

By Being Vocal, American Jews Play an Important Role

Because I am a Jew who is half Ashkenazi and half Sephardic, I get to see how important Israel is to my life from both perspectives.

From a mother who grew up in Bat Yam, a city on Israel's Mediterranean coast, and a father who grew up in Britain, I see how sentimental it is to my mom who lived there, and how valuable it is to a person who wishes he had lived there.

I grew up knowing that no matter what, as long as Israel exists, Jewish people will always be safe. Because he always reminded me of times when we weren't. But as long as Israel exists, we will always have a place to go.

My dad told me stories of Holocaust survivors, of anti-Semitism in England, and how although he was raised in London, Israel is the only place that ever felt like home.

Then there is my mother, whose greatest love of her life is Israel. I grew up listening to stories of her friends from the army, of the amazing times they had, and how nobody can understand the bond you have with your fellow soldiers.

She used to say it is deeper than any kind of bond and will last the rest of your life. She has been living in America for almost 30 years, and still her best friends are her friends from the army.

They both made sure that Israel was a huge part of my life. I spent my summers playing in the sand in Tel Aviv, walking the pier in Eilat, and praying in Jerusalem. I have more childhood memories in Israel than anywhere else. And I can honestly say I have never felt safer anywhere. Israel is my home.

I have always questioned why my parents decided to raise us in America. I know they regret it. They both love Israel so much that they never imagined living anywhere else. But I feel that the bigger reason is that we are to be supporters of Israel in America.

There is a really important role for the American Jew right now. While IDF soldiers risk their lives to protect Israel physically, it is American Jews who can help verbally. We can convince people of the truth, while much of the news media reports a lie. We can share articles on social media to our friends who don't understand.

One by one, we can show Americans that we need them but that they need us too. So by protesting, by having open conversations, by pointing out the lies and reinstating the truth, by using music and art and any other form of communication I can, that is what I dedicate my life to doing.

For the original article, visit .

When Your Teenager is Disrespectful

One mom felt hurt but considered her thirteen-year-old daughter's meanness as normal. "Aren't children supposed to hate their parents in order to ease the upcoming separation?"

Another mother of a **teenager** had given up. "You just have to get used to their **disrespect**. Hopefully some day they'll appreciate you, but for now, there's no chance."

These kinds of misunderstanding of **adolescent** changes hinder

closeness in a family and parents often don't know where to draw the line. Independent thinking is healthy but **disrespect** is not. Choosing one's own values is important but can't be an excuse for **dishonor**. Parents who don't realize the difference, miss valuable teaching opportunities.

Furthermore, **teens** may appear hard but they're still very sensitive. When parents dish it out the same way **teens** do, **teens** get hurt. Their understanding of themselves is much more fragile than their actions lead you to believe. **Teens** are at a prime time for life-altering experiences. An offhand comment by you may make a lasting impression so be careful what you say and how you say it.

There's a reason behind what's going on during **adolescence**. It doesn't mean that we excuse children, but we don't have to be surprised by the changes either. The stress experienced by families during the **teen** years can be overwhelming. Wisdom is required to maneuver through the continual relational land mines. Be patient, look for teachable moments, don't get sucked into futile arguments, and above all continue to pray for your **teens**. They need it more now than ever.

What are some ways you've been able to connect with our **teen's** heart?

Dr. Scott Turansky and JoAnne Miller, R.N., BSN, are founders of the National Center for Biblical Parenting.

It's Time to Get Ahabs out of

Our Pulpits

Pastors generally believe same-sex marriage and abortion are wrong, but most of them won't talk to their congregations about it for fear of losing members.

Those were the opening words of an article I wrote last week called "Most Pastors Avoid Controversial Issues to Keep Tithes Up." The article was based on a study from the Barna Group.

According to the study, fewer than 10 percent of pastors will speak to key issues of the day even though they agree the Bible speaks to every one of them. Most pastors are passive, willing to do "almost nothing" to get people active in politics.

"Controversy keeps people from being in the seats, controversy keeps people from giving money, from attending programs," George Barna said on America Family Radio's *Today's Issues* broadcast.

