

Teen: 'Parents, We Follow Your Lead'

Every youth pastor out there has young people in their youth group. Hence the name "youth group." And those youth have parents.

This article is an open letter to them, the parents of youth, from a teen. It is your responsibility as youth pastors to forward this message.

Dear parents of teens:

We follow your lead. What I have to say may hurt, but I'm saying it out of love. Please hear me, despite my age, and take it to heart. The life direction of your teen depends on it.

Do you know more about pop culture or about God? Pop culture is not pro-God. It's more anti-God. Does it rule your teen's life? Does it rule your life? Do you know more about pop culture than you do about the Bible?

If you do, then why are you surprised that we are following your lead? Pop culture influences us. It does. Maybe that isn't a big deal to you. If it isn't, then you have a bigger problem than your teen does. We follow your lead.

Actions speak louder than words. You say you read your Bible every day, but is that true? Maybe you don't say it because you never do. If God is only spoken of on Sundays, then we will treat God as a Sunday-only-God. He will not have an impact in our daily life at all. Why? It's because we followed your lead.

Spend time with us. You could teach us so much about God's Word, assuming you talk about God outside of Sundays. Time

together is more important than buying us stuff. That's not the way to build a relationship. Talk with us about God and our relationship with Him. It's the commonplace talks about God with you that make a bigger impact on us than anything. It teaches us that God is more than just a Sunday thing.

Limit technology time. This one hurts me to say, but I'll do it anyway. Limit things like our iPhone, computer and TV. Being a teen myself, I get annoyed by this rule at our house, and your teen will be too. But, trust me, I find stuff to do. I write a blog and create videos to help influence others. It gets me doing constructive stuff, which actually matters. Not just playing on Instagram and Tumblr for hours at a time. Help us be more constructive. Set some time-limit rules and actually enforce them. Good things come from it.

Make us read. Encourage us to read the Bible and try devotionals. But let me warn you, if you don't do it, then don't expect us to either. We follow your lead. And along with that, ask them to read other books. Personally, I love to read, but other teens aren't so excited about it. Show them how much better it is than gossip magazines. Show them the classics or, at least, The Maze Runner Series (which actually asks the question. Do the ends justify the means?).

Make us learn Bible verses. You make us learn math, why not God's Word? This is one reason I think Awana programs are so great. Whenever we're in a tough spot, these verses will come to mind and help us remember what the Bible has to say about the situation. Hopefully, we'll really think about the verse's meaning. Remember this, garbage in-garbage out. God in-God out. This also goes back to point No. 1.

Talk with God every day. He wants to hear from you. It's not worthless; maybe you'll learn something, and we will do the

same. As I said in point No. 2, we teens mirror our parents all the time. Monkey see, monkey do. Encourage prayer (at meals, at night and morning ...) and buy some teen devotionals at stores like LifeWay, which will help with point No. 5.

This is not the youth pastor's job. Sure he shares some good advice with your teens, but YOU have to make this last. Encourage us; help us grow. The youth pastor is not the coach. He is on your team. You are the coach, and you will be held accountable—not the youth pastor. Teamwork is key. But don't blame the youth pastor when we only follow your lead.

So, there you have it! Try these out, and I promise you'll see a difference. Now, we are growing up and getting ready to start a new chapter in our lives (as much as you moms hate to admit), we're becoming adults. So start early. Because one day we'll have to make our own decisions, choose our own paths. Your job is to steer us in the right direction for when that time comes.

My biggest advice for you as parents is, get spiritually healthy first, because when you are spiritually healthy, then you do the right things. And we follow your lead.

Tiffany Sullivan is a middle-schooler who likes writing, acting, singing and writing blogs. Diagnosed with scoliosis in 2012, Tiffany loves Jesus and has made it her mission in life to witness to others and bring them into God's kingdom. You can check out her blogs and videos at her website at tiffanysullivan.net.

For the original article, visit tiffanysullivan.net.

Mainstream Media Doesn't Mind Offensive Attacks on Christians

News-media outlets recently have suspended several reporters and commentators for their allegedly controversial political views.

ESPN suspended two of its stars for being offensive. Steven A. Smith was suspended for a remark about women provoking domestic violence, and Dan Le Batard was suspended for renting provocative billboards sarcastically "thanking" LeBron James for bringing two NBA championships to Miami.

Reporter Sean Bergin of Channel 12 in New York/New Jersey was suspended for a remark he made about too many black youths having no father in the home.

Following the shooting death of Jersey City police officer Melvin Santiago, Bergin said, "It's important to shine a light on this anti-cop mentality that has so contaminated America's inner cities. This same sick, perverse line of thinking is evident from Jersey City to Newark and Patterson to Trenton. It has made the police officer's job impossible, and it has got to stop. The underlying cause for all of this, of course, young black men growing up without fathers. Unfortunately, no one in the news media has the courage to touch that subject."

