

# When You Feel Like No One Sees You

The Lord accepts, loves and approves of you in every season of life, even the uncelebrated ones.

Have you ever felt overlooked? Have you ever moved or entered a new environment where no one knew who you were, what you could do or what dreams ignited your soul? Have you ever crossed the threshold into another season of life, where you shifted from recognition to anonymity, from standing as a leader to sitting as a learner again? Have you resigned or retired from a position and transitioned from being sought out to left out, celebrated to celebrating others?

Hidden dreams. Hidden giftings. All of us are acquainted with chapters in life when our visible fruitfulness is pruned back, our previously praiseworthy strengths become dormant and our abilities are unnoticed by the watching world. Like a flower whose budding glory is covered up by wet leaves, we sense the weight of hiddenness in our hearts and whisper, "I have so much more to give and be."

But there is One who can see the beauty of that covered, smothered flower: God Himself. And mysteriously, His delight in that beauty is not diminished by its leafy camouflage. Neither would His pleasure be amplified by the flower's visibility. Good news indeed for the hidden.

Whether hidden through anticipated transition or unexplainable loss, we can spend years feeling that the greatest part of us is submerged in the unseen, as though others can see only the tip of the iceberg of who we really are.

Scientists inform us that only one-eighth to one-tenth of an iceberg is visible. At least 90 percent is submerged in the unseen. Because of their enormous mass, with that proportion,

icebergs are virtually indestructible. Ten percent visible plus 90 percent unseen equals an indestructible life.

The most influential life in all of history reflected this iceberg equation. Ninety percent of Jesus' life on earth was spent in obscurity. Only 10 percent of His earthly life was spent in the public eye. And all of His life was, and still is, absolutely indestructible.

### **Hidden: A Sacred Place**

Our sincere prayers to "be like Jesus" generally are not equated in our hearts with, "God, please grant me the privilege of spending 90 percent of my life unapplauded and underestimated in anonymity!" No. Our enthusiastic intentions to "be like Jesus" include exemption clauses for Jesus' hidden years, temptations and crucifixion. We will pass on those, thank you.

What we are interested in, however, is Jesus' character and authority. But these qualities are not isolated entities. They come with Jesus' life, 90 percent of which was lived in quiet obscurity. "What would Jesus do?" we ask sincerely. Well, for starters, He embraced a life of hiddenness.

Why? Why would Father God wrap the glory of heaven in plain paper, announce the birth of His precious Son with a full angelic choir and then hide this priceless gift for three decades?

We certainly would not have permitted the Son of God to live in anonymity for 90 percent of His life. Every breath would have been monitored by the brightest minds in medical research. Every movement would have been captured by the media and analyzed by psychologists. Every word would have been weighed by theologians and recorded by historians.

Hidden? No way! However, with Jesus' life (and our own), it is critical that we not mistake unseen for unimportant. Consider human conception. God knits us together in the dark warmth of

the womb. Unseen? Yes. Unimportant? Not remotely. These months are quite literally formative. When this hidden phase of development is prematurely interrupted, the results can be tragic.

Or consider the growth of a plant. Before a gardener can enjoy a plant's fruit, she must tenderly and strategically attend to its root. So a plant's birth begins with its burial. The gardener commits a generally unremarkable seed to the silence of the soil. All that is to come rests greatly upon the seed's ability to develop roots in unseen places.

As with a child in the womb and a seed in the ground, God's unanticipated move of hiding Jesus granted Him protected, undisturbed room to be and become. From God's perspective, anonymous seasons are sacred spaces. They are quite literally formative; to be rested in, not rushed through—and most definitely never to be regretted. Unapplauded but not unproductive: Hidden years are the surprising birthplace of true spiritual greatness.

### **From Nazareth, With Love**

“‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Nathanael asked” (John 1:46, NIV).

If you asked devout Judean Jews in Jesus' day what they thought of Nazareth, you would probably have received a collection of less than favorable adjectives including “small,” “insignificant” and “spiritually suspect.” Yet this is where God sent His Son for His first three hidden decades of life.

The citizens of Nazareth hopefully held a higher opinion of their region, but even they did not expect a prophet to come from Jesus' family. Looking back, we may be able to recall former classmates who demonstrated some special ability or annoyingly consistent excellence that made them seem destined for greatness. Evidently the good folks in Nazareth never

nominated Jesus for this award.

