

After Trayvon Martin Tragedy, Pastors Vow To Drive Reconciliation

I've written numerous times about the tragic death of Trayvon Martin, who was killed 2.3 miles from my office. So this is personal to me.

In the aftermath of the verdict in the trial of George Zimmerman, an amazing thing has happened. While there has been racial unrest all over the country, there has been none in the city of Sanford, Fla., where the incident occurred.

I repeat—no violence, no looting and no arson, despite the strong feelings here and the fact that violence was predicted.

I believe one of the reasons is because pastors and other Christian leaders met and prayed and formed relationships and worked together to keep the peace.

On Wednesday, I had the privilege of hosting a group of these pastors in a four-hour meeting in which we discussed these issues and talked about what's ahead. We believe Sanford still has problems and that there is deep institutional racism in our city and in the country. But we also believe something good has happened with the relationships that have been formed and the progress that has been made.

We also issued the Sanford Declaration, which you can read below.

We are now inviting you to participate in a movement across the country to get churches and pastors involved in learning to be racially sensitive and to end injustice and institutional racism wherever it exists. That's because this problem is not a political problem. It's a sin problem. It's

spiritual in nature and must be dealt with in the spiritual realm.

Please read the Sanford Declaration below and sign it, and encourage others to sign it here.

The media has taken notice of our efforts. Our meeting was on the front page of the *Orlando Sentinel* and was covered by nearly all of the local television outlets. Now we are asking leaders from around the nation to initiate meetings just like this. Leaders from Atlanta, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Denver, Colorado and Toledo, Ohio, attended to see our model and have committed to hold similar meetings in the next few weeks. We have a vision for meetings in New York, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, St. Louis, Boston, Seattle, San Francisco and many other cities where there is a similar need.

A young Sanford pastor, Derrick Gay, who was part of our April 2012 documentary, *Sanford: The Untold Story*, is leading this effort with the help of other local leaders. If you want to be a part of it, you can email him at @.

We call on Christians around the country to meet and develop statements for their own communities. We also encourage clergy and individual Christians to sign the Sanford Declaration, a covenant of racial reconciliation, relationship and Christian cultural reformation. Sign your name as supporting these principles. Together we can show the world that Christians care and that we want to deal with the spiritual roots of racism in our culture.

Special note: Can you help us in this effort for racial understanding in America? As this movement develops, there will be costs involved. We are working with our non-profit partner Christian Life Missions to make these meetings happen. We need partners to stand with us financially to cover these costs in the future.

Please send a check of any size to Christian Life Missions,

600 Rinehart Road, Lake Mary, Fla., 32746. Mark it for racial reconciliation. You can also pay by phone during business hours at , or by PayPal by clicking here.

The Sanford Declaration: A Covenant of Racial Reconciliation, Relationship, and Christian Cultural Reformation

In the aftermath of the George Zimmerman verdict, and the need to address racism as a spiritual problem, a diverse group of Christian ministers and leaders drafted the following declaration in Sanford, Florida.

Today this group of ministers and leaders stands as representatives of the gospel of Jesus Christ and His church. We see racism as a threat to the Body of Christ and our mission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). The focus of our collective activities the next few years is to form relationships in order to end expressed racism within the church and society. By doing so, we will lead the way for the rest of our nation to rise above the crippling specter of racism in our culture. Our scriptural guideline for these activities comes from the Apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 4:15 read as follows: "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

We believe that God has gifted us and millions yet to be called to minister for Him in this regard. We believe that God works in the lives of chosen men and women. Further, we believe that the Lord uses His appointed leaders to transform history. We believe that the key to ending racism in the United States and in other nations lies in Christians developing and promoting genuine relationships among each other – just as it is being done in Sanford, Florida since the spring of 2012. As a result, Sanford did not experience the rioting, looting, and violence that other regions did after the July 2013 George Zimmerman not guilty verdict. Additionally, Christians should develop intentional relationships that will result from "living life together,"

Snatched by Islamist Traffickers

The recent upheaval in Egypt once again brings to the forefront the plight of the country's Christians who have come under increased attack from Islamists since the ouster of President Mohammed Morsi.

Now they're hoping and praying Egypt's next government will do a better job of protecting them from attacks and the trafficking of Christian girls.

Funerals like the recent one at St. Mina Church in North Sinai have become all too familiar for Egyptian Christians. Friends and family recently paid final respects to Father Mina Aboud, a beloved Coptic priest. Islamist gunmen opened fire on Mina July 6 while he drove his car after shopping in the northern Sinai town of el Arish.

Father Mina's murder was no surprise to Egypt's Christians because they are frequent targets of attack during times of political instability. Christians have struggled for years—not only to protect their churches, homes and businesses, but also their daughters.

One of the challenges facing Christian families, particularly in Upper Egypt, is the kidnapping of young Christian girls. It generally happens when the girls enter their teen years.

To help avoid this tragedy, some families re-locate to Christian villages. But with that comes a whole new set of challenges.

Manel moved her family from a Muslim village to a Christian one near el Minya because she wanted to protect her oldest daughter Maryam from abduction and forced conversion. She made the decision after noticing some Muslim girls and boys

attempting to lure Maryam away from her family and faith.

“The girls used to tell Maryam, ‘Come with us, we will give you a some money, you are having a hard life.’ The young boys were sending the young girls to do this,” Manel explained. “I feared they would kidnap her and then demand a lot of money to return her, or they would return her and she wouldn’t be in the same way as they took her.”

Now residing as strangers in a new town, Manel’s husband has difficulty finding work.

“I’m much happier now because it is safe for my daughters here, but the working opportunities for my husband are little because few people know my husband,” she said.

Maryam’s family borrowed money to buy food and make their house payment. They prayed God would provide help.

She and her family are not alone. Last year, a Helsinki Commission hearing revealed the number of disappearances and abduction of Christian girls is increasing. Human trafficking expert Michel Clark told of more than 800 cases.