A spokesperson for Channel 12 News told the Hollywood website, *The Wrap*, "It is News 12's policy that reporters must be objective and not state personal opinions on-air. In regards to the particular incident with Sean Bergin, the matter is being addressed internally, and we don't comment on personnel matters."

Clearly, media executives are prepared to take action against

some material considered offensive.

What's important for audiences to understand is that media morality can be very different from public morality. Even more important, the public needs to understand that the media wants to implant its anti-biblical, leftist morality in the public's consciousness.

Thus, over the years, Americans have become much more accepting of sex outside of marriage, divorce, homosexuality, abortion, secular big government, and same-sex marriage because of media indoctrination.

Of course, what the mainstream media never considers to be offensive are any attacks on Christian faith, Jesus and Christian believers. The idea that Disney/ABC would even consider a program called *GCB* (Good Christian B--es) or that Turner Broadcasting would produce a program like *Black Jesus*, shows that offending Christians is of little concern to media executives and their flunkies in the newsrooms and programming offices in Hollywood, New York and Washington, DC. Worse, it shows they willingly and consciously invest in programs that ridicule Christianity, Jesus and people of biblical faith.

Allegedly offensive comments by people such as Steven A. Smith are spur-of-the-moment slip-ups. The production and scheduling of *GCB* or *Black Jesus* are not.

It's highly informative that the remark that got Sean Bergin suspended closed with the line, "Unfortunately, no one in the news media has the courage to touch that subject." This implies there are people working in the media that fear reprisals if they say something truthful that doesn't adhere to the unwritten, but well understood, leftist morality of the media.

Take the case of inner-city crime, for example. Statistics show that African-Americans are far more likely to be murdered by a young black man than they are to be murdered by a

policeman. However, whenever an African American is killed by a police officer, it makes national news, giving the impression that the police are conducting some kind of genocidal campaign against the black race throughout the United States.

Of course, crime statistics also show that males are stopped, arrested and killed by police far more than females, but that doesn't mean America's men and women in blue are a bunch of feminist, sexist "pigs" trying to destroy the male gender.

Because of the leftist media's almost constant distortion of the news, a distortion which it uses to increase racial strife between blacks and whites, an inner-city suburb in St. Louis, the city of Ferguson, this month saw four or five straight nights of rioting, looting and attacks on the police after the death of an 18-year-old black man during an altercation with a policeman.

As in many other recent cases, the rush to judgment among media pundits and even reporters would make your head spin.

Thus, if you work for the mainstream news media, your paycheck depends on your staying in line with the leftist media's unwritten moral code. This explains why there are so few moral conservatives in the media. To earn a paycheck, you must either agree with the media's liberal agenda or pretend that you do. Mention that fatherless families are bad for society, and you can get suspended. Do it a second time, and don't even consider being a news reporter.

The Fox News Channel infuriates the rest of the media, and gained a large audience, because it refuses to tow the Christophobic, secular progressive line of the Left. The *Drudge Report* really angers the media elite by drawing the attention of the American people to stories the mainstream media doesn't want covered. But, even Fox and Drudge don't interview the media executives who produce and market programs

like *GCB and Black Jesus*. Neither do they lay bare the direct consequences of the sexual revolution.

America's mainstream media would have you think America's problem is underfunded schools and poverty programs, not promiscuity, immorality and left-wing extremism. The American people are smarter than the elites running the media. When surveyed, they chose welfare as the leading cause of poverty. They also ranked the breakdown of the family far above racism, unlike the recent reports on the riots in Ferguson from the likes of *The New York Times*, *USA Today* and CNN.

What America, and the world, needs is news-media competition. We need reporters who can report without fear on the problem of fatherlessness. We need reporters who won't be intimidated by Muslim terrorists or by leftist racial demagogues. We need a major media company that green-lights movies and programs that support conservative, biblical values and the historic, traditional definition of marriage and that promote faith and family. We need executives who would be repulsed if someone asked them to fund programs like *GCB* or *Black Jesus*.

The best way to defeat the Left's misguided, mindless media morality is by applying Christian, biblical values of truth, justice, beauty, self-control, kindness, goodness, gentleness, purity, faith and love.

These values begin with Jesus Christ. They are all part of His gospel.

David Outten is production editor for Movieguide, and **Tom Snyder** is Movieguide's editor.

