt so good about being able to get something on my own that I went back often to peel garlic for spare change. This was the beginning of my business mindset.



Ilan as a child

In the 5th grade I got a job selling Israeli flags to drivers around Independence Day. I made 3 shekels for every flag I sold for 15 shekels. But I quickly realized if I bought the flags myself I could bring my own team of friends and enjoy more of the profit.

Every year I expanded my sales and would send out teams to different areas to sell sweets, holiday trinkets and even candied apples.

## Relationships and God

Around the 9th grade I began attending national Messianic youth conferences. There for the first time I was exposed to the Lord in terms of a relationship rather than just a guy who keeps score of dos and don'ts. This was a beautiful season for me spiritually. I would pray and He would speak to me and I felt so close to the Lord.

Still, despite this incredible experience, I struggled to rid myself of the double life I was so used to having. On top of that, my memories of anything to do with God and family were negative. Our family was poor and though I grew up surrounded by people, those people didn't offer meaningful relationships.

I viewed ministers as people who would sacrifice their family for "the calling of God." My father only gave me his full attention when I would get into trouble. He never told me he loved me or was proud of me—my interactions with him were largely when he was displeased with my failure to achieve his standard.

My time in the army was a mix of opportunity and struggle. Initially tagged for a special ops unit, I was reassigned after they discovered my short temper and tendency for aggression—even toward my own team. Instead, I was given other responsibilities, where I did well enough, and completed my service as a combat commander.

It was when I got out, however, that my life took a series of turns that led me to where I am today. That time feels like a blur—a whirlwind of studies, meeting the woman who would become my wife, smoking weed, discovering the financial benefits of selling it, and the fateful day I discovered the book of Ecclesiastes.

## Then My Friend Turned

I had a friend whose dad was also a pastor. We bonded over our rebellious lifestyles. Then he got radically saved. His life changed overnight. He married his girlfriend and started talking to me about God all the time. "You should read Ecclesiastes," he told me once when we were hanging out.

I had no idea what he was talking about. But for days I kept hearing that word "Ecclesiastes" in my sleep, in the shower and even while I was high. Finally, I decided to Google it and recognized the original name of the book in the Hebrew Bible "Kohelet."

I started reading Ecclesiastes and was shocked by what King Solomon had to say. Here was a guy who had everything and tried everything I had dreamed of doing with my life, and yet he reached the end and concluded it was all meaningless. My aspirations to be surrounded by wealth and women shattered in an instant.

## God and The Girl

As my interest in the ways of the Lord increased, I spent a lot of time reading the Bible. My girlfriend, Tanelia, followed suit and began reading hers. But I found that if I wasn't reading in front of her she wouldn't read either. It was clear to me she was only acting interested in my God because she was interested in me.

So when I was invited to a young adults retreat, Tanelia insisted on coming with me. Again I felt like she was



Ilan and Tanelia before October 7th in their home village of Nativ Haasara

Israeli takes a picture of dividing wall from Nativ Haasara village that borders Gaza



**While some of the villages near Gaza can be a few kilometers away from the fence, our village actually sits on the border with Gaza. There is an area in the fence called “Hanativ Lashalom” (the path to peace)...**

just coming to be around me. So I decided we would go to the camp together, but when I got home I would break up with her. My reasoning was that I planned on marrying a believer. Even during times I wasn't following the Lord properly, I knew that was a must. As far as I was concerned, Tanelia was not a believer and as such, I was being convicted of my relationship with her.

During the conference she claimed to have had an encounter with God and gave her life to the Lord. At first, I wasn't completely buying it, because she had fooled me before. One of the leaders heard of her new “commitment” to the Lord and recommended a two-month discipleship program to give her a solid understanding of her faith. I told her I wasn't interested in going because I didn't believe she was serious about God. But when she said, “I'm going to this camp to learn about the Lord with or without you,” I finally believed she was serious.

