

# Liberty University Makes Play for Football Bowl Subdivision

In December 2011, Turner Gill sat in the plush presidential suite atop Liberty University's football stadium, on the verge of accepting the school's head coaching job.

But as he peered out from a brand-new five-story tower onto the program's practice complex just beyond the north end zone, Gill, the former Buffalo and Kansas coach, had another question for school president and chancellor Jerry Falwell Jr.

"Would it be possible to add one more practice field?" Gill asked.

"Sure," Falwell replied. "We can make that happen."

In the current climate of NCAA uncertainty, where smaller Division I athletic departments are more concerned about their future viability than getting into the facilities arms race, granting such a request with a snap of the fingers is practically unheard of.

But at Liberty, a private evangelical school suddenly flush with cash and immense athletic ambitions, there is almost no amount of dirt officials won't move or concrete they won't pour these days to help break into the big time.

In the middle of a \$500 million makeover of this campus, which sprouted up from the Blue Ridge Mountain foothills in 1971 under the name Lynchburg Baptist College and endured nearly 40 years of financial hardships and political controversies attached to its late founder, Jerry Falwell Sr., is a sparkling set of new athletic facilities that touch nearly all of Liberty's 20 varsity sports.

Its baseball stadium, which opened last year, has player and

fan amenities that would put most of the neighboring SEC and ACC schools to shame. Its half-finished softball complex promises to be just as spectacular. In the past five years, new practice or playing facilities have gone up for soccer, field hockey, lacrosse, golf, track, basketball, volleyball and tennis.

And its football stadium, which reached capacity of 19,200 after a renovation in 2010, has a set of blueprints at the ready to add 6,000 seats in the near term and more than 40,000 over time.

“Everything here,” athletics director Jeff Barber said, “is built to expand.”

But Liberty’s very public desire to move up from the 63-scholarship Football Championship Subdivision to the Football Bowl Subdivision has yet to generate mutual interest.

Buoyed by rumblings earlier this year that the Sun Belt Conference would consider adding a 12th football member, Barber and Falwell Jr. made lobbying trips to seven schools and explained why they were ready to make the transition.

But at the league’s spring meetings, the Sun Belt voted against adding another school until at least 2015. According to a person with direct knowledge of the Sun Belt’s expansion plans, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the dialogue was supposed to be private, there wasn’t much support for inviting Liberty this time around.

“They have a lot of resources, but does anybody even know they’re Division I?” the person said. “If we’re going to add a 12th, we want someone people are going to recognize and raise the profile of the conference. I just don’t think Liberty adds anything to our profile.”

That decision has, at least for the moment, left Liberty in a difficult position. In an era when administrators in FBS

leagues like the Sun Belt, Mid-American Conference and Conference USA are worried about how they'll afford a wave of new player benefits brought on by autonomy for the NCAA's power conferences, here's a school saying it can commit whatever resources necessary to play at the highest level.

But with no immediate prospects of getting into one of the 10 FBS conferences, Liberty must wait, continue to build and hope its investment into college athletics will eventually pay off.

"We can be patient," Barber said. "I think there's still going to be more settling, more landscape change if you will. We just hope any of these conferences, when they decide they want to expand, that they'll give us a look."

The elder Falwell, who was both famous and polarizing as a conservative political figure and televangelist, long envisioned the university he founded as a potential religious/athletic power in the same vein as Notre Dame and Brigham Young.

But until his death, Liberty had neither the resources nor the academic reputation to even be a candidate for a major athletic conference.

What changed? In 2007, the school collected on Falwell's \$29 million life insurance policy, clearing its entire debt. Then, thanks to an external degree program developed and accredited in the 1980s—"course work mailed in boxes with videotapes of lectures," Falwell Jr. said—the school was well positioned to take advantage of the explosion in online education.

Liberty now has roughly 12,000 students on its physical campus and 95,000 online, putting the school in a good enough financial position to rebuild almost everything, including a new high-tech library, music school, health sciences building, a school for osteopathic medicine, student recreation space and 252-foot tower attached to a student center. It even has a

year-round, artificial "Snowflex" ski slope atop a nearby hill, the only one of its kind in the United States.

But Falwell Jr. acknowledges the university is still battling an image problem attached to its early days and some of the political backlash that surrounded his father, particularly within the academic community given that school presidents ultimately decide who gets invited to their conferences.

"The perception is that we're primarily a small Bible school, and the reality is we're a liberal arts university with engineering, medicine and nursing," he said. "A lot of people think religion is our No. 1 major, and in reality it's ninth.

"One of the (Sun Belt) presidents made the comment, he said, 'Yeah, Jerry, all you have to do is show people Liberty's not Oral Roberts; it's Baylor.' We've moved toward that goal much faster than anybody thought."

Not that Liberty is running away from its religious roots. Students are still required to go to convocation three times a week, curfew is enforced at midnight, alcohol isn't allowed on campus and there are no coed dorms.

It's also true that Gill, who kept a Bible on his desk when he was coaching at Kansas and Buffalo, was hired in part because his religious beliefs align with what the school espouses.

According to the person with direct knowledge of the Sun Belt's thinking, the school's religious mission "never came up" in discussions among athletic directors and presidents, nor did controversies surrounding the elder Falwell.

Especially in these times, where some FBS schools may be weeded out on finances alone, Liberty's future is likely to be evaluated strictly on its athletic merits.

"I tell people Liberty is better than what they think it is and different than what they think it is," said Barber, who

spent 10 years as an associate athletics director at South Carolina. “We have a lot to offer a conference.”

Bill Carr, a prominent college sports consultant who did Liberty’s FBS feasibility study, said it is already more prepared than the other schools who recently made the jump.

And Liberty isn’t going to stop spending until it does happen. Because for all the work Falwell Jr. has done remaking the campus and the school’s academic image, he knows nothing would be a game-changer quite like the opportunity to play a Baylor or BYU on ESPN.

“My father used to say there were two universal languages all young people understood—music and athletics—and to build a world-class university those two components have to be a major part of it,” Falwell Jr. said. “Athletics isn’t our mission, but it has the potential to shine a light on our mission like nothing else ever can.”

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*Dan Wolken writes for USA Today.*

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## **Why You May Want to Ditch Your Low-Fat Diet for Good**

If you’re cutting back on all fats in your diet, you may be doing yourself more harm than good. That’s the upshot of the latest nutritional research that concludes some fats are not

only good for us, but they can actually help shed pounds.