I have to wonder. Do pastors who turn a blind eye to sin in the nation—such as same-sex marriage and abortion—to keep people in the seats, giving money and attending programs also turn a blind eye to sin in the church for the same reasons? *Selah.*

Ahab Tolerates Sin

As I considered the Barna study results, I couldn't help but think of leaders in the Bible who were passive about sin. I thought of Adam, who allowed Eve to influence him to rebel against God rather than rising up in his authority over the Garden of Eden. I thought of Eli, who didn't deal with his sinful sons. And I thought of King Ahab, the husband of none other than the prophet-murdering queen called Jezebel.

Ahab tolerated sin and goes down in biblical history as one

who “did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (1 Kings 16:33). What on earth did Ahab do to win that dishonor? He set up altars to false gods, for one thing. He also turned a blind eye to Jezebel’s sinful ways.

Scripture tells us “Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord” (1 Kings 18:4). We also know that Jezebel vowed to kill Elijah after he did away with hundreds of her false prophets (1 Kings 19:1). Later, Jezebel had Naboth falsely accused and killed so Ahab could take possession of his field (1 Kings 21).

Ahab knew quite well that Jezebel was having God’s true prophets murdered, but he took a passive attitude toward sin. Ahab knew that Jezebel was out for Elijah’s head, but he took a passive attitude toward protecting a man who had just led the nation into repentance (see 1 Kings 18:17-39). Ahab knew Jezebel was willing to murder Naboth to steal his inheritance, but he stood passively by as Jezebel signed his name to the man’s death warrant.

Get Ahab out of the Pulpit

Over and over again, we see Ahab was willing to tolerate Jezebel’s sin to get what he wanted. Ahab personalities are weak, easily intimidated, and unwilling to do anything that will rock the boat. Ahab personalities are insecure people-pleasers whom the devil has an easy time controlling. It’s time to get the Ahabs out of our pulpits.

Charles G. Finney, a leader in America’s Second Great Awakening, recorded these words on Dec. 4, 1843:

“Brethren, our preaching will bear its legitimate fruits. If immorality prevails in the land, the fault is ours in a great degree. If there is a decay of conscience, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the public press lacks moral discrimination, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the

church is degenerate and worldly, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the world loses its interest in religion, the pulpit is responsible for it. If Satan rules in our halls of legislation, the pulpit is responsible for it. If our politics become so corrupt that the very foundations of our government are ready to fall away, the pulpit is responsible for it.”

It’s time to get the Ahabs out of our pulpits and replace them with leaders who will not tolerate Jezebel; with men and women of God who will confront sin in society and in the church; and with pastors and prophets who are not blind as bats leading the church into a ditch of destruction.

We’re all responsible to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (see Phil. 2:12), but pastors also are to be an example to the flock (see 1 Peter 5:3). That means loving what God loves and hating what God hates. I’m praying for another Great Awakening, and I’m praying it starts in the pulpits.

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The Secret to an Abundant Life

I’m sure everybody desires to have a good life. But what do most people consider the good life? Many go after a bigger house or car, a better-paying job while others seek education,

marriage or other achievements with great passion. And many are convinced these are the things that will give them happiness, peace and fulfillment.

But the truth is these things will not give the lasting peace and joy most of us really desire. Matt. 6:33 tells us to “seek first the kingdom of God...” And Rom. 14:17 informs us that “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (NKJV).

I want to encourage you to pick up your Bible and begin to study the kingdom of God. If you have a concordance, just look up the word “kingdom” and see all the scriptures there are on the subject.

Seeking the kingdom simply means to desire God crave an intimate relationship with Him. It’s about wanting to know God and not just what He can do for you. There is quite a difference between seeking possessions and seeking God.

I’ll never forget one time the Lord spoke to my heart and told me, “Joyce, seek My face and not My hand. If you seek My face, My hand will always be open.” In other words, God was telling me to seek Him above everything else, and He would always provide for me.

God was saving me from myself in a sense, because while I had things that I wanted, I was beginning to realize I still was not a very happy person. That was because of what was happening inside. I didn’t really know who I was in Christ, and I certainly didn’t have any peace or joy because I was still living with the effects of childhood abuses. But I had my things. Well, that didn’t really mean much, because no matter what you have, if you do not have righteousness, peace and joy, then you are not living in the kingdom of God.

