

CN Morning Rundown: Painting From 'The Chosen' Captures Heart of Jesus in Powerful 'You Are Mine' Moment

Here's a quick summary of the top stories on :

Painting From 'The Chosen' Captures Heart of Jesus in Powerful 'You Are Mine' Moment

The hugely popular television series, *The Chosen*, is the first multi-season story about the life of Jesus Christ. Garnering millions of dollars in support, it has become the top crowd-funded media project of all time.

So far, *The Chosen's* worldwide audience has paid it forward to completely fund Seasons One, Two and Three, with the hope of having a fully funded Season Four in 2023.

The series continues to captivate audiences and has even inspired one renowned painter to capture a poignant moment between Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

The Return of American Christendom in the Public Square

"Liberals control institutions because they care more about politics, a disparity that grew larger around 2016," writes Richard Hanania, Research Fellow at the Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University. "This makes attempts to use government [i.e., bureaucracy!] to take back the culture unlikely to succeed, at least in the short term."

Liberals, in our view, care much more about culture than politics. Plato, the founder of the first institution of higher learning in the Western World, put his finger on it

some 2,400 years ago. According to him, the major precepts of the culture are decided by: 1) who teaches the children; and 2) what do we teach them? Politics is downstream from culture.

In the more fashionable words of the Canadian conservative author Mark Steyn, it goes like this: "If public education is radically secular; if Apple, Amazon, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, & Google discriminate against conservatives by censoring and manipulating social media, if Howard Stern, Miley Ray Cyrus, Ellen DeGeneres, and the Kardashians tutor America's youth, defining the tenets of common beliefs and social forms, well, then having an 'R' behind one's name isn't going to make much difference."

FBI Arrests American Woman in Syria for Planning ISIS Terrorism in US

A Kansas woman was arrested Saturday for her role in organizing and leading an all-female battalion in support of ISIS.

According to the Justice Department, Allison Fluke-Ekren was apprehended in Syria, then transferred into the custody of the FBI in Alexandria, Virginia. She made her first appearance in a federal court Monday in Alexandria to meet her court-appointed attorney.

The 42-year-old is a former resident of Kansas and allegedly traveled to Syria several years ago for the purpose of encouraging terrorist activities. {eoa}

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Messianic Rabbi's Advice for Facing Fear: Please Don't 'Stand Still and See the Deliverance'

For many years now on Rosh Chodesh (the biblical start of a new month), our synagogue family gathers together for family game night. Our fellowship hall fills with the smell of hot pizza and the sound of people being family. As the evening goes on, discussions begin to take place. Hearts begin to open up. Needs, hurts and fears that have been bottled up inside bubble up to the surface and are shared without fear of rejection or judgment. Those who need prayer, uplifting and encouraging receive it, and people leave knowing how to pray and who to pray for.

As we play these games, people will begin to have discussions and many will start to open up about their family, their jobs, their hopes. Over the past few years, a real topic of discussion has been their fears. Over the past few years, so many people in our communities have dealt with such significant losses. However, many of them have kept their feelings bottled up inside, partially out of fear of personal failure and partially because of terrible teaching that tells people that if they are having a problem of any kind it is the result of their sin. This horrible doctrine, which instead of preaching the delivering power of G-D, joins the adversary, Satan, as he screams accusations at the children of G-D.

During one of these family game nights, I began to think about the Exodus story and when Moses was leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. The people find themselves between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea. As they realize their predicament and begin to complain to Moses, we read:

“They said to Moses, ‘Have you taken us away to die in the wilderness because there were no graves in Egypt? Why have you dealt this way with us, to bring us out of Egypt? Did we not say to you in Egypt, “Let us alone, so that we may serve the Egyptians?” It was better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness!’” (Ex. 14:11-12, TLV).

Moses provides a response to them in the next verses:

“But Moses said to the people, ‘Don’t be afraid! Stand still, and see the salvation of Adonai, which He will perform for you today. You have seen the Egyptians today, but you will never see them again, ever! “Adonai will fight for you, while you hold your peace’” (Ex. 14:13-14).

In the very next verse, G-D seems to respond to Moses, however we only see G-D’s response to Moses. We don’t actually know what Moses said that brought about G-D’s response:

“Then Adonai said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying to Me? Tell Bnei-Yisrael to go forward. Lift up your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea, and divide it. Then Bnei-Yisrael will go into the midst of the sea on dry ground.’” (Ex. 14:15-16).

As I thought about these verses, I noticed three things:

1. The children of Israel were being honest in their fears based upon their reality, just as those who are struggling with their present situation are being honest with their fears today. The truth is, if we are honest, many of us have felt as if the Egyptian army were behind us and the sea in front of us, and when we turned to our leaders, they were just as perplexed and fearful of our circumstances as we were.

2. Moses responded exactly as too many rabbis and pastors responded over the past few years: Don’t be afraid; Stand still; Watch what G-D is going to do; The victory is ours; and many other cliches and platitudes. However, while Moses was speaking “faith” to the children of Israel, it appears from G-

D's reply that he was whining to G-D with the same level of disbelief that the people were expressing to him.