In fact, avoiding such fats—in favor of low-fat, high-carb alternatives—can promote weight gain.

Confused? Join the club. For decades, health experts have advised choosing low-fat and fat-free foods—such as margarine, skim milk and unsaturated cooking oils—to lose weight and boost overall health. But that line of one-size-fits-all health advice is being challenged by new studies showing fat is not the great dietary evil we've been led to believe it is.

Brett Osborn, M.D., a member of the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine and author of the new book *Get Serious, A Neurosurgeon's Guide to Optimal Health and Fitness*, explains that not all fats are created equal. Some—such as those found in fish, olive oil, nuts, flax seed, and even certain cuts of meat—are essential for good health. And the real culprits in the nation's obesity epidemic are sugary, high-carb, refined processed foods, many of which carry reduced-fat labels.

“Eating fat does not make you fat,” Dr. Osborn tells *Newsmax Health*. “Carbohydrates, on the other hand, drive insulin levels up. Insulin is an inflammatory hormone. And while we do need it to repair ourselves and to build muscle, it has very, very sinister effects and deleterious effects on our health.”

In this [video](#), Dr. Osborn, a New York University-trained board-certified neurosurgeon with a secondary certification in anti-aging and regenerative medicine, explains that there are different types of fat.

Some—such as trans fats found in baked goods, pastries and fried foods—cause inflammation in the body, which has been tied to diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer and other health problems. But others—such as omega-3 fatty acids found in fish and other staples of the Mediterranean diet—have anti-inflammatory properties and promote health and even weight loss.

“Do not be afraid to have fat in your diet, you just need to have good fat in your diet,” he notes. “So the olive oil, the omega-3s, the fish—have as much as you like and [avoid] fried foods.”

Dr. Osborne also notes that cell membranes are made of omega-3s. As a result, consuming more foods packed with omega-3s contributes to healthy bodily functions, while eating bad fats can cause cell membranes to malfunction, as well as spur inflammation in the body.

“We obviously want to error on the side of ingesting or eating as much anti-inflammatory fat—the good fat—relative to the bad fat,” he says. “So we want to squelch inflammation.”

Unfortunately, many Americans have bought into the false notion that low-fat foods are always healthier, even though they often contain lots of empty calories, sugar, white processed flour and simple carbohydrates—all of which contribute to weight gain and obesity-related ailments that cost the nation nearly \$150 billion a year in health-care costs.

“The anti-inflammatory fats, which are things like omega-3 fatty acids, which we can get from fish, supplements, walnuts, flax [and olive oil] ... are the things that are lacking in our diet and have been replaced by the inflammatory fats” along with sugary, high-carb processed foods, Dr. Osborn notes.

He adds that residents of nations whose diets are typically high in healthy fats and low in unhealthy fats—such as the Japanese and those in Mediterranean countries—tend to have longer life spans than Americans, according to the World Health Organization.

“The Japanese have a five-year longevity, if you will, advantage over the Americans. Why? Because they eat a lot of raw food, they keep their simple carbohydrate loads down [and] they’re good-fat-to-bad-fat ratio is better than ours,” he

says. "It's all about the balance. You want to keep the anti-inflammatory fats high and the bad fats ... low.

"And again if you have a lot of pro-inflammatory chemicals in your body, you're going to have accelerated aging and accelerated disease incidence."

Here are a few foods containing healthy fats:

**Fish:** Polyunsaturated fats, such as omega-3 fatty acids found in fish such as salmon and fish-oil supplements, have been shown in many studies to lower the risk for heart disease, boost brain function, ease arthritis symptoms, and help prevent dementia.

**Nuts:** Natural fatty acids in tree nuts are known to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. Researchers from the University of Toronto found that incorporating about two ounces of tree nuts—almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, macadamias and walnuts—into the diet of people with diabetes helped boost their heart health.

**Vegetable oils:** Olive oil and other vegetable-based fats—such as canola and palm oils—are loaded with alpha-linolenic acid, a type of omega-3. Switching to a diet low in simple sugars and high in healthy fatty oils can help people with Type 2 diabetes control their blood sugar and lower their heart-disease risks, research has shown. "Every night before I go to bed ... I have two tablespoons of olive oil in addition to tons and tons of omega-3 capsules that I take every day because I'm not a fish eater," Dr. Osborn says. He adds: "I usually tell my patients, my friends who ask me, avoid all non-vegetable carbohydrates because that's going to keep your natural insulin levels low and that's going to hopefully confer longevity and reduced incidence of age-related diseases."

**Animal products:** Moderate amounts of saturated fat in butter, milk, cheese and even lean cuts of beef, poultry and pork

don't clog arteries and may even be beneficial in moderate amounts. Scientists once thought saturated fat raised levels of dangerous cholesterol in the blood. But the latest research shows there are two different kinds of cholesterol particles—small and dense (the kind linked to heart disease) and large and fluffy (which don't pose a risk). Saturated fat in dairy foods and animal products raises the level of larger particles that are not harmful, but refined carbohydrates boost levels of smaller, more dangerous cholesterol particles.

Dr. Osborn adds that losing weight must also involve exercise and other healthy habits, as well as a nutritious diet.

“Nutrition and training, particularly strength training—they're both parts of the mix,” he says, recommending about 30 minutes a day at a minimum. He also advises keeping your stress levels down, making sure you get sufficient sleep, and making sure your hormone levels are balanced.

“And one other thing: Also understand that your doctor is not going to save you,” he adds. “If you are not taking full responsibility for your health, or getting serious about your health, nobody's going to do it for you.”

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## **A Christian Leader Whose Husband Has ALS Sounds Off on**

# the Ice Bucket Challenge

Well, we are on week two of the very-viral, very-everywhere ALS ice bucket challenge. I know, I know, I can hear the groans; it started out cute and now it's out-of-control. Played. Clogging up social-media sites everywhere.

I even read this charming article in which the author called the challenge (that has raised an unprecedented amount of money for one of the most outrageously underfunded diseases) a waste of fresh water. Another headline whined, "Is the Ice Bucket Challenge Going to Cure ALS?" Um, no (and, by the way, that's a stupid bar to set for any fund raiser.)

Critics complain that the challenge is really about feeding our American narcissism and does nothing for ALS awareness or funding. They assert that people should just quietly donate their money and move on with their lives.