Righteousness

I believe we all want righteousness, peace and joy in our

wouldn't? But how do you get them?

I think a good first step is to stop trying to get things and start learning who you are in Christ. Our pursuit of things like more money, fame, a big house or a promotion at work has a way of distracting us from our pursuit of Christ. When that happens, we can begin to feel guilty about not doing the things we think we should. We may begin to wallow in condemnation and forget that Jesus died for our sins, and we have been made the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. And because of that, we do the right thing simply to please Him and not to get something from Him.

When you know how much God loves you and all He's done for you, it makes you want to sin less. The thing is, Jesus already knows everything we'll ever do, right or wrong, and He loves us anyway. He has already paid for every sin we will ever commit.

Peace

When you know who you are in Christ, you will experience peace. Because being peaceful is not based on the things that happen to you; it comes from abiding, or living, in Christ. You have the Prince of Peace living inside of you! You can decide to have peace in the storms of life because you know there is victory on the other side of every one.

Peace is vital to us because life is unpredictable. I get up every morning and decide to have peace. I do that because I never know how somebody else is going to act. We can't control other people, but we can control our responses to them. A cranky co-worker, someone cutting you off in traffic, a clerk making a mistake at the of that can keep us upset when we have the peace of Christ.

Joy

God wants us to enjoy our lives. That used to be a big problem

for me. Because of the sexual, physical and emotional abuse I endured growing up, I never really got to be a kid. So, when I married Dave, I thought he just wanted to goof around all the time! He wasn't irresponsible, but he was determined that whatever he did, he was going to enjoy it. I learned a lot from that.

Neh. 8:10 tells us that "the joy of the Lord is [our] strength." Joy can range from calm delight to extreme merriment. It's not necessarily about being upbeat all the time, but instead, being secure in your faith and trusting in God enough to just be yourself and enjoy and share the precious life He has given you.

Life in Abundance

The bottom line is this: "The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance..." (John 10:10). God wants His children to have a good life. Because of everything we have in Christ, we should be the example of what good living is. You really can have lasting joy and peace in your life. It just begins with putting God first.

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times best-selling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries Inc. She has authored more than 100 books, including Battlefield of the Mind and You Can Begin Again (Hachette). She hosts the Enjoying Everyday Life radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit .

What to Do When You Feel Surrounded by Darkness

We are living in a greater darkness than ever before. Every day, we face challenges many people before us never imagined possible in their childhoods—things such as terrorism, the loss of childhood innocence, a death-focused society, widespread drug use, broken marriages, abused children, and television programs that mainstream sex, rebellion and anarchy. The list could go on and on. We face enormous threats both from within our cultures and outside of them. At times, the darkness is palpable. In the world around us, and often within our souls, we are walking in the dark.

As with Jesus in His darkest time, we know that our darkness, our dimness, our spiritual destitution, is not from God, and yet God is in it: “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). God will bring us out of the obscurity of darkness: “In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness” (Is. 29:18).

What kinds of darkness do you see in your own life right now? Have you been blinded by the darkness and sin of the world around you? Are you being tossed to and fro as the political or financial climates change? Are you embroiled in marital or family problems that just will not go away, to the point that you want to jump ship sometimes? Are you confused, not sure where you are going, wondering where your former joy and peace went? Do the lights seem to have gone out in your life?

Are you ready to start shining some light into your darkness?

Could it be that God is beginning to get your attention in a

way that He has not had it before? Could it be that He is allowing desperation, anxiety, fear, harassment, despair, misery, anguish, even desolation to arise in you to the point that you will be driven to your knees for answers? Are you asking questions you either evaded before or did not think to ask?

As bad as things seem, could it be that you are in exactly the right place at the right time?

God wants to do something new, something that will change you, your family, your church, your neighborhood, your city and even your nation. Perhaps you were unable to hear what He was trying to say or see what He was trying to show you, so He had to let you feel it. Perhaps this is His rallying cry so that you will arise and find answers to the problems.

