

Texas Governor Opens Heart About Tragedy and Faith

Texas Governor Greg Abbott is a man of the headlines and most recently made national news when he visited Santa Fe High School where, just days before, eight students and two teachers were shot and killed.

After attending a church service Sunday, Abbott and his wife laid flowers at a growing memorial at the school.

“We’re here today for a day of prayer,” he told reporters. “We come here today with hearts that are aching, knowing there are parents today without children.”

In a recent interview with CBN News, Abbott opened up about his faith and how it’s helped him govern through some very difficult times.

Abbott said faith prevailed through all of the hardship and devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey.

“The aftermath of it was the horrific flooding that took place in Houston and there you saw literally the hand of God acting to benefit everyone who was there,” he explained.

Abbott said the same proved true when a gunman opened fire in a Sutherland Springs church, killing 26 people.

“I’ve never seen faith surface and reveal itself so much as in the aftermath of that horrific shooting,” he said. “These people who experienced the worst of the worst, they lean on the thing that matters the most and that is God.”

“It is their faith in God that led them through the pathway of the stormy seas, that led them to the road to recovery and had it not been for God, they would still be stuck in a quagmire.”

Had it not been for God, Abbott said he too would still be stuck.

At age 26, his life changed when he was out for a routine jog. It was after a storm when a tree came crashing down on him, crushing his spine and leaving him paralyzed for life.

“You do ask, ‘God, why did this happen?’” Abbott said. “But what I found help me overcome that was when I calmed down and listened to God. I was forced then more than ever to lean on God and to follow God and it was that pathway that led me out.”

The governor wishes no one ever had to experience what he did or face any kind of tragedy, be it a shooting or natural disaster, but if they do, his prayer is that they come to find God.

“All I could hope for, for anybody is for them not to have to go through that tragedy but for them to come to that same outcome and that is to let God lead their lives,” he said.
{eoa}

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How You've Allowed Deception to Fester in Your Life

In one of my seasons of frustration, not understanding what was going on and why things were not as I felt they should be, I heard that still, small whisper, “Be still and be content!”

The Holy Spirit brought to my remembrance that “Paul learned

to be content!" As we walk the runway of life and encounter all the detours of life, it is sometimes hard to put a smile on and say, "All is well."

I began reading the book of Philippians, as I knew that was where Paul said, "For I have learned in whatever state I am to be content" (Phil. 4:11b). I found a secret in his learning process in Philippians 3:13: "But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead."

God always thinks about the future (Jer. 29:11). Satan doesn't know the future, so of course he is always bringing up the past. As I meditated on all of these thoughts, I asked God, "How do I forget? Satan is always bringing up the past!" He instantly spoke to my spirit, "You remember." "Remember," I thought. Again He spoke, "When you remember, you are choosing your thoughts!" If you are not choosing your thoughts, where do you think those thoughts are coming from?

Paul gives us a clear warning in 2 Corinthians 11:3: "But I fear that somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve through his trickery, so your minds might be led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ."

Second Corinthians 10:4-5 tells us, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Eve took thought of Satan's words; she allowed them to become a stronghold in her mind. She believed a lie and empowered the liar. Eve did not value the Word of God. She chose to believe Satan over God.

Eve was not content with what she had. That is hard to believe. She was living in a perfect place with a perfect

husband, yet she was not content. Her discontentment opened the door for deception, and she walked right in.

Eve had her time in the garden. Now you have your time in the garden of your life. Jesus restored to you everything that was stolen in the garden, including a relationship with Him. You must learn to grow roses from the thorns of life! In my new book, *The Real Woman Grows Roses from the Thorns of Life*, I share how we learn the season of life and learn to be content.

Buds of life spring forth as you receive the truths of the life-giving revelation in this book, producing roses of peace and joy. Life is full of pain, but misery is optional to the real woman of God.

Abraham Lincoln said, "We can complain because rosebushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses." Let's rejoice and thank God that He is with us, giving us the grace to grow roses from the thorns of life. Remember, roses bloom in season, but thorns are always there. {eoa}

Joyce Tilney is an author and Bible teacher. In her new book, *The Real Woman Grows Roses from the Thorns of Life*, you will be encouraged and receive seeds of faith for daily living. For more information: therealwomanjt@ and . Her book is available on Amazon.