Still, many Islamic leaders and government officials debunk claims that Christian girls are being trafficked. They insist the conversions and marriages are not forced; they are simply the result of amorous love between young people of different faiths.

“A boy and a girl from different religions love each other and thus one of them converts his religion in order to get married,” Helmy al Sayed, Freedom and Justice Party Secretary for Giza, said. The FJP is the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood.

“The problem is that families do not accept that, also the two religions—neither the church accepts any of its people to Islam because of love, nor Islam accepts this type of

conversion,” Sayed said.

Sayed claims it is a social problem that must be addressed, not a religious one.

Earlier this year, Coptic Orthodox Patriarch, Tawadros II told CBN News efforts to prevent trafficking and forced conversions often fail.

“This is very sensitive issue for us ... we try with the government, with the local authorities ... sometimes we are successful, but sometimes no success,” Tawadros said.

The Mohammed Morsi government did little to curtail the trafficking. But the political change gives many Egyptian Christians hope. They pray the next government will force police to treat Christian kidnapping complaints seriously and prosecute the kidnappers.

As for Maryam and her family? Their prayers for help were answered when CBN provided them with the seed money needed to start a small clothing business.

Menal said she and her daughters will “tell people in the church that we sell new clothing and the profits we get will help buy clothes for my children and feed my family.”

She also expressed gratitude to her American brothers and sisters in Christ.

“May the American Christians who helped us have a long life and may God be with them to help others like me to become self-supporting,” she said.

The effort is much needed help from caring American Christians at a time of uncertainty, bringing not only a glimmer of hope, but also a new beginning in Egypt.

Christians are calling Morsi's ouster "a miracle." Why was this second revolution so important to them? CBN News Sr.

International Correspondent Gary Lane spoke about this and more on Christian World News July 19.

Reza Aslan Defends Controversial New Book on Jesus

For the third time, Jesus is about to change Reza Aslan's life.

As a teenager, Aslan turned to Jesus in an evangelical youth group, where becoming a Christian made him feel like a real American.

He later studied Jesus of Nazareth in college, which led Aslan to a doctorate in the sociology of religion.

Now Aslan's controversial new book about Jesus is about to make him a best-selling author. *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* has already reached No. 1 on . It's the latest in a long line of controversial and profitable books about the so-called historical Jesus.

Aslan said he wants to show the power of Jesus as a flesh-and-blood human being, rather than the savior of the world. That Jesus has gotten lost in 2,000 years of church history, he said.

But critics say that Aslan has simply created his own version of Jesus. And they question whether the author, a practicing Muslim and creative writing professor, is qualified to write about Jesus.

Aslan said his interest in Jesus started at age 15, when he joined a Young Life group in his home state of California. But over time he began to feel that the Jesus he learned about in church wasn't as interesting as the actual Jesus of Nazareth.

"He seemed more real to me," said Aslan. "I wanted to have the kind of relationship with this man that I felt I could never have with the celestial Christ."

For Aslan, the defining moment of Jesus' life takes place not on Easter but a week earlier, on Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem to the cheers of thousands. Then he drove the moneylenders out of the temple, according to the New Testament Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Those two acts were meant to spark a revolution, Aslan said.

"He took on the religious and political powers of his day on behalf of the poor and the dispossessed, the marginalized and the weak," he said.

Aslan believes that Jesus was a hero even though his revolution failed, at least for the moment. Jesus knew he'd probably be crucified for his actions, Aslan said, but that didn't stop him. Like the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. or Abraham Lincoln, Jesus' death turned him into a larger-than-life figure.

"That is the fundamental difference between Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of faith," he said. "Jesus the Christ is defined by his resurrection. Jesus the man is defined by his death."

After his death and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem some years later, Aslan argues, Jesus' followers reinvented him as a gentle spiritual teacher who taught love rather than revolution.

That kind of spiritual teacher was more appealing than a

Jewish revolutionary. The redefining helped spread Christianity around the world. But Jesus the man got lost along the way, said Aslan, who says that most of the accounts of Jesus in the Bible aren't historically accurate.

His words and his teaching have been stripped of their context and transformed into abstract ethical principles that all people can abide by," he said. "If you want to know who Jesus himself was, you have to start with the fundamental fact that he was a product of his world."

The Rev. John Ortberg, pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California, agrees that understanding Jesus' context is important. A good place to start, he said, is by actually reading the New Testament.

Ortberg, whose book "Who is this Man?" also depicts the life of Jesus, said that Jesus' first followers were attracted by how he lived and what he taught. Then they came to see him as the Son of God, he said.

"There's very little evidence that Jesus has a radically different teaching than what the early church believed," he said. "I think it is difficult to argue that Jesus saw himself as a political zealot messiah."

Understanding Jesus' historical context makes sense, said Josh Graves, the preaching minister at Otter Creek Church in Brentwood, Tenn.

Graves rejects Aslan's claim that the Bible's depiction of Jesus is inaccurate. But he does think Aslan has done Christians a favor by writing about the world Jesus lived in.

"The more that mainline and evangelical Christians get into the New Testament and the history of that world, the better," he said. "There's too many American versions of Jesus walking around that don't work."

Aslan's faith as a practicing Muslim caused controversy during a recent interview on the Fox News online program "Spirited Debate." The show's host asked the author why he, as a Muslim, wanted to write about Jesus. The interview video went viral and led to accusations that Fox was Islamophobic.

It also boosted book sales. Random House, Aslan's publisher, reportedly added a second printing of 50,000 additional copies after the interview aired.

Boston University religion professor Stephen Prothero said that Aslan's perspective as a Muslim may have influenced his writing. He said that the picture of Jesus in "Zealot" seems more like a failed version of the Prophet Muhammad than the figure depicted in the Bible.