He had to allow the darkness to surround you before He could create the new things in your life. If you do not believe me, just think of the dark, "secret place" of your mother's womb where you were formed. Just think of the Creation:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness" (Gen. 1:1-4).

This season is not a mistake. You are not lost in the darkness/wilderness permanently. And if, perchance, you are doing just fine, thank you, and darkness/wilderness is not even on your screen at the moment, please hang on to this book. You will need its message in due time. Dark seasons are part of the growth process for each and every disciple. When you gave Jesus permission to be the Lord of your life, you signed up for some significant challenges.

You cannot be an overcomer if you do not have something to

overcome. Reach out and accept the anointing to be an overcomer, one who radiates the light of Christ into the darkest places:

“Do all things without grumbling and fault-finding and complaining [against God] and questioning and doubting [among yourselves], that you may show yourselves to be blameless and guiltless, innocent and uncontaminated, children of God without blemish (faultless, unrebukable) in the midst of a crooked and wicked generation [spiritually perverted and perverse], among whom you are seen as bright lights (stars or beacons shining out clearly) in the [dark] world, holding out [to it] and offering [to all men] the Word of Life, so that in the day of Christ I may have something of which exultantly to rejoice and glory in that I did not run my race in vain or spend my labor to no purpose” (Phil. 2:14-16, Amplified).

Let God pour out the overcomer’s anointing on you. Through it, He can use your darkest hour as your greatest spiritual weapon. This is an awesome calling!

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The Secret To Mountain-Moving

Faith

If you have been around the church world for a while, I am sure you have heard people talk about different “levels of faith.” This is especially true in charismatic circles.

For example, there are allegedly Christians with *little* faith and then, there are those with *big* faith. By embracing such a faulty faith paradigm, we find ourselves constantly feeling inadequate when our *little* faith does not produce the big results that we are hoping for.

Why is this? And are there really levels of faith?

Do we need to get more faith?

In my upcoming book, *Breakthrough Faith: Living a Life Where Anything Is Possible*, my goal is to bring clarity to some of these ridiculous myths concerning faith. One of the greatest myths is that, as Christians, we need to constantly be seeking “faith upgrades.”

We look back at the giants of the faith in Hebrews 11—Noah, Moses, Abraham, Joshua, etc. Perhaps we review the more modern “generals” of the faith such as John G. Lake, Smith Wigglesworth, George Mueller or Kathryn Kuhlman, and compare our “small” faith next to their “enormous” faith. This is all presupposing that there are actually levels of faith. Wrong.

The more we are convinced that our faith is small, the longer we will think, pray, live, and function as if our faith is small.

However, when we change the way we think concerning our faith, we will begin witnessing the supernatural breakthroughs that God’s Word promises.

So, do you need to get more faith? No. You need to learn how to steward the faith you have already received.

Biblically settling the “faith size” issue

Let’s settle the “faith size” issue once and for all, shall we? Consider the following Scriptures:

In discussing the faith issue, Jesus explains to the disciples:

“Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matt. 17:20, NIV).

Jesus Himself makes it clear that faith the size of a *mustard seed* is sufficient to move mountains of impossibility. That is a stunning claim. Nowhere does He bring up a continuum where there are various levels or degrees of faith, and if only they had extra-value-sized faith, the mountain would be moved. No. If we have faith the size of a mustard seed, we are qualified to bring supernatural transformation to impossible situations in Jesus’ Name.

Spiritual formation leader Richard J. Foster writes concerning faith in his classic, *Celebration of Discipline*:

“Sometimes we are afraid that we do not have enough faith to pray for this child or that marriage. Our fears should be put to rest, for the Bible tells us that great miracles are possible through faith the size of a tiny mustard seed.”

Some might read a Scripture like Matthew 17:20 or a quote like Foster’s and think, “I don’t think I have *this* kind of *mustard-seed faith*. Do I need to cry out to God for it?” Faith is not something that God is waiting to sovereignly give you *if you are already born again*. It is not a sovereignty issue; again, it is a stewardship one. As Christians, you already have faith. God is not looking down from heaven, waiting for a sovereign time to increase the size of your faith.

Revivalist Leonard Ravenhill brought it home fast by saying, "No faith is required to do the possible; actually only a morsel of this atom-powered stuff (faith) is needed to do the impossible, for a piece as large as a mustard seed will do more than we have ever dreamed of."

