

# True Joy

**Psalm 144:1-15** One of my favorite Christmas hymns is “Joy to the World.” True joy can only come from Jesus, and on this Christmas morning we are more aware than ever of this fact. All over the world people are celebrating the birth of Jesus, and their joy is not based upon their circumstances. Their joy is based on the fact Jesus has come to touch their circumstances and every area of their lives.

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On Jan. 1, Britain-based 24-7 Prayer begins its Campus America initiative. The group aims to start prayer rooms on all 2,614 college and universities in the nation in hopes of seeing a year of unbroken prayer on America’s campuses.

“What we’re dreaming of is in a single year, giving an opportunity to every student in America to encounter the life-changing presence of God,” said Pete Greig, founder of the 24-7 Prayer network, which marks its tenth anniversary in 2010.

“We believe God is calling us to put tabernacles on the campuses of America,” he added.

With 74 percent fewer confessing Christians on college campuses than in the general population, Campus America leaders see universities as key in shaping the nation's spiritual trajectory.

"We feel like God wants to show up on these college campuses," said Robert Jobe, a board member of 24-7 Prayer USA.

He notes that in his book, *God on Campus*, author Trent Sheppard writes of a pattern of God showing up in a significant way on college campuses every 100 years.

Sheppard references the 1806 Haystack Revival that began at Williams College in Massachusetts and is said to have sparked the American foreign missions movement. A century later, the 1910 World Missions Conference was held in Edinburgh, Scotland. Many say the initiative launched the modern Protestant movement.

"We believe the significance of the timing is in tandem with what God is wanting to do, as prayer always prepares the way for something God wants to do on the earth," said David Blackwell, a national leader for 24-7 Prayer USA and a director of the Campus America project. "We hope to look back after 2010, maybe five years from now, and see a huge wave of students having been sent to the nations as well as to be effective in their place [in the marketplace]."

Blackwell said God spoke to him and Greig five years ago about calling the campuses of America to pray. They began providing resources for prayer efforts already under way on colleges, but sensed God's leading to begin the Campus America initiative in 2010.

"The idea of seeing these prayer rooms multiply on every campus in the U.S. seems thrilling and terrifying," Greig said. "Exciting because we have reason to believe it could impact the nation. Terrifying because this thing is utterly impossible unless God makes it happen."

Blackwell said they hope to see students on each campus commit to at least 72 hours of nonstop prayer, signing up in one-hour shifts.

“It would raise their level of faith, press some of their own comforts and boundaries and give extended time to what God would do through prayer,” Blackwell said of the commitment to unbroken prayer.

Several campuses have signed up, but Campus America is hoping the initiative will spread virally, much like the 24-7 Prayer movement has done.

Since it launched its first year of unbroken prayer in 2000, the 24-7 Prayer network has spread largely by word of mouth. Intercessors pray in one-hour shifts for local and global concerns, as well as requests sent to the 24-7 Prayer Web site. Groups meet in places as diverse as a brewery in Missouri, the U.S. Naval Academy, the British Parliament and a punk festival in Germany.

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## Ugandan Pastors Call for Apology From Rick Warren

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Ugandan church leaders are calling on California pastor Rick Warren to “biblically issue an apology for having wronged us.”

In a recent letter, the group of 20 denominational leaders said the *Purpose Driven Life* author caused “distress” in their

nation after he requested they speak out against the Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2009 currently awaiting approval in the Ugandan Parliament.

Photo: Uganda's Parliament building

“Your letter has caused great distress and the pastors are demanding that you issue a formal apology for insulting the people of Africa by your very inappropriate (sic) bully use of your church and purpose driven pulpits to coerse (sic) us into the ‘evil’ of Sodomy and Gaymorrah, (sic)” the group of pastors, calling themselves the Uganda National Pastors Task Force Against Homosexuality, said in a letter to Warren.

The rebuttal was spawned after the Saddleback Church founder issued a video statement on Dec. 11, calling the proposed bill “unjust, extreme and un-Christian toward homosexuals.” The bill would impose the death penalty for some homosexual acts and force pastors to report conversations about homosexual practices. Warren said the measure would also squelch “ the freedom to make moral choices.”

The task force, which was formed to respond to Warren, asserts that the bill has been widely misrepresented by homosexual activists and that its only purpose is to **protect the traditional family unit by halting the spread of homosexual acceptance.**

**The pastors further condemn the argument that the bill infringes on the right to privacy.**

“Not all things done in private are free of negative consequences on the public,” the letter said. “Most harmful behavior occurs in private: corruption, bribery, abortion, murder, rape, etc. Many laws prohibit these private practices.”

The letter stated that Warren, who works with the African pastors to help fight HIV/AIDS, could only oppose the bill

because he is ill-informed about its details, quoting Warren's words as evidence.

"As you yourself have said, 'The Bible says evil has to be opposed. Evil has to be stopped,' the letter read. 'The Bible does not say negotiate with evil. It says stop it. Stop evil.' (12/2007)"

"Since homosexuality is evil, you cannot possibly be against a law that seeks to stop it unless you have misunderstood it," the pastors stated.