I get that they're cranky, but I think maybe they don't realize what it's like to face this insidious disease and then realize that it's nearly invisible to the rest of the world. As I watch my husband become entombed inside his own body, I feel desperate for people to understand that this sort of inhumane condition exists. But for some reason, while everyone acknowledges it's one of the worst fates imaginable, funding for research and patient care is nearly nil.

I recently mentioned to a doctor that my husband has ALS, and she first looked confused and then said, "Oh, that's Lou Gehrig's Disease, right?" *Right*. Why does she—a doctor of medicine—still only know it by Lou Gehrig's Disease? Because we humans need to associate things with people. It's easier that way. That's why the celebrity faces and personal challenges happening in the ice bucket challenge are so effective at bringing in money. And if someone gets to look good while plunking their \$50 into the ALS tip jar, *I have*

*zero problem with that.*

Because here's the deal: We are in for the fight of our lives with this monster, and the very LAST thing I want is for people to give quietly, anonymously, and then slink away. Raise the roof! Raise a ruckus! Call all sorts of attention to yourself! I will be happy for you and every Facebook Like you receive, as you nudge ALS an inch or two closer to the collective public consciousness.

So, fear not, dear reader, this too shall pass, and your Facebook news feed will go back to cat videos and kids singing "Let It Go." Until that happens, here's a little reminder about what it's like to live with ALS and why this level of awareness is like gold to families such as mine.

### **A Mile in ALS Shoes**

People ask me often what it's like to live with ALS. It's a brave question because the answers are not very pleasant. But it's also such a worthy question because understanding how this disease impacts those who suffer from it creates empathy, which is so valuable; it carries us into another person's world and allows us to understand what they're feeling and how they're hurting. As I watch my strong husband struggle with things that used to be easy and automatic, I sometimes wish that everyone could see life from his perspective.

If you would like to experience just a tiny corner of an ALS life, I have a list of Empathetic Experiences for you. These are things you can do to walk for just a mile in ALS shoes. If you try one, take a little time at the end to consider that people actually living with the disease have a million miles more to go.

1. Pick up a 10-pound weight. Now imagine it's your fork and move it from your plate to your mouth repeatedly without shaking.

2. Sit in a chair for just 15 minutes moving nothing but your eyes. Nothing. No speaking, no scratching your nose, no shifting your weight, no changing the channel on the television, no computer work. Only your eyes. As you sit, imagine: This is your life. Your only life.
3. Borrow a wheelchair or power scooter and try to maneuver quickly through the aisles at Walmart, without speaking. Note the way people react to you.
4. Strap 25 pounds to your forearm. Now, adjust your car's rear-view mirror.
5. Using none of your own muscles, have your spouse or child or friend get you dressed and brush your teeth. Write down some of the feelings you have being cared for in this way.
6. Before you eat your next meal, take a good, long look at the food. Inhale deeply and appreciate the aroma. Now, imagine never being able to taste that—or any other food—for the rest of your life.
7. Put two large marshmallows in your mouth and have a conversation with your friends. How many times must you repeat yourself? How does this make you feel?
8. Go to bed and stay in one position for as long as you possibly can, moving nothing.
9. Strap weights to your ankles and climb a flight of stairs, taking two at a time. That's the kind of strength it takes for someone with ALS to tackle the stairs on a good day.
10. Install a text-to-speech app on your phone or iPad and use it exclusively to communicate for one day.

And to my friends living with ALS: Please give us more ideas and help us move into your world for a bit. We want to help make your lives rich and full, and I'm not sure we can do that without at least a basic understanding of what you are facing.

I think I speak for many when I say: You are superheroes, and we are in awe.

With unending hope for a million-mile cure.

[Bo Stern](#) is a blogger and author of *Beautiful Battlegrounds* (NavPress). She knows the most beautiful things can come out of the hardest times. Her Goliath came in the form of her husband's terminal illness, a battle they are still fighting with the help of their four children, a veritable army of friends and our extraordinary God. Bo is a teaching pastor at Westside Church in Bend, Oregon.

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## Losing Faith in Ferguson

But tragically, over the past 75 days, that sense of human "otherness" has radically unraveled.

Nearly 300 innocent Nigerian schoolgirls are kidnapped by Boko Haram. A Malaysian airliner vanishes like it's some kind of prop in a David Copperfield magic show. Vladimir Putin invades the Ukraine. Malaysian airliner No. 2 gets blown out of the sky. Ebola threatens the planet with a plague. A border crisis erupts between the U.S. and Mexico. Hamas shells Israel. ISIS beheads children.

Robin Williams hangs himself.

Now Ferguson.

By the time Michael Brown lost his life, the part of my brain that retains and stores calamity was screaming, "enough already." But the tragic death of yet another young man, and the ensuing street protests in Ferguson, Missouri, present a different kind of social puzzle for the church because right

now Ferguson is about one thing: total confusion. When I listen to the news, I feel both sympathy and suspicion at the same time. Nothing seems right about anything. People are scrambling for cover as Cain hunts for Abel.

Except no one in Ferguson seems to know who is Abel and who is Cain.

Ferguson isn't a simple story about slurs and solidarity. It's about the struggle for something far worse. If you believe what you're hearing and seeing on TV is actually true, then lawlessness and lovelessness is your new compass.

I realize there are no tears in heaven. But if there were, I'm confident Dr. King would be sobbing.

The Scriptures use the Greek word *akatastasia* to describe confusion: "instability, a state of disorder, disturbance." It comes from the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 14:33, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (KJV). In other words, when confusion reigns, we always know the source.

And that is the issue when it comes to racism. Our bigotry, bitterness and rioting will never remove the wedge that divides mankind. High-octane emotions only serve to paralyze our thoughtfulness and restraint.

We—both black and white—have devolved into a fallen species of self-reproach and violent rebuttals instead of becoming the sons and daughters God invented us to be in Eden. Our acts of false justice are carrying us out to sea, especially for those of us called by God to live and lead as peacemakers.

There are fundamental differences between white racism and black racism. Notice I did not say there are fundamental differences between whites and blacks. The difference manifests in our racisms. Prejudices are privately held feelings about human difference. Racism happens when those feelings organize into a measurable system. And certainly not

all prejudice becomes racism, yet both are sinful practices. One is an act of the heart, the other is an act of the hand.

Those with more social power wield the greatest potential for racism, but also for the good. In its inception in the North American context, white racism was about superiority, greed and control. Black racism was a response. It was about survival and revenge. Whites fought to maintain control, while some blacks dreamed of retaliation. Each racism fed off the other, yet both never realized they were operating under the same flag—twin pawns of one father, Satan.