Prothero also said that outside of the Bible, there's not enough historical evidence to write about a modern biography of Jesus.

"We just don't know enough about Jesus," he said.

So it's no wonder that Aslan's book is controversial.

"Even people who were present in the life of Jesus couldn't make up their minds about who he was," said Darrell Gwaltney, dean of the School of Religion at Belmont University. "And they were eyewitnesses."

Is African Charismatic Christianity a Counterfeit?

For the last several weeks, I have been asked for my response to an article posted on the Grace to You website by Conrad

Mbewe, pastor of the Kabwata Baptist Church in Zambia and one of the speakers at Pastor John MacArthur's upcoming Strange Fire conference. According to the article, which is entitled "Why Is the Charismatic Movement Thriving in Africa?" this movement is not a powerful visitation of the Holy Spirit. Rather, "We need to sound the warning that this is not Christianity."

Not Christianity? Really?

Now, had Pastor Mbewe said, "I praise God for the wonderful things that He is doing throughout Africa by His Spirit, but there are serious errors that need to be addressed," I would have said, "Amen," to many of his concerns. In fact, charismatic leaders in Africa are addressing these problems as well.

Unfortunately, Pastor Mbewe, just like many other anti-charismatic leaders, fails to see the extraordinary forest because of some very bad trees.

He distinguishes the modern charismatic movement in Africa from "the old conservative form of Pentecostalism once represented by the Assemblies of God churches," claiming that the new movement is spreading like wildfire because it "has not challenged the African religious worldview but has instead adopted it."

But this is a gross overstatement. Rather, as noted by J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Ph.D., professor of contemporary African Christianity and Pentecostal/charismatic theology in Africa at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Accra, Ghana, "Pentecostalism is a response to ... cerebral Christianity and wherever it has appeared the movement has defined itself in terms of the recovery of the experiential aspects of the faith by demonstrating the power of the Spirit to infuse life, and the ability of the living presence of Jesus Christ to save from sin and evil.

“The ministries of healing and deliverance have thus become some of the most important expressions of Christianity in African Pentecostalism. Much of the worldviews underlying the practice of healing and deliverance, especially the belief in mystical causality, resonates with African philosophical thoughts.”

As expressed to me by evangelist Daniel Kolenda, Reinhard Bonnke’s successor, “The Western brand of stale, cold, theoretic and purely cerebral Christianity that Africans have been offered by many of the [Western] evangelical denominations is laughable to them. For Africans, their faith must have real-world consequences or it is worthless.”

Put another way, since Africans see the spiritual realm and natural realm as one, and since they don’t need to be convinced about the reality of demonic spirits, if Jesus is really the Savior, then He also saves from sickness and demonic powers.

At the same time, Pastor Mbewe is absolutely right that many traditional, worldly practices and mindsets have been incorporated into African charismatic Christianity. What he fails to mention, however, is that some of these same errors are found in African evangelical churches as well—although, to be sure, the vast majority of evangelical churches in Africa practice the spiritual gifts as well—and, as noted by Kolenda, “Many of those who are speaking the loudest against these heresies are the Pentecostals and charismatics!”

What, then, are some of the most serious abuses? Pastor Mbewe claims that in “the African Charismatic circles, the ‘man of God’ has replaced the witchdoctor,” endued with special powers and breaking through the barriers of the demonic world and ancestral spirits, which “is also why the heresy of generation curses has become so popular.”

Although somewhat overstated, this is a real problem, and so

when the people are not experiencing divine blessing, they run to the “man of God” to pray for them, giving these leaders a stranglehold over the people. It is the man of God who can bring the “breakthrough,” because of which, Pastor Mbewe points out elsewhere, this form of Christianity threatens the important New Testament teaching of the priesthood of every believer.

Another charismatic minister involved in Bible school training in several African nations pointed out to me that “the preachers started to live like kings while the people that attend the churches live in abject poverty. Being a preacher became an occupation, not a divine calling. And now some even have private jets whilst their people are burying their dead because they couldn’t afford a doctor.”

But to repeat yet again, these abuses are being addressed by many charismatic leaders as well, and they are the loud, ugly, glaring exceptions rather than the general rule.

They should absolutely be addressed and exposed and corrected, but they should not be taken as an indictment of African charismatic Christianity as a whole, God forbid, nor should they distract from what God is doing in Africa. (Remember that Paul didn’t reject what the Spirit was doing among the Corinthians. Rather, he praised them for excelling in the gifts and then corrected the errors in their midst.)

As for the so-called “heresy of generation curses,” this teaching can obviously be exaggerated and exploited, but the Scriptures do teach that generational curses exist (see, for example, 1 Samuel 2:27-33), and in a country like Africa, which is full of ancestor worship, it is not farfetched to think that certain demonic, generational curses need to be broken off of people’s lives. Is it right to brand this a heresy?

There’s something else we need to consider, and that is the

extent to which we have baptized Christianity into our own American culture, equating size and prestige with spiritual success and running the church like a business. (Another distinctly American Christian error is mistaking patriotism for the kingdom of God.)

And just as some African charismatics have morphed the witchdoctor into the “man of God,” we have morphed the megachurch pastor into the CEO and superstar, the almost infallible guide whose every word is to be followed and who does most of our scriptural thinking for us. So much for the priesthood of every believer! (It has been pointed out that preachers in the Reformation, wearing robes and ascending their lofty pulpits, did not sufficiently break with the Roman Catholic model of ministry.)

Turning back to Africa, Pastor Mbewe writes that “prayer in the modern Charismatic movement in Africa is literally a fight. In fact, the people praying are called ‘prayer warriors’.” And that’s why so much time is spent in the prayer meetings rebuking Satan and demons in Jesus’ name, with people shouting and praying fervently. Yes, he writes, “This is nothing more than the African traditional religious worldview sprinkled with a thin layer of Christianity.”