This article originally appeared on Movieguide.org. [Want to know what God's doing in Hollywood?](#)

Study Links Cardiac Drugs to Breast Cancer

Many older women take drugs called calcium-channel blockers to lower their blood pressure. But new research has found that these widely used medications can double a woman's risk of developing breast cancer.

Calcium-channel blockers relax blood vessels so that blood flows more easily, lowering blood pressure. They are among the most widely prescribed drugs in the United States.

Researchers at the [Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center](#) in Seattle collected data on 1,907 women between the ages of 55 and 74, who had breast cancer. They compared those subjects with information on more than 880 women without cancer.

The scientists found that women who had used calcium-channel blockers for 10 years or more were at higher risk for breast cancer than those who took other types of blood-pressure medication.

I don't believe calcium-channel blockers are the best choice for reducing blood pressure anyway. I use angiotensin II antagonists or ACE inhibitors (such as lisinopril) as my first line in treating high blood pressure. I prescribe other medications, such as diuretics, if necessary.

Of course, the best way to prevent high blood pressure is to do so naturally. Losing weight is the most effective way. Generally, a loss of 10 pounds results in the need for one less blood-pressure medication.

I also recommend eliminating salt, [following a plant-based](#)

[diet](#), and walking one hour daily.

Chauncey W. Crandall, M.D., F.A.C.C., chief of the cardiac transplant program at the world-renowned Palm Beach Cardiovascular Clinic in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, practices interventional, vascular and transplant cardiology. Dr. Crandall received his postgraduate training at Yale University School of Medicine, where he also completed three years of research in the cardiovascular surgery division. Known as the “Christian physician,” Dr. Crandall has been heralded for his values and message of hope to all his heart patients.

For the original article, visit chaunceycrandall.com.

10 Ways Millennials Are Shaping the Local Church

They are the largest generation in history. In the United States alone, they number more than 78 million, even larger than the seemingly ubiquitous Boomers.

They are the millennials. They are changing our nation, our world and our churches.

For the purpose of this post, I want to focus on changes they are already bringing to our local churches. I have the benefit of a [large research project](#) on the millennials, plus the ongoing conversations I have with members of this generation. And I have spoken with countless leaders in churches about their experiences with millennials.

Keep in mind that the birth years of the millennials are from

1980 to 2000. So the oldest member of this generation is 34, while the youngest is only 14. But their impact is already noticeable, and it will be for years to come. Here are 10 ways they are shaping local congregations today:

1. More of them are attracted to smaller venues. They are thus one of the reasons for the incredible growth in the multi-venue model of churches and the growth of new churches. Leaders of smaller churches should be encouraged by this trend as well.

2. They see culture as something to influence, rather than an enemy to denounce. Many Millennials truly have a missionary mindset. They are turned off by those who constantly rail against people.

3. They like to cooperate with others. They do not view other churches and Christian organizations as competitors. They are attracted to congregations that are working with other congregations.

4. They abhor worship wars. I have a previous post on this topic called "[What Worship Style Attracts the Millennials?](#)"

5. They love churches that love their communities. One of the first questions a Millennial will ask a church leader is, "What is the church doing to influence, impact and minister to the community?"

6. They are attracted to churches that emphasize groups. The millennials want to be a part of a congregation that has healthy small groups, Sunday school classes, home groups or other groups.

7. They want to be trained on their schedule. The millennials truly desire training. But they are accustomed to having that training available when they are able to hear it or view it. Such is the reason that many churches are going to [video](#)

[training](#) while having “live” worship services and small groups.

8. They will question almost everything. This generation will want to know why a church does what it does. The most unacceptable answer is, “We have always done it this way.”

9. They are slow to join and slow to leave. Church leaders are often frustrated that a Millennial takes so long to commit to a local congregation. But they are intentional and thorough. Once they commit to a church, they are less likely to leave, especially over petty issues.

10. They want to be involved. If a church does not have an intentional plan to get millennials involved in ministry quickly, they will not reach this key group.

I love this generation. I love their enthusiasm, their commitment, and even their questions. They are one of the reasons I remain an obnoxious optimist about the revitalization of local congregations.

I would love to hear from some of you millennials. And I would love to hear from some of the older folks like me who are interacting with this generation. Your comments are always more valuable than my posts.

Thom S. Rainer is the president of LifeWay Christian Resources. For the original article, visit thomrainer.com.

Pentecostals Put Themselves

in Middle of Ferguson, Missouri, Violence

The streets of Ferguson, Missouri, have fluctuated between violence, calm and renewed violence following the shooting death of Michael Brown, a black 18-year-old, by Darren Wilson, a white Ferguson police officer, in a confrontation on Saturday, Aug. 9.

After two failed attempts to restore order by police, as violence and looting erupted again over the weekend, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon has set a curfew and called in the National Guard.