By the time we completed the discipleship program I concluded that Tanelia was the woman I wanted to marry. We married within the year and began our new life in pursuit of the things of God.

## October 2023

Then October 7th arrived at our doorstep, literally.

I had been studying business and finance—investment, cryptocurrency and the like. We had just recently

discovered we were expecting our first child. I had been working as a guard at the Erez crossing into Gaza near our village and decided to focus on building my business in finance.

While some of the villages near Gaza can be a few kilometers away from the fence, our village actually sits on the border with Gaza. There is an area in the border wall called “Hanativ Lashalom” (the path to peace) that was always considered by the village as the designated road that would be used “once we had peace with Gaza.”

Most villages near Gaza get a 15 second siren warning before the first rocket falls. Because we're so close, when Gaza fires on us, we usually hear the explosion from the first rocket, then sirens go off to warn us of the rest of the rockets.

## God With Us

On October 7th, the sirens went off and kept going on and off as rockets flew overhead. It didn't take long to sense this felt different. For a moment I thought to myself, I have a gun and ammunition and I can go fight them! Then I saw this image in my mind of me going out and taking out all the terrorists with my friends

and neighbors and coming home to my wife only to find her with a bullet in her belly. In that moment I understood my responsibility to my household, so my priority was my wife and our unborn child.

Early on in the chaos I heard the Lord speak to me clearly, “This has nothing to do with you.” With those words I felt a complete and utter peace surround me even as I heard yelling in Arabic and the whistling of rockets overhead.

My wife and I went into the bomb shelter and that’s when we started getting all the strange communications on the group chats. “Have you been kidnapped?” “What’s your status?” “There’s a terrorist here, someone come help!”

Knowing because of our loud flooring, I would be able to hear if terrorists broke into our home. I had had no sleep the night before, so I loaded my gun and took a nap in the bomb shelter for about an hour.

Our friends and family were obviously concerned and were calling non-stop trying to advise us what we should do. I felt an overwhelming peace despite the noise and chaos that was going on outside and felt very protective over my wife and her early pregnancy.

We were being swarmed with messages telling us to flee for our lives, and that our entire village had been taken over. But I just told everyone, “Please don’t call us. We’re in a difficult situation as it is, but we’re at peace. If you can’t come here physically to help, just pray for us.”

## Not Yet

By 10:00am, we decided to pack our bags and went outside to try to load up the car. As I walked out of our house, I saw an abandoned parachute on the ground. I took a picture of it and sent it to the neighborhood group chat and everyone freaked out, “That belongs to one of the terrorists who parachuted into the village, don’t go near it!”

To me it sounded like everyone was being paranoid, so I kept going towards the car. That’s when a slew of gun fire rang from the bushes and I dropped to the ground and crawled back into the house.

I understood the message...“*Don’t go yet.*”

About 45 minutes later I went out again and several rockets flew over my head and hit a house nearby. I ran back inside.

The electricity and water had been shut off from the moment the attacks began. Needing to charge my phone, I snuck out, turned on the ignition of our car and left it running with the phone plugged in. At some point I cautiously ventured down the street to see what was happening. The scene was something out of a horror movie—bodies on the ground, smoke rising, and shattered remnants of everything. Again, I ran back inside. No terrorist followed me.

## Escape

I served in combat when I was in the army and I know to recognize the sound of our soldiers’ movements. So when our soldiers arrived at our house, I knew it was them! They on the other hand, didn’t know who I was —and I look Middle Eastern! Still, I was so relieved I stuck my head out of our window and fifteen IDF soldiers instantly turned their M16’s on me.

“Talk!” They yelled at me. They wanted to hear my accent. It was the first moment all day that I felt fear. I started firing off every fact I knew about myself—my name, age, weight, ID number—my life story. Then my wife started yelling, “He’s my husband!” It was only a few moments of uncertainty, but my life flashed before my eyes.

The soldiers were satisfied, wished us God speed, and moved on to the next area to search out terrorists who at this point had taken over the entire southern section of our village.