During His public years, when Jesus returned home, the people were stunned. Throughout almost three decades it had never occurred to this small community that Jesus might be made of prophetic (let alone Messianic) material. In response to Jesus' amazing ministry, they said:

“‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?’ they asked. ‘Isn't this the carpenter's son?’ ... And they took offense at Him” (Matt. 13:54-57).

So Jesus grew up as a relatively uncelebrated boy from an unroyal family in the unrespected town of an unliked region. Bad news if you are planning on running for office; good news if your job description is embracing hiddenness.

### **Are We There Yet?**

Somewhere, somehow, in the thick of those long, undocumented years, Jesus awakened to His divine nature and calling. He realized and accepted that He was the Son of God, eternally existent as God and yet temporally present as a man. More than a prophet and more than a king, Jesus was with Father God in the beginning, created all that is, and was now on earth to offer His sinless life as an atoning sacrifice.

Every day following this awakening, Jesus might have wondered, Is today the day? Imagine Jesus, with God's divine power and calling bursting within Him, waking up each morning, turning to Father God in prayer and asking, “Are we there yet?!”

Day after day, year after year, Father God simply replied: “No, My Son. We are not there yet. Today is not the day.”

During these uncelebrated years, Jesus submitted to a seemingly delayed destiny. A God-sized mission pulsed in His heart, but He was not free to explain, proclaim or actively pursue it. Onlookers saw only the tip of the iceberg of who Jesus truly was, and they could have never imagined the

indestructible greatness growing just beneath the surface of Jesus' unapplauded life.

What would that experience build in someone? What does it build in us? What grows in that underestimated gap between God's calling and others' perceptions; between our true capabilities and our current realities? Most of us struggle if our dreams are delayed one year, let alone 20! We find God's pauses perplexing. They seem to be a waste of our potential. When those pauses extend beyond what we can explain (like three days), we often spiral into self-doubt or second-guessing.

But in anonymous seasons we must hold tightly to the truth that no doubt strengthened Jesus throughout His hidden years: Father God is neither care-less nor cause-less with how He spends our lives. When He calls a soul simultaneously to greatness and obscurity, the fruit—if we wait for it—can change the world.

### **The First Fruit of Hiddenness**

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John" (Matt. 3:13). Finally, after years of disciplined waiting, Father God has an unusual answer for Jesus' usual question. "So ... are we there yet, Father?" Jesus might have offered as He concluded His morning prayers.

"Actually, we are," replied Father God.

"We are? We are ... there?!" Jesus asked.

"In a word: yes. Today is the day, Son. Leave Your tools on the table. I've made an appointment for You with a holy man in camel's hair."

There.

Where is there for you? What do you think it will feel like? There, for Jesus, was a miraculous but misunderstood journey

toward a splintered, bloodied cross.

Leaving His hometown, Jesus' steps must have been filled with thought. On the other side He would encounter Cousin John, an odd but strangely endearing, organic fellow. Sincere souls by the hundreds were drawn to John's raw, unedited call to repentance.

Imagine how Jesus must have felt when He arrived at the Jordan, saw the crowds and heard John yell out, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him" (Luke 3:4). After waiting 30 years, most of us would have exploded with tearful emotion: "Here I am! I have finally come. God sent me to bring you new life!"

But not Jesus. Instead, He calmly navigated His way through the people and waded into the Jordan toward John. No parade. No drum roll. Not even an explanation. Only John knew the truth about the sinless One standing before him.

How could He do that? Especially after waiting for decades, how could He not immediately let the people know who He really was and all that was in His heart?

Jesus' anonymous season had prepared Him for this moment. The choices He made in the Jordan River are reflections of choices He made before the Jordan River. Something in surrendering to hiddenness strengthened Jesus not to make a name for Himself. Something in embracing that prolonged season of obscurity enabled Him to appear to be less in order to be able to do more.

Hidden years, when heeded, empower a soul to patiently trust God with their press releases. Waiting actually grants us the strength to wait a little longer and not rush God's plans for our lives.

### **God's Words for the Hidden**

As Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being

torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove (Mark 1:10).