Again, it is certainly a serious error to focus on Satan as much as (or more than!) God or to be more demon conscious than Jesus conscious (even remotely so), but it is also true that there is a time for intimate fellowship with God as well as a time for fervent, even warring prayer, in keeping with verses that speak of spiritual warfare and of striving in prayer (see, for example, Ephesians 6:10-19; Romans 15:30; Luke 22:44; and 2 Corinthians 10:3-4). And what’s wrong with the concept of “prayer warriors”?

Pastor Mbewe also claims that the main leaders in the movement “survive on a few, well-worn, tortured verses. ... There is absolutely no effort to properly exegete Scripture. Rather, by

chanting phrases and making people drop under some trance, in witchdoctor fashion, they are holding sway over the popular mind." He wonders why others are not seeing this or sounding the alarm, stating, "For the love of crowds, we have allowed African traditional religion to enter the church through the back door."

And so he states emphatically, "This is not Christianity. It does not lead to heaven. It is a thin coating over the religion that has been on African soil for time immemorial, which Christianity was meant to replace. We have lost the Christian faith while we are holding the Bible in our hands and using some of its words. This is really sad."

As for the "men of God" who lay hands on the congregants every week, he says they "are imposters and must be rejected with the contempt they deserve."

Really, it is blanket statements like this that are so dangerous and inaccurate, leading readers to make their own, equally erroneous statements, such as: "How tragic that the church people of Africa have been duped into apostasy." Or this: "I think the charismatic movement should not waste their time debating cessationists, but rather take the time to fix the devastating effects they have had on Africa as a whole." (These comments were posted on the Charisma News and Grace to You websites.)

In reality, as noted in a Pew Research report, "The share of the population that is Christian in sub-Saharan Africa climbed from 9 percent in 1910 to 63 percent in 2010."

This is absolutely extraordinary and represents one of the greatest advances of the gospel in history, and almost all of this growth is charismatic in nature. Yet because of some abuses, many of which reflect the immaturity of the movement, this glorious work of God that has resulted in tens of millions of Africans coming to faith in Jesus is being

rejected and scorned.

As for the very real weaknesses that do exist, as one of my colleagues heavily involved in African ministry expressed, how much better it would have been had Pastor Mbewe recognized, "If we have the gift of teaching, we should lovingly serve those who need it, instead of alienating them when they are giving God the best they know, and they have some real strengths too."

And perhaps we in the West could learn from some of their strengths.

As Kolenda notes, "Some of the finest, strongest and most sincere Christians I have ever met anywhere in the world are in Africa. I personally know families who have lost family members who gave their lives as martyrs because of their confession of Christ. Many of the Africans Christians that I know have a faith in Christ so strong that it would put most Western Christians to shame. Their faith, humility and love for the Lord is an indictment of the indifference and unbelief so prevalent in the Western church."

One of my American friends hosted a pastor from Ghana who was visiting for a few weeks, and after attending several church services—after which the people inevitably went out for a meal together—the pastor said, "Now I see why nothing is happening in your churches! You spend all your time feasting; we spend ours praying and fasting."

Some of the finest students we have ever trained in our ministry schools have been African charismatic believers, marked by their devotion to Jesus, their passion for the lost, their willingness to sacrifice for the gospel, their solid lives of prayer and their hearts for holiness.

As noted by Professor Asamoah-Gyadu, *"The foremost theological emphasis of Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity is ... the transformative encounter with God who is holy and who is*

spirit. In the African context, participants in Pentecostalism keenly testify not only about their new life, but also the transition often made from resorts to traditional religious resources in order to be sincere Christians believing in God alone.”

Jesus is doing the transforming work!

Again, there is no denying that this rapid spread of the gospel throughout much of the continent of Africa bears all the marks of a new, often immature movement, but rather than rejecting it as un-Christian, God is pleased when we recognize His work and help bring it to maturity.

In the words of Kolenda, “If we are going to point out the negatives of the charismatic church in Africa, let’s be fair and also point out the many, many positives. Without the ‘charismatic’ church in Africa, Islam would have taken the continent over and there would be very little gospel influence at present. Waves of salvation have swept across entire nations,” and millions have responded to a clear gospel message of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus alone.

And so, while it is likely that those attending the Strange Fire conference who hear Pastor Mbewe speak will come away with an entirely negative view of African charismatic Christianity, the perspective of Professor Asamoah-Gyadu is far more accurate: “African Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity is complex. It is alive. It is thriving. And it must be a major focus for Christians around the world who are involved in evangelism, missions and the state of the global Church.”

In sum, quoting Kolenda once more, “Many of these African Christians are the first generation of their tribe in history to become Christians. They will have to work through many traditional, tribal and cultural issues (just as our ancestors

did in the West when the gospel first came to them), but we should not underestimate the power of the gospel and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. We should thank God for the unprecedented harvest that is taking place and continue to contend for the integrity of the gospel.”

Can I hear an amen?

Michael Brown is author of *The Real Kosher Jesus* and host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show *The Line of Fire* on the Salem Radio Network. He is also president of *FIRE School of Ministry* and director of the *Coalition of Conscience*. Follow him at AskDrBrown on Facebook or @drmichaellbrown on Twitter.

Celebrity Ex-Scientologist Reportedly Penning Memoirs After Exposing Church 'Thought Modification'

Actress Leah Remini, one of the most prominent celebrities to leave the **Church of Scientology**, is planning to publish a memoir about her life, a source close to the actress said.

It is not known how much Remini will divulge about the church in which she was raised, but the actress has received “a number of offers” from publishers, the source told Reuters late on Friday.

Remini, 43, who is best known for her role in the CBS comedy “The King of Queens,” has given little explanation on why she

chose to split from the church that lists Hollywood stars Tom Cruise and John Travolta among its members.

Last month the *New York Post* newspaper first reported that Remini had left the church after “being subjected to years of ‘interrogations’ and ‘thought modification’ for questioning leader David Miscavige’s rule.”

