

WATCH: Missionary Miraculously Healed After Suffering With Multiple Sclerosis for Over a Decade

Even with a chronic, disabling disease, Wendy Lawson was able to take a mission trip to Africa where her life took a dramatic turn. Watch below to see what happened when God stepped in.

When Is It Right to Leave a Marriage?

Three months ago, when I wrote a column titled “10 Men Christian Women Should Never Marry,” readers shared some heartbreaking stories of their marital mistakes. One woman admitted, “The man I married is six of the 10 things you listed!” Many other readers also asked this honest question: “If my husband is one of those men, can I divorce him?” (You can read that column [here](#).)

I don't enjoy recommending divorce to anybody. God instituted marriage, so it's sacred. It's a holy bond that we should protect. Jesus Himself said, “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matt. 19:6, NASB). Yet in the same passage He mentioned immorality (v. 9) as an allowable reason for divorce. In a fallen world full of sin and unfaithfulness, divorce is not always avoidable.

It's true that many Christians are too eager to bail out of a marriage after their first big argument or when the flame of romance dims. Too many people view divorce as a convenient escape hatch. Yet this flippant disregard for covenant vows is not acceptable for a follower of Christ. Any Christian couple that stands before God to seal their union should be committed to staying together through thick and thin.

At the same time, I have counseled with both men and women who were trapped in severely dysfunctional marriages—and it was obvious some of these relationships simply could not be restored. In those cases, I had to ask them to prayerfully seek a divorce—and find support, counseling and prayer as they walked through the traumatic aftermath of a painful breakup.

Here are four situations in which divorce may be an advisable option:

1. Unrepentant adultery. If a husband or a wife is unfaithful to their partner, it's possible to forgive and reconcile. But that's only an option if the person who committed the adultery is willing to admit their sin and break off the illicit relationship. If the affair was a one-time experience, and the guilty spouse is broken over their sin, then healing is possible. However, a man who is constantly cheating on his wife (or vice versa) is deceived, and he is also putting his wife at risk of disease. If your spouse is having sex with someone else, you are not required by God to tolerate that behavior.

2. Domestic abuse. I never counsel a woman to stay in a physically abusive marriage. The wife needs to get herself and her children out of the house if her husband is beating her or making violent threats. It is irresponsible for any Christian minister to tell an abused woman to stay in a domestic situation that is physically dangerous. Separation is an option for a season; if the husband is willing to receive counseling, it might be possible to save the marriage. But God

does not expect you to stay married to an abuser. He wants to rescue you out of that situation!

3. Emotional cruelty or control. I know women who have endured years of verbal abuse from husbands who claim to love God but don't understand that their dominating attitudes are slowly killing their wives. Some husbands think they have the right to monitor and analyze their wives' every move. Others scold their wives, scream at them or subject them to constant profanity and angry tirades. For victims, this can lead to depression, addiction and even suicide. If the abuser is not willing to repent of such toxic behavior, the spouse needs to get out before the abuse destroys what's left of his or her self-image. This principle also applies to spouses who are involved in drug abuse, alcoholism or criminal activity.

4. Spiritual incompatibility. Many times one spouse will come to faith in Christ before the other. In the best situations, the believing spouse leads the unbelieving spouse to the Lord. But what if that spouse never embraces Christianity? Paul told the Corinthians that they can stay together but that it is not wrong to allow an unbelieving spouse to leave (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

In some conservative churches, leaders teach that divorce is *never* acceptable and that a person who chooses to divorce—even if they have been abused—is in sin if they leave the marriage. These hardliners will typically declare, “God hates divorce,” quoting Malachi 2:16, and then suggest that even the innocent party in a divorce will be judged by God. That's an unfair use of Scripture. God's mercy is bigger than that!

God certainly hates the pain, shame and family disintegration that accompanies divorce, but He also offers healing, restoration and freedom to people who have endured a marriage breakup. As we work to protect marriages and encourage strong families, let's also leave room in our hearts—and in our theology—for people who simply cannot stay in irreparable

relationships.

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When You're Falsely Accused and Lied About

A pastor friend in China was falsely accused. In 1956 the government sent him to prison for nine years and then kept him on probation another sixteen years. Twenty-five years is a long time to remain falsely accused, forbidden to preach the gospel, or conduct services.

I have visited with this pastor three times in the past several years. For me, he represents the vast sector of the Church outside the Western world where Christians suffer greatly and endure much false accusation solely because they believe in Jesus.