You have already received breakthrough faith

Consider your salvation for a moment. How did you make the decision to follow Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? It was not some natural expression of human willpower, but rather, it was a supernatural gift that enabled your will to make such an eternity-altering choice. Our human nature does not have the capability to make a decision that leads to salvation. Scripture makes it clear that before the Holy Spirit's intervention, we were *dead* in sin. In order for us to make a decision where we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit needs to come and hover over our spiritually lifeless hearts. He prepares the way for us to cross the threshold into newness of life in Christ.

Ephesians 2 is one of my favorite chapters in all of Scripture. If you ever think you are without a good reason to offer up praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, just review verses 1-3. They basically tell us how we were dead in our sins, under the influence of the devil, and were considered "children of wrath." Praise God for two words in verse 4 that changed everything: "*But God...* "

Move on down to verses 8 and 9. Pause and reflect on this familiar passage for a moment, for in it lies the secret that will change the way you see faith *forever*:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast"(Eph. 2:8-9, NASB).

Let me pose this question: *Where does saving faith come from?* Review Paul's words to the Ephesians: *It is the gift of God.*

It is not something you have to work up or work for. Faith is something that was deposited into your dead heart by God Almighty. He has dealt unto every single believer the measure of faith that enables you to say “Yes” to Jesus. Got it?

So just pause and ponder for a moment longer. If you received faith *from God*, is there any bigger your faith can get? After all, it came from *God Himself*! If such is truly the case, the ultimate invitation has been extended your way. The faith that saved you from your sin, hell and eternal torment is the very faith that empowers you to live a victorious, overcoming life by the supernatural power of God.

What is the secret to having mountain-moving faith?

Ready for it? Change the way you think about *your faith*.

I am sure you’ve heard the religious nonsense:

“So-and-so didn’t receive the miracle because he/she didn’t have enough faith.”

“I just need to get more faith.”

“I wish I had faith like so-and-so does.”

Why some people receive miracles while others do not is not the focus of this article—and honestly, I don’t have a clear answer for that. Mystery in the kingdom is legal; it’s not a cop-out. However, the most insensitive thing in the world we could tell someone is “You don’t have enough faith.”

As Christians, *we all have enough faith* because we received *faith from God*. Anything that we receive from God Himself needs no upgrade. Such is the case for your faith. You have enough. It does not need to be super-sized or exchanged for the latest, greatest model.

The key to breakthrough is not getting more faith—rather, it is using the faith you already have received. I challenge you,

friend, in the same manner that I challenge myself: Trust that God gave you mountain-moving faith when you came to Christ. Truly, this faith removed the *ultimate mountain* from your life: sin. If the faith you received at salvation can secure your eternal destiny, surely it can bring healing, victory and deliverance to your present circumstances.

Returning to the reflections of author Richard Foster, he presents a simple, yet profound way that we can start exercising our faith and begin seeing results: "Usually, the courage to actually go and pray for a person is a sign of sufficient faith. Frequently our lack is not faith but compassion." And as John Wimber used to say, "Faith is spelled ." Let's start taking risks, compassionately praying for those in need, and earnestly believing that the Lord will supernaturally move the mountains in their lives.

When all is said and done, it's not merely about getting prayers answered. Such is a limited, self-seeking perspective. It's about exercising faith in Jesus Christ, seeing His Name receive great glory, His power displayed for all to see, and that many would bow their knee before Him as Savior and King.

Larry Sparks is a conference speaker, blogger, columnist and host of the weekly radio program *Voice of Destiny*. His new book, *Breakthrough Faith: Living a Life Where Anything is Possible*, will be released with *Destiny Image Publishers* on Oct. 21. Featured in *Charisma* magazine and on CBN's *Spiritual Gifts* webcast, Larry is also founder of *Equip Culture*, a ministry that equips believers with the tools and resources to live victoriously through the supernatural power of God (). You can follow @LarryVSparks on Twitter to receive messages of encouragement and empowerment.