Though prejudice and racism have multiple mutations, here's what I find fascinating after 32 years of pastoral leadership: The white racist believes there's an inherent virtue inside himself that inherently doesn't exist inside the untrustworthy black man. The black racist believes there's an inherent virtue inside himself that inherently doesn't exist inside the untrustworthy white man. In other words, they share the same theory.

Throughout my childhood, racial bias was based on the masterful use of hideous stereotypes. Never underestimate the power of mockery. Iconic childhood stereotypes, such as George Jefferson, Fred Sanford and Archie Bunker kept the black male at bay by displaying him as a caricature of subservience. These nightly images on network TV helped to keep the post-segregation systems fully alive and angled toward white prosperity.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 legally eradicated numerous housing, voting and educational barriers for black Americans. However, just because the deadbolt had been legally unlocked doesn't mean that white America wasn't on the inside of the house (and church) holding the doorknob. Black America was acutely aware that white America was not happy about sharing the house, even though they had helped to build it.

Thankfully those kinds of stereotypes have all but worked their way out of the water supply, but without them it becomes harder to convince people that certain racist systems are still in play. I recently asked a group of younger African-American leaders who serve on our staff here at Real Life Church if they knew who George Jefferson, Fred Sanford or Archie Bunker were. There was little to no knowledge. I asked them who came to mind when they think of the black male. In unison names like Will Smith, Ben Carson, LeBron James and President Obama came to mind—a far cry from those images of the 1970s.

In my experience, the wedge between whites and blacks is neither difficult to understand nor difficult to eradicate on the individual level. As a white man, my imperative is to remain fully engaged in the lives of my black colleagues and neighbors and resist displaying any emotional ambiguity (becoming dull and disinterested) toward the historical and contemporary narrative of my African-American relationships. I must also commit to living brave and confrontative when racism rears its ugly face. In return, I emotionally need my African-American relationships to acknowledge the progress that has been made in the last 50 years and to celebrate the momentum. I need them to speak into my life when needed, but also to tell me often that my heart and life reflect Jesus' unsuspecting love for people.

When a black American sees my disinterest in their world, they lose heart. When an African-American speaks as though slavery is still the norm, I lose heart.

But when we can together acknowledge the problem and the progress, something powerful and transformative happens to us and through us. Revenge becomes reconciliation. Offense becomes objectivity. From that baseline, there is no mountain we cannot climb nor move.

No one knows the outcome of Ferguson. Judgment is what we do.

Justice is what God does. The events are as fluid and combustible as anything I have seen since the Rodney King riots. The potential to polarize, marginalize and pulverize our neighbors is real—not just in Ferguson but also in our own churches and communities.

A precious life made in the image of God is gone. His name is Michael Brown. Sympathies for Michael range from non-existent to irrational. Somewhere in the midst of this chaos are Michael's parents. That has to count for something. There is also a police officer without any track record of wrongdoing. His family, too, will never be the same. He may go to prison. He may not. But we have to trust that God's justice will find its way through the systems of human judgment.

We just spent an entire week losing our faith in Ferguson.

May this next week be different.

I encourage you to look one last time at the picture attached to this post. It was taken last month here at Real Life Church.

For me, it captures the message of heaven. I am praying that the parks and playgrounds of Ferguson, Missouri will soon look the same.

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**Editor's Note:** *The opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of Charisma Media.*

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# School Punishes Pentecostal Student for Saying 'Bless You'

Kendra Turner was brought up right. She's the kind of kid who says "yes sir" and "no ma'am." She was "raised up right," with good manners as they are prone to say around Dyersburg, Tennessee.

So it was not out of character for Kendra to say "[bless you](#)" after a fellow classmate sneezed. But that common courtesy landed the 18-year-old in hot water.

Turner said she was rebuked by her teacher at Dyer County High School and thrown out of class for violating the teacher's ban on the words "[bless you](#)."

"She said that we're not going to have godly speaking in her class and that's when I said we have a constitutional right," Turner told [Memphis television station WMC](#).

Another student sent the television station a photo taken inside the teacher's classroom showing a list of banned words. Among the censored words are "dump," "stupid," "my bad," "hang out" and "bless you."

She wrote about her incredible story on Facebook. It was then picked up by the *MomDot.com* blog and then, as they say these days, the story went viral.

"I stood up and said, 'My pastor said I have a constitutional right—First Amendment freedom of speech,'" Turner wrote on Facebook. "She said, 'Not in my class you don't.'"

Turner says she was tossed out of the class and sent to the principal's office where things apparently went from bad to worse.

"The assistant principal said if I didn't want to respect my teacher's rules then maybe my pastor should teach me because my freedom (of) speech and religion does not work at their school," she wrote.

As you might imagine, the school has a very different take on what happened inside that classroom.

"We can't discuss discipline issues because of right to privacy of students," assistant principal Lynn Garner [told the Dyersburg Gazette](#). "But I can say there are two sides to every story. Sometimes people spin things and turn them to make them seem one way."

The assistant principal said Kendra was sent to In School Suspension as a matter of protocol. She was allowed to leave at the end of the class period.

"In this case, this was not a religious issue at all, but more of an issue the teacher felt was a distraction in her class," Garner [told the newspaper](#).

To be clear—the school would have us believe that a child telling a classmate "bless you" after a sneeze somehow caused a classroom commotion so severe it warranted a punishment? It's a good thing Kendra didn't offer her classmate a tissue.

Kendra's pastor is among those not buying the school's explanation, and he's taking a public stand in defense of the young girl.

"I believe this young lady," said Steven Winegardner, pastor of the Dyersburg First Assembly of God. "Everything she said took place."

Winegardner told me he's hoping students will lead a petition drive to force the school to overturn the classroom ban on the words "bless you."

"Christians have been told to be quiet, to shut up," he said. "It's ridiculous. Everybody has a right to their beliefs. I'm glad Kendra stood up."

Winegardner's wife [told WMC](#) that the teacher had issues with other students using the words "bless you."

"There were several students that were talking about this particular faculty member there that was very demeaning to them in regard to their faith," she told the television station.

Every now and then a story will land on my desk that seems too outrageous to be true. And to be certain there are two very different versions of what happened in that classroom. But I'm prone to believe Turner, too.

That's because Tuesday, a school official tried to convince me this young lady was a trouble maker. They were clever with their words—but that was the impression I received.

That same school official told me there was no ban on the words "bless you." But a classroom photograph proves otherwise.