We may ultimately face such a time in America. Before the German Nazis began to exterminate Jews and Gypsies around WWII, they caricatured and dehumanized them through ridicule and false accusation. In America, evangelical believers committed to biblical stands on morality are commonly typed as intolerant, hateful, or even dangerous.

Hurt

Psalm 7 is written for the believer who has been falsely accused. You sense the pulsating hurt as you pray this psalm with David. An air of desperation prevails; you feel hunted

and about to be torn in two. (See vv. 1,2.) The false accusations of betrayal and robbery hang in the air. (See vv. 3,4.)

The rotten treatment given David is undeserved. (See v. 5.) His actions have been blameless in regard to those who have wounded him, and he pleads with God to affirm his integrity and convene the court of justice against those who treat him wrongly. (See vv. 6–9.)

We know nothing of David's nemesis except he was Cush, a Benjamite, Saul's tribe, who had been bitter enemies of David. (See 2 Samuel 16:5–14; 19:16–23; 20:1–26.)

Pain is hard enough to bear when you are mostly or partly responsible; it becomes a heavy cross when you are not at all to blame.

Trust

Have you been falsely accused or lied about?

Like David, you may be completely powerless to do anything—other than trust in God. That is what you must do: trust.

The pastor in China and suffering saints through the ages survived because they lifted their eyes from their circumstances to the Lord who reigned over the circumstances. Man may be against us, but God is for us.

David begins Psalm 7 terrified and panic stricken; but as he prays, calm and confidence enter. He sees a different future. He would not be torn to bits; God would shield him. Those who hunted him would themselves be targets for the flaming arrows of God. (See vv. 10–13.)

Confidence

David inwardly resolves his pain by knowing those who dug the

pit for him would themselves fall into it. Those who sow trouble will reap it on their own heads. (See vv. 14–16.)

How can we be so confident that in the end everything will turn out all right? Because the Lord is righteous, and in the long run He will not let evil prevail. Therefore, with David, we declare our faith even before an external change has occurred in our condition (v. 17).

My friend in China was officially exonerated in 1980. By the time he assumed leadership again of his congregation in 1983, he was seventy-five. The church had dwindled to thirty. Now he is eighty-seven, and in these twelve years some six thousand adults have been added to the Lord and baptized in water.

Such would have never happened had he not continued to trust in Jesus during the long winter of undeserved imprisonment. But God intended to more than compensate for the lean years by giving him an abundant spiritual harvest at the end of his life. Through nearly ten thousand days of suffering he never permitted vengeance, blame, or self-pity to rule his spirit. If he had, he would have emerged from the experience a useless and bitter old man rather than an incredibly fruitful pastor.

Keep praying and trusting during the period of false accusation and the desperate loneliness. It may not change your circumstances, but it will stabilize your spirit. And, remember, you have a basis for confidence since God himself is righteousness. In the end His justice and fair play will abound toward you as well. So, like David, worship Him even before you see the resolution of your circumstance. Despite your present need you have a great future . . . in Christ.

Pope Francis: Making Sense of a Whirlwind Middle East Tour

After two intense days of religious ceremonies in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, meetings with Israeli and Palestinian officials, unscheduled photo opportunities and debilitating traffic arrangements, Israelis and interfaith relations experts are trying to attach the appropriate symbolism to Pope Francis' visit to the region.

Nearly every stop made by the pontiff was subjected to simultaneous scrutiny and praise. While long-term tensions between the Jewish people and the Catholic Church were made apparent by the trip, some experts are acknowledging a thaw in Israel-Vatican relations.

"The Jewish people and the Catholic Church in recent years have found that their 30 years of dialogue have paid off and friendly relationships have resulted," says Betty Ehrenberg, executive director of the North American branch of the World Jewish Congress and chairperson of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, an umbrella organization representing prominent Jewish organizations in discussions with leaders of other faiths.

Ehrenberg, who attended a meeting between the pope and Israeli President Shimon Peres, told that there is "a friendship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people that should be nurtured" and that there "certainly was a warmth to this visit, and you can't deny that."

"We have to realize that we have problems in common, and we have to work together on these problems," she said.

Also important, in Ehrenberg's estimation, is the message that the visit sends to Middle East Christians who find themselves under the constant threat of attack.

“There has been very little outcry [on Christian suffering] by the United Nations; there has been very little outcry by other international organizations,” Ehrenberg says. “We haven’t heard enough of an outcry, not from the Catholic Church and not from any of the Christian denominations. In fact, it has been the Jewish people that have been decrying this phenomenon.”

But by visiting the Middle East, the pope “has shown that he is present and that he cares, and gives Christians here in the region strength,” she says.