Why This Muslim Holiday Could Be a Good Thing for the

Kingdom of God

Billions of Muslims are fasting right now to commemorate what they believe was the first revelation of the Quran to the prophet Muhammad. But what you don't know is it's also an open door for the kingdom of God.

"At Open Doors, we see Ramadan as an opportunity for God to reveal himself to Muslims," says David Curry, president and CEO of Open Doors USA. "We pray that as they spend time searching out meaning and reflecting on spiritual ideas, that God would meet them where they are and bring them to Jesus."

He continues: "Sometimes, in other cultures that aren't as saturated with Christianity, God moves in ways that Americans would consider rare or extraordinary. As a result, we have heard from Muslims in regions around the world who claim to have come to Jesus through dreams and visions. Last year, we talked to Amir and Rasha—a couple from Lebanon—who both said that Jesus had appeared to them in dreams, independently of each other. In the husband's dream, he said Jesus called to him, 'I am your Savior. You will follow me.'"

While these miraculous visions are amazing, for some, this month of fasting brings nightmares.

Ramadan often comes with horrific violence against Christians or other Muslims, who are deemed "infidels."

Curry says that while the majority of Muslims celebrate Ramadan peacefully, in regions that are home to hostile Islamic elements, violence does increase during this time. This is because the Christians who do not fast or otherwise honor Ramadan stand out. When militants catch wind of Christians who are not participating, they see these believers as infidels or traitors to Islam. As a result, some radicalized Muslims see Ramadan as a time of "moral cleansing" that separates the faithful from the unfaithful. They take it

upon themselves to rebuke or eliminate those who do not adhere to the teachings of Islam.

“Last year, the Islamic State specifically called extremist Muslim brothers around the world to attack infidels in their homes and in public spaces. We saw similar calls to violence in the two years prior as well. These calls to violence are often followed by attacks on churches, Christian villages, or Christian travelers and other innocent civilians around the world,” Curry says.

Curry says the recent attacks on Indonesian churches in which more than a dozen were killed is likely linked to Ramadan. A radicalized family carried out the attacks. The next day, a similar family attacked police, and an 8-year-old child suicide bomber survived.

Rather than living in fear, though, Curry suggest Christians take the time to befriend their Muslim neighbors during this month, especially in areas not typically prone to violence. In some areas of Egypt, for instance, Egyptian Christians host breakfasts for their Muslim neighbors, to provide them with sustenance that will carry the fasting people throughout the day.

An estimated million Muslims living in the United States, and all of them are compelled to observe Ramadan as a part of their faith.

“In this way, they open dialogue and demonstrate the gospel of loving one’s neighbor in a powerful way,” Curry says. “While this example might not be a good fit for everyone, we can all think about it and look for opportunities to apply it to our own settings.”

Ramadan began May 17 and continues through June 15.

How you can participate:

- Pray for and with Christians living in countries celebrating Ramadan. Pray they won't encounter extra persecution during the month of Ramadan, and that they will be able to navigate tricky political, cultural, social and familial realities during this period.
 - Pray they will be able to stand strong in their faith throughout the month and will be able to live out their faith, even within difficult contexts. Pray they will be able to love Muslim neighbors and show the love of Jesus to everyone they meet during Ramadan.
 - Pray for Muslims during Ramadan. Pray their search for God will find its answer in the risen Jesus. Pray they will be kind to Christians in their midst.
 - Download the free guide to pray for the Muslim world during Ramadan at [.](#)
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The Shocking Connection Between Everyday Items and Demonic Activity

Most people today consider dolls to be collectibles or children's toys. But Kimberly Daniels thinks twice about having one in the house. In her book, *Breaking the Power of Familiar Spirits: How to Deal With Demonic Conspiracies* (June 5, 2018), Daniels writes on how evil spirits operate under covers that make up our everyday lives. From fashion to furniture, from trends to traditions, and from rituals to dolls, Daniels shows how the familiar areas of our lives can harbor demonic influences. One of these areas is fetishes.