By Being Vocal, American Jews Play an Important Role

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I grew up knowing that no matter what, as long as Israel exists, Jewish people will always be safe. Because he always reminded me of times when we weren't. But as long as Israel exists, we will always have a place to go.

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They both made sure that Israel was a huge part of my life. I spent my summers playing in the sand in Tel Aviv, walking the pier in Eilat, and praying in Jerusalem. I have more childhood

memories in Israel than anywhere else. And I can honestly say I have never felt safer anywhere. Israel is my home.

I have always questioned why my parents decided to raise us in America. I know they regret it. They both love Israel so much that they never imagined living anywhere else. But I feel that the bigger reason is that we are to be supporters of Israel in America.

There is a really important role for the American Jew right now. While IDF soldiers risk their lives to protect Israel physically, it is American Jews who can help verbally. We can convince people of the truth, while much of the news media reports a lie. We can share articles on social media to our friends who don't understand.

One by one, we can show Americans that we need them but that they need us too. So by protesting, by having open conversations, by pointing out the lies and reinstating the truth, by using music and art and any other form of communication I can, that is what I dedicate my life to doing.

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When Will Hamas Learn Terrorism Doesn't Pay?

The 25-mile strip of land, in-between the Mediterranean Sea and Israel's southwest border, known as the Gaza Strip, has been home to over 10,000 rockets launched at Israel since 2006 and, in return, has suffered billions of dollars of damage.

As a result of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords, the territory was

designated to be a part of a Palestinian State under the same Palestinian Authority that governs the West Bank.

Hamas, however, won local elections in 2006, and subsequently kicked the Palestinian Authority out of Gaza in 2007. They have been ruling the area Hamas is a jihadist, Muslim Brotherhood organization that is labeled a terrorist organization by the United States, European Union, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, Japan, and Egypt.

Their charter calls for the destruction of Israel, and their spokespersons and clerics regularly espouse their commitment to this goal.

The primary reason that Hamas rules Gaza is not to provide a better life for its inhabitants, but to have a base from where they can build the military capability to destroy Israel. If their intentions were otherwise, Hamas would have used the \$100 million worth of cement and construction materials they received to build much needed housing for its ballooning population. Instead, Hamas chose to build an underground network of tunnels designed to deliver hundreds of terrorists inside Israel. Some of the tunnels were large enough for trucks to drive through them, and many were equipped with supplies for sedating and transporting kidnapped Israelis.

In fact, a major terrorist attack was being planned for Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, on Sept. 25. If Israel had not entered Gaza and discovered these plans, over 200 terrorists would have sneaked into Israel through the tunnels intent on killing thousands of Israeli civilians and kidnapping others.

Hamas also demonstrated callous disregard for their people, allowing some 160 children who had been used for child-labor to die while building the tunnels and by executing some 17 men who had overseen the building of the tunnels so they could not provide intelligence to Israel. Life has little meaning to Hamas fighters who glorify death in the cause of Jihad.

Complicity of the UN

With inhabitants numbering around million people, Gaza is an overcrowded area with one of the highest population growth rates in the world. Most of the inhabitants are considered refugees by the United Nations, which provides them with schools, sustenance, hospitals and the like. Hamas does provide some social services, but the presence of the UN relieves Hamas of fighters who glorify death in the cause of Jihad.

Unfortunately, the U.N. also perpetuates the sorry state of affairs in Gaza. First, they refuse to treat Palestinian refugees like all other refugees, and provide for their resettlement, thereby keeping Palestinian refugees in an ongoing state of limbo. In addition, Palestinian refugees are the only refugee group whose children and grandchildren are also awarded refugee status.

So, while there are only 30,000 original refugees from 1948 alive today, the UN is caring for some 5 million Palestinians, keeping many in "refugee camps" rather than providing for their absorption into host countries.

Also, the U.N. in Gaza cooperates so fully with the Hamas government that at times the lines are blurred between the two. For example, the U.N. Development Program office in Gaza allowed "non-U.N. employees," without any paper trail, to oversee the procurement and use of the concrete that was then used to build Hamas tunnels. When rockets were found in U.N. schools, they were conveniently turned back over to Hamas, and the U.N. published as fact the civilian casualty figures provided by Hamas.