“Hopefully we can work together with the Catholic Church to help ensure religious freedoms for everyone around the world, and for protection,” she says.

Pope Francis planted roots for improved interfaith relations even before being elected pontiff, says Giuseppe Platania, founder of Italy’s Israel Allies Caucus, an alliance that fosters cooperation and dialogue between the Italian Senate and the Israeli Knesset.

“He is a friend of the Jewish people, probably more than others before him,” Platania told . “He appears to be very open to dialogue with the Jewish community. Back in Argentina, the pope had a strong relationship with the Jewish community. So he grew up with a strong, positive relationship with the Jewish community from before he became pope.”

Platania says Francis made a “significant” symbolic gesture during his first week as pope by making a phone call to the chief rabbi of the Jewish community in Rome.

“When you become a leader of over a billion people, what you do carries tremendous weight,” Platania says.

Appropriately, then, every stop by Pope Francis on his Israel trip—planned and unplanned—was scrutinized for its symbolism.

“His itinerary is very significant,” Platania says. “What he goes to visit first was very well thought out. The actual order of the people he sees and shakes hands with and the sites he visits is very significant.”

The pope referred to Palestinian Authority-controlled territory as the “Palestinian state,” a move that contradicts the U.N. status of the Palestinian Authority as a nonmember observer state. Francis also landed first in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem a day before his official state welcome by Israel at Ben-Gurion International Airport.

According to Platania, Francis is not the first pope to visit Palestinian-controlled territory before setting foot in fully sovereign Jewish territory, and the order of the pope’s itinerary may have had more to do with religion than politics. The New Testament identifies Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus.

“Maybe there is a stronger Christian connection to start [the trip] by going to Bethlehem than by going to the Kotel,” Platania says.

Ehrenberg says there is nothing new about the Vatican’s policy toward Palestinian statehood.

“The Vatican recognized a Palestinian state many years ago already,” she says. “So anyone surprised by this doesn’t remember when this first happened in the ’80s.”

The pope then surprised many by making an unscheduled prayer stop at concrete sections of a wall separating Bethlehem from Jerusalem, erected in 2002 to prevent terror infiltrations into Jewish population centers. He prayed in front of graffiti that read “Free Palestine” and (in broken English) “Bethlehem look like Warsaw Ghetto,” leading to widely distributed photos.

Ehrenberg says the photo-op in front of the Israeli security fence "can be interpreted as some kind of a PR coup for the Palestinians" but that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the issue when he spoke to the pope "and explained that the fence was built particularly to prevent the acts of terror that the international community is so against."

"It's not because Israel wanted to build it there," Ehrenberg says of the fence. "It was forced upon Israel by terrorist attacks. [Netanyahu] showed the Pope the plaque remembering the horrific terrorist attacks that were perpetrated [at the AMIA Jewish center] in Buenos Aires, which the pope knows only all too well."

Platania says, "This pope is coming across as very charismatic, very people-oriented. Some people think that's great. Other people think he has an agenda. Praying at the security wall was a sign of peace, but I wonder if he wanted to come across as exposing the wall and Israeli policy."

Even "the best of our friends, eventually even with the best intentions, may want to use that friendliness, the diplomatic efforts, smiles and phone calls to rabbis to help promote their own agendas," Platania explains.

A longer-term issue between Israel and the Vatican relates to valuable Jewish artifacts dating back to the period of the First Temple in Jerusalem and believed to be held in Vatican archives that have been off-limits to Jewish leaders.

"The issue of artifacts is a big deal," Platania says. "Many people have asked to visit the archive and have been denied. It is believed that there are a lot of items that belong to Jewish heritage on all levels—things that could potentially be from the Temple, but even if they are not, still belong to the Jewish people and could be given back."

Returning the items, according to Platania, would be an

“amazing act of reconciliation and friendship.”

Yet the Israeli government appears patient on the artifacts issue and is hopeful that there is much to be gained by improving relations with the Vatican. Peres and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, meanwhile, accepted an invitation from the pope to pray for peace at the Vatican. That gathering is scheduled for June 6.

“The relationships certainly will continue and will deepen,” Ehrenberg says. “Shimon Peres is going to visit the pope in two weeks, so let’s see where that leads.”

For the original article, visit .

Atheist Richard Dawkins: ‘I Am a Secular Christian’

Richard Dawkins is known far and wide as an atheist. Now the popular scientist is admitting he’s actually not an atheist at all—he’s a secular Christian.

Dawkins recently spoke at the Hay Festival. There, the evolutionary biologist was presenting the first volume of his memoirs, *An Appetite for Wonder*, according to *The Telegraph*.