The church declined to comment on news of Remini’s memoir.

To date, a handful of Scientology’s celebrity members have left the church, but none has published an insider account of their time there.

Film director Paul Haggis, who along with actress and Cruise’s ex-wife Katie Holmes are among the church’s most high-profile defections, has spoken publicly about his experiences and disagreements with church policies.

Earlier this week Haggis wrote an open letter published in *The Hollywood Reporter* trade magazine expressing support for Remini, who he said has come under attack from celebrities in the church.

“I can’t express how much I admire Leah,” Haggis wrote. “Her parents, family and close friends were almost all Scientologists; the stakes for her were so much higher than for me. Her decision to leave was so much braver.”

Jenna Miscavige Hill, the church leader’s niece, published a memoir in February, “Beyond Belief: My Secret Life Inside Scientology and My Harrowing Escape,” that details her life growing up in the religion until she left it in 2005.

Scientology, which was founded in 1954 by science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, describes its practices as a religion and believes man is an immortal being whose experience extends beyond one lifetime.

Critics of the church say the religion is a **cult** and accuse

Scientologists of harassing people who seek to quit.

Miscavige succeeded Hubbard as leader of Scientology in 1987.

8 Truths About Male Authority

SO WHO ARE WE? 8 TRUTHS ABOUT MALE AUTHORITY

Being real men is not just about gender; it is about spiritual maturity in all areas of life. Therefore, manhood is about our calling and not about any competition with women.

Truth #1: We have a gender-unique leadership role in our marriages. 1 Corinthians 11:3 says: "But there is one thing I want you to know: A man is responsible to Christ, a woman is responsible to her husband, and Christ is responsible to God" (NLT). Then, in verse 8 it says: "For the first man didn't come from woman, but the first woman came from man." I don't know why God made this arrangement. In many ways our wives are more competent than we are. Wise men will lean on their wives to decide many things for the family. In the end, it is not a matter of competence or even gender; it is a matter of following God's order.

When I was in grade school, my desk was closest to the door. That made me the leader for fire drills. Why was I the leader? Because I was more competent? No. Because I was a boy? No. It was because the teacher said so.

Truth #2: We are to love our wives as Christ loved the church and give ourselves up for her. Our authority is for sacrificing and protecting our wives, not for lording power over them. We don't need to be less strong to be a servant, nor do we need for our wives to be weak so that we can appear

strong.

Truth #3: We are to train up our children without provoking them to anger (see Eph. 6:4). Our sense of authority must be strong enough to guide, correct and discipline our children (see Heb. 12:9) in a way that evokes respect and not anger. That takes an inner confidence that only comes with understanding the authority God has given us. I often told our sons when they were growing up: "It is not my favorite thing to discipline you, but it is the role that God gave me. Therefore, we will both do the right thing." They are all great Christian men today, and dearly love their mom and me.

Truth #4: We are to conduct business with confidence and integrity (see Matt. 25:20-21). Men are not to be cowards when it comes to giving their all in the business world, nor are we to think of our capital as our own. Authority follows the man who has invested with Another in mind. Also, our wives are more likely to increase their respect for us when we have done our jobs with confidence and competence, using the authority we have in our arenas to produce profit for the good of all.

Truth #5: We are to provide leadership in the church after first prioritizing our household (see 1 Tim. 3:1, 4). Taking responsibility in the church is also a part of the authority we are to exercise. Of course, an overseer is a servant-leader. Taking responsibility to care for the church (God's family) is an expression of the authority God delegates to us.

Truth #6: We are to take the lead in battling that which could ruin our part of the world (see Gen. 2:15). Since the Garden of Eden, God has specifically given the man the mandate to "cultivate" (be productive) and to "keep" (be protective). The latter refers to the fact that even in a paradise, there are things that can creep in and ruin the good that has been produced. Therefore, the man has the responsibility and authority to guard his house and his family (and sometimes his workplace and his country) from that which could harm or

pollute its well-being.

Truth #7: We are to train other men who will train other men (see 2 Tim. 2:2). Our responsibility does not end with our family. We are charged with training up other mature men also, who will train others. This kind of authority, again, is not a dominating kind. The whole “accountability” dynamic has gotten distorted into “I’m your spiritual boss” silliness. Mentoring is support, teaching and guidance for those who desire that kind of leadership in their lives.

Truth #8: We are to complement our wives in their leadership roles in family, church and society. Genesis 2:18 says, “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him’” (NAS). Helper does not mean weak. Which is stronger: the one who needs the help or the helper?

Therefore, part of our authority comes from listening to our wives. Another part of our authority is to empower and serve them so that they can also be leaders in the family, the church and society.

When we men remember that all of life is stewardship-that is, the management of God’s goods for Him-we will not use the delegated authority we have in an arrogant or prideful way. We will use our authority to lift up others, as Christ did for us.

Joel C. Hunter, D. Min., is pastor of Northland, A Church Distributed, located in central Florida. His wife, Becky, is thrilled to have him as leader of their home ... unless he tries to buy another yellow Jeep.

James Robison: Another View of the Prosperity Gospel

During the last decade, I've spoken with numerous people whose lives have been negatively affected by unbalanced teaching on giving. The teaching has come from ministers who are using Scriptures on "getting the return" to appeal to the Western materialistic mind-set.

"Just give, and it will come back," these ministers tell the crowds, with a fervor that convinces many listeners. They refer to a thirty-, sixty- and hundredfold return in a way that implies the contributor can expect to receive an immediate blessing—presumably so his or her debts can be quickly eliminated. The fact that some people's spending habits and financial practices should be drastically altered is not even addressed.

I have counseled a number of individuals influenced by prosperity messages who gave to the point of bankruptcy. One notorious TV preacher literally wore out the phrase "Make a vow to God," encouraging viewers to make a \$1,000 vow and promising abundance such as that enjoyed by the widow of Zarephath, whose pot of oil never ran out (see 1 Kin. 17).

