

US Celebrates Freedom While Ignoring the Moral Obligations That Come With It

“When a government starts an earnest fight against terrorism, public opinion immediately accuses it of violating terrorists’ civil rights.” –Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1978)

Two powerful essays by two very different individuals have challenged me to reflect on our moral obligation. The two men, now deceased, are Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Nobel Prize-winning Russian author and critic of the Soviet system, and Charles Colson, the once-infamous Nixon attorney who became a committed follower of Jesus.

We are in the middle of a great debate about our moral obligation. Some of that debate will be included as we move into the fall election season. Some of that debate exists at any time of the year.

One of the most influential speeches of the 20th century was delivered by Solzhenitsyn at Harvard University’s Commencement on June 8, 1978. Acknowledging Harvard’s motto “Veritas” (truth), he prefaced his remarks by saying, “Truth is seldom pleasant; it is almost invariably bitter.”

Although his political references are somewhat antiquated (communism vs. the West), his cultural, social and moral critiques are as thought provoking today as they were a decade before the iron curtain fell. And he did not mince his words.

His message was deep and wide. He challenged the West’s decline in courage and its legalistic life, shortsightedness, loss of willpower and humanism. He even claimed “...the press has become the greatest power within the Western countries, more powerful than the legislature, the executive and the

judiciary. One would then like to ask: By what law has it been elected, and to whom is it responsible?"

Perhaps you recall the firestorm he created as he spoke from such an honored platform to the social ills of our day. His insights were immediately and hotly debated.

Some of his most sobering insights, though, came when he addressed the direction of freedom. "The defense of individual rights has reached such extremes as to make society as a whole defenseless against certain individuals. It is time, in the West, to defend not so much human rights as human obligations."

Solzhenitsyn continued, "Destructive and irresponsible freedom has been granted boundless space. Society appears to have little defense against the abyss of human decadence, such as, for example, misuse of liberty for moral violence against young people, motion pictures full of pornography, crime and horror. It is considered to be part of freedom and theoretically counterbalanced by the young people's right not to look or not to accept. Life organized legalistically has thus shown its inability to defend itself against the corrosion of evil."

Anyone who lives in a culture without an "objective legal scale" faces the dire unpredictability of its leaders. Solzhenitsyn experienced that under communism and called that society "A terrible one indeed" but he also said, "...a society with no other scale but the legal one is not quite worthy of man either. ... Whenever the tissue of life is woven of legal relations, there is an atmosphere of moral mediocrity, paralyzing man's noblest impulses."

He ended his speech by referring to the "disaster" that has befallen the West. He did not describe it as a "world war disaster" but rather "...the calamity of a despiritualized and irreligious human consciousness." Even in 1978, he believed we

had "...approached a major turn in history."

No wonder his essay generated a huge reaction. With panoramic insight, Solzhenitsyn challenged that graduating class to accept its moral obligation.

About 25 years later, Chuck Colson (with Anne Morse) wrote in "The Moral Home Front" (*Christianity Today*, October 2004) a challenging claim that America's moral decline is encouraging our Islamic adversaries.

Colson's challenge must not be ignored. "We must be careful not to blame innocent Americans for murderous attacks against them. At the same time, let's acknowledge that America's increasing decadence is giving aid and comfort to the enemy. When we tolerate trash on television, permit pornography to invade our homes via the internet, and allow babies to be killed at the point of birth, we are enflaming radical Islam."

None of us wants to think that any part of our American way of life could possibly hinder how we are perceived by other cultures. We like to think we are a beacon of light in a very dark world. And, in many ways we are. But in other ways, our way of life can be very dark.

"Our hope," according to Colson, "is to make freedom so attractive that other Muslim countries will follow suit. But when radical Islamists see American women abusing Muslim men, as they did in the Abu Ghraib prison, and when they see news coverage of same-sex couples being "married" in U.S. towns, we make our kind of freedom abhorrent—the kind they see as a blot on Allah's creation."

Colson's words sound hauntingly familiar to the insights Alexander Solzhenitsyn gave in his famous Harvard speech in 1978.

We must not assume the problem is freedom. The problem is the effects of freedom without responsibility—without moral

obligation. And when the West honors freedom but dishonors morality, some parts of our world get very upset. And so should we.

Colson calls this matter of U.S. decadence “an urgent priority.” And he ends his essay with these words, “If our cultural rot continues unabated, a Talibanized West may no longer be a joke but a grim reality.”

And now in 2014, open your eyes and ears; ponder what you’re seeing and hearing.

We have a moral obligation to respond.

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Texas Gov. Rick Perry Could Face 99 Years in Prison for ‘Abuse of Power’

Texas Gov. Rick Perry, a possible Republican presidential candidate in 2016, said on Saturday an indictment against him for abuse of power was a political move that he intends to fight.