3. G-D's response to Moses is so important and often mistaught. Look closely at what G-D says. He doesn't tell Moses the things Moses told the people. G-D doesn't say, "Don't be afraid! Stand still, and see the salvation of Adonai, which He will perform for you today." Not at all. G-D tells Moses to stop crying to Him and to tell the children of Israel to go forward. G-D actually tells Moses to tell the people the opposite of what Moses told them. G-D's instructions continue by telling Moses to lift his staff, stretch out his hand over the sea and divide it.

Contrary to the teaching of Moses and many rabbis and pastors, our response to fearful events in our lives, like those we have experienced over the past few years, is not to "stand still and see the salvation of G-D."

Rather, our leaders should be stepping forward in faith and telling all those in the body of believers to move forward in faith.

One last but important thing to note is that G-D didn't tell Moses to chastise the people for their fear and unbelief. G-D didn't say, "You guys are stuck in between the army and the sea because of sin in your lives." G-D told Moses to stop crying to Him and to tell the people of G-D to move forward.

I hope you hear my heart from my words today as I encourage you: Don't look at the army behind you, don't look at the sea in front of you and don't look for someone to blame. Just move forward. I can't promise that the sea will always part, but I can promise that with each step, you will move closer to G-D's promise for you. {eoa}

Eric Tokajer is the author of *Overcoming Fearlessness, What If Everything You Were Taught About the Ten Commandments Was Wrong?*, *With Me in Paradise*, *Transient Singularity*, *OY! How*

Did I Get Here?: Thirty-One Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before Entering Ministry, #ManWisdom: With Eric Tokajer, Jesus Is to Christianity as Pasta Is to Italians *and* Galatians in Context.

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COVID-19 Fears Leads to The National Prayer Breakfast Going Online Only for Second Straight Year

Despite the urgent need to pray for national and international revival, and for the Lord to lift the scourge of the COVID pandemic, the organizers of the National Prayer Breakfast have once again canceled their in-person gathering at the Washington Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. due to the coronavirus threat.

For the second year in a row, the event will only be held online.

ALL ISRAEL NEWS has obtained a letter that has been sent to thousands of VIP leaders throughout the U.S. and around the world, which we publish below.

Launched in 1953 by American evangelist Billy Graham and then-U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, the National Prayer Breakfast has become the premier annual gathering of Christian leaders, with typical attendance upwards of 4,000 people.

It is actually not just a breakfast but a two-day series of meals, large group meetings and smaller breakout sessions in which Christians meet with each other and other faith leaders “in the name and Spirit of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”

A major Christian thinker, author or opinion leader delivers the keynote address, Christian artists provide worship music and various people pray for the nation and the world.

Held the first Thursday of February, the event is attended every year by the sitting American president—who gives a brief address—as well as the sitting vice president, the speaker of the House, many members of the House and Senate, governors, state legislators, pastors, priests, rabbis and business leaders.

It is also attended by world leaders and many ambassadors.

Typically, a delegation of Knesset members attends.

I have attended several of these wonderful gatherings over the years and was hoping to attend this one. It is sad that COVID has dissuaded people from gathering in such large groups, and I’m praying we can meet in-person again next year.

Here is the letter that has been sent by the bipartisan Congressional organizers of this year’s National Prayer Breakfast:

Dear Friends,

This Thursday, February 3 at 8 a.m EST., U.S. Senate co-chairs, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (NY) and Senator Mike Rounds (SD), will host the 70th National Prayer Breakfast on Capitol Hill. (See link below)

At this event, Members of Congress and their spouses, regardless of the Members' faith tradition, come together to pray in the Spirit of Jesus of Nazareth for our nation and our President.

We are pleased to announce that the keynote speaker for this year will be Mr. Bryan Stevenson, founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, a human rights organization in Montgomery, Alabama. A widely acclaimed public interest lawyer, Mr. Stevenson has dedicated his career to helping the poor, the incarcerated, and the condemned. He is the author of the bestselling book "Just Mercy" which was recently adapted as a feature film. The program will also include a musical performance by gospel music singer and songwriter Kari Jobe. Since her first album in 2009, she has received two Grammy Award nominations and ten Dove Award nominations, six of which she won.

Because of Covid, a widely attended event was not possible again this year and, as such, the 2022 National Prayer Breakfast will be made available for people throughout the nation and around the world to view via CSPAN or live-streamed at beginning at 8 a.m. EST on Feb 3rd.

After the event, this year's NPB will continue to be available for viewing until Mar. 15, 2022.

While there is naturally disappointment that the larger gathering of friends from across our nation and around the world will not take place in Washington DC, it is the Congressional Cabinet's* hope that you will use this as an opportunity to gather together in the Spirit of Jesus with others in your local communities to pray for our nation and our President.

Blessings,

Congressman John Moolenaar, Congressman Tom Suozzi, Senator Mark Pryor, and Representative Zach Wamp

On behalf of the Congressional Cabinet

*The Congressional Cabinet, a group of sitting and former Members of Congress who are part of the weekly House and Senate Prayer Breakfasts and provide leadership for the National Prayer Breakfast.

This article originally appeared on All Israel News (). {eo}

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The Fight's Not Over for New York Health Care Workers Wanting Vaccine Exemption

A group of New York health care workers being persecuted for their religious objections to the COVID-19 vaccine is seeking a new injunction after a United States Supreme Court ruling in a federal healthcare lawsuit. Thomas More Society attorneys filed a renewed motion on Jan. 30, 2022, seeking emergency and preliminary injunctive relief against the state for the health professionals in United States District Court. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul and her administration were ordered by Judge David Hurd to respond by Feb. 11, and the health care workers will have until Feb. 18 to reply.