Some ministers believe they are teaching the truth, and they may be sincerely seeking to help the hearer. My intention is not to accuse anyone of deliberately misleading or manipulating those whom they impact. But I've seen firsthand the unhealthy consequences of this type of teaching, and the manipulation breaks my heart.

More Blessed to Give

Scripture points out that what we're seeing today is not new. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah talked about priests who were greedy for gain (see Jer. 6:13; 8:10). The prophet Micah grieved over the ruling classes of Israel, whose rulers judged for reward, priests taught for hire and prophets divined for money (see Mic. 3:9).

What a different spirit we find in the apostle Paul, who told the Ephesian elders: "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak.

"And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:33-35, NKJV, emphasis added). Though the love of money was a hallmark of false teachers (see Tit. 1:11), Paul stood above approach.

Throughout Scripture Jesus puts the primary focus on the joy of giving, not on the return. He offers us the supreme example of what it means to give: He gave His life for us—knowing there was nothing we could give Him in return.

God wants us to express His heart when we give. That means we won't be asking, "What's in it for me?"

Ministers who use Luke 6:38 as their text ("Give, and it will be given to you") overlook the statement in verse 35, which emphasizes the importance of doing good, even lending, and not hoping for a return.

Those who give with undue emphasis on the return are often encouraging a self-centered focus. Unknowingly, they short-circuit a supernatural response from God and are not satisfied when they do receive a return. Selfishness never finds satisfaction but continually seeks gratification. On the other hand, if we ever come to understand how to properly focus on releasing what God entrusts to us, I don't believe we can stop

the return and positive results.

Think about the Good Samaritan who helped the injured man at the side of the road. He didn't put oil on the man's wounds hoping he would suddenly inherit an oil well. He didn't pay for the man's care at the local inn because he thought he would suddenly own the Hilton chain.

He was the true good neighbor Christ says we're to emulate. He came to the man's aid because the love of God flowed out of him freely.

Jesus came that we might have life more abundantly (see John 10:10). Those with less than pure motives, or perhaps a lack of clear understanding, mistakenly believe that Jesus came to give us abundance in life instead of abundance of life. If we understand the true nature of God, we know that He wants to bless and reward His children. God is not opposed to our having things, but He is deeply concerned that things not have us.

If your heart is set on the things of this world, you'll be going after worldly gain instead of heavenly pursuits. Jesus cautions us: "'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal'" (Matt.6:19-20).

The reason Jesus deals candidly with worldly wealth is that He wants our hearts to be in the right place. He tells us, "'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'" (v. 21).

The fact is, where you invest your money says volumes about your desire and heart focus. Jesus says we cannot serve two masters (God on the one hand and "mammon," which literally refers to money or riches, on the other). God wants us to put our trust completely in Him.

Isn't it ironic that the words "In God we trust" are printed on the backs of our dollar bills? If we don't put our trust in Him, we'll put it in something else—most likely money.

Does that mean you can't have a nicer car? No, just don't let the nice car have you. Does it mean you can't have a big house? No, just don't let the big house have you. If you are holding on to an earthly treasure you love, you can expect to be personally tested. Many things I've loved have melted or vanished.

Listen for God's voice of caution: "Idol check!" Remember, it can all disappear or blow up in a moment.

The most rewarding thing you can do with your riches is bless someone else. Money used to help those in need is treasure laid up in heaven. Scripture says, "'If you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded'" (Matt. 10:42, NLT).

Christ's concern for the poor and outcasts is one of the most common themes in the book of Luke. Speaking to His followers, Jesus said: "'Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you'" (Luke 6:38, NKJV).

In Bible days people would go to the marketplace for grain. The grain was poured out, shaken down and filled to overflowing so that the buyer received the amount he paid for. Although we know that we "reap what we sow," some commentators have noted that in the above passage, Jesus was not necessarily promising a return of our gift in kind, but rather an equivalent in joy and blessing. The main point here is that those who have given generously will be blessed generously—God won't shortchange a cheerful giver!

But He gives intangible gifts as well as material blessings. Though I came from a dysfunctional family, my wife, Betty, and

I not only have been married for 40 years, but also have three children and 11 grandchildren who love one another dearly and put God first. My family blesses me!

Acquaintances have often told me, "James, you are a blessed man!" Honestly, I feel so rich in life that I need nothing more than for my wife to say "I love you" or for my grandchildren to go with me to a special place and allow me to spend time with them. These are blessings money can't buy.

Farmer or Miner?

The concept of sowing and reaping is an important aspect of giving. Unfortunately, it has become so distorted in recent years that many people have missed out on the intended meaning. Look at what the apostle Paul says about the law of harvest—and notice how the emphasis is on giving, not on receiving:

"A farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in a response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully.

"And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. ... For God is the one who gives seed to the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will give you many opportunities to do good, and he will produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched so that you can give even more generously" (2 Cor. 9:6-11, NLT).

Have you ever met a farmer? He prepares the ground, plants the seeds, tends the crop, prays for sun and rain—and no matter what happens, he will plant again. If he gets "droughted" out, hailed out, stormed out or stomped out, he's still going to plant again. Why? He's a farmer, not a miner.

A miner seeks to extract resources for his own benefit, and if he doesn't succeed, he abandons the mine, whereas a farmer continually invests in the ground, improving it and trusting God for the increase.

In addition, not all farmers yield the same amount of crops. One of the huge deceptions in some personal prosperity teaching is the notion that everybody is going to have a big house, big car or big income. This concept promotes a "sameness" mentality, and it simply is not scriptural.

No two farmers get exactly the same amount of rain and exactly the same yield in their crops. In fact, godly farmers may not have as good a harvest as their ungodly neighbors. It happens!