With a prayer in His heart, Jesus broke through the surface and saw the Holy Spirit descend from a tear in the heavens “in bodily form like a dove” (Luke 3:22).

Imagine! The curtains were drawn. The blessing had been given. Now Father God had something He wanted to say.

Perhaps you, like me, have never heard an audible voice from God. But if your ears were going to hear God’s voice only once, what would you want Him to say?

Would you want Him to explain pain or answer a burning question? Would you prefer clear direction or insight into the future? Jesus and John could certainly have benefited from all of the above. But evidently there was something they both needed to hear even more:

“And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased’” (Matt. 3:17).

A wise friend once noted that God spoke these words before Jesus had ever done anything for which we call Him Savior. True. God sounded His affirmation over Jesus’ life before Jesus ever preached one sermon or enlightened one mind; before Jesus ever healed one body or saved one soul.

These loving words were spoken over Jesus’ hidden years. God declared His full acceptance and pride over what Jesus had become through His anonymous season. In unseen places over underestimated years, Jesus had been making unrecorded, unapplauded choices that had prepared Him for everything to come. And Father God—who values the seen and unseen alike—was very, very pleased.

Through Jesus, we inherit this affirmation from above, for God is still shouting these words of love over us even before we

are recognized or celebrated, before we make the grade or make the news or even make dinner. Before we get that promotion or even get out of bed, Father God is already shouting. Not because of any stunning accomplishment but because of who we are: Through Jesus, we are His!

May God's affirmation from above echo today in your soul: "I love you My child, My friend. With you I am well pleased."

Is there anything else in the whole wide world that our souls truly need to hear?

Read a companion devotional.

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## **Chuck Pierce: We Are in a Time of Major Warfare**

We are in a time of major warfare. So says prophetic minister Chuck Pierce.

While warfare is raging in the Middle East, Pierce is talking about **spiritual warfare**. He says he plans to send out prophetic words for the next several days until he senses a breakthrough and admonishes believers to be alert and watchful.

"We have entered a dangerous season!" he says. "Even though the enemy would like to knock your legs out from under you and drive you off of your path, decree that the Lord is taking a stand and illuminating your path."

Pierce then offers this **prophetic word**:

“The confrontation of the enemy is at hand. You must be filled with praise to enter into that conflict ahead. War is stirring in your midst. War is rising. Unless I rise and inhabit your praises, you will not be able to praise in the midst of the conflicts ahead. I am calling you into a place, and I am going before you so that I am waiting to give you victory. I will establish Myself in your midst. When your conflicts arise, praise Me, and I will assure you of victory in your wars ahead.”

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## **How to Jump Start the Faith Engines of Your Community**

It is the responsibility, and within the latent capability, of every believer to be competent to help and encourage friends and family—to be able to perform first aid for the soul, to be the first line of defense against darkness.

Paul says it best: “And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14).

That is the idea: brethren (that is, people in relationship), full of and motivated by goodness and love, holding the right tools, empowered and led by God, able to gently admonish, encourage and help set free.

The Bible refers to that process, that gift, that thing God is doing to bring about internal healing and freedom by a single Greek word: *sōzō*. It means “to save, heal and deliver.” It is

all one package, one and the same Greek word. So that is what we call it, too.

Jesus came to “sozo” us.

Over the last 10 years, thousands have found increased peace and freedom and experienced the freshness of encounters with a loving, living God. Many are learning how to walk out the scriptural injunctions to complete each other, to care for, encourage and even reprove each other. Some encounters are very dramatic, some gentle and peaceful. All occur in an informal, confidential, honoring, one-on-one or small-group setting, friend with friend.

This is not counseling—that is properly the purview of trained professionals, not first responders. This is about a couple of friends going together to God to get help in time of need.

In a nutshell, Sozo is a God-led framework helping to free individuals from the effects of wounding and sin, and delivering people from the snares and presence of the demonic. It is done in overt partnership with God through finding past and present believed lies and points of access and removing or changing them; establishing healing, blessing and obedience in their place; and restoring individuals to relationship with Papa God and a more fruitful and fulfilling walk.

In Sozo, we depend on God on a moment-by-moment basis. We like to say, “If God does not show up, we cannot fake Sozo ministry!” That is unusual, I think.