Perry was indicted on Friday by a grand jury in Travis County,

a Democratic stronghold in the heavily Republican state, on two counts of abuse of power and coercion over a funding veto he made last year that was seen as being intended to force a local prosecutor to resign.

"This indictment amounts to nothing more than an abuse of power and I cannot and I will not allow that to happen," Perry told reporters in Austin, Texas. He added he stood by the veto that led to charges being laid against him.

A probe was launched last year after Perry vetoed \$7.5 million in funding for an integrity unit that is part of the Travis County district attorney's office.

The veto was seen as hardball politics to force out county District Attorney Rosemary Lehmberg, a Democrat, after she pleaded guilty to drunken driving and remained in office.

If convicted of the first-degree felony, Perry could be sentenced to between five and 99 years in jail while a conviction on the other charge can bring between two and 10 years in jail, a prosecutor said.

Perry is expected to survive the court battle but the trial could drag on for months, casting a shadow over his campaign and scaring away major donations, said Mark Jones, a political science professor at Rice University in Houston.

In the short run, Perry could use the legal battle to win support during Republican primaries by portraying himself as a staunch conservative being targeted in a politically motivated prosecution launched by Democrats, Jones said.

"This comes as Perry was gaining traction due to the immigration issue that saw him rise from an also-ran to a third-tier candidate in the Republican presidential race," Jones said.

Republicans have long charged that they have been targeted by

the Public Integrity Unit, run out of the Travis County prosecutor's office. The unit has investigated prominent Republicans including former U.S. House of Representatives Majority Leader Tom DeLay.

After flaming out in the 2012 presidential race, Perry had been mounting a political comeback that gained him national attention for attacking President Barack Obama by saying he had not done enough to secure the border with Mexico.

Perry, the longest-serving governor in the state's history and the first indicted in the state in about a century, was forced to exit the 2012 presidential race after gaffes including when he lost his train of thought during a debate and could not recall which government departments he wanted to abolish.

He is not seeking re-election as governor and will step down next year.

Reporting by Jon Herskovitz; Additional reporting by Jonathan Allen in New York; Editing by Lisa Shumaker

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You Won't Believe Who Accepted the Ice Bucket Challenge Now

On Sunday night evangelist and megachurch pastor Greg Laurie joined the ranks of people who have accepted the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. Standing at home plate of Angel Stadium in

Anaheim, California, and having just preached about the hope of heaven to a crowd of 47,000 people, he was doused with an orange Igloo cooler full of ice water.

The fun soaking came on the final night of his three-day "2014 SoCal Harvest" and only after the altar call, which saw thousands of people stream from the stands to the outfield grass in response to Laurie's challenge for them to accept Jesus Christ as savior.

The ALS Ice Water Challenge, which has gained popularity across the nation and raised millions of dollars to fight amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (better known as Lou Gehrig's disease) in recent months, requires that a person dump a bucket of ice water over his or her head or donate \$100 to the ALS Association. After being drenched with ice water, the person then challenges three other people to do the same thing and posts the event on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or another social-media outlet. Laurie accepted the ice bath *and* donated \$100.

"This is a fun thing to do, but this is a serious disease," Laurie said, as the moment was streamed live around the world and posted on Twitter. "As a matter of fact, my own aunt died from it. So I hope anything I can do to draw attention to it will be helpful to fight this dreaded disease."

Laurie then challenged Texas pastor Jack Graham, Chicago pastor James MacDonald and musician Chris Tomlin to also participate in support of ALS. Graham was present and accepted on the spot. After having a tub of ice water dumped on him at home plate, Graham in turn challenged Los Angeles Lakers rookie Julius Randle, Los Angeles Angels baseball player Josh Hamilton and Arizona State football coach Todd Graham.

Tomlin was on stage at Harvest leading worship and, as do the others, he has 24 hours to respond.

Harvest Crusade emcee Levi Lusko started the string of

challenges. He accepted a challenge from Austin Thompson on Saturday night, also getting doused with ice water at home plate. Lusko in turn challenged Laurie, musician Phil Wickham and musician Sonny Sandoval of the group POD. Wickham was on stage singing Saturday night. He accepted the challenge and had his soaking on Sunday afternoon at the stadium. Sandoval had led the opening prayer on Saturday. There was no word as to whether he accepted, but it was likely that he did.

The New York Times estimates that 30,000 people have the disease, which affects nerve cells to the brain. With the Ice Bucket Challenge spreading, the ALS Association has received \$13.3 million in donations since July 29, up from \$1.7 million during the same time period in 2013, the *Times* reports.

What to Do When You Have No Answers

I shared recently about the big decisions I need to make and how much I was struggling to make them.

It has been a season of tremendous confusion for easy answers, no straight, lighted path before me, nothing uncomplicated.

I kept asking God to just make things clear to me. I kept telling Him that I would go or be wherever He wanted me to go or please tell me!

But as I have shared before, I kept looking to others to help me wrestle through decisions with me.