Dawkins isn’t ready to embrace the supernatural, charismatic aspects of Christianity but expressed his affinity for religious ceremony during his talk.

“I would describe myself as a secular Christian in the same sense as secular Jews have a feeling for nostalgia and ceremonies,” the *Telegraph* reported Dawkins as saying. “But if you don’t have the supernatural, it’s not clear to me why you

would call yourself a minister. But I am a secular Christian, if you want to call me that.”

Do we want to call him that? Does “Christian” belong in the same sentence as Richard Dawkins?

“In his best-selling book *The God Delusion*, Dawkins famously mocked the God of the Old Testament, claiming, ‘The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully,’” says Michael L. Brown, author of *The Real Kosher Jesus* and host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show *The Line of Fire*. “This quote quickly became an atheist favorite, kind of an instant classic and part of Dawkins’ legacy.”

The world-renowned biologist made headlines last year by saying he’s confident President Barack Obama is an atheist.

“I’m sure Obama is an atheist, I’m sure Kennedy was an atheist, but I doubt if Pope Frank is,” he said on *Real Time*, hosted by Bill Maher, who is also an atheist. He also provoked outrage among child protection agencies and experts after suggesting that recent child abuse scandals have been overblown, according to RNS.

Assemblies of God Pastor

Marries Kanye West and Kim Kardashian

A young relative of the late Assemblies of God pastor David Wilkerson, author of *The Cross and the Switchblade*, officiated a celebrity wedding in Florence, Italy, over the holiday weekend.

Rich Wilkerson Jr., who leads Trinity Church's Miami-based young adult ministry known as The Vous, helped Kanye West and Kim Kardashian tie the knot on Saturday.

According to Reuters, the couple, known collectively as "Kimye," celebrated their nuptials accompanied by their daughter, North, and around 200 family and close friends.

Wilkerson's relationship with Kimye started on a random Tuesday night about two years ago, when they showed up unannounced at one of his weekly services, according to *People* magazine.

"They hit it off with Wilkerson and began attending the church regularly when they were in town," the magazine reports. "The church, known for its diversity and its ministry to inner-city youth, became a safe place for the famous couple."

Oprah Tackles Charismatic Christianity's Belief in

Casting Out Demons

The first episode of the final season of Lisa Ling's *Our America* will feature charismatic churches and the practice of casting out devils.

For the show, which airs on Oprah Winfrey's network OWN, Ling will visit charismatic churches in Georgia and Florida to observe the practice of deliverance, "where faith and the power of Christ are called upon to cast Satan's demons from the emotionally tormented," a press release says.

Ling, who has co-hosted *The View* and reported for CNN, first broadcasted *Our America With Lisa Ling* in 2011. Last year, in an episode titled "God and the Gays," she featured former Exodus International President Alan Chambers, who apologized to "a group of survivors of the condemned and damaging practice of 'reparative (or conversion) therapy.'"

Click below to watch a preview for the episode "Fighting Satan," which airs Thursday at 10 p.m. EST/PST.

Danger: Militant 'New Secularism' Rising

Christians need to recognize that a "new secularism" is trying to undermine and destroy their faith, a Free Church minister in Scotland has said.

David Robertson, who is also the director of the Solas Centre for Public Christianity, warns about the difference between secularists who are "simply about the separation of church and

state” and a “new secularism which is much more militant and dangerous.”

Writing for the website Christian Today, Robertson explains, “The vast majority of the posts on secular message boards are anti-religious.

“The main purpose is to attack religion in general, Christianity in particular and in very particular the Catholic Church and evangelicals.”

He says this attitude “quickly degenerates into personal abuse” if the comments are challenged.

The new secularism appears to come with “values,” Robertson argues, such as being pro-abortion, pro-euthanasia and pro-homosexuality.

“Dare anyone in public life suggest, for example, that marriage should be between a man and a woman and they are automatically decried as a homophobic bigot—even (or perhaps especially) if they are homosexual and atheist,” he says.

Robertson comments, “The New Secularists want the complete neuterization and privatization of religion. They want only their views and values to be taught and allowed in public life.

“We need to recognize the new secularism for what it is—an attempt to undermine and destroy Christianity.

“We need to stand against its fundamentalism, and we need to stand up for the poor, the young, the disabled and the marginalized (who most need the Good News) by proclaiming the gospel of Christ against the elitism and intolerance of our new fundamentalist atheists.”