They said she was not punished. But Kendra's pastor saw the slip of paper that ordered her to In School Suspension.

For whatever reason, the school will not explain why the teacher has an issue with the words "bless you." This one is a head-scratcher, folks. But one thing is clear: Religious intolerance is nothing to sneeze at.

**Todd Starnes** is host of Fox News & Commentary, heard on hundreds of radio stations. Sign up for his [American Dispatch newsletter](#), be sure to join his [Facebook](#) page, and follow him

on [Twitter](#). His latest book is [God Less America](#).

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## 3 Keys to Spiritual Awakening in America

The subtle embrace of night casts her shadow across the brow of the young maiden of liberty. Night's luring embrace seems to seduce the nation further into an abyss of compromise slouching toward chaos. The brilliant hope of the nations and the grand experiment of self governance seems to be reeling to and fro from the weight of her confusion and toll of her compromise.

America is staggering like a drunken fool from compromised values, confusing and unsustainable standards and a glamorized chaos. Where is the leadership compelled by vision for America's future that is truly worthy of her good past? Where are the champions of mercy and the heralds of brotherly love? Where are those who will lay down their lives to bring us together and stand for a cause greater than themselves?

Has the future of America ever been more at risk than it is today? If the answer is "Yes," could it be because we are in dire need of bold leadership willing to raise a standard in our generation and cry out to God for national repentance and revival?

How a flag from the days of our founding was introduced to me is irrelevant in this writing. The fact that it was introduced to me is the compelling force behind this writ of proclamation. I had never seen the flag. I was never taught about it in school, and it is totally beyond me as to how I could have missed it or why others would be silent concerning

it.

✘ The flag (pictured) is a white standard with a simple evergreen tree in the center with the words "An Appeal to Heaven" across the top of the standard. Designed by John Locke, it would fly beneath the orders of Gen. George Washington atop the ships that would make up The Continental Navy. This navy was funded out of the pocket of Washington himself. The flag would be known as the Washington's Cruisers Flag.

The message of the flag is simple. The founders were living in days cruel for their times, and men were hungry for the great pearl of liberty. Their frailty was obvious for any honest onlooker, and none dare, not even for a moment, suspect that their worthiness in warfare would lead them to triumph against the greatest navy of the world.

They only had one hope for the cause of liberty to prevail. It was the hope of heaven's intervention. It was the hope of angel armies to render assistance in a cause to set at liberty the dreams of the world. It was simply that—"An Appeal To Heaven." Beneath the standard championing their plea, courageous and selfless men surrendered their lives to the cause of welcoming liberty's embrace. It was enough!

We are in need of such an appeal today! These days are marked by a nation increasingly confused, comfortable with compromise and vacillating on the brink of chaos. There are markers strewn along the path of the last decades that indicate an approaching crossroads of peril or awakening.

As difficult as it is to be up against forces and foes that are visible and formidable like our Founding Fathers faced, it seems excruciatingly perplexing that the foe of our generation is much more stealthy, invisible and barbaric. Great signs of societal strife and chaos need not always herald a looming doom; they also can serve as a catalyst for common sense and

become a clarion call to humble ourselves and cry out to God making an "Appeal To Heaven." I propose to you the latter.

Some may quickly interject such a plea is foolishness, and surely many would judge an "Appeal To Heaven" as futile and fruitless. Is the nation today absent of the valor of such men, or is it void of such a brave and courageous people?

Rather than dismiss the Founders from our history, what if we remember their courage, their sacrifice and their dreams that carried them on eagles' wings to establish a good people in a prosperous land? A nation that would become "one nation under God."

I say to you confidently that the nation is full of people who still love liberty's dream and they are full of brotherly love, courageous hearts and a willingness to sacrifice for the benefit of coming generations. There is a people who believe brotherly love triumphs over barbarism in any generation.

There is a sound of awakening and transforming revival being carried on the winds of the Spirit in these days. There are cities and regions across the nation that are experiencing the hopeful rains of early outpourings of the Spirit. It has yet to become a sweeping movement of holy reconciliation and revival, but it is on its way!

I am currently writing this at 2:43 AM (EST) and the reason I cannot sleep is because I heard a news commentator out of Ferguson, Missouri, ask, "Where are the clergy of this community?" In a rather strange kind of way it was confirmation to me that the nation will once again seek the ancient path rediscovering the way of the Lord.

There is currently on the Gulf coast of Florida a move of the Spirit that is spreading throughout a much larger region. Thousands have experienced as a region a revival that has been freely carried from city to city and church to church.

America is ripe for a revival that cannot be contained by a building and will never be controlled by a ministry.

The revival began for me on a Sunday morning in March when I encountered the Lord in an absolutely life-changing way. In a vision I saw Him walk into the room carrying a flag in one hand and a torch in the other. When I saw Him I was so stricken by His Glory I literally felt as though I was dying! It was truly overwhelming, and I ended up on the floor of the platform of my church for nearly six hours. The details of that may be shared at another time, but I clearly heard the Lord say to me three things:

**1. I am bringing to My people revelation of the Father's heart.**

**2. Through the revelation of the Father's heart, I am releasing the fire of My holiness.**

**3. Through the fire of My holiness, I will reap a supernatural harvest in the earth.**

It is time for America's spiritual awakening!

In addition I have met personally with pastors and leaders from many different cities and regions in all kinds of gatherings who are hungry to see God move mightily in their communities.

The Lord is birthing a new movement in America. It is a movement of hope and holiness. It is a movement of courageous deeds over divisive dogma. It is a movement not to make men famous but to make the Name of the Lord great in the earth!

What if we were beginning to see a grass-roots movement of Jesus that was so organic and powerful it would not flinch in the face of fear and would reap the reward of the Lamb's suffering—a mighty harvest of souls?

The value of the Washington's Cruisers Flag is that it can

become a signet call to our generation. I had never seen the flag before I was introduced to it in a dream. In the dream I saw the ages and generations coming together to restore the ancient path—the way of holiness. We are being called to come together!

Could a flag from the days of our founding become the symbol for the cry of a nation?

Let's love with boldness and lead with passion.

Let's serve faithfully and risk generously.