Destruction, violence, hatred, division, death.

“The only one sitting back and laughing at this all is Satan,” says Jack Hembree, pastor of [Bethel Fellowship](#) (AG) in Florissant, Missouri—located just a few minutes from where rioting has broken out. Hembree, who expressed his grief in a note to his congregation over the violence, urged his congregation not to “take sides” but instead bring Christ into the situation.

“The differences that divide us were not created by God but designed by the enemy. It is time to battle not with a gun, bottle, or badge, but with prayer and the Word of God,” Hembree wrote. “Lay down our economics, our political persuasion, our differences, or whatever is hindering the power of the words of God from working in us and pick up the cross of Jesus Christ that brings forgiveness, confession, repentance, acceptance, love, freedom and life.”

And his church has joined other churches as members of the Metro North Church Alliance to do just that.

“What you don’t see on the national media is the church,”

Hembree says. "The churches got together and marched down that same street the rioters marched on, passing out bags of supplies, food and toiletries to people. Church members stood in front of buildings through the night to make sure they were not looted. Church members parked in people's driveways to make sure they were safe all through the night. Church members went up and down the streets, cleaning up the mess. The national media doesn't show any of that.

"The people of Ferguson are very good people," Hembree says. "Yes, there needs to be some changes. We know that and it's nothing new, but it's a good community with good people."

Brian Schmidgall, executive presbyter and pastor of [MiddleTree Church](#), located on the dividing line between North and South St. Louis and about three miles from the rioting, agrees with Hembree's evaluation of Christ being the answer.

"There will be people of profile flying in and getting their face in the spotlight because it's trendy and in vogue ... there will be social-justice programs and systemic structure changes, but there will be the same problems 10 years down the road," Schmidgall says. "The one thing the church addresses is the heart. If you don't address the heart, then healing and recovery don't happen."

Schmidgall also observed a phenomenon of the digital age that he felt actually intensified and fueled the rioting.

"Social media is instigating a lot of this [violence]," he says. "As the mainstream media [originally] couldn't get access to the scene, social media was really getting charged and drawing a line in the sand for people—and everyone knows that if it's on the 'Internet' [or a text/tweet], it must be true..."

As Schmidgall works to bring a sense of stability in the midst of chaos, he believes this tragedy can be redeemed by God. The focus of MiddleTree Church, he says, is to bridge the divide

between North and South St. Louis (the haves and have-nots), and he believes the incident in Ferguson will open doors for the churches in his area to unite and be used by God to make a change in the community.

“The Lord’s hand is priming this for good things,” he says, adding that he’ll be meeting with local ministers this week to plan united action. “What the enemy meant for harm, I think the Lord is going to use this.”

Pastor Aubery Kishna and his wife, Vimla, have been pastoring [Jubilee Worship Center](#) (AG) for the past 19 years. Theirs is the AG church located closest to the demonstrations and rioting, occurring just down the road from the church. One member lives in the apartment complex directly behind a looted and burned gas station that has appeared on national news.

Kishna, a bivocational minister, says his church canceled services last Wednesday but held them on Sunday, encouraging members to pray for their community, while leading them in prayer for the families, school districts and political leaders involved. They currently plan to hold midweek services this week.

The church, which sees 40 to 50 people in attendance on Sundays, also took food from its pantry and partnered with another church that was distributing food to those in need in the area of the demonstrations.

The Kishnas both agreed that the community seems to be fairly peaceful during the daylight hours, but at night, things “get out of control.” But Vimla, who is a teacher, says her school district, along with two others, were closed on Monday, due to the demonstrations.

AG Missionary Jay Covert, who oversees [Urban Outreach Church Plants](#) in East St Louis and Washington Park, where he is no stranger to danger, hasn’t seen a strong reaction in his community or neighborhoods to the riots.

Having just been caught in gang crossfire several months ago while he and a visiting pastor drove around the neighborhood, Covert is concerned that the riot in Ferguson might not be an isolated event. That unless there's a God-driven transformation in the hearts of people, riots and violence may happen and intensify as a trend throughout the country before things get any better.

"Where we're at, murder is not uncommon," Covert explains simply. "Murders rarely get solved because no one talks, they're fearful—'snitches get stitches' is the saying."

Kishna says that no matter what the outcome of the investigation, he feels deeply for the parents of Michael Brown. "We had a 26-year-old girl that we buried just a couple months ago," Kishna says. "She was at the wrong place at the wrong time and was caught in a gang shooting. ... My heart breaks for Michael Brown's family. But not just for them, but for all the 'Michael Browns' who have been shot and killed on the streets by gangs. There's no one crying foul for them."