We went back to our bomb shelter to wait for more news. It was around 5pm—almost 11 hours after the attacks began that we received the most incredible text message from the head of security in the village. “Permission granted to evacuate...”



REUTERS/Tsafir Abayov

Rocket attacks on residents of Nativ Haasara are common and often hit without any warning

Ilan with his son who has only known life during war in Israel



The young adults get together during Passover 2023 that birthed our congregation

I didn't read the rest of the message, I packed up the car and got in the passenger seat. I told my wife, "Drive as fast as you can. Don't stop for anything. I'll shoot at any threat I see." She hit the gas and we flew past bodies, abandoned weapons, empty shells, fire, smoke and more bodies until we reached safety.

## New Life

Our village remained evacuated for a long time, so we left our life in our desert village and moved to the seaside city of Ashkelon. Our son was born a few months later, and I found myself reconsidering what I wanted to do with my life spiritually.

I didn't like my father's approach, but it influenced me as to how I presented God to others. When I would witness to people, I always presented our faith intellectually as strict and demanding and people would be turned off. I decided I wasn't good at evangelizing and remember telling a friend this. He responded, "You misunderstand what witnessing is. Everyone is called to be a witness—using words is optional." That moment changed my perspective drastically. Suddenly, living my life with integrity as a witness of the Lord mattered.

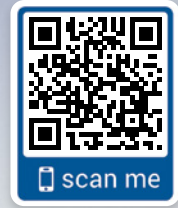
I had always feared being a minister because I didn't want to have minister's children who would turn out like me. I also didn't want to be a youth pastor because I knew how much teenage drama they had to deal with. Still, slowly, as I grew closer to the Lord, I found myself looking for ways to serve Him.

There was a long process of dragging my heels, but I found myself surrounded by quality young people who wanted to pour into other young people. Ashkelon has some 20 congregations but none of them are Hebrew speaking, and most teenagers in Israel speak Hebrew as their native language. My friends had started a Hebrew speaking gathering of young adults and kept insisting I join their leadership team. Finally I acquiesced.

In early 2024, we heard about the Jerusalem Bible Institute and everyone got excited. Our team was not lacking in passion, but we did think we could benefit from Bible and leadership training—especially in the ways of the Holy Spirit. Our leadership team unanimously decided to join and we've just completed the first semester of studies together.

I have to say this school came just at the right time for us as a team. I love the relationships that have been built. I love hearing from so many leaders in Israel who are sharing from their experience and not just theory. And of course, I love hearing testimonies and seeing God coming through at the end of each story in ways you'd never dream. ■

**Ashkelon has some 20 congregations but none of them are Hebrew speaking...My friends had started a Hebrew speaking gathering of young adults and kept insisting I join their leadership team.**



Shalom from Jerusalem,

If you were to sit with each of the students from the **Jerusalem Bible Institute**, you'd find that each one of them has a story of battles and near misses. A story where things were just one wrong decision away from complete disaster. A story of people who were met by chance and relationships that were built by destiny.

Now they're here in Jerusalem, absorbing the Word of God, learning His ways and already actively passing on their knowledge of Him to other young Israelis.

**JB**I opened its first year with 18 students. Yeshua was able to change the world with just 12.

With so many ministries in Israel focused on their own worthy projects, it is rare to find a ministry that exists because of cooperation of the Body of Messiah as a whole.

**JB**I is just that—a school that belongs to no one ministry. Rather, it is a community effort of leaders and pastors who give of their time and wisdom for the purpose of raising up mature believers who can demonstrate the love of God with signs and wonders.

If you'd like to be a part of this local Messianic Israeli effort, you can! **JB**I has **\$85k left to raise of their \$200k budget** and we can help them get there together!

In His service,



**Kobi & Shani Ferguson**



**Kobi Ferguson**  
President & CEO

**Shani Ferguson**  
COO

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