Let's stand for truth and make "an Appeal to Heaven"

*Rick Curry was born in Richmond, Kentucky, and has been involved in full-time ministry all of his adult life. He is the lead pastor of King's Way Church in Pensacola, Florida, and provides apostolic oversight to its affiliate congregations. He is currently leading with other key leaders a significant revival that is quickly spreading all along the Gulf Coast and in many other regions of the country.*

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## **The Key to Succeeding During Disruption**

**Change is not simply a season in our spiritual journeys; it is a process we undergo for the whole of life.**

As her labor pains intensified, I watched in amazement as my typically sweet-natured, mild-mannered wife took on the appearance of Sigourney Weaver in *Alien*. In one startling moment her peaceful appearance was replaced by a taut jaw, steely eyes and the bark of a drill sergeant preparing young

soldiers for the battle of their lives. The thin line of sweat that had formed on her brow began to pulsate in rhythm with her temples.

I wanted to run for my life, to get as far away from this frightening creature as I could. But the next moment she was back to normal—normal, that is, for a pregnant woman about to give birth.

For a moment I wondered at the amazing transformation I had just witnessed. Was she possessed? Should I call the church intercessors? Was this the time to order the anointing oil I had seen advertised in *Charisma*?

Then I remembered the warning of the wise old doctor who had done everything within his ability to prepare my wife for this moment: “Transition is unlike anything you have ever felt before.” Suddenly, it all became clear to me. This was it—the dreaded stage called “transition.”

The lessons I learned on that stormy night 15 years ago have enabled me to keep my sanity during many other transitional experiences in my life, both natural and spiritual. Here’s what I’ve discovered.

### **Transition Is Unavoidable**

The inescapable reality of life in the 21st century is “Change, or you will be changed.” If there is anything we’ve learned from the last few years of experience in doing life, it’s that the near future holds anything but the expected. We live in the midst of changing times.

Gone are the days of predictability and routine. Those frameworks that have held firm for generations, providing the basic structure of life, have begun to falter. The concepts that have governed business, science, government and philosophy no longer seem to apply. The traditional formulas for interpersonal relationships cannot guarantee the same

results they once did.

And no one has felt the pain of transition any more than women.

As women have begun to take a more visible role in shaping our world, they have experienced the direct effects of transitional living. Fifty years ago, it was unheard of to have women as heads of state, industry and education, yet now they lead us capably and successfully. This social transformation has left women managing the pain of personal transition while also dealing with the pressure of learning new skills.

For years I lived with the idea that we were simply in a season of change, only to wake up one day and realize that this season was unending. Transition is not simply a period of time in our lives; it is the whole of life. In fact, transition is the lifestyle of Spirit-led men and women.

It is vital for us to embrace this truth because if we perceive transition to be only a "momentary affliction," then we will be incredibly disappointed when we move from one period of transition headlong into the next. My wife, being the insightful woman that she is, quickly discovered that the transition of labor leads to the transition of motherhood, which leads to more transition in every area of life.

What's true of life in general is also true of our relationships with the Lord. As one well acquainted with transition, Paul said that in following Christ we are "transformed ... from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). The end result of spiritual transition is total and complete glorification; anything less than that will keep us on the road to change.

Like ancient Israel, God created us to be a spiritually nomadic people who travel light along life's journey as we pursue the pillar of fire, the cloud of glory and the ark of

His presence. We were created for the journey, not just the destination.

## **Transition Will Redefine You**

For this reason, transition can be frightening, especially for those who have defined themselves by what they do rather than by who they are. I have counseled a number of women who fall into this category:

- Working women who quit their jobs to raise children—"I don't even know who I am anymore without my career."
- Married women who have just gone through a divorce—"If I'm not his wife, who am I?"
- Mothers whose children are now grown—"With our last child out of the nest, I don't know what to do with myself."

I recently experienced a similar identity crisis. After pastoring for 15 years, I went through a six-month period during which I wrote, conducted seminars and spoke in conferences but didn't actively pastor. One day during this period, Tyler, my youngest son, came home from third grade with a question.

"Dad, what are you now?" he asked. I groped for an answer, rambling on about what I was doing. His eyes glazed over.

Tyler was looking for a noun—pastor, lawyer, doctor, teacher—and all I could give him was a string of action words telling him what I was doing. For a few months I struggled with the way transition was redefining me.

But I finally realized that there was no point in trying to get comfortable because as soon as I did, change would appear on the horizon. Just about the time my wife became comfortable in her role as the mother of an infant, the baby began to walk, and our whole world changed. When we moved the

breakables to higher shelves and covered the electrical outlets, we realized our world would never be the same.

Although we were eventually able to return the delicate figurines to their original places, we had to make other adjustments in our home and lives as we went from being the parents of a toddler to being the parents of a grade-schooler to being the parents of a teen-ager. Through the process I learned that the only way to avoid transition is to stop growing.

### **Transition Takes Time to Assimilate**

Science teaches us that light travels through space at a constant speed of 186,281 miles per second. The governing laws of the universe dictate this speed with absolutely no deviation.

Yet humans travel through life without the benefit of a fixed velocity. We move at a variable rate that fluctuates according to our capacity for assimilating new information and influences. How well we absorb the implications of change dramatically affects the rate at which we successfully manage the challenges we face—both individually and collectively.

Each of us was designed by God to move through life most effectively and efficiently at a unique pace that will allow us to absorb and respond to the major changes we face. When we assimilate less change than our optimum speed allows, we fail to live up to our potential. When we attempt to assimilate more than our optimum speed permits, we become overloaded and stressed out.

Many of the women to whom I minister have recently found themselves in an unprecedented state of disequilibrium. They're not quite sure where the world is going and where they fit in the journey; consequently, they feel "out of balance" emotionally, spiritually and physically. As a result of this upheaval, they often find it difficult to maintain a healthy

balance between work, rest, worship and play.

The result is that they are allowing change to manage them rather than managing it. This can cause them to become bitter instead of better.

Futurist and author Alvin Toffler was the first to popularize a term that describes the potentially debilitating effects of transitional living when he coined the term "future shock" in 1965. In a book by the same title, he accurately predicted the devastation that could result if we are unable to properly absorb major changes in society.

"Future shock" occurs when people are asked to tolerate more disruption than they have the capacity to endure, and it results in high levels of stress and low levels of effectiveness. A few years ago, I learned that a number of pilots were in open revolt against more technology. These pilots were saying, "Please don't increase the technology in my cockpit. If I can't manage everything in here, you're going to kill me."

It seems the pilots were not complaining about inferior technology. In fact, what they were given was very often equipment they had asked for and even helped to design. But they were worried about making a rapid transition to new instruments without proper time for assimilation.

We all need time to assimilate the changes that are necessary for our survival. Learning the principles that will allow us to manage change and increase our spiritual resilience is not just a luxury but a necessity.