The lawsuit centers around the state of New York's refusal to honor religious exemptions for the health care worker COVID-19 vaccine mandate. The filing is in light of the Supreme Court's Jan. 13 decision upholding the Biden administration's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for Medicaid and Medicare-participating health

care facilities, for which the high court acknowledged religious exemptions.

Thomas More Society attorneys filed the renewed motion, along with an amended complaint on behalf of New York doctors, nurses and other medical professionals who hold religious objections to the COVID vaccine. The health workers received an original preliminary injunction against Hochul's categorical ban on religious exemptions to COVID-19 vaccination in October 2021 from the district court. The United States Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit vacated that decision shortly thereafter. A subsequent emergency appeal to the United States Supreme Court was denied, though accompanied by a strong dissent from Justice Neil Gorsuch who wrote of the high court that, "we fail ourselves," by not granting the motion.

"Gov. Hochul's now obviously pointless vaccination crusade contradicts, not only Title VII, but the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services mandate, both of which require what she refuses to allow: religious exemptions from COVID-19 vaccination," said Thomas More Society Special Counsel Christopher Ferrara.

"The 2nd Circuit did not have benefit of the federal healthcare mandate in holding that Title VII permits only 'accommodations' under Hochul's mandate, but not 'exemptions.' The two terms are equivalent, as the federal mandate makes clear," Ferrara added.

The original lawsuit emphasized that the New York mandate's direct conflict with the required religious accommodations afforded under Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the necessary neutrality compelled by the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment.

"The conflict between Gov. Hochul's will and federal law is now beyond dispute. The entire situation has been a nightmare

for these medical professionals who were once hailed as the heroes of the pandemic,” said Ferrara. “These doctors, nurses and other health workers were terminated or voluntarily resigned from their employment as a result of their religious inability to obtain the vaccine. One lost his private practice partnership, one moved out of state, and five submitted under duress to initial COVID-19 vaccination to avoid losing their employment but continue to religiously oppose additional booster shots as are now additionally required as of Jan. 21, 2022. The 16 health care heroes who remain in New York are in dire need of immediate relief to avoid further violations of their constitutional rights, ongoing unemployment and/or imminent additional violations of their religiously formed consciences.”

As the group of medical professionals prepare a regular appeal to the Supreme Court from the proceedings last fall, that court’s decision in the federal healthcare vaccine mandate case requires that covered medical facilities, including those in New York, protect the ability to seek “religious exemptions.” That is the basis for the renewed motion for injunctive relief in the district court.

The new filings report that it has become apparent that COVID vaccines do not prevent transmission of the virus, and that health care professionals across the state are contracting COVID and are required to quarantine, but then are required to return to work after only five days per new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance on self-isolation. And because of vaccine failure, the guidance now also provides that both unvaccinated and vaccinated workers infected by the virus can return to work, even if “mildly symptomatic,” in order to address a staffing crisis.

The filed motion noted that “it has now become obvious that New York’s COVID-19 vaccine mandate is utterly ineffective and counterproductive. It notably provoked the firing or forced resignations of 37,000 health care workers across New York,

only to be followed by Gov. Hochul declaring a statewide crisis in health care staffing. And the prevailing science now shows that COVID-19 vaccination does not prevent health care workers from getting and transmitting the virus (especially the now-dominant omicron variant).”

“This farce must be brought to an end,” declared Ferrara. “As jurisdictions in 47 states and around the world have refused to adopt or have abandoned such draconian vaccine mandates, New York’s governor and her health bureaucrats are in need of adult supervision regarding respect for religious freedom.”

The health care workers are represented by Ferrara, along with Thomas More Society Senior Counsel Steve Crampton and Counsel Michael McHale.

Read the First Amended Verified Complaint filed with the United States District Court for the Northern District of New York on Jan. 30, 2022, by Thomas More Society attorneys in *Dr. A, et al. v. Kathy Hochul, Governor of the State of New York, et al.* here, along with the accompanying Memorandum of Law in Support of Plaintiffs’ Renewed Motion for a Temporary Restraining Order and a Preliminary Injunction here.

Read more about the Thomas More Society attorneys’ actions on behalf of New York’s professional health workers with religious objections to the state’s mandatory COVID-19 vaccine here. {eoa}

The Thomas More Society is a national not-for-profit law firm dedicated to restoring respect in law for life, family and religious liberty. Headquartered in Chicago and with offices across the country, the Thomas More Society fosters support for these causes by providing high quality pro bono legal services from local trial courts all the way up to the United States Supreme Court. For more information, visit .

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Let's Pray American 'Christians' Experience Radical Conversions to Christ

Let's Pray for Radical Conversion Among American 'Christians': I read with interest Dr. Michael Brown's commentary on Brady "Phanatik" Goodwin's announcement that he was renouncing his Christian faith. What caught my eye was the impersonal and sterile nature of the faith he was renouncing. In explaining his decision, Goodwin said,

"I sent a letter to my church withdrawing my membership and saying that I am denouncing the Christian faith that I have believed, professed, proclaimed and defended for the last 30 years of my life."