Not only did Hamas control reports of civilian casualties, they controlled the foreign press itself! Now that journalists are safely outside of Gaza, some are complaining that Hamas threatened and prevented them from giving an objective report

on the ground. So, they are putting footage on YouTube that proves Hamas fired rockets next to hotels and U.N. buildings, and that Hamas operatives wore civilian clothing so their casualties were counted as civilian.

There has been nary a word out of the U.N. denouncing any of this.

Israel's Military Operation

Hamas was behind the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teens in June, and then launched some 200 missiles aimed at Israeli population centers, causing Israel to take military action to stop the rockets, destroy the tunnels, and restore calm. Over the course of the month-long operation Hamas fired over 3,000 rockets at Israel endangering the lives of 6 million civilians.

Israel uncovered over 30 tunnels and destroyed about half of Hamas' missile stockpiles that were found in homes, mosques and schools. Hamas alleges that out of the 1,800 people killed over 70 percent of them were civilians, but Israel says that some 900 combatants were killed while firing on Israeli troops in Gaza.

During Operation Protective Edge, Israel repeatedly stated that the people of Gaza were not their enemy. They went out of their way to warn the inhabitants of buildings and neighborhoods with leaflets, text messages, telephone calls, and a "knock" on the building with an empty shell before they would fire at a target. Many missions were also aborted because civilians were seen in the vicinity.

The truth is, had Israel not gone to such lengths to save the lives of civilians, urban warfare in a city as densely populated as Gaza City would have resulted in tens of thousands of deaths. Nevertheless, the images of dead children broadcast on both TV and social media would drown out any attempts by the spokespersons of the Israeli government to

explain their regard for civilian lives.

Everyone involved has paid a hefty price because of the terrorist regime ruling Gaza. While Hamas suffered a military defeat; the people of Gaza lost homes, businesses, and a future; and Israel's reputation suffered greatly in the public arena of images vs. words. Unless the West places conditions on their funding—conditions like demilitarization of Gaza, an end of Hamas rule, and education to prepare the people for peaceful coexistence with Israel—it will happen all over again sometime in the future.

Susan Michael is U.S. Director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. Visit them online at , creator of .

Pizza Parlor Church Discount Gives Atheists Indigestion

Steven Rose loves Jesus and pepperoni pizza.

But when the Searcy, Arkansas, restaurateur decided to mix church and cheese, it gave a group of out-of-town atheists a bad case of indigestion.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) is threatening to sue Rose after he offered a discount to customers who bring in a church bulletin. They said Bailey's Pizza is violating the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

"The law requires places of public accommodation to offer their services to customers without regard to race, color, religion or national origin," FFRF spokesperson Elizabeth Cavell told television station KTHV.

Rose, who opened the pizza parlor in July, told me there's nothing nefarious about the church-bulletin discount.

"It was a straight-up marketing tool to give a discount to people I love and care about—and have them come in and have lunch with me," he said. "I thought it was a sweet idea. I didn't say you had to go to church to get it. Go get a bulletin from your neighbor and come in and have a pizza."

The trouble started a few weeks ago when someone posted a Facebook photo of the sign promoting the discount.

"It was from a guy whose Facebook name is 'Bong Hits for Jesus,'" Steven told me. "It said, 'good luck with the discrimination lawsuit.'"

Rose said he didn't consider the post to be a credible threat—seeing how the Facebook user's name is "Bong Hits for Jesus."

Two weeks later, he received the letter from the Wisconsin-based atheist group. They said that if he did not stop offering a church discount, they would "take appropriate steps."

"I'm just selling pizzas," Steven told me. "I love my Lord, and you see it expressed all over my building—but I'm just selling pizzas."

And he's not kidding. The local television station reports that customers are allowed to write Bible verses on the walls. And in the center is a message from the owners: "God is the center of our lives, so our scripture wall is the center of Bailey's Pizza."

"To me, if making a pepperoni pizza furthers the kingdom—well I'm excited about that," he said.

But just because Rose is a Christian business owner doesn't mean he has a problem with nonbelievers.

“They’re coming at us and saying we’re discriminating,” he said. “I don’t hate anybody.”

