

# US Soldiers Face Unjust Charges by International Criminal Court

As the International Criminal Court (ICC) continues to pursue actions against U.S. citizens, including veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States moved to counter this international body, which has a questionable reputation. The Trump Administration plans to sanction the ICC if the judges proceed with possible charges of war crimes committed by American soldiers.

National Security Adviser John Bolton declared, "The United States will use any means necessary to protect our citizens and those of our allies from unjust prosecution by this illegitimate court." Bolton also called out the court for bowing to pressure from Palestinians, who are also calling for an investigation of Israel. Never mind that the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization, as terror groups, have the blood of thousands of innocents on their hands. The Palestinian leadership continues to give stipends to the families of their "martyrs," Palestinians who kills citizens of Israel and the United States and die doing so. The Palestinian authority also pays Palestinians who are in prison for carrying out terrorist attacks in Israel.

The Trump administration will consider banning ICC judges and prosecutors from entering the United States, place sanctions on any funds they have in the U.S. financial system, and prosecuting ICC officials in United States courts. Additionally, any country that cooperates with the ICC in prosecuting Americans will risk forfeiting U.S. aid and military assistance. The United States may also look at negotiating new bilateral agreements that will forbid other nations from surrendering Americans to the ICC.

The court is based in the Hague, Netherlands. Founded in 2002, the United States and Russia (among other nations) refused to ratify the treaty or join the legal body. President George W. Bush was firmly against the establishment of the court. President Obama tried to cooperate with the ICC but was largely thwarted by bipartisan opposition in Congress.

The ICC has been investigating possible war crimes in Afghanistan for over a decade. Last November, the investigators asked to include the actions of U.S. military personnel, civilian contractors and members of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The ICC's "Pre-trial Chamber" is now deciding if further inquiries, or criminal charges, are appropriate.

Since Afghanistan became a party to the ICC in 2003, the court now claims jurisdiction over potential criminal acts committed in a member state, even if allegedly committed by individuals whose country of origin (for example, the United States) is not a signatory to the Rome Treaty that established the international judiciary.

It would be an unprecedented relinquishment of U.S. sovereignty over its legal system, and control over its own citizens, to support the broad, sweeping international powers of this controversial court. The decrees of this court, though supported by most member states of the United Nations, are not accountable to any oversight body; not being a nation-state itself, it would be inappropriate to even have an extradition treaty with such a body.

Some misguided Americans applaud the work of the ICC and strongly support the idea of prosecuting U.S. soldiers and other citizens. For example, the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) has assisted the ICC with thousands of victim statements obtained by the CCR.

The CCR is also providing legal counsel and advice to two

detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Sharqawi Al Hajj and Guled Hassn Duran, both of whom claim to be war-crime victims due to their interrogation and detention following the events of 9-11. The CCR claims, "Overall, Al Hajj and Duran's victim's representations make the case for a thorough investigation that brings an end to impunity for over a decade of international human rights violations related to the war in Afghanistan." A CCR spokesperson bemoans the fact that, "To date, no high-level U.S. official from the civilian leadership, military, CIA, or private contractor has been prosecuted for war crimes and crimes against humanity."

As we commemorate another anniversary of the horrific acts of September 11, 2001, we remember the thousands who died in New York City, the Pentagon, and in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. We also remember the sacrifice of over 6,000 U.S. troops who died fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, the grief of their families, and the over 60,000 U.S. troops who were wounded there. {eoa}

*For the original article, visit .*

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## Who Is Your Enemy?

*"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44).*

In a few simple words, Jesus captured a counter-cultural way of living that goes against our inclinations to throw gas on a fire and escalate and conflict. To love people who are enemies determined to harm you, and to pray for people who have decided that their part-time job is to make your life

miserable will take a miracle from God to regularly practice.

Verse 45 of Matthew 5 helps explain what Jesus means in verse 44. He says that loving our enemies means living like God the Father, who “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” The being that God is patient and long-suffering with all people, whether they are righteous or not (Ex. 34:6, Num. 14:18). Theologians call this common grace.