My heart goes out to Goodwin, but it sounds as though his Christianity was rooted in externals such as church membership and a set of doctrinal beliefs that he has "defended" for much of his life. There is little indication of a warm and personal heart relationship with Christ.

By contrast, when we read the words of the early martyrs of the church, it is obvious they were not laying down their lives for an institution or set of doctrines. Their testimonies are warm and passionate concerning their love and commitment to Christ.

For example, Polycarp (circa A.D. 69-155), pastor/bishop of Philippi, was martyred for his faith late in life. Brought before the pagan proconsul of the region and given the option of renouncing Christ or being burned alive, Polycarp passionately replied, "For eighty-six years I have been His

servant, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

Polycarp obviously did not see himself dying for a mere set of doctrines. It was a person he was representing, and this person meant everything to him. This is not to downplay the importance of doctrine but to remind us that it is a person who saves us, not a doctrine.

John Wesley discovered this in a very dramatic fashion. He was ordained as a minister in the Anglican Church and even went to Georgia as a missionary; but according to his own testimony, he was a Christian in name only for his faith was in the external forms of Christianity and not Christ Himself. This all changed when he visited a Moravian society where someone was reading Martin Luther's *Preface to Romans*.

As Wesley listened to how Luther described the change that comes when a person puts their faith in Christ and Him alone, he had a life-changing experience that he considered to be the time of his conversion. He wrote, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sin, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Wesley was never the same. After this conversion experience, he spearheaded the great Methodist Revival that transformed the British Isles and impacted the church around the world.

I am not suggesting that Goodwin was not truly saved. Only God knows the heart. His words, nonetheless, remind me not only of Wesley's experience but also that of Pandita Ramabai (1855-1922), a remarkable Christian woman whose life was transformed when she came to the realization that she too was a Christian in name only.

Pandita was reared in a devout Hindu home in India but decided to convert to Christianity as a young woman while studying in

England. She, therefore, joined the Church of England, was baptized and began studying to defend her new religion to family and friends.

But two years after her conversion, she came to the realization that she had, as she put it, merely "changed religions." Her faith was in the external formalities of Christianity, not the person of Christ. She realized she was a Christian in name only.

She bowed before the Lord and gave herself completely up to Him. Her life was revolutionized as she experienced the new birth of which Jesus spoke. Her faith was now in Christ Himself, and it was very personal, heartfelt and dynamic.

In 1905, she began a prayer meeting with the 500 residents of the orphanage she had founded. She announced that the purpose of the prayer meeting was to pray for the conversion, not of the Hindus or the Muslims, but of all the Christians in India.

She realized from her own experience that many who called themselves Christians had only a superficial faith based on the outward formalities of Christianity. Their faith was in church membership or the fact they had once been baptized or the fact they attended church. Their faith was not in Christ Himself.

Out of this prayer meeting, a great revival was ignited that spread throughout India. Multitudes of "Christians" encountered the living Christ and their lives were transformed. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, young orphan girls went out preaching the gospel in the surrounding Indian villages.

The revival attracted visitors from far and near, including American missionaries who were in awe of what they observed. So great was Pandita's social impact that in 1989, the Indian government issued a postage stamp in her honor with her picture.

If Goodwin's faith was like that of Wesley's or Pandita's before their conversion, I pray that he will turn to Jesus with all his heart and come to know Him in a real and personal way. This is what Christianity is all about, for Jesus Himself said in John 17:3 (MEV), "This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent."

It is safe to say that our nation is filled with those who are "Christian" in name only. Perhaps we would do well to pray for their conversion. When such nominal (name only) Christians awaken to their condition and turn to Jesus with all their hearts, the church comes alive and becomes a transformative force in society.

It happened with Wesley in 18th-century England and with Pandita in 20th-century India, and it can happen with us in 21st-century America. {eoa}

Dr. Eddie Hyatt *is a Bible teacher, author and revivalist. His books, America's Revival Heritage and 1726: The Year that Defined America, undermine the modern "woke" secularist revision of American history by documenting how the 18th-century Great Awakening had a direct bearing on both the founding of America and the ending of slavery on this continent.*

This article originally appeared at .

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Study Reveals Huge Gaps in Giving Preferences Between Different Evangelical Age Groups

Evangelical Protestant donors under age 40 are extremely different from their older counterparts—and especially when compared with evangelical donors 70 and older.

The findings are detailed in “The Generation Gap: Evangelical Giving Preferences.” The study of over 1,000 American evangelical Protestants was released today by Grey Matter Research and Infinity Concepts.

Fifty-eight percent of evangelical Protestants give money to charities or ministries outside of their churches. These donors were asked their preferences in eight different areas regarding giving. In every one of those eight areas, preferences vary substantially by age.

Overall, evangelicals favor the following:

- Giving domestically more than overseas (46% to 27%, with the remaining 27% expressing no preference).
- Trusting an organization until it proves unworthy of their trust over doubting an organization until it proves it is trustworthy (48% to 33%).
- Supporting organizations they already know rather than learning about new organizations (58% to 28%).
- Supporting a small number of causes over a wide variety (58% to 31%).
- Supporting a small number of organizations over a wide

variety (62% to 27%).

– Doing research on an organization over giving “when it feels right” (53% to 33%).

– Doing advance planning regarding their giving over donating “spur of the moment” (47% to 34%).