Hembree says that the weekend's renewed violence is making things difficult and unsafe for churches, where prayer is even more of a focus.

"Some of the [ministry] efforts have been suspended for a few days," Hembree says, expressing concern about "outsiders" being the cause of the problems. "As of now, we are still proceeding with attempting to meet the needs of families in the area... [but] if it gets too dangerous, they will have to stop for the short term. Those decisions will be made daily."

Schmidgall says that it is vital for the church to be actively involved in the lives of people in the community. "If you have relationship, you have a voice," Schmidgall says. "Because if we don't have those relationships, what is going to happen if the outcome of the investigation isn't what people want to hear?"

10 Judgments Jesus Made Against Religious Church Systems

Every church and/or organization has a corporate culture with norms, rules and expectations that pressure participants to conform. Some cultures are good and some bad.

That being said, there are particular attributes that characterize false religions or become the norm during religious decline in a true faith such as Christianity. For example, "Every religious system in the world is centered upon a temple (or a sacred place) and has rites and ceremonies, has hierarchies and titles distinguishing men from one another, and has holy days and holy celebrations" (quoted from a teaching I heard from Pastor Tommy Moya several weeks ago).

The Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah, Micah and Amos decried religious ritual that was without true righteousness, humility and love for neighbor (Is. 1:10-17; 58; Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:8). The line of prophets arose starting in the 8th century B.C. primarily because Israel had a tendency to focus more on adhering to the temple ritual worship of the Levitical system than the ethical lifestyle required by the Law of Moses as found in the Ten Commandments. For this, the prophets pronounced judgment upon the nation, and God dispersed the people and, on two occasions, let enemies destroy their temple.

We have the same issue in today's church, irrespective of the denomination or expression of the body of Christ. (Many Pentecostal, charismatic and evangelical churches have these

same issues.) Not only that, but all leaders (including me) have to constantly grapple with some or all of the following issues internally to make sure we are never sucked into this false system.

The following are 10 of the characteristics of false religious systems as taught by Jesus in Matthew 23:

1. There are onerous rules and regulations some call legalism (Matt. 23:1-3).

In the contemporary church, there are numerous man-made traditions and requirements that never arose from the Word, which have become an unnecessary burden upon believers. For example, in many Pentecostal churches the emphasis is on outward holiness related to attire, makeup, the cutting of hair, jewelry and other regulations. I have spoken to numerous young people who stopped attending church because these regulations made them feel weird in front of their unchurched friends. Fundamentalists in the past forbade any form of entertainment, including watching movies, listening to the radio, watching television, etc. These are legalistic efforts to bring holiness that have resulted in numerous churches losing their next generation.

2. The church leaders serve to receive prestige from men (vv. 5-7).

God makes it clear in His word that some religious leaders love the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42-43). The judgment of God is against the leaders who are constantly posturing themselves within their denomination to attain the highest seats of authority and places of honor among men. Truly, some of the greatest people of God in the earth today are hidden from the public eye.

3. The leaders crave titles and moving up the ranks of hierarchical religious systems (vv. 8-11).

Today's church is replete with people who use titles to validate their ministries. I can't tell you how many people I have met with the title apostle, bishop, doctor or archbishop on their business cards who have very little influence in the church and secular world. Truly God doesn't care about an apostolic title; God looks more at apostolic function and fruit. I have found that, the more a person speaks about their academic achievements and ecclesial titles, the more insecure they are as a person and about their ministry accomplishments.

I say this as a person who has been consecrated both a bishop and apostle and who flows in circles with leaders who use these titles. There is nothing wrong with these titles (both are biblical) as long as we don't flaunt them, crave them and depend upon them for validation and/or to hide that we do not have real apostolic function and fruit. Many of the greatest leaders in the church world do not insist upon people referring to them with a title.

4. The leaders have an entitlement mentality (vv. 11-12).

I believe in the biblical principle of serving the people of God as a prerequisite to being qualified to function in the same ministry as they do. For example, Joshua was called the servant of Moses; Elisha served Elijah; David served Samuel and Saul, and the 12 apostles served Jesus.

That being said, there has also been abuse of this principle since many people desire to become leaders partially because it enables them to be waited upon. I believe younger ministers should serve older, more mature ministers out of honor and proper protocol, but at the same time older ministers should not demand it or become abusive if they do not receive it. We do not receive titles in the kingdom so we can be waited upon but so that we can have greater opportunity to serve in the church.

The more mature a Christ follower is, the more they will

celebrate service as the highest form of ministry and leadership. God resists those leaders who emotionally abuse and/or lord it over those under their care (1 Pet. 5:3).