Sozo is a changing and growing “lay” approach to working with God in setting each other free. There is no single training manual, proponent church or ministry or certification process. It is more like Alcoholics Anonymous and less like “Sozo, Inc.” It makes the best use of tools and approaches developed by others and modified for our use and to fit our DNA. No minister is a “professional”—though many have had years of training and experience in Christian ministry. Some are

psychiatrists, some are certified counselors who use the tools on a daily basis, and most, like me, are just compassionate knuckleheads.

So you can fit in just fine.

So ... is it wacko? Is it spiritual mumbo jumbo?

Let's look at our friend Bob's car.

The right way to start a car, as intended by its "creator," is with a starter. Failing in that, we can always try to jump-start it. Failing in that, and if it is a stick shift, we can always push-start it. And if that does not work, we can take it to a mechanic, figuring something is broken.

Let's look at Bob.

Bob is feeling down. You and he are having coffee and he expresses dispirited feelings, sad moods and poor behaviors. You are wondering what to do and how to think about your friend Bob. He is like that car that will not start.

If we try to get Bob help we may find some professional who will recommend changes to his environment, behavior, relational skills, cognitive reasoning structures or brain chemistry. Lots of ways to start the car—none wrong if they work.

That's great, but what can we do about it?

I am a spirit being, I have a soul, and I live in a body. The Bible is pretty clear about this. Our Creator intends for us to live from the inside out. What we believe in our hearts drives all else.

The beliefs in our hearts are like a car starter—they are intended to propel our lives. God intends our hearts to be powered from within—from communion with Him within our spirits.

Beliefs then influence the thoughts and operation of our brains. Our brains are meant to be structured over time through the flow of sound truth and gentle love. We are to automatically and effortlessly think along peaceful and healthy mental pathways—as brain scientists say, “Neurons that fire together wire together.” The proper wiring and functioning of the brain then guides and directs behavior. And through proper maintenance and protection, we do not break down emotionally or behaviorally. We are not broken.

Our approach, and the subject of this book, is to work mostly from the inside out on beliefs and also on spiritually broken aspects of lives (the result of negative spiritual events). We think that when Jesus said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,” He meant it in a very practical and applied way. We may advise people with unexplained issues to get a thorough physical to make sure there is not a true physical brain malfunction, and we may give advice on right thinking and on responsible behavior.

We take this approach first because experience in thousands of settings shows it can be very effective, and at worst it is still encouraging and loving when applied within our framework. Second, it is well framed within the truth found in Scripture. And third, we take this approach because we can. It is simple to learn, powerful in application, low pressure, informal and well within the definition of “first aid.” It is within the reach of most people.

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# 1 Crucial Key to How You Experience the Holy Spirit

**Disappointed:** I joined a charismatic group about a year ago and am amazed to see numbers of people slain in the spirit when they are being prayed over. I desire the same but am always disappointed that I don't get slain. The latest seminar I attended was a week ago, and still I didn't get slain in the Spirit.

**Dear Disappointed:** I fully understand. I too have hungered to fall down under the power of the Holy Spirit as others do, and I have wrestled with this issue over the years. It is finally resolved in my heart and mind. Let me offer a few thoughts the Lord has shared with me.

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## We Don't All Have the Same Experiences

First, it is not necessary that I have the same physical manifestations to the power of God that others have. The Spirit came and rested on Jesus, and He didn't fall down (Luke 3:22). So since this is not a required step or action of spiritual maturity, there is no reason for me to *have* to experience it in my life. However, I still might enjoy being slain in the Spirit, so is there anything I can do to prepare myself to receive it?

I believe that right-brain people experience this manifestation more often than left-brain people. I am a left brainer, so normally I wouldn't fall down when being prayed for. I may desire the experience, but obviously, I am not

going to fake it and just fall over, nor am I suggesting that right brainers are faking it.