"Most idolatry is rooted in fetishism," Daniels writes.

“Simply put, a fetish is an object with a spirit attached to it. If we’re not vigilant, we can open doors to familiar spirits in our lives and homes simply by the items we possess and the practices we keep.”

In writing on fetishism and idolatry, Daniels goes back in history to when dolls had spiritual value attached to them. In religions and occult practices, dolls were used as supernatural intermediaries to confer favor, represent gods and enact witchcraft.

Daniels warns readers to avoid things with occult origins, as they give the enemy access points into our homes. The subtle yet familiar influences can be especially damaging because they can go undetected in your life for years. *Breaking the Power of Familiar Spirits* shows why the church must no longer view the world with only natural eyes. Christians must see what hides within the spiritual realm.

“If you create an atmosphere of holiness and seek God,” Daniels says, “everything that is not like God will come out of hiding and be exposed.” {eoa}

Kimberly Daniels is a former city council member in Jacksonville, Florida, and a current member of the Florida House of Representatives. She is a sought-after conference speaker and preacher and is the pastor of Spoken Word Ministries in North Florida. Her athletic ability and military background give her an ability to release strategies to the body of Christ that promote discipline, endurance, and deliverance. She graduated from Florida State University and Jacksonville Theological Seminary and is the author of several books, including *From a Mess to a Miracle*; *Clean House, Strong House*; *Give It Back*; *Prayers That Bring Change and Selah*.

Beth Moore: 'Legalism Will Make a Liar Out of You'

Bible teacher Beth Moore recently tweeted to her nearly 900,000 followers one challenge she's faced as she's grown older:

1 challenge of being older is the compelling to wave red flags & warn of dangers ahead. You want others to learn easier ways. You want to have made the mistakes so they don't have to. Red flag:

Legalism will make a liar out of you. You'll force it on others & fail at it yourself.

– Beth Moore (@BethMooreLPM) May 16, 2018

Moore elaborated on the dangers of legalism:

“When our legalism exceeds our compassion, we have abandoned the heart of Christ to cling to the safety and control of the letter of the law. Legalism is a pet python. You can only keep it in the cage so long. Eventually it will slither out and crush the life out of you.”

From demanding accountability within the church to imploring the administration of grace, Beth Moore has been making waves across Christian and public media.

Last month, her voice went viral when she called on church leadership to be cognizant of sexual assault and oppressive culture. She shared about her years in ministry and how being a woman often provoked tension with her co-ministers, the majority of whom were men.

Her activism prompted a response from The Gospel Coalition apologizing for either participating or being silent in the presence of misogynistic behavior within the church. {eoa}

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Chasing Time

It's hard to "be in the moment" when we are thinking about the moment that comes next.

Do you ever find yourself anxious to finish one meeting because the next meeting is about to start? Do you feel your day is overprogrammed? Do you end a day wishing you could have spent more time with someone you barely engaged?

I often reminded college students to enjoy their time in the classroom because it would end soon enough. Most students were focused on "What must I do to graduate?"

I asked them to be in class with more than their physical presence. "Wherever you are, be there! Don't chase the end of the semester. It will arrive soon enough."

I think about how present Jesus was with people. When He looked into someone's eyes, time stood still. He made people feel His compassion for them.

It wasn't just His words that made an impact. He seemed to influence others with His eyes. People dropped whatever they were doing so they could follow Him.

He seemed to care deeply about whoever He was with. He focused on the one in front of Him or within the sound of His voice. He knew when one had pushed through a crowd to touch His garment.

Even now, we seek His presence. His sheep know His voice and

want more of it. We would gladly touch His garment.

I believe we please the Lord when we receive each other in His name. As we honor one another with our time, we give our scarcest commodity.

We need not chase time. We must embrace it.

Bless someone today with your undivided attention.

“Whoever receives one of these children in My name receives Me. And whoever receives Me receives not Me, but Him who sent Me” (Mark 9:37).

Why Jimmy Carter Got 2 Standing Ovarions at Liberty University

As Jimmy Carter waited to appear before a commencement crowd at Liberty University, it looked like he might be entering the lion’s den. The school, founded by Carter’s political foe, Jerry Falwell Sr., has stayed true to its socially conservative roots. Carter has been steadfastly to the left.