In Jesus’ day, the Jews had many enemies, such as the Romans and Samaritans. Jesus’ answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” in the Good Samaritan story of Luke 10:29–37 is that Samaritans are your neighbor. Even your enemy can be your neighbor. So don’t be too quick to divide people up into neighbors and enemies.

Who are your enemies?

Right now in your mind, see the face of your enemy, the person who has done you the most harm, the most damage, the most evil, the most injustice, has caused the most grief, the most stress, the most anguish, the most strife, and Jesus says, “Love.” The call to love extends to every type of enemy we may face.

In the context of this passage, then, Jesus is saying that our love should be like the common grace of God. This love goes beyond tolerating. It actually seeks the good of the enemy. Paul says, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:20–21). That is the idea here, too. Overcome evil not with more evil, but with goodness and love.

Why? This is how God treats us. God decided to be good toward us when we had no interest in Him or regard for Him. It is God’s love that changes us to become loving. Without God initiating, we would not be changing or capable of really

loving.

Therefore, part of our response should be thankfulness at the mercy given at the cross, where Jesus died a murderer's death in our place. We were an enemy to God, and in Jesus Christ, God loved us. It is this love that changes us to become loving.

*Who do you need to stop persecuting and start loving? {eoa}*

**Mark Driscoll** is a Jesus-following, mission-leading, church-serving, people-loving, Bible-preaching pastor and the author of many books, including *Spirit-Filled Jesus*, which you can preorder here. He currently pastors *The Trinity Church* in Scottsdale, Arizona, with his family. For all of pastor Mark Driscoll's Bible teaching, please visit or download the app.

Click here to get a free devotional ebook from Pastor Mark Driscoll.

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## Why Christians Should Never Be Motivated by Revenge or Personal Justice

*"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44).*

Loving your enemies was and still is scandalous in many ways. Why? Because our sense of justice tells us that loving an enemy is unsafe, unjust and unhelpful. It makes no sense. Love, at least in the way we usually think of it, requires a

kind of mutuality between two people. How do we love someone who wants to hurt us?

The command to love your enemies comes within Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, beginning in Matthew 5. In the sections before, Jesus has repeatedly said, "You have heard that it was said \_\_\_\_\_, but I say to you \_\_\_\_\_." In verse 43, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy;'" then he goes on in verse 44 to say, "But I say to you, love your enemies ... and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

It seems here that Jesus was quoting a common statement in that day about the rightness of having "hate" toward your enemies. Perhaps it was a popular colloquialism in that day, not unlike a well-known bumper sticker or marketing slogan in our day.

The "love your neighbor" idea comes from Leviticus 19:18, which says, "You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." Nothing about hating there. Plus, if Jesus thought this verse implied hatred of enemies, he probably wouldn't have quoted it later in Matthew 22:39 as one of the greatest commandments.

Where then did the idea come from? We definitely see the idea in the Old Testament that God is a God of justice who is capable of justly judging those who reject him. We also see this in the New Testament with, for example, what happens to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts when they lie to the Holy Spirit as God takes their lives (Acts 5:1-11).

But these are always God's doings. Though people and institutions may be used by God to carry out his justice, they are never allowed to take it into their own hands, and they are never commanded to "hate" anyone. This is vengeance, which is reserved for God alone. Only God can perfectly deal with

everyone and everything.

Still, it would be easy for some to make a kind of inference that God wants us to hate our enemies, especially with our natural human tendency toward anger and hatred. Probably what happened, then, is that there was unauthorized add-on to the command to love one's neighbor in Jesus' day. There is evidence that some Jewish groups read the text this way, and it is not hard to imagine the human heart saying, "If I am supposed to love my neighbor, I should hate my enemy." This is typical human thinking.

But Jesus is not interested in fallen human thinking. He is interested in calling us to living as children of His kingdom, or, as He says in the next verse, "sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:45a).

*Has your view of conflict in relationships been primarily based upon the hate model of culture or love model of the kingdom? {eoa}*

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# Why We Shouldn't Skim Over Jesus' Most Important Commandment

*"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44).*

When we are the one who has harmed someone, these words ring true and seem tender. But, when we are the one who has been harmed, these words ring troubling and seem tough.