I wanted friends willing to listen to me say or ask the same thing 15 times in 15 different ways. I needed to grapple and

ponder and brainstorm. And I didn't want to do it alone.

This single parent decision-making thing can be a lonely business.

And for someone who likes to think out loud, it is I think I've been torturing everyone around me. I put my friends and family in the position of having to hear me think out loud a lot.

I spent a lot time trying to find would tell me what to do! I'm surprised they all didn't run away from me.

I felt such a burden to figure things to make a decision already.

I wanted to talk (and talk and talk...)

And it struck me

Why not talk to God?

Maybe that desire to think out loud is really more about a desire to pray. I just hadn't thought of it that way before.

I'd been so busy looking for someone to lead me that I'd missed talking to the One who is my Leader. I'm truly like a silly little sheep. I have The Good Shepherd as my guide and I'm not looking to Him. I'm looking around to anyone and everyone to give me answers, direction, and guidance.

He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. Isaiah 40:11

But God in His graciousness did indeed provide.

First it was a dear friend who, while in the midst of her own health crisis, willingly listened to my life circumstances and shared her thoughts. I'm in of God's provision.

She asked me where I wanted to be in 5 years. She said, "Focus on where you want to be, rather than all the little things that need to happen to get there."

At first I thought, "How in the world do I do THAT? There are things that need to be that need to be made and actions that need to be taken!"

But the more I thought about it the more I realized that if I trust God's leading, I must also trust that He will provide a way.

I kept thinking of the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant who had to step into the river before it parted. Maybe I need to be willing to do that as a step of faith.

*So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and **as soon as** those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and **the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water** (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away... Joshua 3:14-16*

A lot grabs me in those one thing that stuck out was that the Lord wants us know that this was not an easy wade in the was an overflowing river. Probably seemed a bit daunting to those priests, but they trusted that God was going to make a way for them to follow His leading and they took a step of faith.

God gave direction and then provided the way.

I want that.

I want well-lit straight path ahead. I'm finding that God doesn't often choose that path for me. My path is more often than not a little dark so I can only see a step or two in front of me. I cannot even see a bit up the path. It is

always, and I mean always, a bit curvy and rocky. I'm walking slowly, deliberately and with anxiety in my heart for what lies ahead. I want to make decisions that I know will turn out that have a happy ending.

I know I can trust God. I also know I can trust that God's word is true. And His word says that I will have trouble. I've been living in the trouble long for peaceful. I'm always worried that my decisions will lead to more troubled times. Lord, forgive me for my fear and anxious thoughts.

But I also know that there is peace in making a decision and trusting God with the outcome. I want to make a decision and have the outcome to end the way I want. But God says that He guarantees the outcome to be for His glory and my that it will be my "perfect" outcome.

As I was wrestling with my hope for perfection, God continued to bless me. My one sister, who loves me and all my goofiness, was willing to listen, brainstorm and pray with me until the wee hours of the morning. My sister, the one I grew up with, is also my sister in Christ. And what a blessing she is to me!

I shared with her all my thoughts, concerns, fears, and she listened patiently, and even laughed at all my jokes! (That is definitely a blessed thing J!)

As we talked through my situation, she said some things that really struck me:

If I love Christ and live my life for Him, He WILL lead me.

If my desire is to glorify Him and bless others, He will work in my situation to those ends.

Sometimes a decision just needs to be made and God will take care of the rest.

And finally, she reminded me of Philippians 4:7, "And the

peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

That term guard was what she wanted me to notice. It's actually a military term. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance says that *to guard* means: “‘a sentinel, guard’ – to guard (keep watch) like a military sentinel; (figuratively) to actively display whatever defensive and offensive means are necessary to guard.”

God's peace guards our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. He is willing to do whatever is necessary to protect our hearts and our minds.

So if that is do I so often feel so little peace?

I don't believe it is because God is doing anything believe that it is because I'm seeking that peace in my my decisions.

My sister pointed out that God's peace is something I have regardless of my circumstances, my decisions and their outcomes.

It is my decision to live in that peace that God does and will always guard. I'm blessed by that reminder.

And I'm grabbing hold of that , I'm grabbing hold of that peace.

My big decision is one of the biggest of my single mom one of the top ten of my life to this point.

I know that regardless of my decision, God will not leave me nor forsake me.

And regardless of my decision, God's peace is mine.

Oh how desperately I want that peace. It seems so “christianeze-ish” (my word) for me to say I will live in God's peace regardless of things going it also seems a bit

sketchy that I would say that after all I've written about struggle and anxiety and ...

That peace is God's mine. It's a God thing. And I will grab hold of it and I will focus on it and I will study it and I will live it because God is guarding me with it.

I'm so thankful for my Lord, for my friend and for my sister.

God will lead me even if it isn't with lightning bolts and neon might be a late night talk or a quiet morning studying His the Word or a little bit of both or He might just guide me to make a decision and trust Him.