The last census of 2011 found that less than 78,000 people in the U.K. (or percent of the population) identified themselves as secularist, atheist, humanists, agnostics or free thinkers.

Colin Hart, director of the Christian Institute, says of atheists, "This tiny group of people lays great claims to have their beliefs at the front and center of our national life."

"What the atheists lack in numbers, they certainly make up for in terms of their influence and boldness. They understand that their beliefs are a worldview which they are determined to impose on everyone else," he adds.

Popular Pastor Loses Wife in Tragic SUV Accident

Charlie Stoumbaugh, a popular pastor in Buena Vista, Colorado, has lost his newlywed wife to a tragic car accident near Cooper Mountain.

Miranda Schumann, 26, died Friday on the way to Yellowstone National Park. An SUV she was riding in flipped and rolled over several times.

The couple was only married eight months.

According to 9 News, this is not the first tragedy Stoumbaugh has faced. One of the families in Cornerstone Church, where he pastors, was killed in a rockslide in 2013.

Family friend Leslie Quilico, the family pastor at Cornerstone Church, told 9 News that Stoumbaugh loved his wife with all his heart—and he's heartbroken.

Why do bad things happen to good people?

"We trust that God is good, but we mourn right now," Quilico says. "That's a question that we've all answered for people a

thousand times, and I think the answer for us right now is we don't know."

Christian Mother On Death Row for Her Faith Forced to Give Birth in Sudanese Prison

Meriam Yahia Ibrahim, a Christian mother who, on May 15, was sentenced to 100 lashes and death on charges of adultery and apostasy, gave birth to her second child on the morning of her 100th day in prison.

Denied access to a private medical center, Ibrahim was forced to give birth in the hospital wing of the federal women's prison, which is situated in Khartoum's twin city, Omdurman, Sudan, early Tuesday morning. The baby is "said to be healthy," according to the *Daily Mail*.

According to CNN, Daniel Wani, Ibrahim's husband, a United States citizen and [resident of New Hampshire](#), was barred from witnessing the birth of his first daughter, whom they have reportedly named Maya. Wani's firstborn son remains imprisoned with Ibrahim. Wani says Meriam has been shackled to the floor in her group cell for the entirety of her and her son's 100-day detention, as of the day of this release.

In speaking about the birth, one of Ibrahim's defense lawyers, Elshareef Ali Elshareef Mohammed, told the *Telegraph*, "They didn't even take Meriam to a hospital—she just delivered inside a prison clinic."

Ibrahim was initially arrested and arbitrarily detained,

without charge or trial, on February 17 by Public Order Police, a special law enforcement unit tasked with enforcing Sudan's Shariah-inspired 1991 Public Order Code. On March 4, Ibrahim was charged with adultery and apostasy (leaving Islam) by the El Haj Yousif Public Order Court in Khartoum. Ibrahim was convicted of both charges May 11, at which time she was allotted three days to recant her Christian faith, which she refused to do.

The daughter of a Muslim father who left her and her mother at age 6, Ibrahim, who was raised an Orthodox Christian and is now a practicing Catholic, is considered a Muslim in the eyes of Sudanese law and is therefore accountable to the Public Order Code, which is not supposed to apply to "peoples of the book"—Christians and Jews.

On May 15, Ibrahim refused to recant her Christian faith, [stating](#), "I am a Christian, and I will remain a Christian." The presiding judge, Abbas al-Khaleefa, then sentenced Ibrahim to 100 lashes for adultery and to death for apostasy. Judge al-Khaleefa granted the defense 15 days to appeal the decision and made clear the state's intent to pursue its execution of the sentences following the birth of her second child.

Ibrahim's defense team, provided by Justice Center Sudan, a Khartoum-based nonprofit, submitted a letter of appeal to the Khartoum Court of Appeals on Thursday.

International Christian Concern's (ICC) regional manager for Africa, Cameron Thomas, says his group is incredibly relieved to hear that Maya is reportedly healthy, following her mother being forced to give birth in a Sudanese prison for refusing to recant her Christian faith.

"We remain concerned for Meriam and the baby, as we know the conditions of the prison are unfit for a newly born child and a mother recovering from labor," Thomas says. "We've released a petition ([to sign, click here](#)) calling on the government of

Sudan to immediately and unconditionally release Meriam. ICC continues to advocate on Meriam's behalf, remaining in constant contact with those on the ground in Khartoum.

"Ultimately, this is an egregious case in which an American citizen has now been born in a Sudanese prison because of her mother's faith. One has to ask, how much further is the Sudanese state willing to go to prove it's intent to make Sudan 'purely Islamic'?"