Love them? But, they did [fill in the blank]. And maybe they've never even apologized or changed.

In the Bible, love is often a feeling. But rather than being a feeling that promotes action, it is often first an action based upon obedience to God that results in a feeling. This explains why the Bible commands husbands to love their wives and wives to love their husbands rather than commanding them to "feel loving." This further explains why Jesus even commands us to love our enemies in Matthew 5:44.

Jesus' command to love our enemies is probably one of his best-known statements, even among non-Christians. It's also a command that's easy to skim over because we've heard it so much before. But we shouldn't skim over this revolutionary idea.

If you have an enemy who has tried to harm you, the importance of Jesus' words is likely very obvious. You would appreciate it if the person who has held a grudge would let it go, move on and let you do the same. But, is there someone else who is thinking the same thing about you? Is there someone whom you have decided to "persecute" in some form or fashion because

you consider them your “enemy”? If so, it is important to not only apply Jesus’ teaching for your benefit, but also for the benefit of others.

*In what ways has Jesus been loving toward you long before you were loving toward Him? {eoa}*

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## **AG Pastor Exposes the Incredible Truth About Generational Curses Every Believer Should Know**

Pastor Choco De Jesus explained the power of generational curses in a recent sermon. De Jesus links modern genetics research to generational curses and says, “Your mother or your father turned on that gene in your system. You have the capacity through the power of the Holy Spirit to turn off that gene.”

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## **3 Things to Immediately Do When the Devil Attacks You**

Kyle Winkler says the three steps experts give for people who encounter lions in the wild are the same three steps believers should follow if they are attacked by the devil. He explains those steps and relates them to the spiritual realm in this short, powerful video.

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## **Bethel Worship Star Joins Forces with IHOP for National Event**

Bethel pastor and worship leader Jeremy Riddle has joined with the International House of Prayer for an upcoming conference. Riddle will be a guest worship leader at this year's Onething 2018 conference. Find out more by watching the video or visiting the website.

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# What to Do When Your Pastor's Sin Comes Out

When Sarah Joy Hays learned in the summer of 2016 that her pastor in Baton Rouge, La., had been having an affair with another woman in their church – a woman who had been her spiritual mentor for many years – she was angry and confused.

“I got pregnant out of wedlock, and she was one of the first people I told,” Hays recalled. “She kind of pastored and mentored me through it.

“To find out she was actively involved in this affair throughout that – that’s where I had the hardest time, figuring out how to react to that. I was going through something that was very obvious, an ‘external sin.’ And she was in the same situation, essentially, but nobody knew.”

Both the pastor and the woman with whom he had an affair were disciplined by their denomination, and he was removed from the pastorate, Hays said.

Two years later, the small congregation has a new pastor, many members have taken advantage of periodic one-on-one and group counseling provided by their denomination, and some measure of healing has been achieved.

But Hays said she is still guarded spiritually. “It causes you to question any amount of wisdom and discernment from then on,” Hays said. “It helps determine trust and how you give away trust.”

Bill Hybels. Theodore McCarrick. Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. Tariq Ramadan. Andy Savage. Paul Pressler. Retired Mormon missions president Joseph L. Bishop. Creation Festival founder Harry Thomas. Rabbi Haskel Lookstein. Stanley Rosenfeld.

The shameful roster of spiritual leaders who have been accused of committing acts of sexual misconduct and abuse, or enabling others to commit such acts, or both has left many souls who looked to them for instruction, discernment and direction to sift through the wreckage wrought by their malfeasance.

What do we do when we learn that the person we trusted as an intermediary for God, or to teach us about all things eternal, is actually a predator? What if the faith leader we've admired all our lives turns out to be more a scoundrel than saint?

"Part of what happens to us, on a much deeper level than the initial shock, disbelief, disappointment or outrage, is that our sense of ourselves is affected negatively," said Lallene Rector, president of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Illinois, where she has been an associate professor of psychology of religion and pastoral psychotherapy since 1986.