My decision right now is to take a big step of faith. I'm moving forward without a definite plan, but with hope and peace that as I step out God will guide. I'm taking a big step and praying fervently that God will make clear paths where I see none right now.

I'm trusting God will lead I'm excited to see what He shows me.

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. Proverbs 16:9

The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD upholds his hand. Psalm 37:23-24

Sue Birdseye is an author and single mom of five kids that range from 4-years-old to 17-years-old. Her book, *When Happily Ever After Shatters (Tyndale House)* is in bookstores. This is adapted from her blog, .

After Shocking Michael Brown Autopsy Revelations, National Guard Deployed in Ferguson

Missouri's governor said on Monday he will send the National Guard into the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson to restore calm after authorities forcibly dispersed a crowd protesting last week's fatal shooting of an unarmed black teen by police.

Gov. Jay Nixon signed an executive order deploying the state militia, saying demonstrators had thrown Molotov cocktails and shot at police as well as a civilian, a description of the night's events diverging widely from some eyewitness accounts.

"Tonight, a day of hope, prayers and peaceful protests was marred by the violent criminal acts of an organized and growing number of individuals, many from outside the community and state, whose actions are putting the residents and businesses of Ferguson at risk," Nixon said in a statement on his website.

A midnight curfew was imposed for the second night in the tense St. Louis suburb hit by racially charged demonstrations, violence and looting since unarmed Michael Brown, 18, was shot to death on Aug. 9 by white police officer Darren Wilson.

At around dusk on Sunday, hundreds of protesters in Ferguson including families with young children fled to safety after police wearing gas masks and body armor fired tear gas and smoke canisters to scatter them hours ahead of the curfew.

"The smoke bombs were completely unprovoked," said Anthony Ellis, 45. "It (the protest) was led by kids on bikes. Next you know they're saying, 'Go home, Go home!'"

The Missouri Highway Patrol said "aggressors" were trying to

infiltrate a law-enforcement command post and that armored vehicles were deployed to ensure public safety.

"We ordered them back. We ordered them back again. After several attempts, we utilized the smoke to disperse these individuals," said Highway Patrol Corporal Justin Wheetley.

State Highway Patrol Captain Ron Johnson told a late-night news briefing: "Molotov cocktails were thrown, there were shootings, looting, vandalism and other acts of violence that clearly appear not to have been spontaneous."

He was explaining the police tactics against what he said had to that point been a peaceful demonstration.

"Coordinated acts" by a few in the crowd were "premeditated criminal acts designed ... to provoke a response," Johnson said. "I had no alternative but to elevate the level of our response."

He noted most of the protesters were peaceful and blamed the trouble on "a few people bent on violence and destruction."

Johnson said the trouble began after police responded to the shooting of a civilian at 8:25 p.m., which was followed by gunfire directed towards police and Molotov cocktails being thrown. At least one other person was shot, and several were arrested. No police were injured.

Officials said Ferguson schools would be closed on Monday.

Private, Federal Autopsies

A preliminary private autopsy, asked for by Brown's family, showed the teenager was shot at least six times, *The New York Times* reported on Sunday night.

Quoting Michael M. Baden, former chief medical examiner for the city of New York, the newspaper reported that Brown was shot twice in the head, and that the bullets that hit him did

not appear to have been fired from very close range because no gunpowder was detected on his body.

Brown's family was set to appear with Baden on Monday morning in St. Louis to address the autopsy's findings.

Earlier on Sunday, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder ordered a federal autopsy of Brown's body, seeking to assure the family and community there will be a thorough investigation.

Police say Brown was asked by Wilson to move off the road and onto a sidewalk and that Brown reached into a patrol car and struggled with Wilson for his service gun and was shot.

A friend of Brown's, Dorian Johnson, 22, and at least one other witness said Wilson reached out through his car window to grab at Brown and the teenager was trying to get away when shot. Brown held up his hands in a sign of surrender but Wilson got out of his patrol car and shot Brown several times, they said.

Police in Ferguson have come under strong criticism for Brown's death and their handling of the aftermath.

On Saturday night they also used smoke canisters and tear gas to drive away protesters who refused to leave the area when the midnight-to-5 a.m. curfew began. Seven protesters were arrested after failing to disperse.

As disturbances continued in Missouri, 500 people protested outside police headquarters in Los Angeles on Sunday over the shooting death of an unarmed black man in California a week ago.

That rally was peaceful, with many holding up signs reading, "Hands up, don't shoot," in reference to witness reports that Brown had his hands up when he was shot in Ferguson.

Additional reporting by Lucia Mutikani and Julia Edwards in Washington, Victoria Cavaliere in Seattle, Dana Feldman in Los Angeles and Chris Michaud in New York; Writing by Colleen Jenkins and Sharon Bernstein; Editing by Mark Heinrich

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500 Pastors Unite in Intercession for Spiritual Awakening in Colorado

Ask Keith Peterson what a spiritual awakening looks like, and the Colorado pastor points to a cartoon that was published on the front page of a Denver newspaper in 1905.