## **What Right Brainers Do**

Finally I realized that right brainers posture themselves in a different way inwardly than I do as a left brainer. As they are being prayed for, their thoughts are focused in the right side of their brains, meaning they are seeing what is happening. They are “seeing” the hands being laid upon them as the hands of Jesus. They are seeing power streaming from those hands into their bodies (Hab. 3:4). They are seeing their bodies absorbing this power and energy of the Holy Spirit, and feeling weakened as the power of God interacts with the energy within their own bodies. They are hungry to believe all this, receive it, and experience it, so they have expectant faith and are tuned to inner sensations. *As they feel a lightness, they don't resist* but simply allow themselves to fall into the arms of a catcher.

Now, obviously, not all right brainers experience it exactly this way, but these are the general principles.

## **What Left Brainers Do**

So how is that different from what I do as a left brainer? Well, first of all I am not normally using vision. I am not seeing anything positive with the eyes of my heart. With my natural eyes, I am watching the person coming down the line praying for people and them falling, and I am thinking, “I hope this happens to me,” and picturing and believing that I probably will remain standing, since I never fall. This is a totally different inner posture than that of the right brainer. This inner analysis, doubt, questioning and lack of tuning to believing pictures and inner sensations essentially bar me from receiving this experience.

## **What I Could Do as a Left Brainer**

So I have discovered that if I will just posture myself as right brainers do, and see what they are seeing, and believe what they are believing, and not resist. But if I feel a bit faint and allow myself to fall into the arms of a catcher, then I too can receive what they receive, and I can do it with integrity and not be faking it. So that is what I have done from time to time, when it has been appropriate and I have desired it.

## **No Judgmentalism, Please!**

I don't hunger for this experience as right brainers do. Nor do I judge it or come against it. Being slain in the Spirit is fine and meaningful for many, but perhaps not as meaningful to me personally, and that is fine. God has made us all different. If we measure ourselves against one another, we are fools, the Bible says (2 Cor. 10:12). So I celebrate their encounters with God without judging myself by demanding that I need to have an identical encounter.

The Bible neither prescribes this experience as a sign of spirituality, nor does it speak against it. So I adopt this same perspective.

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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 September 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.

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## **Duggar Clan Adds Yet Another Member**

The Duggar clan just keeps on growing—though this time it’s through marriage.

Jessa Duggar, star of *19 Kids and Counting*, is engaged to

marry Ben Seewald. Seewald and Duggar have been courting for 11 months.

“We are so blessed to be engaged!” the couple said in a statement. “God has written an amazing story through our courtship, and another chapter has just begun! We are thrilled to see what the future holds—especially the wedding bells!”

According to *US* magazine, Duggar is 21 and Seewald is 19. To celebrate 11 months together, Seewald gave Duggar a pearl bracelet and handwritten note.

“What good are such beautiful pearls if not to have the grace of being worn by one so elegant and majestic as yourself?” the note reads. “These pearls were like I am when we’re apart; but not anymore! I love you, my precious princess!”

In what is becoming a Duggar family tradition, Jessa will follow in the footsteps of her sister Jill and save her first kiss for marriage, *US* reports.

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## **There’s Nothing Funny About This Turn of Events With Robin Williams**

Westboro Baptist Church is rearing its cultish head again. The group, which is best known for toting “God Hates Fags” signs, has targeted Robin Williams’ funeral for its next protest.

Westboro plans to picket the late comedian’s funeral because he used his comedy, they argue, to “mock God.” Westboro is also up in arms because Williams, they claim, was a “homosexual enabler.”

Williams, who played a gay character in *The Birdcage*, was found dead last week after committing suicide.

“Westboro Baptist Church hopes to preach in lawful proximity to Robin Williams’ funeral—to warn the living: Repent or likewise perish,” says one of the tweets.

“God hates Robin Williams. Westboro Baptist Church hopes to preach outside his funeral,” the group also tweeted.

“HEED: You spend your life mocking God and promoting sin, you get no peace,” another tweet says.

Planting Peace, a nonprofit that aims to spread peace in a hurting world, is speaking out against its Kansas neighbor.

“In keeping with our philosophy of addressing acts of hate and intolerance with compassion and love, we are inviting the public to show their respect and support of a man who spent his life making others smile, who was always there for others in their time of need, and who supported the greater good through works of service and charity,” the group wrote in a statement. “Please join Planting Peace in counteracting the WBC’s message of hate through a fund-raising event benefiting St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, a cause Mr. Williams passionately and publicly supported.”