5. The leaders become a stumbling block to others seeking the kingdom (vv. 13-15).

It has been evident the past 30 years in both the evangelical and Roman Catholic churches that leaders can become huge stumbling blocks instead of assets to the kingdom. Whether it is lavish lifestyles, sexual misconduct, abuse of power, or other forms of narcissism, many believers have been turned off from Christianity by those who are supposed to represent it. Truly those who handle the Word of God will receive the most scrutiny at the judgment seat of Christ (James 3:1).

6. The leaders value and love money and wealth more than anything else (vv. 16-17).

While I do not believe church leaders should live in poverty, nor do I believe they should receive salaries from their churches that are greatly disproportionate to the average income of their congregation and/or community. The religious leaders Jesus denounced seemed to value gold more than the glory and honor of God. Leaders should never serve primarily for money but for the love of God and His people (1 Pet. 5:2).

7. The weightier matters of the Word are neglected (vv. 23-24).

Although I believe and practice the principles of tithing, fasting, church attendance and the like, they should never be an excuse for me to think I have fulfilled all of my Christian duties. Jesus says here that we ought to continue to tithe but also include in our lifestyle the practice of treating others with justice, mercy and faithfulness.

For example, if we tithe but treat our spouse poorly, neglect

the poor in our midst, or mistreat others, our tithe will not do us any good. Then we are just like the Pharisee Jesus describes in Luke 18:10-14.

8. Ritual is valued more than inner transformation (vv. 25-28).

In the church we all have our traditions and rituals; whether it is the high-church liturgies of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox or Anglican churches, and/or the more informal gatherings of the Pentecostals and evangelicals. The tendency for human beings is to fall into a routine and equate our routine with true worship. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that she worshipped what she did not know (John 4), which means that people can worship in ignorance and/or without a true experience with God.

Whether it is the sacraments of denominational churches or the shouting, shaking and tongue talking of the Pentecostals, human nature has a tendency to fall into habit patterns of outward worship bereft of the life-changing dynamic of encountering the living God. We do not have to do away with these rituals, sacraments and traditions but should integrate them with true heartfelt worship and passion for our Lord.

9. They honor the departed saints without living like them in the present (vv. 29-32).

I have found that it is much easier to study about revival than to actually work hard for it. It is much easier to study church history than it is to make history. Every denomination and expression of the church has its Christian heroes of the past, but very few denominations, churches and adherents attempt to emulate the life, passion and sacrifice of the saints of old (for example: Ignatius, Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Francis, Whitefield, Wesley, Edwards, Finney, Spurgeon, Moody, Hudson Taylor, John G. Lake, Wigglesworth, Maria Woodworth-Etter, Francis Schaeffer and

more).

Jesus wants us to honor the prophets of old by living like them, not merely by building and revering their tombs.

10. They reject the prophets and wise men who confront their false systems (vv. 33-37).

Those who are captivated by a religious system will never listen to those speaking for God who are not of their denomination and/or do not have acceptable academic credentials. Sound familiar? The Pharisees and Sadducees rejected Jesus (John 7:14-18) and Peter (Acts 4:13) for the same reason. It is not an accident that in Luke 3:1-2 it shows that the Word of God came to John in the wilderness and not to an already established institutional leader. Thus, God bypassed the litany of prominent political and religious leaders and their systems (3:1) because they were so corrupt.

When a leader is captivated by their religious system or dead institution they become blind to the pure Word of the Lord. God has to bypass them and speak prophetically through those outside the dead institution. Those who are humble and have ears to hear (as Nicodemus in John 3) will recognize and receive the people God sends to them, irrespective of their institutional affiliation.

Truly, God cannot be contained in a temple, an institution, a denomination or any one religious system. He is Lord of all and will seek after those who worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

May God help us to avoid these 10 judgments!

Joseph Mattera is overseeing bishop of Resurrection Church, Christ Covenant Coalition, in Brooklyn, N.Y. Visit him at josephmattera.org.

Pray for Kendra

A Tennessee teen got into trouble at her school recently for saying “bless you” after her teacher sneezed. The phrase was on the list of things not to say according to 17-year-old Kendra Turner. Turner told *The Tennessean*, after she said “bless you,” the teacher stood up and asked who had spoken.

“She asked why I said it, and I told her I was being courteous, and she asked me who told me that it was courtesy?” Turner said. “I told her my pastor and my parents taught me to say it.” She was placed on in-school suspension.

The Tennessean reported that Turner held a news conference at Dysersburg First Assembly of God Church to talk about the incident. “I want God to be able to be talked about in school,” she said. “I want them to realize that God is in control and they’re not.” She also added that she didn’t want the teacher to get into trouble.