In addition to Warren, numerous Christian leaders have spoken out against the Ugandan bill, including Exodus International, known as one of the largest outreach ministries to homosexuals.

The Ugandan pastors representing the National Fellowship of Born again Churches, Uganda Joint Christian Council and the Roman Catholic Church in Uganda to name a few insist that the Western homosexual lobby has jaded Christians and caused them to fervently oppose the bill.

The pastors' further declare that America and Europe have addressed homosexuality "with kid-gloves as a minor, private issue," but now "these societies are waking up too late on realizing that the matter affects how their entire society is ran."

The group continued to defend the bill by insisting that requiring everyone "including pastors, teachers and parents" to report knowledge of homosexual acts is necessary because of the prevalence of sexual abuse in same-sex schools in Africa. The group noted that a similar law protecting young women has been in effect for 15 years.

The task force also insists that the death penalty provision would only apply to "aggravated homosexuality," which includes rape of a minor and/or a handicapped person.

Further in the letter, the group conceded to amending the bill by reducing the “aggravated homosexuality” sentence to 20 years. The pastors also amended the bill to include stipulations for churches to provide counseling and rehabilitation to those struggling with same-sex attraction.

Though the pastors said they would support the bill with some amendments, they also said they would not make homosexuality legal in Uganda.

“In a globalized world, this western takeover of institutions by homosexuals has turned into international promotion of homosexuality and of other vices like abortion and pornography in other countries, ” the letter said. “Some members of Parliament in Uganda have looked at all these developments as a threat to strongly held family values in Uganda and everywhere and have sought to use their mandate as [the] people’s representatives to seek remedies before it is too late.”

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## **Several Pro-Life Groups Decry ‘Historic’ Health Reform Bill**

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Several pro-life groups responded to the Senate’s passage of landmark health care reform legislation Thursday morning with calls for more restrictive abortion language in the final measure.

President Obama called the vote “historic” and said it brings

the nation "toward the end of nearly a century-long struggle to reform America's health care system."

If the reforms pass, the legislation will be "the most important piece of social legislation since the Social Security act passed in the 1930s and the most important reform of our health care system since Medicare passed in the 1960s," President Obama said.

But pro-life groups including the Family Research Council, Traditional Values Coalition, Susan B. Anthony List and the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) decried the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that passed in a 60-39 party-line vote, saying it does not do enough to prevent government funding for abortion.

"As efforts begin to work out the differences between the Senate and House bills, we encourage pro-life members of the U.S. House ... to once again stand-up and protect the sanctity of human life," said Jay Sekulow, Chief Counsel of the ACLJ. "The final bill must include real protections for the unborn. And it must offer the American people a plan that is sensible and affordable."

"Without significant changes, Congress should reject this government-run, pro-abortion effort," he added. "It's time to stop the political deal-making and posturing and listen to the American people."

Family Research Council President Tony Perkins said most Americans oppose federal funding for abortion. He pointed to a recent Quinnipiac poll that found 72 percent of respondents favor Democratic Rep. Bart Stupak's amendment prohibiting abortion funding in the House bill.

"House and Senate conferees would do well to heed that warning when they come together to iron out their differences with the final bill, else this bill could collapse because of it," Perkins said.

Unlike the House bill, the Senate measure allows states to opt out of providing abortion coverage. But some pro-life advocates say taxpayers in states that opt-out would still be paying for abortions in states that allow abortion coverage.

Although Stupak has vowed to oppose a House-Senate compromise that allows abortion funding, other pro-life Democrats have indicated support for the Senate abortion language, *Time* magazine reported.

Negotiations between the House and Senate are to begin in January. Observers say a compromise is unlikely before February.

If the health reform legislation is signed into law without substantial revisions, attorney Mathew D. Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel, said his organization may file a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the bill.

In addition to allowing abortion funding, he says the health reform legislation exceeds Congress' authority by requiring that all Americans own health insurance as part of a proposed national health insurance program overseen by the government but offered through private insurers. The program would also prevent insurance companies from dropping patients who get sick.

"We believe it's unconstitutional," Staver said. "It exceeds Congress' authority to pass health care that requires everyone to carry insurance coverage and that penalizes employers that do not provide the level of coverage that the bill requires."

He said Congress has the authority to regulate interstate commerce, but he believes the health reform legislation goes beyond that scope. "Here they're trying to regulate every individual, including employers, which do not have any interstate commerce component, and that's beyond Congress' power to regulate," he said.

Pro-life leaders who oppose the health reform measure are also looking to the 2010 mid-term elections, when they hope to rally voters to unseat members of Congress who support abortion funding in the legislation.

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# Seeds of Promise

Paging through a botanical magazine last winter, I found myself marveling at the beautiful flowering trees and exotic plants pictured inside. In a moment of sheer inspiration, I decided it would be awesome to have more in my yard than one scruffy pine tree surrounded by a few faded wood chips. Whether impetus or impetuous, this surge of enthusiasm compelled me to order the "*Jasmine flowering tree*" so exquisitely displayed on page 5.

I was jazzed.  
In fact, I couldn't wait to get my plant.