The Jan. 21 edition of the now-defunct *Denver Republican* featured an evangelist with a pitchfork in hand, chasing the devil out of the Mile High City.

The cartoon comically illustrated a spiritual reality that occurred after pastors launched city-wide prayer, prompting businesses to close for noon intercession and nightly house meetings in 10 districts throughout Denver, says Peterson, who leads Pastors For Revival.

For the 500 pastors and 70 churches aligned with Pastors For Revival in its desire for a spiritual awakening in Colorado, prayer continues to play a part in 2014 as it did in 1905.

The pastors have encouraged circles of prayer throughout the city, conducted monthly city-wide intercession, and emphasized

personal revival as a condition for a large-scale awakening.

“We’re traveling along the same lines as our predecessors who emphasized houses of prayer, rather than theology or teaching, because it’s in prayer that we encounter the presence of God.

“We want to be good hosts of his (God’s) presence,” says Peterson of Pastors For Revival.

The ministry website includes the front-page newspaper cartoon as well as articles on past revivals, pastors’ videos and prayer events.

Peterson and Pastors For Revival knew they were on track in 2013 when Anh Le, a Vietnamese molecular biologist trained at the University of Colorado in Boulder and at German evangelist Reinhard Bonnke’s Orlando, Florida-based ministry school, told them he’d heard a word from God about Colorado.

“The very day the Holy Spirit told me to hold a crusade in Denver, I could have died when an enraged pimp appeared out of nowhere with a knife as I ministered to a woman he held hostage as a victim of sex-trafficking,” says Le, a Denver native.

The son of Vietnamese parents—his father a practicing Buddhist and his mother a Catholic—Le had held one small crusade in Colorado and a larger one in Africa when the Holy Spirit directed him to hold a second crusade, Revival Fest, in Denver Aug. 9-10 at downtown’s Civic Center Park, directly across from the state Capitol.

The park is home to the nation’s third-largest gay-pride event and an annual 4/20 celebration of legal pot in the Mile High City, both held just weeks before Pastors For Revival called for a nondenominational prayer meeting at nearby Beth Abraham/Church in the City for Awakening Colorado.

“Actually the LGBT community is part of my target audience

because, I believe, like with myself when I was an atheist, people who call themselves gay or are part of another religious or ethnic group want more in their lives," says Le, who was called as an evangelist at 19, even as he pursued a degree at the University of Colorado in Boulder and envisioned a business enterprise that would fund his world-wide ministry plans upon graduation.

"I think we're doing warfare in the spirit in Denver," where Le's repeated Gospel messages and ministry over two days were translated by a Spanish-speaking interpreter.

Le, who calls Bonnke his mentor and models his crusades after the German-born evangelist's ministry, tells audiences that atheism depressed him until he radically encountered Jesus Christ, who brought profound joy into his life and success in business.

A portion of the profits from Le's business, On Fire Merchant Services, help fund Revival Fest crusades, fun, family-oriented events that turn serious when Le prays for the sick, including people infirm with cancer, HIV, arthritis as well as those who are deaf, blind or crippled.

Peterson and Le, while acknowledging crowd size for the two-day Revival Fest was significantly less than the 325,000 who turned out for gay pride in 2013 and the tens of thousands for this year's 4/20 event which coincided with Easter, say that even one person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ or a sick body that's restored is worth the investment of prayer, time and money.

"I wish for the big crowds—but only for the sake of souls," says Le whose African crusade drew an estimated 8,000 people—many of whom he says were saved and healed of serious diseases.

In Africa and Colorado, pastors and Le work side-by-side to direct crusade-goers to local churches where new believers

grow in their faith, receive instruction from the Bible, and learn their spiritual gifts for life and personal ministry.

Le tells the story of praying for a young African girl without female genitals. She was brought to the crusade by her mother. After prayer, Le says, the girl's mother reported that her daughter's previously missing private parts were miraculously restored.

One woman who attended Denver's pride event and Awakening Colorado says Le, Peterson and Pastors For Revival are spot-on in welcoming the LGBT community, though few if any showed up to hear the Gospel or receive personal prayer ministry.

Amy Baldwin and her husband, Matthew, who offer what they call encouraging words or prophecy to people interested in hearing from God, say it's easier to connect with the LGBT community than with some Christians.

"It's easier for me to catch God's heart for someone when I am in a place where the darkness feels so strong that the light is obvious," says Amy Baldwin, whose first encounters with the LGBT community were in Thailand with Youth With A Mission.

In Thailand, transgendered males are commonly referred to as "lady boys" and are prized for their contributions to the thriving sex industry. Baldwin believes transgendered people in Thailand outnumber those in the United States, though she admits there's no concrete statistical evidence to support her observations.