But Liberty President Jerry Falwell gave Carter a generous introduction, praising his kindness, warmth and humility. In a curious comment, Falwell said: “The longer I live, the more I want to know about a person and give my political support to a person. Policies are important, but candidates lie about their policies all the time to get elected.”

For his part, Carter, 93, resisted the urge to re-litigate old institutional battles. Instead, he deployed his characteristic

humility and charm to emphasize his closeness with and affection for fellow Baptists and other Christians in spite of significant differences.

As he always does, Carter emphasized the plight of women and girls who experience sexism and other forms of degradation. He also spoke on themes progressive Baptists often emphasize: wealth disparity and the threat of nuclear war. But Carter lifted up other issues that, along with sexism, conservative Baptists routinely denounce: human trafficking, discrimination and rising prison populations.

Carter's address began and ended with standing ovations. His presence and the audience's generosity called to mind what I viewed as one of the high points of the 2016 presidential campaign: Sen. Bernie Sanders' visit to Liberty. That event was also a model of civility and mutual respect in spite of profound political disagreements.

Baptists haven't always been so keen to get along. Extending into many corners of cultural and political life, the Baptist battles have been the biggest story in American religion during my lifetime. Though never "my tribe," I have witnessed and chronicled these developments for nearly two decades. It seems Carter and Liberty might model a better way.

Thus, when Mr. Carter stood to address Liberty's graduates and their families, it offered a judicious moment to take stock of where the Baptist battles stand.

When I was born in November 1980, Carter's presidency was winding down in the wake of Ronald Reagan's election. Around the world, a wave of fundamentalism was forcing scholars and policymakers to take note of religion, once thought to be on its way out.

Here in the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention was in the earliest stages of a conservative resurgence that would definitively break with mainline Protestantism. The SBC, now

America's largest Protestant denomination, would usher in a new era of leaders who would face public and private temptations concerning influence, faithfulness and proximity to political power.

In 1980, Carter was the only evangelical many elites knew. Liberty University was a fundamentalist Bible college.

Today, Carter is an international humanitarian icon. Grieved by some of the Southern Baptist Convention's changes, Carter severed ties with the SBC in 2000. This fact was little noted in press reports on his Liberty speech, but the substance of his critique was over an SBC powered by resurgent conservatives who more rigidly specified gender roles. Carter has subsequently expounded on his egalitarian views, making women's rights a centerpiece of his advocacy work.

In the 11 years since his father's death, Falwell has grown Liberty's prominence through ambitious fundraising and a massive online-degree business. Founded as independent institutions, Liberty and nearby Thomas Road Baptist Church, pastored by the Rev. Jonathan Falwell, are closely linked to the SBC through their relationships with the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, a rival state convention founded in the mid-1990s over fears that the regular one was run by liberals and heretics.

All this to say that while political officials, candidates and media trumpet Liberty's political relevance, we still see how endless debates, competing interpretations and divergent emphases in Baptist life have little to do with national politics.

White evangelicals who think they mostly oppose Carter's politics would do well to give him the same respect Falwell and the Liberty University crowd gave him. Likewise, progressives predisposed to hate Jerry Falwell should take note of his generosity to Democratic political leaders who

visit the campus. Many more Democrats should accept the invitation to speak at Liberty.

Presidents come and go, but the Baptist battles will continue apace. As leaders and ordinary believers debate what it means to be Baptist, these two important leaders with close ties to the presidential office have shown us that politics matter less than we suppose.

Falwell and Carter offered a model of civility and generosity that all Americans, whether Baptist or not, can stand and applaud. {eoa}

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An Invitation to God to Invade Our Schools

In light of the latest tragic school massacre, I want to make a simple proposal. It was prompted by a phone conversation with my dear friend James Robison.

We were talking on the day of the tragic, Santa Fe school massacre, and he said, “Forget about trying to get prayer back in schools”—by which he meant, “Let’s not put all our efforts into trying to change these laws right now.”

“We need to start praying in our schools,” he exclaimed.