"To the extent that we have felt enhanced in our own self-esteem by our affiliation with these leaders, part of what we may experience (often unawares) is a deflation of our own self-worth," said Rector.

"The failure of these idealized figures can strike at the very heart of our own longing for a kind of perfection," left over from our disappointments in our parents and other adults in childhood, said Rector. "Add God to that mix – the clergy as a role representative of God – and it's psychologically intoxicating."

The Bible can be instructive to some believers when it comes to spiritual leaders falling from grace – but perhaps not in the way some people might think it is.

Take King David, for instance – at best a morally complicated man who was nevertheless, Scripture says, "the apple of God's eye." It's a paradox often invoked to defend faith (and other) leaders who behave badly.

“David is like these pastors in that he is lionized for the things that he did, like expanding boundaries and whatnot, and a tradition of overlooking” the bad things he did, said the Rev. Wil Gafney, associate professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas.

But Gafney said the biblical king’s story is not meant to be a prescription for how anyone should behave. “Just because God did something wonderful with (David) doesn’t mean we should do all the things he did.”

From her reading of the biblical account, Gafney believes David raped Bathsheba. “The text says he sent men to get her. That evaporates consent,” Gafney said.

“I think we need to be able to not hang a thing around someone’s neck forever,” Gafney said, “but be honest and not sweep it under the rug. That means allowing brokenness to be broken.”

Because David’s story is about “how we deal with a beloved leader,” Gafney said, “some have chosen to say, ‘Well, it was all worth it.’ Some have said, ‘Let’s leave his bygones in the past.’ But others choose to say, ‘Let’s be real about this person and this is part of that legacy that doesn’t go away.’ And it doesn’t go away, because when we don’t hold him accountable for it in our telling, we then give other people permission.

“Christians have evolved into this understanding of repentance that is not biblical – that it’s about saying, ‘I’m sorry,’ and hopefully not doing the thing again.”

But that’s only the first layer of repentance, said Gafney. “From the Hebrew Bible forward, reparation is at the heart of repentance. ... Yes, your profound sorrow, your turning your life around – that’s part of it – but you’ve still never made it right,” she said.

If the ramifications of one person's failure can seem endless, the failure of an institution means restitution on another scale. A moral catastrophe like the systemic cover-up by bishops and other Catholic leaders cataloged in the landmark, 1,300-page Pennsylvania grand jury report released in August "demands public and sincere lamentation from every segment of the Body of Christ," said Richard Rohr, the Franciscan priest and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, N.M., in a recent statement. "Only then can deep healing begin."

But Rohr points out that the Catholic Church has more than just sinful behavior to account for. "It also demands public ownership, repentance, and reform of our very immature teaching in regard to sexuality in general, male power issues in particular, and our 'enforced' understanding of celibacy, which will predictably produce this kind of result.

"This shadowy material will keep emerging unless we own it and hold it fully accountable," he said.

And while leaders do their work, we have our own to do. "In the meantime," he wrote, "let's all pray and try to live more authentic sexual and spiritual lives ourselves." {eoa}

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## **20 Signs of a Toxic Church Culture**

The following 20 signs are based on my observations regarding organizational dysfunction associated with a toxic (poisonous) culture in any organization.

In this article, the word “culture” refers to the prevailing attitude, behavior, and unspoken feeling and or rules that motivate and determine how people respond, react and act in the context of their work.

The following toxic traits fit either a “for profit” or “nonprofit “organization (including nonprofits like a hospital, school or church).

### **1. The leader is a demanding micromanager.**

When the leader of an organization is constantly hovering over staff and other team leaders—not only telling them what to do but exactly how to do it (although this is necessary temporarily when a new person is learning a new job until they prove their competency), it discourages the work environment because the leader’s leadership style demonstrates a lack of trust towards those under him or her.

### **2. The leader is emotionally abusive and demeaning.**

A work environment is absolutely horrible when the boss is constantly putting the staff and other leaders down—never praising them and only speaking to them when he wants to correct them.