### **Find Something to Focus on During Transition**

I believe that the greatest challenge we face in life is the challenge to forget the past, consider the present as transitional and focus on the future. When we camp in one spiritual or emotional location for too long, spiritual rigor

mortis sets in. To remain where we are is to remain as we are.

Several years ago, I found myself standing in front of a kiosk in the shopping mall, desperately trying to focus on a three-dimensional mosaic picture. I had walked by the booth a hundred times smirking at the silly people wasting their time trying to discern the unseen. After one of my caustic comments, my wife threw down the gauntlet: "All right, wise guy, if it's so easy, let's see you do it!"

I marched confidently over to the booth, picked up the picture and entered a world of total confusion. No matter how hard I tried, I could not see anything but a thousand unrelated pixels.

After allowing me to wallow in my humiliation for a time, my wife finally revealed the secret: "If you get close to the picture, relax your vision and focus on one spot, it will magically appear before your eyes." I finally did, and the picture became clear.

The key to retaining your sanity during the unexpected moments of transitional living is to stay focused on the big picture. Many people find themselves struggling with arrested emotional and spiritual development because they have lost the power of vision during the process of transition.

What I thought was anger in the delivery room that stormy night in Kansas City was actually the intensity of my wife's focus. When I questioned her attitude, she quickly reminded me of the doctor's advice: "Find something and focus intently on it. It may be a picture, a light bulb or even my bald spot, but whatever you do, don't break your focus."

The same advice can be applied to transitional living. Find one spot on the horizon of your destiny, and focus on it.

Our ability to change determines whether or not we survive.

The simple reality is that we have no choice over whether or not we will encounter the force of change in our lifetime. Our power lies in the ability to handle it correctly when we are confronted with it.

If you resist the changes that are necessary to succeed in business, you will eventually file bankruptcy papers. If you refuse to change as your spouse matures, you will eventually file divorce papers. If you resist the changes that are necessary for soul growth, you will eventually face defeat and despair.

In order to survive transitional living, we must make peace with the journey. The challenge to change is not some kind of divine punishment; it is a gracious invitation to rise to a new level of being.

Once you stop resenting the process you can engage in the exciting journey of encountering the unexpected. I challenge you to settle these issues once and for all and get on with the business of being “transformed ... from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

**Terry Crist** is the senior pastor of City of Grace church in Scottsdale, Ariz. He is the author of *The Image Maker* and *The Language of Babylon*.

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## **Amid Iraqi Terror Crisis, Light of Christ Is Dawning**

Before sending the first wave of military “advisers,” U.S. officials expressed reservations about putting combat “boots on the ground” in Iraq again to deal with a fierce Islamist

terrorist threat in the country's unstable northern regions.

But a Tennessee-based Christian relief organization has had its own "boots on the ground" in this dangerous territory for the past nine months and is showing no signs of backing down in the face of the ruthless militants' convert-or-be-slaughtered ultimatum.

"Despite the atrocities being committed by ISIS [short for the Islamist State of Iraq and Syria], Iraq represents an opportunity to bring the hope and love of the Gospel," says Crisis Response International (CRI) Director Sean Malone.

Teams of CRI responders—a combination of staff and trained volunteers—are committed to bringing a witness of God's love in tangible ways providing food, shelter and medical needs to hundreds in Iraq daily, he said. But most importantly, CRI is praying and bringing the peace and salvation of Jesus into the hearts of hundreds of Iraq residents who are desperate for answers.

Workers have been on the ground in Iraq for more than nine months after responding to the increasing crisis and displacement of more than 1 million Syrian refugees late last year.

"We already had teams on the ground and were positioned to respond to the thousands that needed us when the ISIS crisis broke out," said Malone.

This vision and resolve is why the Christian organization is committed to ministering to the desperate situation in Iraq, when most other organizations have pulled out of the area or are still considering whether to get involved. Since December 2013, CRI has been laboring to support and reach the Syrian refugees with basic needs and the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the ISIS crisis broke out late this spring, the ministry had an established base, teams on the ground and expertise in the area.

“The question of the hour isn’t if we should pull out, it’s how can we meet and respond in Christ’s love and service to the overwhelming need that exists in Iraq since ISIS terrorists have displaced thousands,” said Malone.

CRI personnel in Iraq now are from New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, California, Tennessee and Colorado. Teams are rotating in and out of the area and typically staying about 14 days. To stay longer, they would need visas and additional government approvals. CRI may go that extra mile in cases where it wants certain people to assist in the long term. But in this case, because of the stressful environment in northern Iraq and the dangers its personnel face, shorter-term trips were deemed better for the volunteers.

Responders reported to their home office in Nashville this week that a new refugee camp has just formed to hold about 2,000 families. Another 5,000 people are in dire straits right down the road from their base with no aid organization in site, so CRI is stepping in to supply basic needs such as diapers, food and more there as well. As refugees are displaced, they tend to congregate together.

Hundreds of Iraqis are coming to the Lord every week as CRI is providing Christian leadership in the midst of this crisis. If the world is asking, “What’s the church’s response to hundreds of thousands of displaced and disenfranchised refugees in crisis?” CRI missionaries immediately responded by sending \$50,000 worth of supplies to contribute to the aid efforts with 10 staff members on the ground in Iraq right now. But the need is truly huge, and more support is needed, urgently.

“If you aren’t a trained responder through CRI, you can partner with us financially and by sharing our news releases via email and social media. We need your help spreading the word that in the midst of this horrible tragedy, God is breaking through with His light,” said Malone.

“This is the church’s hour, and a great opportunity to bring the hope of the Gospel to areas that are just devastated by crises,” said Malone. “One hundred percent of donations go directly to the crisis supplying food, water, beds and medical clinics in Iraq.

“Churches have closed, people are homeless sleeping in the streets. It’s one of the worst situations we’ve been involved with, but now is when we’re needed most. Now is the time for the church to show the love of Jesus,” he added.

CRI is a nonprofit organization that resources, trains and mobilizes volunteers, churches and other organizations to respond to disasters and compassion initiatives around the world. It provides a model and framework for responding to disaster situations and delivering resources to areas that would otherwise be off-limits to volunteers. CRI says its procedures and training avoid what the government calls “the second disaster,” referring to the chaos that often ensues when spontaneous resources and untrained volunteers arrive on a chaotic scene.