Some people—even righteous individuals—will be tested. They may seem to have problems, challenges and pressures that others don't battle. Through life's challenges, the Lord often gives people an opportunity to share a powerful testimony that will minister to others.

Where is your heart? If you're just looking for a return, you're a miner. God wants us to be farmers for kingdom purposes. If you are faithful, Scripture says "in due season" you will reap a harvest. "So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time" (Gal. 6:9, NLT).

This Isn't Spiritual Bingo

God has blessed Betty and me tremendously. We've never personally been in the bondage of debt or gone through the financial struggles that many people have experienced.

One reason is that we have never sought "stuff." Our philosophy has always been: "Can't afford it? Don't buy it." We have always lived below our means.

Our first home was a 10-foot-by-50-foot trailer. We had a

king-size bed in our room—and let me tell you, that bed was our room.

A few years later, we bought a small house. As I recall, our monthly payments were \$109. A short time later, our ministry had a need, and Betty and I decided to sell our house.

We gave the equity to the ministry—all of it. Though it represented a lot of money to us, we never expected to get it back “thirtyfold, sixtyfold or hundredfold.” In fact, Betty and I have never given with that focus because we live knowing God has focused His love on us and all His children.

Shortly after selling our home, I shared Christ with a local woman and her family. I didn’t expect to see her again, but within a few months, she walked in the door of our ministry with a check for the \$109,000 she had received from selling her small house, which was located on the property where the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport would soon be built.

“I want to help you start a television ministry,” the woman told us. She also said she had heard us talk about desiring to take care of the pastor and his wife who had given me a home for the first five years of my childhood, as well as for a couple of my high school years. “I want you to take care of them,” she said, “and I am buying you a house so you can do that.”

She paid cash for a home that Betty and I shared with my foster parents for a number of years. We later sold that house and gave all the money to the ministry, trusting God to take care of us.

Once again, God showed us favor. Twenty-eight years ago, He led us to the property where we built our next home and still live today. It was way out in the sticks, and the land wasn’t considered valuable. However, it was perfect because it had a nice yard where our children could play, and it gave our family privacy.

Would you believe that 25 years later, our suburb became one of the most sought-after areas in the Metroplex, with some land value multiplying up to 100 times? Only God could have known about the increase that was in store. Clearly, Betty and I did not choose the area for the return but rather to invest in our family's future—and God blessed us beyond our wildest imagination.

My intention is not to single out our family; I imagine that many of you reading this article could add phenomenal blessings to the list. My point is that until our hearts change and giving to get is no longer the major motivating factor, we are not hearing what God wants us to hear—we're hearing what the West and unbalanced ministers are teaching.

God doesn't want us to play the money game. This is not spiritual bingo or Bible lottery. Giving is the essence of life. If we release that which He has freely given us, He will increase it for His purpose—not so we can build bigger barns but so we can live life abundantly.

Those who focus on earthly treasures and receiving a blessing may get a lot of stuff, but they will not experience fullness of life. In the end, they will rot in their stuff. The Father wants to bless children who can be trusted to release His resources, which certainly includes money, for kingdom purposes.

Scripture says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9, NKJV). God promises you will receive much more than material gain.

Those who know Christ are rich beyond measure—rich in salvation, forgiveness, joy, peace, glory, honor and majesty. That, my friend, is true prosperity. Once you've received these blessings from above, I encourage you to share them with

others so they, too, can know what it means to really prosper.

James Robison is founder and president of LIFE Outreach International in Fort Worth, Texas. He and his wife, Betty, co-host LIFE Today, a daily TV program that reaches more than 150 million households. His most recent book is *The Absolutes: Freedom's Only Hope* (Tyndale).

Pastor's Imprisonment in Iran Opens Door to Gospel Witness

In Ward 350, Saeed Abedini is kept with 30 to 40 other prisoners—twice the legal limit. When he sleeps at night, the arms and legs of his fellow inmates are draped around him.

On several occasions, Saeed has been beaten by guards, resulting in internal bleeding. The psychological harassment is unending. Twice—once last fall and again in May—Saeed was moved into solitary confinement. The first confinement lasted four weeks, the second for 10 days.

His offense, according to the Iranian government and court system that arrested him and sentenced him to eight years, was “endangering national security.”

But the real reason Saeed approaches his first anniversary of imprisonment is because of his faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior who found him in his Tehran bedroom more than a decade ago.

Saeed's wife, Naghmeh, sits politely in her home in Boise, Idaho. Her two children, Rebekka, 6, and Jacob, 5, have just

awakened.

Their grandmother, born in Iran, takes them into her care as Naghmeh settles into her living room, which is adorned with a Persian rug.

Quietly and relentlessly, Naghmeh has labored on behalf of her husband over the course of the past year to bring his plight to the attention of the world.

A website, [www.free-saeed.com](#), was started last December in conjunction with the American Center for Law and Justice. The site has garnered more than 600,000 signatures from people around the world demanding his release from illegal incarceration.

Naghmeh's pleas for Saeed's freedom have also been carried directly into Iran through BBC Farsi and Voice of America Persia.

This past spring, she spoke before the United Nations.

On Sept. 26—the one-year anniversary of Saeed's imprisonment—Naghmeh is hoping believers will congregate at all 50 U.S. state Capitol buildings to conduct a prayer vigil for her husband.

"My husband is in jail simply because he loves Jesus Christ," she says. "He was arrested as he worked on an orphanage we are building on property we own and for which we had received all the proper permits. He was also gathering peacefully with other fellow Christians in their private homes, expressing his faith."

When the call came in the middle of the night to inform her Saeed had been arrested, Naghmeh was surprised but ready. Her husband had been arrested and detained several years earlier, when the couple had visited with churches they had planted in Iran.

The detention lasted only two months before he was released

and encouraged to begin humanitarian work, which led them to start an orphanage in Tehran.