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## **116,000 Pack Angel Stadium for 25th Anniversary Harvest Crusade**

For months drivers all over Southern California have been seeing bumper stickers that read “Harvest: Greg Laurie. August

15-17, 2014: Angel Stadium.” There have been radio advertisements and newspaper articles leading up to the 25th anniversary Harvest Crusade in Orange County. Christians have been praying for the event and inviting their friends. And this past weekend, they came.

The three-night count for the 2014 SoCal Harvest Crusade: 116,000 people packed the stadium in Anaheim; 62,733 more watched via webcasts; and 12,791 made decisions for Christ.

Each night opened with video testimonies and music from various contemporary Christian artists and worship leaders, including Phil Wickham, Skillet, Chris Tomlin, Sidewalk Prophets and Crystal Lewis. On Friday night, Laurie interviewed former Mafia kingpin Michael Franzese about how Christ had transformed his life when he was in prison. On Saturday, POD point man Sonny Sandoval said the opening prayer. And each night, emcee Levi Lusko stirred up the crowd.

But it was Laurie who hit home with the audience. Through the years at the Anaheim crusades and others around the country, nearly a half-million people have made decisions for Christ.

Who is Laurie? He accepted Christ as a teenager during the Jesus Movement-era and studied the gospel under the tutelage of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa pastor and movement founder Chuck Smith. Laurie started a Bible study and eventually a church in Riverside, California. Today, Harvest Christian Fellowship is one of the largest churches in the nation and has a second campus in Orange County.

On Friday night at the crusade, Laurie opened with the message, “The God Who Loves and Forgives.” He followed on Saturday and Sunday with simple yet poignant messages titled “Jesus and You” and “See You in the Morning.” All three messages can be viewed at .

Laurie peppers his teaching with quotes from celebrities, even referring to Robin Williams’ suicide and singer Lana Del Rey

this year. Yet he always comes back to the gospel. In one message this year he told the story of Jesus and the woman at the well who had many husbands, making it real with a story from his own life: His mother had more husbands than the woman at the well, and as a child Greg had a front-row seat.

“Some people water down the gospel in an attempt to be relevant,” emcee Levi Lusko told *Charisma*. “But that backfires. Greg keeps up to date. He is curious and always asking questions about social media or some popular singer. He is cool but does it without compromising the Bible’s teaching.”

Second-generation Calvary Chapel leader and Whosoever’s co-founder Ryan Ries agrees. “It works because Greg is in tune with the Holy Spirit,” Ries told *Charisma*. “As he gives the words that God prepared for him, God does all of the rest. Greg is just the instrument. When people hear the plain Gospel they get hit by the Holy Spirit and come forward, and their lives are changed.”

Indeed. As has been happening for 25 years, on each night of the crusade, Laurie gives a passionate altar call. He has shown people the problem of sin and the hope of an answer in Christ. And they respond by the thousands. From all over the stadium, even the nose-bleed seats, they come to the outfield grass to make a decision to follow Christ. Singer Jaime Owens-Collins once described the response as looking like a flow of lava. Once in the outfield, Laurie leads the new followers of Christ in prayer and then volunteer counselors give each one who has made a decision a Bible and additional help.

“This is when the battle is at its peak,” Laurie told *Charisma*. “I pray for the right words as we call people to Christ. Each one is an answer to someone’s prayer. It is a privilege to spread the gospel and call people to Christ.”

A few years ago, 21-year-old Matt Denson attended a crusade.

“I wasn’t a Christian, and I didn’t want to be one,” Denson told *Charisma*. “It was the altar call that got me. I stayed in the stands. I listened to what Greg was talking about, and I repeated the prayer. I already had my own Bible. I grew up in the church, but I didn’t want anything to do with it until I came to Harvest.”

Today, Matt attends Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside and volunteered to be an usher at the crusade.

Another 21-year-old, Jessica Montano, was attending her 15th Harvest Crusade.

“I grew up at Harvest Crusades,” Montano, who attends Calvary Chapel Chino Valley, told *Charisma*. “My family always came. We would always invite friends. And many have made decisions for Christ. It is easier to get my friends to come here than to come to church. This is like a concert at a stadium. People are used to it. Today people don’t really know what a church is. This is more modernized, but we still preach the Bible. This is church, but it isn’t church.”