Then the light went on inside of me. So simple!

To be clear, this is not a substitute for a discussion about school security or gun access or family life or mental disease or violent video games or anything else that is practical or relevant. This is in addition to all the other conversations we need to have. That being said, this topic is as important as anything we can discuss.

Simply stated, I want to encourage committed Christian young people on our campuses throughout America to join together for a few minutes each day for prayer. Focused prayer. Faith-filled prayer. United prayer. A simple cry to heaven for God to come and touch each school. "God, save our school!"

It can be before classes start. It can be during a lunch break. But let it be at the same time and same place every day, joining together in faith and asking God to move powerfully in each school.

Whether it's three students standing side by side or 30 students in a big circle. Let it be done in simple faith every day, and we will see the results together.

I'm aware that many young people have been doing this for years.

I'm aware that there are formal prayer movements already advocating this very thing.

I'm aware that I'm saying nothing new.

I simply want to add my voice of encouragement, offering testimony as well.

I'm also confident that, as Christian young people do this on a regular basis, they'll be more prone to share their faith as well. They'll be more aware of "divine appointments" and more overflowing with love for their fellow students. All this is a natural extension of prayer.

Some might say, "God is sovereign, and He doesn't need our

invitation or permission for anything He does. If He wants to 'invade,' our schools, He will."

There's much truth to that, but it's also true that, "Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the Kingdom" (Charles H. Spurgeon).

Or, in the classic formulation of Matthew Henry, "When God intends great mercy for His people, the first thing He does is set them a-praying."

Or, to quote John Wesley, "God does nothing but in answer to prayer."

Let us, then, give ourselves to prayer for our schools.

In the fall of 1997, I met with the superintendent of schools of Escambia County, Florida. Pensacola was the largest city in the county, and there had been a remarkable spiritual outpouring that had been taking place there since June, 1995, called the Brownsville Revival.

Ultimately, when it ended in late 2000, more than three million people had attended services there (this is the rough, cumulative total), traveling from more than 130 nations. And every night, hundreds of young people were there, many from the local area.

I met with the superintendent to ask him about the impact the revival had on the schools. Did something tangible happen to the students? Were lives visibly and dramatically changed?

He was quite happy to speak with me, saying he could testify firsthand to the extremely positive results. He had also served as a local principal and saw many young people changed before his eyes. He was glowing with praise for what the Lord had done.

But I mention this story here because these students were praying students. When they got touched at the

revival—delivered from addictions, set free from violent or self-destructive behavior, transformed in their attitudes and lifestyle—they immediately wanted to share their faith with others. And they began to gather in prayer for their schools. The fire quickly spread!

Richard Crisco, now a pastor in Rochester, Michigan, was the youth pastor at the church where the revival took place, and he carefully charted what was happening to these kids.

In September, 1995—so, just a few months into the revival—there were about 300 kids who gathered in early September for the See You at the Pole prayer meeting. One year later, 2,000 kids joined in prayer on that day. And at quite a few of the schools, these young people would gather for daily prayer, often with tears, saying those simple words, “God, save our schools!”

Of course, it was a sovereign visitation that sparked this prayer movement in the schools. But it was the prayers of these young people that helped deepen and sustain the movement once it started.

All the more, then, should we pray if there is no sign of revival in our region. All the more should we pray for rain in a time of drought.

I’m not saying this is the cure-all. I’m not saying that we do not need to take other, practical steps to protect our schools. I’m not saying that overnight, everything will change.

I’m just putting out a simple call for young people across America to gather daily in prayer for their schools. And I’m encouraging parents to encourage their kids to do so.

Schools are letting out now across the country, but why not start while you can, with plans to pick up in September?

Our kids (and grandkids and great-grandkids) are hurting right now. They're having to put up with things most of us never even thought about. Let's believe with them for God to come and touch their classmates and teachers. Let's believe with them for the Spirit to invade their schools.

Let's believe together and pray, "God, save our schools!"

11 Things Jesus Didn't Say

One of my favorite characters in the Bible is Peter. Yes, he's the disciple who is often remembered for sinking (after walking on water) because he took his eyes off of Jesus; for being rebuked by Jesus ("Get behind me, Satan!"); and for denying Christ (not once, but three times in the same night) immediately after telling Jesus—to His face—that he wouldn't.