### **3. The leader doesn’t understand or desire to delegate tasks to others.**

Often, micromanagers have a hard time delegating work to others because they have a “perfectionist” spirit and think they are the only ones who can get a job done the correct way. Even when they delegate, they don’t trust those they delegate to and are constantly on top of them, thus not giving them room to breathe or grow.

### **4. The leader and the governing board are always arguing.**

I have spoken to numerous pastors or CEOs who say they dread board meetings because of philosophical differences. The

result is, there is constant bickering and or resistance which then hurts the execution of the vision, which spills over to the rest of the organization—creating a toxic environment.

**5. There is low morale among the staff, employees and participants.**

When the staff and team leaders of an organization have low morale, it negatively affects the rest of the participants since it is like a virus that spreads to all.

**6. The vision and mission are always changing based on the mood of the leader.**

Any church or organization that has a new vision and mission every year has a confused leadership team. Since vision determines the organization's responsibility and mission determines its authority, when these two are constantly changing, nobody understands what is expected; thus, creating confusion, lack of trust towards the leader and resulting in a toxic culture.

**7. A culture of rampant gossip is tolerated.**

When an organization cannot keep confidentiality among the leaders and staff, and when backstabbing and gossip is tolerated, the organization is poisonous and unfit to work in until there is a drastic shift away from this behavior.

**8. There is a lack of transparency regarding financial decisions.**

When any organization—including a church—doesn't at least annually divulge financial expenditures, values and priorities, it shows a lack of accountability and possible mismanagement. When only the lead pastor and or CEO of an organization (not talking about a "for profit" mom and pop restaurant or small business) know the true financial state and or has access to the monies, it can be an ethical disaster

waiting to happen. I've known of some cases where not even the trustees of the organization knew what was going on financially.

#### **9. There is an ambiguous accountability structure.**

When nobody on staff or in a ministry or job position understands who to report to, it creates a toxic, confusing environment without true accountability.

#### **10. There is a lot of transition in the staff and middle management.**

When a "season" of transition becomes years of staff transition, it becomes part of the culture and demonstrates some level of toxicity that chases people away from the work environment. People in healthy work environments usually enjoy going to work (unless they are lazy and unmotivated) and make a long-term commitment to serve.

#### **11. There is no "buy in."**

The key to the success of all organizations is when the staff and participants go from being "employees" to "proprietors;" hence, only when the key players in an organization take ownership and have the attitude of a shareholder does the organization gain momentum.

An organization populated only with mere "employees" is a toxic organization that marginalizes its ability to execute its vision and mission.

#### **12. There is an entitlement mentality among the leaders and staff.**

When the leadership and staff of an organization have a "what's in it for me" mentality—the organization is in big trouble.

This entitlement mentality spreads, then instead of a culture

of servant leadership you have a culture of obtaining a title in the organization primarily, so you can enjoy the fringe benefits.

**13. There is much activity without measurable goals and profitability.**

When an organization has much activity without measurable goals, then it's difficult to define success and failure. In a church like this, nobody has to exercise their faith in God to accomplish their mission and assignment. Consequently, it is an organization that is on autopilot or like an aimless ship at sea in the night. This causes much frustration and lethargy among the staff, and eventually creates a toxic environment.

**14. There is blame-shifting and a lack of taking responsibility.**

In any organization that doesn't have clear lines of communication, leadership structure and accountability, it is easy to have a culture of blame-shifting. Since blame-shifting generates animosity among the staff (and irresponsibility from the ones blaming others) you have a toxic culture that needs to be cleaned up systemically.

**15. The participants do the minimum amount of work required.**

I have observed in many organizations leaders and staff who just do the minimum work required to keep their position. They clock in and clock out and don't care to do above and beyond the general job description. This generates a very bad environment if it is not dealt with and results in resentment from other staff members carrying most of the weight.

**16. There is a dearth of volunteers.**

When it is hard for a nonprofit to garner volunteers, it may demonstrate that there is a disconnect with the vision, the morale is low or the people are not committed to the mission.