"I can't even express how much God loves them," says Amy Baldwin. "His love for them is so fierce," she adds.

Though welcomed at Awakening Colorado, members of the LGBT community were noticeably absent to the Baldwins, who say they plan to attend a fall pride event in Boulder, Colo. with hopes of sharing God's heart there.

“My fear is that the growing acceptance of the LGBT lifestyle here is going to look like Thailand. That’s not healthy, especially for children,” Amy Baldwin says.

Awakening Colorado organizers and supporters say seeing people give their lives to Jesus Christ for the first time, along with the music, food and fun in downtown Denver is something they would like to repeat. They also hope that participation by groups of people who previously became disenchanted with church or were alienated by some Christians will grow at future events.

Flash: Christians Actually Far Less Likely to Divorce

This is a game-changer. Talk about “an old wives’ tale.” You’ve heard it said that 1) 50 percent of all marriages end in divorce, 2) most marriages that do happen to make it are, nonetheless, unhappy, and 3) Christians are just as likely to divorce as nonbelievers.

These claims, long understood to be research-based facts, never quite sat right with me. Still, admittedly, while these assertions do swim upstream against the flow of both our common sense and our common experience, we have, nevertheless, accepted them (present company included) as valid because—well, you know, because “social science ...”

As it turns out, your gut was right. It’s all nonsense—urban legend of a sort propagated, most likely, by the same post-modernists who today seek to similarly undermine the God-designed institution of legitimate man-woman marriage by redefining it into oblivion.

Shaunti Feldhahn is a Harvard-trained researcher and author. In her recently released book, *The Good News About Marriage: Debunking Discouraging Myths about Marriage and Divorce*, Feldhahn details groundbreaking findings from an extensive eight-year study on marriage and divorce. Among other things, her research found:

- The actual divorce rate has never gotten close to 50 percent.
- Those who attend church regularly have a significantly lower divorce rate than those who don't.
- Most marriages are happy.
- Simple changes make a big difference in most marriage problems.
- Most remarriages succeed.

In an interview with CBN News, Feldhahn shared that, like most of us, she had swallowed the anti-marriage propaganda hook, line and sinker. She believed, "that most marriages are unhappy and 50 percent of them end in divorce, even in the church."

The CBN story continues:

"'I didn't know. ... I've stood up on stage and said every one of these wrong statistics.'

"Then eight years ago, she asked assistant Tally Whitehead for specific research on divorce for an article she was writing. After much digging, neither of them could find any real numbers.

"That kicked off a personal, years-long crusade to dig through the tremendously complicated, sometimes contradictory research to find the truth.

"'First-time marriages: Probably 20 to 25 percent have ended in divorce on average,' the study revealed. 'Now, OK, that's still too high, but it's a whole lot better than what people

think it is,' Feldhahn added."

CBN noted, "[T]he 50 percent figure came from projections of what researchers thought the divorce rate would become as they watched the divorce numbers rising in the 1970s and early 1980s when states around the nation were passing no-fault divorce laws."

So, in other words, and I wish I could say I long suspected this, the 50-percent divorce figure is simply a myth based upon decades-old (and woefully inaccurate) speculation. As it turns out, the shelf-life for marriages in the United States has taken a sharp turn for the better since the 1970s and '80s.

"'But the divorce rate has been dropping,' Feldhahn said. 'We've never hit those numbers [the 50 percent figure]. We've never gotten close.'"

"And it's even lower among churchgoers, where a couple's chance of divorcing is more likely in the single digits or teens," added CBN.

Additionally, the study determined that four-out-of-five marriages are happy. "That number flies in the face of the popular belief that only about 30 percent of marriages are happy."

"'Most people think most marriages are just kind of 'eeh' ... just kind of rolling along,' observed Feldhahn. 'And they're shocked when I tell them that the actual average is 80 percent: 80 percent of marriages are happy. ..."

"'The studies show that if they stay married for five years, that almost 80 percent of those will be happy five years later,' she concluded."

Still, of the study's many myth-busting revelations, the fact I found most interesting (and instructive) was this: Of all

marriages, Christian marriages prove the most durable.

"The Good News About Marriage also reveals the divorce rate among those active in their church is 27 to 50 percent lower than among non-churchgoers," noted the report. "Feldhahn's hope is that once people learn the truth that they will spread it far and wide."

"'This is a great chance,' she said, 'to stand up and say. We were all fooled. Not anymore.'"

Indeed, "Fool me once ..." and all that.

I've covered it before. Here's what marriage is: the God-ordained, lifelong, covenantal union between man and wife, designed to provide men, women and children optimal stability and overall well-being. Marriage is that biologically, spiritually and morally centered institution calculated to ensure responsible procreation and perpetuate the human race. Marriage, real marriage, represents the fundamental cornerstone of any healthy society (any society that hopes to survive, at least).

Here's what marriage is not: anything else.