“God is a gentleman,” Naghmeh says. “He knew that I was not ready two years ago to deal with the situation I am now facing with Saeed. He was gracious to me and was preparing my heart even then. He doesn’t cut too deep when you are not ready.”

To show your support, click on .

Read Franklin Graham’s statement to pray for Saeed.

Click here to read the original article at .

Top 10 Dirtiest Places in the Home

Even the cleanest homes have billions of germs, but some places in your home are far worse than others. In a recent germ study, microbiologists from National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) discovered that six of the dirtiest places in the home were in the kitchen. Below are the top 10 dirtiest places, along with tips for cleaning.

1. Dish sponges and scrubbers. According to NSF, the sponge or scrubber in your kitchen sink is the dirtiest place in your home and probably contains both E. coli and salmonella. The study found that after three weeks of use, 70 percent of sponges contained bacteria. To kill germs, place sponges in the microwave for two minutes. You should replace them at least every two weeks.

2. Kitchen sink. NSF found that because of the frequent contact it has with food, your kitchen sink may be 100,000

times more contaminated than your bathroom sink. Your toilet may be cleaner than your kitchen sink, says Eileen Abruzzo, director of infection control at Long Island College Hospital of Brooklyn, N.Y. What should you do? Thoroughly scrub the entire surface once or twice a week with hot water and soap.

3. Toothbrush holder. This was the third “germiest” area in the study. According to NSF, the average toothbrush holder is crawling with more than 2 million cells of bacteria. Research by Charles P. Gerba, Ph.D., of the University of Arizona, found that flushing the toilet sends a spray of bacteria into air, which can float around the bathroom for at least two hours before landing on surfaces. Not only should you clean your toothbrush holder thoroughly once or twice a week, but it’s also best to purchase one made from stainless steel or plastic.

4 and 7. Pet bowl and toys. Pet dishes and toys were a source of coliform, staph, yeast and mold in many homes. These items should be washed daily, either in a sanitizing dishwasher or scrubbed by hand with hot, soapy water. Soft toys should be washed at least monthly with other laundry on the hot water cycle.

5. Coffee maker. According to NSF, bacteria and mold thrive in the dark and damp areas of your coffee maker. Cleaning the inside every couple of month (assuming you use it every day) will not only keep it clean but also improve the taste. Fill the water reservoir with about four cups of vinegar and let sit for 30 minutes. Then turn it on and allow the vinegar to cycle through. Finally, run two or three additional cycles with water until the vinegar odor fades.

6. Faucet handles. Faucet handles in both the kitchen and bath contained coliform bacteria as well as yeast mold. You should clean them daily with non-toxic disinfecting cleaner or nontoxic disinfecting wipes.

8. Kitchen countertops. This high-traffic area collects germs all day long from purses, grocery bags, various raw food containers, dishes and more. Kitchen surfaces should be washed at least daily and after every meal with hot, soapy water.

9. Stove dials. The controls that adjust your stove's heat are some of the filthiest places in your home. This is because you constantly touch them while handling food. Check your stove's manual to be safe, but you should be able to remove the dials and either put them in the dish water or wash them with warm, soapy water.

10. Showers and bathtubs. Finally, the NSF found the bacteria staphylococci in 26 percent of the bathtubs and showers they studied. This bacteria causes various staph infections, including those in the urinary tract. The best practice is to use a natural, nontoxic and nonabrasive tub and shower spray daily.

Other common sources of bacteria include TV remotes, salt shakers, keyboards, cell phones, makeup bags, light switches and the interior of the refrigerator. According to the Centers for Disease Control, bacteria and viruses can live two hours or longer on most home surfaces—much longer in dark and moist areas.

Don Colbert, M.D., *is board certified in family practice and in anti-aging medicine. He also has received extensive training in nutritional and preventive medicine, and he has helped millions of people discover the joy of living in divine health.*

For the original article, visit .

4 Reasons You Should Dance With Your Daughter

When we go to weddings, one of my favorite parts of the celebration is when the dad dances with his daughter, the bride. I can't wait to share this moment with each of my three daughters at their weddings.

I really like to dance with my girls and, throughout the years, have danced with them at home, at daddy-daughter dances and at other events.

So, if you're a dad who has a daughter, don't wait until her wedding day to dance with her. In fact, dance with her as often as you can. Here are four reasons why you should dance with your daughter.

1. It sets the standard. Long before their daughter's wedding day, dads have an opportunity to set the standard for the kind of guy their daughter should look to spend the rest of her life with. Dads should show their daughters what they should expect from the boys they date and the man they eventually marry—she should expect a gentleman who honors her body constantly, holds her hand securely, protects her passionately, laughs with her joyfully, values her immeasurably and loves her deeply. She should see all of those things when you, Dad, dance with her.

2. It builds memories. One of the things I talk about in my book *All Pro Dad* is the importance of creating memorable monuments with your children. Memorable monuments are things you do with your children that create lasting and loving memories. Dancing with your daughter can be a wonderful memorable monument—moments that can leave you both laughing on the floor at the end of one song and crying in each other's arms at the end of the next one. They'll certainly be memories

you'll both cherish.

3. It says she's beautiful. Twirl your daughter around, but also make sure to pull her in close and tell her she is beautiful and special. Like your wife, your daughter needs to hear that she is beautiful and captivating. Also, your little girl needs to know her beauty is not just outward, but that she also has a beautiful heart and incredible talents. Dancing with your daughter can provide you with a perfect opportunity to affirm her beauty.

4. It validates your love. As you affectionately embrace your daughter, you'll be saying to her, "I love you more than you'll ever know" ... even if you don't even say anything.

So seek and find moments to dance with your daughter now because, in the blink of an eye, she'll be dancing with her husband.

Do you dance with your daughter? How do you find ways to do so? And if you both have a favorite song to dance to, please share it.

Mark Merrill is the president of Family First. For the original article, visit .