– In giving locally versus beyond their local area, preferences are split (37% to 36%).

However, the study found that younger donors usually see things very differently. For instance, they prefer overseas over domestic, want to spread their money around to more organizations and causes and like to learn about new organizations more than older donors.

Mark Dreistadt, founder and president of Infinity Concepts, summarizes younger evangelical donors as unique compared to other age groups. “Younger donors have a much more international focus. They seek variety in their giving. They’re less trusting but do less planning or research. Unlike older donors, younger donors are a mix of perspectives rather than a strong common voice. Not only that, but they feel less strongly about their perspectives than do older donors.”

Ron Sellers, president of Grey Matter Research, notes older people are still the core donors for many organizations. But, looking toward the future, many ministries and charities are making a strong push to reach younger donors. “What leaders need to realize is that they can’t effectively reach the 35-year-old donor with the same strategy they used to reach their 65-year-old donors,” Sellers explains.

The report states it’s unknown whether younger donors will change their perspectives or carry some/all of these unique perspectives with them as they age into being core donors for nonprofits. But Dreistadt and Sellers both say if younger donors remain consistent in their preferences, it may mean the

landscape becomes quite different for organizations.

“Organizations may need to provide more variety in programs and messaging in order to retain these donors,” Sellers says. “They may find it harder to attract people who value variety to monthly donor programs or long-term relationships, but there may be more opportunities for short-term growth. Nonprofits and ministries may need to focus more on building trust rather than assuming it already exists. Marketing and messaging may need to have a more emotional focus for people who give spur of the moment.”

Dreistadt adds, “In short, if younger donors stay consistent with their current preferences, the fundraising landscape may be considerably different in the future.”

[Click here for the full report.](#) {eoa}

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The Most Vital Key to Reaching the Next Generation

In case you haven't noticed, sweeping cultural changes are happening in the midst of this global pandemic. Recent polls have shown that teenagers and young adults are abandoning faith.

One recent poll showed that about three-quarters of teens in the United States reject the Christian faith they were raised with after they graduate from high school. The same poll found that about half of this group returned to church in their late

20s or early 30s. The Pew Research Center found that only 1 in 4 Millennials are affiliated with any religion, far more than older adults when they were young.

There are many reasons for this spiritual crisis, and older Christians are eager to blame the media, atheist university professors, secularism in politics or lukewarm churches. But I agree with Dr. Alex McFarland, national talk show host and author of the book *Abandoned Faith: Why Millennials Are Walking Away and How You Can Lead Them Home*. He believes one of the reasons youths are leaving church is because they have no relational connection.

McFarland writes: "Many youth have no—or very limited—exposure to adult role models who know what they believe, why they believe it, and are committed to consistently living it out." In other words, we can't blame the liberal boogieman. The blame really lies with us. We forgot how to mentor.

This week I'm releasing my seventh book, *Follow Me: Make Disciples Like Jesus Did*. It may not be my most popular book, and that's understandable because the topic of discipleship has always had a tendency to drive people away instead of attracting big audiences (see John 6:65-66). I started investing my life in young adults 25 years ago, and relational discipleship has become my life message. I believe the only way we will reclaim this young generation will be by making seismic shifts in the way we do ministry.

In *Follow Me*, I'm challenging church leaders to recognize four shifts the Holy Spirit is leading us to make:

1. We are shifting from quantity to quality. In the days before COVID, we assumed we were successful if we had big crowds in our nice buildings. But just because a sanctuary is full of people doesn't mean we are making strong followers of Jesus. We must never evaluate our success by worldly standards. God is not impressed with crowds; He wants strong,

faithful followers who can then influence others.

2. We are shifting from spectators to disciples. Churches that already had strong small group ministry before the pandemic stayed strong during the crisis and rebounded afterwards. But churches that put all their resources into big congregational events were shut down or lost huge percentages of their membership.

Jesus didn't call us to make churchgoers. He never intended His followers to just sit in rows of chairs year after year, listening to sermons and being entertained. He told them, "Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19a, NASB 1995). He certainly didn't want His followers to remain spiritual infants; He invites us all to grow up and do the works that He did.


3. We are shifting from big events to small groups. There's nothing wrong with big gatherings. I love to worship with a crowd. But when we made the church about the crowd, we created a Frankenstein's monster that doesn't even resemble the original church in the book of Acts. People don't effectively grow if their only input comes from a weekly or monthly 30-minute sermon. They need solid discipleship training in a close-knit environment with supportive relationships, warm hugs and eye contact.

We live in a world full of fear, loneliness and abuse. And that's a big reason many people would never set foot in a big church full of strangers. Their social anxiety prevents them from walking into a concert-style arena to hear a sermon in a dark room. But they would consider visiting a home for a meal or a small-group study. Why are we making it so hard for people to connect?

4. We are shifting from unapproachable celebrities to accessible servants. We have lived through the era of the rock-star preacher, and this fad is fading fast. It is no

coincidence that during the pandemic, several high-profile ministers with massive followings disappeared because of tragic moral failures. I didn't rejoice when I heard the news about these leaders—because I know we are all capable of making horrible mistakes. But the collapse of these giant ministries underscored the fact that God is calling us away from Hollywood-style glamour and back to New Testament humility.