Weeks after I had placed the order, however, my excitement was beginning to wane. "Where's my tree?" I wondered. "Spring will be over next week, and I still don't have an award-winning landscape!"

Finally, a package from California arrived. Staring blankly at the way-too-small parcel, I decided it must be the invoice or perhaps the all-important stakes needed to support my new tree. As I opened the little brown box, I simultaneously surveyed the area around me, looking to see where the rest of my delivery was hiding.

After carefully unveiling the mysterious arrival, I stared motionless into the shallow carton. Finally, in disbelief and agitation, I drew out a package of tiny, unimpressive seeds.

My initial excitement quickly dissipated. "You've got to be kidding me," I moaned. "They actually expect me to plant these dead flakes?" I simply could not imagine that I would have to WORK to obtain this tree.

Suddenly I came to a sobering realization: That's how many people would like to go through life-wanting results without doing the work, expecting a harvest without planting the seeds. Unfortunately in God's kingdom it doesn't work that way. In fact, most of what God accomplishes on Earth today starts in seed form.

When God wanted to send a deliverer to save mankind, He sent a seed and placed it in a plain human package. No wonder those who had so long awaited the coming of the Messiah were less than impressed to see an ordinary baby instead of a king.

And what about the teachings of this infant grown to full stature? He taught that the kingdom of God was like a seed which, when planted, would grow gradually: *"first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head"* (Mark 4:28, NASB).

In other words, Jesus told us that the dealings of God would almost always involve a maturing process. God gives us seedlings of promise that must be nurtured and cared for until they

can stand tall like an oak tree.

So many times we get discouraged when we don't see quick results from our labors. We may even become so frustrated that we are tempted to stop and quit. But God's Word helps us remember this principle: The plantings of the Lord begin in seed form.

In Old Testament times when Zerubbabel was rebuilding the temple, people laughed and scoffed as they compared the fledgling work to the majesty of the original built by Solomon. But through a messenger the Lord sent reassurance: "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin" (Zech. 4:10, NLT).

Right now you may have a beautiful picture in your heart of what you long for. You may even have dared to ask God for great things and have sensed His promise to you of success.

But when you opened your hands to receive, all you found was seeds—small, unimpressive conceptions. Don't be discouraged! Remember that seeds contain life and have within them the very essence of your promise. If you plant them in good soil and invest yourself in the nurture and development of them, they will grow and bloom forth with fruit.

Today, hear the Holy Spirit whisper to you, “Do not despise the day of small beginnings, for I delight to see the work begin.” Plant your faith, my friend, and watch and see what God will do.

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## 21 Days of Consecration

America’s greatest need is spiritual revival. The United States has seen an awakening in every century of its existence—except this one.

In the 18th century, the First Great Awakening swept thousands of colonists into the kingdom of God, and the courage to break free from Great Britain germinated in the soil of awakened hearts.

The 19th century witnessed the Second Great Awakening, which shook the American frontier with dramatic results. Entire denominations doubled their memberships in just years.

In the 20th century, the Pentecostal-charismatic movement had a global impact. During the last 100 years, nations of the world have been touched, and more than 640 million people now claim to be Spirit-filled.

America’s history has been informed consistently by significant spiritual renewal. However, we are now one-tenth of the way through the 21st century and, as far as we know, the U.S. has yet to experience a fresh awakening.

The ineffectiveness of the American church pushes us to ask some hard questions of God and ourselves:

Have we allowed ourselves to be preoccupied with political, social and peripheral issues more than with the nation's greatest need? Have we spent billions fighting political and social battles while losing the spiritual battle for the souls of a new generation? Have we chosen the easier way of carnal weaponry while neglecting God's more challenging way of spiritual intensity?

Have we picketed more than prayed, fought more than fasted and lashed out more than loved? Have we been duped into hoping that righteousness would be installed from the top down rather than recognizing that true awakening comes from the bottom up?

Does the church in America need to experience a fresh grace through repentance? Do we need a deep cleansing and renewal?

I believe that the answer to these questions is a painful and convicting yes.

Today's church is desperate for a deep and transformational revival that will change the spiritual landscape of our country again.

The question is, what would an awakening in 21st century America look like? What would happen if God shook this nation during the next decade? How would we know if revival and awakening were occurring?

Fasting from a pure heart with proper motives will help lead us into the brokenness required to receive God's next move in our nation. Fasting brings spiritual benefits because it helps us humble ourselves, presses us toward personal cleansing, focuses our hearts and weans us off earthly distractions.

It allows for heightened sensitivity to God's voice and positions us to bring deliverance to the captives. Fasting and prayer facilitate a personal renewal of our connection and intimacy with Jesus. His presence and pleasure become our reward.

Ultimately, the renewal of the church and of the nation will depend on people who respond to His call. True spiritual awakening in this century will be a grass-roots movement in which intimacy with Jesus is restored one heart at a time, producing the fruitfulness and freshness we all desire.

Why not let the 21st century awakening start in your church. More importantly, why not let it start in your heart?

**Billy Wilson** is executive director of the International Center for Spiritual Renewal and executive officer for Empowered 21: Global Congress on Holy Spirit Empowerment.

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