Kendra Turner’s suspension for living out her faith is a sign that we need to aggressively pray for our students. Millions of students are returning to school and my hope is that we don’t see another Sandy Hook Elementary shooting that killed 20 children or that my middle-school daughter would not be bullied. As we send our students back to school, here are some points that we can pray:

- 1) Pray for protection. Pray for safety for school staff, teachers and students. Pray that the campus would be one of the safest zones in your area. And pray for safety as they travel from home to school.

- 2) Pray for wisdom. I pray that God would give my children wisdom to understand their teachers and the material. I also

pray for wisdom for the teachers and staff serving my children. And for wisdom for the counselors dealing with troubled kids.

3) Pray for provision. Do you remember those news stories about cafeteria workers dumping school lunches after discovering the student doesn't have enough money to pay in their account? Pray for provision for the schools to have everything they need to teach and feed their students. Kids going hungry because their parents didn't put money into their lunch account should not happen.

4) Pray for Christian students, staff and teachers to be a good witness as they are salt and light to their school. Pray for boldness to proclaim the word of God and favor with the administration. Let's believe for a reversal of the trend of shutting out the word of God in the public school system.

5) Pray against fear. Pray that your student would have no fear of being bullied or fitting in. The pressure to fit in and be part of the popular group creates fear of showing their Christian faith. Pray for strength for your student to not compromise their faith.

If you would like prayer for your school or student, click [here](#).

Leilani Haywood is the editor of Spirit Led Woman. She is an award-winning writer and frequent contributor to Charisma.

The Amazing Story of the MEV

In the videos below, watch the incredible story behind the MEV, the need it addresses, why it's important today, and the

miraculous way it all came together.

Michael Brown video:

Watson, Williams, and Horton video:

Kinnaman and Vicari

Steve Strang's personal connection with Bible Translation:

Translators speak out:

Can Convicted Murderer Spark Revival in Country's Largest Prison System?

In a solitary confinement unit at a maximum-security prison in Texas, convicted murderer Troup Foster offers spiritual guidance to offenders as a part of a program designed to spark a cultural change in the country's largest state-prison system.

Foster, 52, is one of 34 offenders in the first class of a university seminary school set up at the state's Darrington Unit. He is about to enter his senior year and has found a niche as a "tier walker" who ministers to inmates in solitary confinement and offers moral guidance to some of the state's most hardened criminals.

"A lot of these guys are going home, and the public has to

deal with them. If we can change some of those men's lives now and put them on a better path when they leave here, the public is going to be safer," said Foster, who is serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

"For me, I am probably going to die here."

The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a private college based in Fort Worth, Texas, began its bachelor of science in biblical studies program at Darrington, south of Houston, about three years ago. To be accepted, an offender has to be at least 10 years from the possibility of parole, have a good behavior record and the appropriate academic credentials to enroll in a college course.

The program, which is largely paid for by charitable contributions from the Heart of Texas Foundation, has more than 150 prisoners enrolled and plans to send its graduates as field ministers to other units who want the Bible college alumni for peer counseling and spiritual guidance. The first degrees are expected to be conferred next year.

"These guys ... know that their seat can be lost because of their behavior," said Ben Phillips, director of the Darrington program and an associate professor at the Southwestern Seminary. "Guys tend to weed themselves out over time if they are not serious about it."

The program, based on a similar one at the Angola unit of the Louisiana penitentiary system, is aimed at reducing violence inside and recidivism for those who are released at no additional expense to taxpayers.

Phillips said one goal is to instill accountability in students who will then take the message to the general prison population.

"Prisons have a tendency to take bad people and make them worse," he said.

For Foster and others who had earned certain perks for good behavior, enrollment in the program has made their lives a bit harder. To act as calming influences, they have been transferred to prison blocks with disciplinary problems.

The college will begin a new school year in the coming days with the senior class enrolled in courses such as "American Religious Movements," "Theological Issues in Prison," "New Testament" and "Contemporary Issues in American Culture."

The students, mostly Christian with a few Muslims and Jews among their ranks, have a reading list that ranges from the Bible to Aristotle to 19th-century French historian Alexis de Tocqueville.

Dressed in white prison uniforms, they write papers on desktop computers cut off from the Internet in a crowded section of the prison that houses their seminary branch. For research, they rely on a library stocked with books on religion.

The Texas prison system, which has 150,000 inmates, is counting on the seminary school to calm its population.

"Part of TDCJ's core mission is to promote a positive change in offender behavior. We believe these men will be a powerful voice for other offenders as they complete this program and go out to other prisons," the Texas Department of Criminal Justice said in a statement.