In short, marriage is what it is.

It's encouraging to learn that, even under the increasing barrage of no-fault divorce and sin-centric marriage re-definition artillery, this cornerstone institution has, thus far, survived all efforts to destroy it.

It's even more encouraging to learn that, as with all things, marriages built upon the rock of Christ prove stronger still.

I agree with Shaunti Feldhahn: Let's spread the good news far and wide.

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concentrating in constitutional law. Having retired as an undefeated heavyweight professional boxer, Matt has taken his fight from the ring to the culture war. (Follow Matt on Twitter: @jmattbarber).

3 Passive Actions That Are Killing Marriages

“The heart of a man needs to be engaged; it needs to feel like it belongs and is understood.”

Husbands are losing their marriages because they won't communicate. Wives are losing their marriages because they won't let their husbands communicate.

It's a vicious cycle that is killing marriages every day. It's part of a cycle that is creating passive and rejected men.

I've seen it first hand in multiple couples. Put them in a group of people and they'll talk a good talk, but put them in a room together, and the communication train derails almost immediately. He doesn't want to say anything to offend her, and she is waiting for him to say the wrong thing.

What happens next? He disengages and resorts to one of the following methods of passivity:

1. Sarcasm. Sarcasm used to be my second language. I would use it often as a way to get out of tough communication situations. I would use it just so I would have something to say in a conversation I wasn't comfortable in. It became one of the reasons for my near divorce early in marriage.

Sarcasm is typically an over-exaggeration of a comment or

circumstance. It's a defensive method used to dodge the truth or accuse the other person, typically your wife. It can even come across as a joke. This is especially harmful in group situations. In order for a husband to feel better about himself and his personal issues, he may choose to make jokes about his wife to the other people around him. This builds him up and tears her down.

No marriage will last if sarcasm is one of the leading means of communication.

A great marriage will stay clear of sarcasm and seek to engage in meaningful discussions.

2. Silence. A silent man is a man causing a slow death to his marriage. Silence becomes the answer to a man's problem when he can't share his heart with his wife and be accepted. In other words, he can't freely share the issues on his heart without being torn down or disrespected by his wife.

How many times does it take for him to disengage? Not very many at all. In my personal experience in early marriage, it only took a few times for me to realize that it was easier to not tell my wife what was wrong than to actually tell her. The main reason this becomes an issue is because the wife thinks his issue is more about her than it is about him. Wives, please understand that if your husband has something to get off his heart, he needs you to listen and understand. You want him to be able to come to you.

No marriage will survive long with a silent husband.

A great marriage will allow for open and honest communication from both spouses.

3. Avoidance. Men who avoid interacting in their marriage are doing it for a reason. From long work hours to extra time spent with their friends, he is tired of spending time with his wife and will find any means to be away. These husbands

need to rarely worry about sarcasm or silence, because they are always away.

Avoidance can be caused in many ways. I know men who work hard all day and then come home only to be drilled with things to do and a stressed wife. The mindset soon sets in that his hard work is not appreciated, and he can find appreciation elsewhere. This, of course, is one of the most dangerous forms of passivity in a marriage. Appreciation could be found by going to the local hangout, climbing the corporate ladder, or seeking respect from another woman.

No marriage will last when avoidance is the main goal.

A great marriage involves two people working and communicating together side by side. It involves trust.

How can you avoid becoming a passive husband and build a strong marriage? These two steps are not easy, but they are musts if you seek resolution:

First, if you fall into one of the three categories listed above, you need to invite Jesus into that situation. Get over your whole macho, "I'm a man, I don't need Jesus" delusion and honestly ask Jesus to enter that part of your life. Ask Him how to resolve your issue and how you can speak to your wife about it.

Second, after praying for some time, set a time to speak with your wife about the situation. Let her know that you've been honestly praying for some time about the issue and would like to discuss it with her. Lay out what you've been praying about and what's on your heart. Allow for some back and forth and then pray together at the end. Invite God into that situation, or situations if she adds her side of the story, and work on it each day from that time forward.

It's worth it, and you can do it.

Are you being passive in your marriage? Share your struggles in the comments section so that others can help. What are some ways you fight being a passive husband?

Maturity is a blog built on establishing spiritual maturity in today's man. The goal is to assist men in building better marriages and help them grow in maturity and explore different aspects of manhood. features new weekly blog posts, daily social-media updates and a powerful resources page. Stay up to date with the Maturity blog communities on Facebook and Twitter.

For the original article, visit .