Xavier Cornejo was in Angel Stadium for the crusade, visiting from Ecuador to see if a Harvest Crusade would work in South America.

“It is amazing to see that these things still are happening in the U.S.,” Cornejo told *Charisma*. “Greg isn’t just having a fun time, he is actually doing the Great Commission. This happens when the church works together. It is the love of the people.”

John Collins has been with Laurie since the first crusade and serves as executive pastor at Harvest Christian Fellowship.

“The technology and our ability to reach so many more people has changed in 25 years,” Collins told *Charisma*. “What hasn’t changed is the message. Greg is faithful to the gospel.”

Laurie's Sunday night message was on the hope of heaven, which had both broad and personal meaning. Harvest Crusade co-founder and Laurie's spiritual father, Chuck Smith, died last year, and this was the first crusade without him.

"Chuck helped us to get started. He laid the foundation for us," Laurie said. "He is just a reminder that all of us are here for just a short time, then we pass on. Our goal is to take as many people to heaven with us as possible."

Laurie will speak at a Harvest Crusade event in Dallas in October.

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## **'We Will Not Rest Until This Blasphemous Show Is off the Air'**

American Family Association and its division is urging Christians who are concerned with the new Cartoon Network Adult Swim "comedy" *Black Jesus* to contact advertisers that are supporting the program via their advertising dollars.

About 2 million viewers watched last Thursday's episode, which contained at least 60 profanities in just over 20 minutes.

After the Aug. 7 debut of the show, AFA and One Million Moms contacted the show's key sponsors. Both Unisom (Chatter, Inc.) and American Eagle Outfitters announced they were pulling their ads after the first episode. And none of the advertisers AFA and One Million Moms contacted appeared during Thursday's late-night broadcast and overnight re-broadcast.

“Both American Family Association and will not rest until the disgusting, blasphemous show is off the air,” said One Million Moms Director Monica Cole. “We will be vocal in urging Christians to contact the companies who choose to use their advertising dollars to keep filth like this on television—filth that is a direct attack on both Christians and African Americans.”

Several new advertisers placed ads during last week’s 11 p.m. episode, including Air Heads Candy, Progressive Insurance, Compound W, Dave and Buster’s and . Additional advertisers during the rebroadcast at 2:30 a.m. included Monistat, Xbox and Xfinity/Comcast.

*Black Jesus* features an African-American Jesus character who swears frequently, drinks and smokes marijuana as he interacts, sometimes violently, with friends and residents of Compton Gardens.

In response, both AFA and One Million Moms have been communicating frequently with their many supporters about the blasphemous show and the advertisers supporting it.

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## **Guess What Hotel Chain Is Banning Bibles Now**

The U.K. nationwide hotel chain Travelodge has removed Bibles from all of its rooms, in a move criticized by the Church of England.

Bibles provided free by the Gideons have been taken away for “diversity” reasons.

The removals took place after refurbishment work across the hotel chain, which replaced the drawers where Bibles were being kept.

In response, a spokesman for the Church of England said: "It seems both tragic and bizarre that hotels would remove the word of God for the sake of ergonomic design, economic incentive or a spurious definition of the word 'diversity.'"

Writing on the *Telegraph* website, commentator Tim Stanley described Travelodge's decision as "an act of cultural vandalism upon a tradition that goes back 126 years."

A spokesman for Travelodge said: "The reason is because of diversity. With the country being increasingly multicultural, we didn't feel it was appropriate to just have the Bible."

He added: "People were also taking Bibles away and with the redesign of the rooms, it was felt that it would be better to remove them."

Travelodge is the only hotel chain in the country to have removed the Bibles, despite its never having received a complaint from a guest.

Both Premier Inn and InterContinental Hotels, which owns the Holiday Inn chain, say that Bibles are being retained in their hotels.

A spokesman for Premier Inn said: "On the rare occasion that a customer does not wish to have a Bible in their room, they can request this to be removed ahead of their stay."

The practice of placing Bibles in hotel rooms dates back over 120 years, originating with the work of the Commercial Travellers' Christian Association.

In recent times, the work of distributing Bibles in hotels has been taken up by The Gideons International, which provides this service to more than 190 countries worldwide.