This lack of motivation creates an apathy, that is toxic for the culture of the entity.

#### **17. The boss regularly ignores the protocols.**

Every efficient organization needs to have protocols in place related to communication, accountability, layers of leadership and responsibility so that participants know the when, where and who to report to. When the top leader continually violates these processes put in place he or she acts like they are above the law and become bad role models for other leaders who will also replicate their disregard for protocols and order.

#### **18. The boss regularly bypasses the leadership structure set up.**

When the top leader allows people to report directly to him or her—(thus bypassing the delegated leadership structure) it creates confusion, favoritism and disrespect towards those bypassed.

The result is resentment among those bypassed, a sense of entitlement and favoritism among those with direct access to the boss, resulting in a toxic environment that can only be fixed if the senior leader leads the way by ceasing to violate the hierarchical leadership structure.

#### **19. Creativity and innovation are discouraged.**

Healthy organizations encourage creative thinking, innovation, a certain level of risk-taking and cutting-edge methodologies to support and advance the mission.

When an organization is more concerned with protecting the status quo, the result is groupthink—a lack of creativity and a uniformity lacking a healthy dose of critical thinking, which eventually leads to the dulling and ineffectiveness of the organization.

#### **20. There is no long-term planning.**

The old popular adage “when you fail to plan, you plan to fail” is a proven truism. An organization constantly given to last-minute events (barring an unexpected crisis or emergency) or a lack of long-term planning (every organization should at least execute an annual planning meeting for future events directed towards advancing the assignment) is an organization without a spirit of excellence or proper focus.

The result will be many opportunities to maximize the gifts, talents and resources of the organization will be missed, which will frustrate many and hurt the morale of many.

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## **The Hidden Opportunity Outward Pressure Offers You**

*My fellow believers, when it seems as though you are facing nothing but difficulties see it as an invaluable opportunity to experience the greatest joy that you can! For you know that when your faith is tested it stirs up power within you to endure all things. And then as your endurance grows even stronger it will release perfection into every part of your being until there is nothing missing and nothing lacking (James 1:2–4 TPT).*

Outward pressure is always an opportunity to be inwardly transformed.

An experiment was done in the Arizona desert called Biosphere 2. The goal was to create perfect growing conditions for trees, fruits and vegetables, as well as humans. A huge glass dome was constructed to house an artificial, controlled environment with purified air and water, healthy soil and

filtered light.

For many months at a time, people lived in the biodome and everything seemed to be going well—with one exception. When the trees grew to a certain height, they would topple over. It baffled scientists until they realized they forgot to include the natural element of wind. Trees need wind to blow against them because it causes their root systems to grow deeper, which supports the tree as it grows taller.

Who among us doesn't long for a perfect growing environment for ourselves, with no disruptions from outside influences? Often, we attempt to create a controlled environment, striving to avoid any form of adversity or challenge. When confronted with hardship, the normal tendency is to find the quickest route of escape—choosing rather the path of least resistance. However, what if our trials and challenges were working *for* us rather than *against* us? With this consideration, listen to what the apostle Paul had to say on the matter:

“Our light affliction, which lasts but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

If trees could talk, would we hear them complaining whenever the wind blew against them? When you carefully consider how a tree gracefully bends and sways when the wind blows against it, you will notice it does not stand rigid, resisting the flow of energy. It does not push back. The tree accepts the strong wind as a gift that helps it grow stronger while its roots dig deeper. If we allow the winds of adversity to work for us rather than against us, God can use the adversity to develop our character and deepen our spiritual roots. When our roots grow deep, we can remain standing. Just as the trees which grew in the biodome toppled easily once they reached a certain height, likewise, without a strong foundation of godly character, we too can experience a great fall.

Remember, outward pressure is always an opportunity to be inwardly transformed. {eoa}

**Lisa Bevere's** *authentic, passionate, and witty teachings weave profound biblical truths with practical application. A New York Times best-selling author, her books are in the hands of millions worldwide. Lisa and her husband John, who's also a best-selling author and teacher, are the founders of Messenger International.*

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