Texas Gov. Rick Perry Could Face 99 Years in Prison for 'Abuse of Power'

Texas Gov. Rick Perry, a possible Republican presidential candidate in 2016, said on Saturday an indictment against him for abuse of power was a political move that he intends to fight. Perry was indicted on Friday by a grand jury in Travis County, a Democratic stronghold in the heavily Republican state, on two counts of abuse of power and coercion over a funding veto he made last year that was seen as being intended to force a local prosecutor to resign. "This indictment amounts to nothing more than an abuse of power, and I cannot and I will not allow that to happen," Perry told reporters in Austin, Texas. He added he stood by the veto that led to charges being laid against him. A probe was launched last year after Perry vetoed \$7.5 million in funding for an integrity unit that is part of the Travis County district attorney's

office. The veto was seen as hardball politics to force out county District Attorney Rosemary Lehmborg, a Democrat, after she pleaded guilty to drunken driving and remained in office. If convicted of the first-degree felony, Perry could be sentenced to between five and 99 years in jail while a conviction on the other charge can bring between two and 10 years in jail, a prosecutor said. Perry is expected to survive the court battle but the trial could drag on for months, casting a shadow over his campaign and scaring away major donations, said Mark Jones, a political science professor at Rice University in Houston. In the short run, Perry could use the legal battle to win support during Republican primaries by portraying himself as a staunch conservative being targeted in a politically motivated prosecution launched by Democrats, Jones said. "This comes as Perry was gaining traction due to the immigration issue that saw him rise from an also-ran to a third-tier candidate in the Republican presidential race," Jones said. Republicans have long charged that they have been targeted by the Public Integrity Unit, run out of the Travis County prosecutor's office. The unit has investigated prominent Republicans including former U.S. House of Representatives Majority Leader Tom DeLay. After flaming out in the 2012 presidential race, Perry had been mounting a political comeback that gained him national attention for attacking President Barack Obama by saying he had not done enough to secure the border with Mexico. Perry, the longest-serving governor in the state's history and the first indicted in the state in about a century, was forced to exit the 2012 presidential race after gaffes including when he lost his train of thought during a debate and could not recall which government departments he wanted to abolish. He is not seeking re-election as governor and will step down next year.

ISIS to US: 'We Are in Your State, Cities'

It's a frightening reality: Americans now live in a country that could be facing a terrorist threat worse than al-Qaida: the Islamic State.

U.S. intelligence officials warn that ISIS has now gained momentum that will be difficult to halt in Iraq and Syria. They say the ruthless Islamic terrorists intend to prove their power far beyond the Middle East.

Intelligence warns the Islamic State may attempt a major terrorist strike in Europe or the United States to assert itself as the true leader of the international jihadist movement.

ISIS – sometimes known by its longer name, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria—is using social media to advance its in-your-face propaganda.

Recently, a photo was tweeted of a hand holding an ISIS flag right in front of the White House. It was pictured with a hand-written warning attached: “A message from ISIS to U.S. – We are in your state. We are in your cities. We are in your streets,” the Aug. 9 note read.

Another photo was shown in the same picture. It featured a handwritten note in Arabic held in front of a building with two American flags at an unclear location.

Translated, the note dated June 20, 2014 says: “Soldiers of

the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria will pass from here soon,” followed by a verse from the Quran.

The Secret Service said it is investigating the matter.

“We have an intelligence division whose mission is to assess information that we receive every day for dangerousness or potential threat level. We are aware of the image and will take the necessary and appropriate follow-up steps,” Secret Service spokesman Ed Donovan told ABC News.

Meanwhile, a New Jersey man said he meant no offense when he flew a flag that looks like the ISIS flag in front of his home in New Jersey.

Mark Dunaway, from Winslow Place, New Jersey, said he was expressing his Muslim religion by flying the flag every year during Ramadan and every Friday.

“Every Muslim uses that black flag,” quoted Dunaway. “You’ll find it in any mosque in world. I am an American citizen and I love my country, but I am also a Muslim and I use that flag to say I’m a Muslim.”

But a spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations told ABC News Dunaway’s flag isn’t the Islamic flag.

The scare comes as President Obama announced there will be no need for the United States to rescue stranded Yazidis from Iraq’s Mount Sinjar, saying U.S. airstrikes allowed most to escape.

“We broke the ISIL (ISIS) siege of Mount Sinjar,” he said. “We helped vulnerable people reach safety, and we helped save many innocent lives.”

But Yazidi leaders disagree, telling *The New York Times* the crisis isn’t over. Despite Obama’s assurances, the United Nations said the situation is still dire.

“The United Nations has declared a level three emergency for Iraq, the highest global humanitarian priority for the U.N. and partner agencies,” U.N. spokesman Stephan Dujarric said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki broke the political power struggle in Baghdad, saying he’s stepping aside after eight years as Iraq’s premier.

Prime minister designate, Haider Al-Abdi, now has less than 30 days to form a new government. Iraqi political analyst Kareem Hassan Jabr said al Maliki’s replacement will need to correct past mistakes.

“The new prime minister has two main tasks to achieve. The first is fight terrorism and the second is to fight the financial corruption which has prevailed in government institutions,” Jabr said.

The new prime minister will also need to do more to stop the advance of the Islamic State in Iraq.