The FFRF has a history of targeting and bullying Christian business owners. Earlier this month, a North Carolina diner dropped a discount for customers who prayed before their meal.

“We are no longer issuing the 15% praying in public discount,” read a sign posted at Mary’s Gourmet Diner. “It is illegal and we are being threatened by lawsuit. We apologize to our community for any offense this discount has incurred.”

Why must atheist groups like FFRF be so ill-tempered?

So is it really unconstitutional for restaurants to provide religious-themed discounts? Not at all, says Hiram Sasser, director of litigation for Liberty Institute.

“In fact, if what FFRF is saying were true, restaurants and other businesses would be precluded from giving veterans and military members discounts because that would technically be discriminating based on veteran status,” Sasser tells me. “Is that what FFRF wants? Give me a break!”

The folks at Bailey’s Pizza are still not sure why the Wisconsin atheists are targeting their restaurant.

“They may have something against my pizza,” Rose said.

Or maybe they’re upset because Bailey’s Pizza won’t deliver to Wisconsin. Who knows?

Whatever the reason, Rose is still contemplating what to do next. He fears a legal battle would be costly—and he’s quick to point out: He’s no Papa John’s.

“It’s just me and my wife running this place,” he said. “I’ve got window units at my house. We’re not rich. We’re just trying to be our own bosses and be an American success story.”

Steven tells me it's really sad that the FFRF is spending its money to attack his restaurant.

"The 75 cents that somebody saves when they bring in a church bulletin—is that really what they need to be spending their money on?" he asked. "How about spending that money helping the homeless?"

For now, the church discount will remain at Bailey's Pizza.

"As for me and my house, we'll serve the Lord," he told me.

And he will also keep serving their 32 varieties of pies—from Frito chili to baked potato pizza.

"We pride ourselves in crazy pies," he said. "But I'm old school. I eat the pepperoni—that's all I need."

You really can't go wrong with a large pepperoni. Just be sure to hold the anchovies—and the atheists.

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*.

Is Pope Francis Preparing for Early Retirement?

Addressing journalists on his return from his intense five-day visit to South Korea late Monday, **Pope Francis** bantered with reporters and lightheartedly said he may only have "two or three" years left to live.

The 77-year-old pontiff covered a range of topics on the flight back to the Vatican—from war-torn Iraq and his desire to visit the United States next year to his personal health, hinting he may retire early.

He was asked how he lived with the immense popularity he has generated around the world, evident when crowds chanted his name on the streets of Rio de Janeiro during his first official visit to Brazil last year.

“I try to think of my sins, my mistakes, so as not to think that I am somebody,” he said. “Because I know this will last a short time, two or three years, and then (go) to the house of the Father,” he said during an in-flight news conference.

Elected in March 2013, Francis has already shaken up the **Catholic Church**, preaching a message of humility and compassion while moving to clean up corruption and cronyism at the Vatican bank and reforming the Curia.

While he appeared to be in good health, Francis also addressed recent concerns about his well-being and his last-minute cancellation of a visit to Rome’s Gemelli Hospital in June. Years ago, he had part of a lung removed, and he reportedly has been troubled by back pain.

“I should have gone to the Gemelli up to 10 minutes before I was there, but I could not do it,” he said. “It is true, they were seven very demanding days then, full of engagements. Now I have to be a little more prudent.”

The energetic pope, who grew up in Buenos Aires, joked about “neuroses” and revealed that his last holiday was a trip outside the Argentine capital in 1975. He said he had recently learned to slow down.

“I change rhythm,” he said. “I sleep more. I read the things I like. I listen to music. That way I rest. In July and part of August I did that.”

The pope reaffirmed his support for former Pope Benedict's shocking decision to retire and did not rule out a similar move himself.

"I think that the emeritus pope is already an institution because our life gets longer and at a certain age there isn't the capacity to govern well because the body gets tired, and maybe one's health is good, but there isn't the capacity to carry forward all the problems of a government like that of the church," he said.

"I would do the same," he added. "I would pray, but I would do the same."

Pope Francis' return to the Vatican was marred by news of a family tragedy. On Tuesday, a road accident in Argentina killed two of his young great-nephews as well as their mother, the wife of the pope's nephew, the Vatican said.

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