Ministers who lead like Jesus aren't afraid to empower others, and they aren't afraid of their followers being more successful than they are. In fact, they want their disciples to surpass them. The faster we shift away from the outdated celebrity model, the sooner we will reach the world with Christ's love. {eoa}

Lee Grady's new book, Follow Me: Make Disciples Like Jesus Did, is available now from most online book distributors. You  can also order it from Charisma House at my.

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**Ministry Gives Vibrant
Evidence of Holy Spirit's**

Miraculous Work

Donna Sparks signed in at the Carroll County Jail in Huntingdon, Tennessee, and went into the auditorium to set up for that night's ministry, and there she waited. And waited. And waited. What was going on?

She waited at least 30 minutes, and still no one came. She shares the complete story on her blog, one of the many examples of the Holy Spirit's wonder-working power to which Sparks' life and ministry bear witness.

That week, Sparks writes, she found herself buried beneath graduation and party planning for her youngest daughter, government issues and meetings, counseling, speechwriting, shopping and more—and she still had to clean her house by the end of the week. She felt stressed, nervous about her youngest girl graduating and just plain tired. So when Tuesday evening crept up, and with it severe weather, she considered forfeiting that week's women's prison ministry meeting.

The ladies will understand with all I have on my plate, she thought. They won't expect me in such stormy weather. And what if the jail loses power? We wouldn't be able to have the service anyway. On top of all the work and worrisome weather, Sparks suffered from a stress headache that would not relent. It would be a good evening to go home, rest and focus on the remainder of her long to-do list.

"But I couldn't do it," she writes. Experience taught her that when she really didn't feel like going to an engagement, and especially when the enemy's influences presented a surplus of excuses to stay away, something big was going to happen.

With all this in mind, "I loaded up the projector, my laptop, speaker and my Bible, and off to the jail I went," Sparks writes. "It was going to be a sacrifice, but I know God honors our sacrifices."

As she waited in the empty auditorium, wondering if it had all been a waste of time, she pressed the intercom button and asked if any of the women were coming to church. The reply came back, "Yes, we are getting them ready right now."

Baptism in the Spirit

Sparks says when the familiar buzzer sounded, the door opened, and the women entered. This was a bigger group than the previous week, but it only consisted of 10 or so women.

Sparks greeted her guests, and they started the worship service. "The whole time I was praying and asking the Holy Spirit to lead me and give me the words to speak," she writes. "I had no idea what I was going to speak on but I knew He knew what the ladies needed to hear."

Sparks began to preach by the power of the Holy Spirit, and before she knew it, the women were weeping. She gave an altar call to accept Christ, and six ladies responded. They prayed, repented and asked Jesus to be Lord of their lives.

But God wasn't finished, and "He never fails," Sparks writes. She encouraged the women to read the first two chapters of Acts and told them they would discuss the baptism in the Holy Spirit the following week. She started the music and invited any woman who needed prayer to come forward. One by one, they came. While she prayed for the first young woman, the Holy Spirit revealed some truths about her life. As Sparks spoke the words He gave her, the woman trembled and wept tears of joy.

"I immediately felt that I should ask her if she wanted to be baptized in the Holy Spirit," Sparks writes. "She said, 'Yes! I want everything God has for me!'"

Again, Sparks prayed with her, and the moment she placed her hand on the woman's forehead, this brand-new believer spoke in tongues. "It was flowing out of her like a river. She was

rejoicing and crying and could hardly stand,” Sparks writes, adding that since the woman had only given her heart to Christ moments before, she “probably didn’t even understand what the baptism in the Holy Spirit was, but she simply wanted more of Jesus.”

The next woman came forward and said, “Miss Donna, I want what she got!” Sparks says. They giggled together, and the Holy Spirit gave Sparks words meant only for this woman. She, too, began to weep, and before Sparks could even put her hand on this woman’s head, she fell under the power of the Holy Spirit. When Sparks helped her up, this woman was also speaking in tongues and ran to grab a friend from the back of the room. “Give it to her too!” she told Sparks.

Sparks told the woman and her friend that Jesus, not Sparks, was the baptizer in the Holy Spirit, and if she wanted the gift, to reach out her hands to Him to receive it. Sparks prayed for her and gently placed her hand on the woman’s head. The Spirit moved, and this woman also spoke in tongues. “Now, both of these girls were jumping up and down and praising Jesus,” Sparks writes.

Then another woman came forward and asked to receive as well. Within moments, she also was praying in tongues and weeping with joy. The power and presence of God flooded the jail auditorium, thick and tangible. “One of the ladies said it felt like electricity in the air,” Sparks writes, adding that another had goosebumps from the moment she walked into the auditorium.

As Sparks prayed with one of the women, she discerned the woman’s calling as a worship leader. The woman said, “My dad was a worship leader, and there’s nothing in this world I would rather do,” Sparks writes, adding that she told her she would lead worship next week. The woman’s excitement was uncontrollable as her Spirit-birthing tears flowed.

That night, Sparks prayed with other women and saw an abundance of healing, emotionally and physically, take place. "I was reminded why I must always press on, especially when I don't feel like it," she writes.

Tears streamed down Sparks' own face as she sat in the parking lot after that service, knowing God's supernatural work had nothing to do with her. "The Holy Spirit longs to draw sinners to Christ," she writes. "It's not by any strength or ability we possess but by the wonderful, breathtaking power of the Holy Spirit."