Had Peter been on social media back in the day I'm sure his most-used emoji would have been the face-palm one.

I can relate.

What I really love about Peter is the transformation that took place in his life following his encounter with the Holy Spirit in the upper room. He went from following Jesus at a distance to standing up boldly to deliver a message that resulted in 3,000 people believing in Jesus, thus launching the church.

Here's what he said: "For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps (1 Pet. 2:21, NLT).

Peter didn't just pen these words; he lived them. He did good, he suffered martyrdom and followed in the steps of Christ.

We, too, are called to live like Jesus. And if we're going to live like Jesus, we should love like Jesus loved, do what Jesus did, and say what Jesus said. But what about things He didn't say?

11 Things Jesus Didn't Say

1. Church isn't really that important.

The author of Hebrews confirms that gathering for worship with other believers is so vital that it should be habitual.

"Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but let us exhort one another, especially as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25, MEV).

Here are 5 reasons why church is important:

1. Jesus died for it.
2. Jesus is the head of it.
3. Jesus said He would build it.
4. Jesus said the gates of hell will not prevail against it.
5. Jesus chose it as the vehicle to advance His kingdom.

Be the church.

Got to church.

Grow the church.

2. Blessed are those who are more passionate about politics than their faith.

Christians who find themselves defending their political posture more than sharing their faith have bought into a different gospel.

When the apostle Paul spoke to political leaders, he preached Jesus. He also reminded believers to submit to the government and its officers. See Titus 3:1-2.

The next time you feel the urge to blast political leaders on your social media platform, stop and pray for them.

3. Winning an argument is more important than winning the person.

You can win an argument and lose the person. Is it worth it? No.

I'm not saying that there aren't times to take a bold stance like Jesus did. But the requirement for this is not to be a jerk. In Robbie Dawkins' book *Do What Jesus Did*, he shares a story of praying with an atheist. Robbie could have debated God's existence and won his argument, but he would have lost the opportunity to pray with the young man. By simply sharing the love of Jesus, Robbie earned the right to pray with him.

According to 1 Corinthians 13, if we don't communicate our message in love, our message is worthless.

In fact, even Paul said foolish arguments are foolish: "But avoid foolish debates, genealogies, contentions, and arguments about the law, for they are unprofitable and useless" (Titus 3:9).

4. Embracing all faiths is Christlike.

Although it is true that we are commanded to love everyone, there is absolutely no place in Scripture that affirms or condones that we embrace any belief system other than Jesus.

Not only did Jesus proclaim that He is the only way (John 14:6), but Paul condemned anyone who preaches anything other than Jesus: "Although if we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than the one we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8).

5. Everyone is going to heaven.

What did Jesus say?

“Enter at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who are going through it, because small is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:13-14).

6. I will let you into heaven as long as you're a good person.

Jesus loves sinners like me, but He is intolerant toward sin—and the only way to heaven is to repent of sin and accept the free gift of salvation (by confessing and putting your faith in Christ).

Getting into heaven has nothing to do with us being good or even the good deeds we do—but has everything to do with what Jesus already did on the cross (see John 6:44).

And for the record, no one is good (see Luke 18:19).

7. It's your body. Do what you want with it.

While our culture encourages this, God's word says the opposite: “What? Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God, and that you are not your own? You were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

The good news is that whatever bad choices you already made with your body, the blood of Jesus is good enough to make you clean. He'll even remove any guilt and shame that weighs you down.

8. I love Christians more than unbelievers.

God loves all of us the same, so be careful not to forget where you used to be before He rescued you.

“We also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving

various desires and pleasures, living in evil and envy, filled with hatred and hating each other. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:3-5).

9. The world will know we are Christians by our knowledge of Scripture.

Though memorizing Scripture is important, Jesus said that it's our love for one another that will prove to the world that we are His disciples. See John 13:35 and 1 Corinthians 13.

10. Homosexuality is worse than all other sins combined.

Sin is sin. Yes, there are specific sins that have greater consequences, but any disobedience is sin. Here's what James 2:10 says: "For whoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point is guilty of breaking the whole law."