To make a donation visit [criout.com](http://criout.com) on your smartphone and text the word “ISISCRISIS” to 41444 and you will receive a link to give in whatever amount you like via credit or debit card.

For more stories and testimonies of the ministry’s work in Iraq, visit [criout.com](http://criout.com).

*This story was reported by CRI personnel on the ground in Iraq and written by Mark Andrews and Kyle Patterson. Patterson is a communications specialist with [Thrive Media Group](#) of Buffalo, New York, which works mostly with nonprofits. Andrews’ [latest book](#) is a Christian military thriller in which U.S. aviators help defend Israel during a new Mideast war.*

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# 'Pastor Choco' Calls for Pentecostals to Stand in the Gap

Pastor Wilfredo De Jesús, named to *Time* magazine's 2013 list of the 100 most influential people in the world, carries a burden for the poor and disenfranchised. Now he has written a book that explains the biblical case for social activism, *In the Gap: What Happens When God's People Stand Strong*.

Widely known as "Pastor Choco," De Jesús is the senior pastor of New Life Covenant Church in Chicago, the largest church in the U.S. Assemblies of God Fellowship with 17,000 attendees. The church has more than 130 ministries that reach the broken-hearted, poor and homeless, including prostitutes, drug addicts and gang members.

*In the Gap*, which is available in English and Spanish, draws its title from Ezekiel 22:30, where God laments the lack of someone to stand "in the gap" for His people. De Jesús writes that "a gap represents a place of weakness, vulnerability and danger" and could be a social problem such as illiteracy, racism or human trafficking, or something more personal, such as a prodigal child, an unfaithful spouse or an abusive family member.

After years of standing in the gap, De Jesús has come to understand what makes a "gap person"—the champion who protects or supports someone in need, a man or woman who finds the courage to sacrifice everything to represent God and block evil from destroying those He loves.

De Jesús gives nine examples of courageous people in the

Scriptures—men and women who recognized desperate needs and trusted God to use them to make a difference: Nehemiah, Esther, Noah, David, Barnabas, John the Baptist, Gideon, Deborah and Caleb.

De Jesús believes that little has changed in the more than 2,000 years since the last of these biblical characters lived.

“People are still in distress, and God is still looking for men and women to stand in the gap in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our cities and towns, in our nation, and in every corner of the world,” he writes.

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## **How Much of Christ Is in Your Christianity?**

That’s quite a compelling question, isn’t it? It’s kind of like asking how much of Christ is in Christmas. I think many of us would agree that Christmas has become so commercialized that among the general populace Christ is hardly noticed, much less celebrated and revered. Easter would be in the same category. How in the world a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ could have ever evolved into an affinity with Easter bunnies and Easter eggs I’ll never know. Such is the tenuous nature of idolatry.

Is it possible for Jesus Christ to be lost in Christianity, the very religion whose Name it bears? We know that without a relationship with Christ, just another religion is all that remains. We also know from Scripture that someone can profess to know Christ but in works actually deny Him (Titus 1:16). But isn’t it also true that in works many may profess to know Him, but in authentic heart knowledge they do not?

Who knew Jehovah in Old Testament times? That earthly system of Judaism was to point the way to Christ, but in actuality it hid Him from the multitudes who were enmeshed in the works of the law. The external had glossed over the need for the internal. Sin and death reigned in the old order of things.

Isn't the same true today? There is an external order in modern Christianity that seems to rule. Its emphasis on appearance, hype, professionalism, showmanship and production allow us to easily deceive ourselves into thinking that somehow all these things become essential to our success while Christ is glossed over.

Many of our contemporary churches have become echo chambers for the latest trends in pop psychology, marketing, politics, entertainment and entrepreneurial leadership, while the simple demands of Christ are often overlooked or packaged in a way to make Him palatable to the masses.

We have become all too enamored with our own glory in the kingdoms that we are building, at times totally unaware of receiving that invisible kingdom "that cannot be shaken" (Heb. 12:2).

Judaism with all its external forms, rituals and framework began its removal 2,000 years ago and was replaced with a higher heavenly standard established through the new covenant. Now again in this end time marks the removal of all that is external to bring us to a forcing point, and it is this: After all is said and done, how much of the Christ do you really have? Not what you do, not what you've built, not what you have, not even the noble activities that constitute your Christian life. But how much of the Christ Himself do you have?

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ"

(Col. 2:8).

Here in this chapter Paul is speaking of the inward life, encouraging the Christ life—to walk in Him and be rooted and built up in Him. Philosophies and empty deceits, based on traditions of men, and the basic principles of the world speak to us of humanistic things, mystical things, outward things that are without real eternal substance.

Much like today and throughout the centuries of time, Christianity can too easily slip into an outward-ness. “Don’t be cheated,” Paul says, from the simplicity and completeness of the inward Christ life. There are many things that seek to rob, steal and plunder our love, affection and holy intimate knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not just the philosophies and empty deceits we need to beware of, but there are even good and acceptable things, which while having their proper place in the Christian life, have a tendency to cheat us from the real person and mind of Christ. Such things as buildings, budgets, programs, projects, meetings, committees or other things that concern the church system apart from the mind of Christ, have the potential to dry up the real heart of the Christ life. Often it’s these very things that rob us of the hallowing intimacy that we are meant to experience with Christ. These things are useful but must be kept in their proper perspective lest they dilute our vision of Jesus Himself.

When Christ was born, a hellish opposition immediately arose to kill and destroy Him. Likewise when the corporate counterpart of the Christ, the Man-child Company is brought forth near the end of this age (Rev. 12), there will be yet another most violent release of hellish opposition. “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18).

Everything of this world order is in direct opposition to the Christ being revealed.

The return of the Lord once again will signal the removal of all that is earthly and temporal and of man, so that only the eternal order of Jesus Christ and His kingdom will remain.

When Christ returns, He is coming for the formation of Christ in us. It is Him in us that He will recognize. His words, "I never knew you," and "I don't know you" were spoken to so-called ministers and foolish virgins who were doing the work of God and who laid claim to His Name. Somehow the Christ was not found in them. Somehow their form of Christianity had replaced Christ Himself.

So once again the question beckons us: How much of Christ is in your Christianity?

**Bert M. Farias**, founder of [Holy Fire Ministries](#), is the author of [The Real Gospel](#) and co-host of the New England Holy Ghost Forum. He is a missionary evangelist carrying a spirit of revival to the church and the nations. Follow him at [Bert Farias](#) on Facebook or [@Bertfarias1](#) on Twitter.