"This is what revival looks like," Sparks adds. "When people realize God's love for them, and they understand their immense need for a Savior, then we begin to experience revival."

Story of Grace

The Spirit-filled night of revival in the jail auditorium, of women hungering with a desperation for Jesus above all, is just one of countless testimonies of the Holy Spirit's power at work in and through Sparks' life and ministry.

Sparks, an evangelist and author, founded Story of Grace Jail Ministry in 2015, per her website. She began ministering in the Decatur County Jail when she took over the jail ministry at her church in Decaturville, Tennessee. As time went on, her team not only ministered in the Decatur County Jail but also those in Carroll and Henry County.

At this time, only the Carroll County Jail has resumed normal operations post-pandemic, but Sparks and her team once more are bringing the transforming presence of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit to broken women there in need of His grace. They have helped countless women find salvation through Jesus Christ, witnessing miraculous healing and baptisms in the Holy Spirit.

The team partners with rehab centers such as Teen Challenge,

The Hope Center and facilities like the Dream Center in Jackson, Tennessee, to help the ladies step into the new lives birthed during their incarceration. Story of Grace recognizes the importance of building relationships with these beautiful women and getting them into appropriate aftercare programs. "We have seen God do the miraculous behind prison doors, and we know He's not done," Sparks writes on her website.

Sparks has a tender heart toward broken women and longs to see them walk in the freedom and purpose of God. Filled with compassion, she understands what it's like to feel broken beyond repair, hopeless toward the future.

Beauty From Ashes

Sparks grew up in church, she shares in her book *Beauty From Ashes*. Her parents ensured she and her brother were there any time the doors were opened. She gave her life to the Lord at the early age of 9, and she lived to please her Savior. She sought Him and daily made decisions based on His truth and standards throughout her teenage years and early adult life.

But when life got hard, Sparks' faith faltered. At the age of 23, she found herself divorced—twice. With anger festering in her heart, she felt disappointed in herself and disappointed with God. She explains how easy it can be to yield to deceptive influences when you stop listening to His still, small voice. "Satan's intent is to steal us away from our Savior, kill the relationships we have with Christ and totally destroy us," she writes.

As Sparks sat in her anger, ignoring the voice of the Spirit, Satan's deceitful devices took root. He whispered, "What has God done for you? You would be better off doing things your own way. God hasn't done a very good job with your life so far."

As she entertained these thoughts, her bitterness toward God only grew, Sparks writes. The distance she created between

herself and her Savior caused a void that nothing could fill. She turned to alcohol and partying, and a destructive cycle of drinking drove her further into depression.

Sparks writes about how, around this time, she encountered a new co-worker, Bryan. Not a believer, he still lived a more moral life than she did at the time, she says. Although he didn't drink or do drugs, he didn't judge her lifestyle.

After dating for two months, the two married. The first year was a nightmare, she says. Her drinking led to many arguments. This created a deeper downward spiral, and she drank more and more.

About three years into their marriage, she learned that she was likely infertile, Sparks explains. The news sent her deeper into depression's void. At one point, she had a panic attack and was prescribed antidepressant medication and Xanax. With her addictive personality, this proved a dangerous combination.

Feeling hopeless and worthless, Satan fed her lie after lie that ultimately led to suicidal thoughts—and a miraculous rescue straight from heaven. Read *Beauty From Ashes* to see God's redemptive rewriting of her story.

Miracles Without Limit

Sparks knows the power of God has no limits; not only has she witnessed this in her own life, but she has also seen miracle after miracle manifest through the power of the Holy Spirit, she tells Charisma Digital.

One woman struggled to get through the door for the worship service without help, Sparks says. Excruciating pain shot through her foot and up her back, but she pushed through to enter the presence of Jesus. As Sparks and the incarcerated women lost themselves worshipping the Savior, she heard someone yell, "I love You, Jesus!"

It was the hurting woman, now jumping up and down. Tears trickled down her face, but not tears of sorrow. A heat swept over her while she was worshipping, and the pain left, Sparks explains. No one laid a hand on her. The presence of Jesus touched her as she was pouring out her praise, eradicating her suffering.

Sparks documents many other contemporary miraculous acts of God in her book *No Limits: Embracing the Miraculous* (Bridge-Logos, 2019). In a recent interview with Dr. Steve Greene on the Greenelines podcast on the Charisma Podcast Network, she says she could already write a sequel because she continues to see God doing the impossible.

Sparks hopes *No Limits* inspires believers to continue trusting God and believing for miracles in their own lives. She also encourages them to take His Good News to others who may need faith to believe. Though the powers of this world work to convince people God does not exist, much less work miracles, *No Limits* stirs and strengthens the faith of those who need hope. Sparks' most recent book, *Masquerade: Deception in the Last Days* (Bridge-Logos, 2020), unmask the lies that disguise themselves as truth and reach us through Satan and worldly influences that twist the truth and water down the Word of God.

"I believe we are in a generation where God is raising up people to move with the gifts of the Holy Spirit," Sparks tells Greene. "And you know, I'm seeing it, and I'm living it."

To learn more about Donna Sparks, her Story of Grace prison ministry and any of her books, visit [.](#)

Samantha Carpenter is a copy editor for Charisma Media.