I also want to point out that Jesus blasted the religious leaders of His day for their spiritual arrogance more often than He did the sexually immoral. See Matthew 23.

11. You have to behave before you belong.

One of my favorite stories in the Gospels is found in Luke 5. Jesus asked Matthew—a despised and hated tax collector—to follow Him. Matthew didn't have to first pass a test; he didn't have to jump through spiritual hoops; and he didn't have to pay back everyone he ripped off before he could follow. Jesus just invited him to belong, period.

Matthew was so excited that he threw a party (with other notorious sinners) and made Jesus the guest of honor! It's ironic that the only ones who had a problem with this were the Pharisees. Jesus confronted their disdain by declaring that He came for those who know they are sinners—not for those who think they are righteous. Ouch.

Behavior follows belonging.

Jesus will take you just as you are, but He won't leave you that way.

Chuck Tate *is the author of 41 Will Come: Holding on When Life Gets Tough. He is also the founder and lead pastor of RockChurch, a growing and thriving congregation in the heart of Illinois. Before planting RockChurch in 1998, Chuck worked for a national youth ministry in Tulsa, Oklahoma.*

Empowered21 African Congress Spurs the Spirit of Pentecost Across Africa

The Empowered21 Africa Congress came to a close on Saturday, May 19, 2018, as more than 1,100 young people came forth to be anointed for ministry.

“To see the altar filled with young leaders under the age of 35 ready to accept their destiny to make a spiritual impact as Spirit-empowered leaders was amazing,” said Dr. Billy Wilson, president of Oral Roberts University and global co-chair of Empowered21. “It was an honor to pray over them as the future doctors, lawyers, presidents, evangelists, pastors, bishops, government officials and professors... the next generation of leaders for the nations of Africa.”

The commissioning service was the culmination of the four-day Congress, which attracted delegates from 50 countries. A 2,400-voice children's choir, all dressed in white shirts, packed the stage and overflow areas of the auditorium and

captivated the delegates with animated praise and worship songs native to South Africa. Dr. Wilson and Apostle Professor Opoku Onyinah, E21 Africa Co-chair, prayed over the children in the commissioning moment for these young lives.

“It moved me to the core of my being and brought tears to hear these children commit their love to Christ in song and spoken word to the 2033 challenge of Empowered21—to see every person on earth have an authentic encounter with the Holy Spirit by 2033,” said Onyinah.

Co-chairs of the Africa Empowered21 Next Generation Network (NGN), Apostle David Hayforn from the Church of Pentecost in Ghana and Pastor Thandanani Savhasa of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, shared the stage in a powerful exchange of messages echoing the same theme as a cry from the next generation: “Give us the baton, we are ready!”

Sessions and educational tracks were offered at the event site, Word and Life Church, outside Johannesburg. Ministry tracks, many filled to overflowing with delegates, were held during the afternoons of May 17 and 18. Sessions on Thursday included Advocacy and Prophetic Voice to the Nations, Christian Business Ethics and Networking, Reaching People with Disabilities and Children’s Ministry. On Friday, delegates flocked to tracks dealing with discipleship, humanitarian aid and disaster relief, prayer, theology and a session dealing with deliverance and prophetic ministry challenges.

Prior to the afternoon track sessions on Friday afternoon, delegates to the Congress heard powerful messages from Dave Burrows (Bahamas), Claudio Freidzon (Argentina), LaDonna Osborn (U.S.), and Michel Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso). Dr. Wilson challenged the delegates to live in a new dimension by “burying your past, surrendering your present, and accelerating your future” as a climax to the Friday evening general session.

Earlier in the Friday service, E21 Africa Cabinet Co-chair Frank Chikane recognized members of the Africa Cabinet and also reported registration figures that included a country roll call. "I was moved with emotion reading the list of countries and heard attendees shout out country names from onsite registration," said Chikane. "Clearly, this was the work of the Lord as Africa is on a new path of significance."

The Empowered21 celebration of Pentecost 2019 will be held for the Latin America regions in Guatemala City, Guatemala, June 5-7, 2019.