Fourth-year seminary student Jake Strickland, serving a 35-year sentence for murder and a 10-year sentence for intoxication manslaughter, said he knows he can never make up for the anguish and grief he has caused the family of his victim but prays he can do some good by counseling offenders as he serves his sentence.

Fellow student David Ludwick, 30, who is serving a life sentence for a capital-murder conviction, said he wants to try to mend his ways as he braces for decades behind bars.

“Prison is the university of crime. You learn better methods to steal cars and burglarize homes,” he said. “What this program is doing is producing leaders who can impact people’s lives in another way and teach them to be virtuous.”

Reporting by Jon Herskovitz; editing by Scott Malone and Douglas Royalty

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Reality TV Producers Exploiting Gentle Amish

They typically wear plain clothing with nothing as fancy as a button or a zipper, travel by horse-drawn buggy and shun modern conveniences such as electricity.

It’s that Old World charm of the Amish that draws 8 million tourists—and \$1.9 billion—each year to Pennsylvania’s Lancaster County, home of the nation’s largest Amish community of 31,000.

What the Amish don’t do, supporters say, is tote rifles as part of a violent protection racket—as depicted in the television show *Amish Mafia*—or regularly defy their religion, like in *Breaking Amish* and *Breaking Amish: Brave New World*. And, Amish horror stories are not the norm, despite the plot lines of the upcoming *Amish Haunting*.

“This is a false portrayal,” said filmmaker Mary Haverstick, who is leading a push to eject the shows, airing on the Discovery Channel and related networks, from Lancaster County.

The movement is gathering support because of what some see as a demeaning, inaccurate portrayal of the gentle, devout group.

Hotels and restaurants are urged to turn away film crews, Haverstick said.

Last week, more than a dozen state officials, including Gov. Tom Corbett and Congressmen Joe Pitts and Patrick Meehan, issued a statement citing “bigoted” and “negative, inaccurate and potentially damaging portrayal of (the) Amish” and demanding an end to the shows.

The Lancaster Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Convention and Visitors Bureau, and a regional interfaith coalition of clergy echoed those comments.

“I’ve lived here for 50 years and know many Amish folks,” said Haverstick. “They are exceptionally vulnerable to this type of exploitation.”

But some wonder if the hard-edged reality TV approach is that different from the soft exploitation of the Amish by the local tourism industry. In both, the Amish are unpaid, costumed “extras.”

Pennsylvania Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau television ads feature the Amish and seeing the religious sect is a top reason tourists give for visiting, said bureau spokesman Joel Cliff. Tourism dollars generate \$363 million in tax revenue and support 24,000 jobs.

Most tourism is respectful of the Amish, who sell their quilts, furniture and produce, Cliff said.

“They’ve learned to live with and benefit from [tourism],” he said.

Haverstick says there is no comparison between the two approaches, as one celebrates the Amish for who they are and the other depicts them falsely.

“One [Amish] man called me and said they are portrayed like garbage in the shows,” she said. “There was pain in his voice.”

Mockery of Amish

There is no immediate evidence the reality shows have caused harm, said Tom Baldrige, the Lancaster chamber president, but problems could surface down the road.

“Long term,” Baldrige said, “it may hurt tourism. They make a mockery of the Amish.”

Heading into its fourth season, *Amish Mafia* has drawn the fiercest criticism.

“There is no Amish Mafia,” Donald Kraybill, a professor at Elizabethtown College and co-author of *The Amish*, told WITF radio in Harrisburg recently. “It is an utter fabrication.”

Discovery Channel spokeswoman Laurie Goldberg declined to comment.

The lead producer of all four shows, Eric Evangelista, whose Hot Snake Media company creates content for the Discovery Channel, did not respond to Reuters requests for comment.

The area has drawn visitors for nearly 60 years, ever since the 1955 Broadway musical *Plain and Fancy*, about a sophisticated New York couple who inherit property in Amish Country. Americans soon found it an easy day trip from much of the East Coast.

The 1985 thriller *Witness*, starring Harrison Ford, was filmed mostly in Lancaster County, and attracted a new crop of visitors from Europe and Japan, Kraybill said.

“We still get people asking to see the *Witness* farm,” said Cliff.

Old and new businesses capitalizing on the Amish sometimes collide.

The Amish Experience in the village of Bird-in-Hand, expanded its tours in 2013 to include *Amish Mafia* locations, said agency owner Brad Igou. Almost immediately, Discovery Channel lawyers sent a cease-and-desist letter, he said.

Tour guides still mention *Amish Mafia*, Igou said, but only to debunk what he calls the show's many inaccuracies. Their script has been approved by Amish religious elders, if not by the Discovery Channel, he said.

Editing by Barbara Goldberg and Gunna Dickson

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