Painting From 'The Chosen' Captures Heart of Jesus in Powerful 'You Are Mine' Moment

The hugely popular television series, *The Chosen*, is the first multi-season story about the life of Jesus Christ. Garnering millions of dollars in support, it has become the top crowd-funded media project of all time.

So far, *The Chosen's* worldwide audience has paid it forward to completely fund Seasons One, Two and Three, with the hope of having a fully funded Season Four in 2023.

The series continues to captivate audiences and has even inspired one renowned painter to capture a poignant moment between Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

Dallas Jenkins, the show's writer, producer and director, met with artist Liz Lemon Swindle, who illustrated the powerful "You are mine" scene from Episode One where Mary Magdalene is delivered by Jesus.

"This moment here, without even a close second, [is] the single most important moment in the whole show," Jenkins said to Swindle. "The whole gospel is encapsulated in this moment. She ran from Him. He met her where she was. He met her in a bar ... at her lowest point. He chases her down and then she finally surrenders. Thank you for capturing it," Jenkins said while holding back tears.

"It was an honor to do," shared Swindle. "I've heard over and

over again just that different people respond to this and then move forward with it. It's opened doors for them and books for them, and that's really a great thing."

The artist explained why she chose to capture that particular moment on canvas.

"I was her. I'm not wild by any means but I find myself putting a lot of things before Him and just getting busy with life, and He kind of gets set over here until I can get to Him," Swindle explained. "For me, it really made Him a priority because He made me one. I look at it and think, that could be me at so many different stages in my life. Not just one time, over and over and over."

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Your Heart's Desires Entrusted to God

Part of developing faith for yourself is learning to trust God instead of depending on yourself. It is looking away from your own abilities and toward God's faithfulness. Many of us say with our mouths that we trust God, but we are busy doing things in our own strength. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Trusting God means dying to yourself.

We must be intentional about surrendering our plans to God's plans.

Sarah had to learn this lesson. She had to learn to trust God, to have faith that He would fulfill His promises, instead of trying to bring about the promised child on her own. When the fulfillment of a promise is delayed, God uses that time to train us in trust and intimacy. The Father purposely hides many details of life, including how He will bring deliverance in the face of our problems. Why does God do this? He wants us to have security in intimacy with Him rather than in having all the details of our future.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6, MEV).

Modern-day Sarahs have this desire to acknowledge God in all their ways, to have intimacy with Him that produces fruitfulness in their lives. They have faith in God for themselves, and that faith is credited to them as righteousness (Rom. 4:11). The modern-day Sarah's heart moving to obey God is more righteous than the act of obedience itself. The desire to obey God means everything.

"Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4).

Your everyday desires can be powerful, leading to something much bigger than you ever imagined. When God appeared to Abraham and made a covenant with him, Sarah wasn't thinking about being legendary. She probably never even dreamed of being the mother of nations. She just had a regular, normal, everyday desire: to have a baby. And because of her age, she had probably dismissed that desire or tried to stuff it down deep inside her as a desire that would never be fulfilled. She may have even experienced a certain amount of brokenness over her barrenness.

But God had big plans for Sarah. He was going to take her everyday desire of everyday life and transform it into something great.

The Desires of Your Heart

You were created for a purpose. God designed you specifically to be able to fulfill His purpose for you in the earth.

“For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them” (Ps. 139:13-16, NKJV).

You were fearfully and wonderfully made—body, soul, and spirit—with God’s plan for you in mind. Nothing about you is an accident, from the color of your eyes to your natural gifts and talents to the things that draw your heart. You have a purpose, a God-given purpose that only you can fulfill. But I believe that understanding your purpose often starts with the everyday desires God puts in your heart. I believe those desires are the starting point, the place where God starts drawing you closer to His plan and purpose for you.

Psalms 37:4 says, “Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” I believe this verse means that when you delight yourself in the Lord, He will implant desires in your heart that align with His purpose for you. He will awaken some desires that were already there or change other desires, all to spur you on toward fulfilling His good plan for you. Your everyday desires are the place where everything starts.

“O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar

off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether" (Ps. 139:1-4).

God knows you. He understands your thoughts, your ways. And He understands those everyday desires in your heart because when you have delighted yourself in Him, He is the One who puts them there.

Sarah's desire for a baby was one of those everyday desires, and it was where everything started for her. God took that desire to give birth and used it to turn Sarah into the mother of nations and a woman of legendary faith.

To find meaning in life, you have to understand God's purpose for you. We all have a part to play in the family of God. You were chosen by God to be part of His family, part of the body of Christ, before the foundation of the world. You are chosen. You are accepted. You are blessed.

As a daughter of God, you need to find your place in the family. You need to find where you fit, your wonderful place. You need to discover your purpose. You need to know where your place is to serve the body of Christ and advance the kingdom of God by doing what God designed you to do. God gives every person work to do, an assignment. You are anointed for that assignment, and that means God's power to feel something, to desire something, is connected to your assignment.

You need to identify your desires and give them appropriate attention. Many of us have experienced our desires being belittled, and because of that discouragement, we don't look any deeper into whatever those desires are. But if God has awakened desires in your heart, you need to pay attention to them.

*The preceding is an excerpt from chapters 1 and 2 of **Michelle McClain-Walters' The Sarah Anointing** (Charisma House, 2022).*

*For more information or to order The Sarah Anointing, visit .
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