

How to Break Free From the Enemy's Stranglehold

We're called to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12). But our adversary the devil roams around like a roaring lion intent on devouring your **faith** (1 Pet. 5:8).

One way the devil does this is by trying to choke you, or put you in a stranglehold. In the wrestling world—and remember, we're wrestling against **principalities**, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places, according to Ephesians 6:12—a stranglehold is an illegal hold that chokes the opponent. Merriam-Webster calls it a “force or influence that chokes or suppresses freedom of movement or expression.” If the wrestler doesn't break free from the stranglehold, the lack of blood or air can cause him to black out.

Translating this to our spiritual realities, the enemy wants to choke the Word of God out of your mouth so you can't wield your sword of the Spirit or pray. The enemy wants to choke your revelation of who you are in Christ and your authority over him. The enemy wants to counter the work of the blood of Jesus and the **Holy Spirit** in your life so you'll sideline yourself. We need to learn how to prevent the enemy from getting us into a stranglehold in the first place—but if we've fallen into the devil's trap, we can break free with one simple **prayer**.

Worry: The Devil's Stranglehold

What is this stranglehold I'm talking about? Worry. Did you know that one definition of *worry* is “to harass by tearing, biting or snapping especially at the throat” and “to shake or pull at with the teeth” or to “to assail with rough or aggressive attack or treatment”?

This is one of the enemy's so-called roaring lion tactics. He magnifies our circumstances to get us to worry. Once we begin to worry, he moves in position to engage us in a stranglehold that makes us feel powerless to do anything about that which we're worrying. It's a clever strategy that plays on internal cares that we haven't cast on the Lord—or that we continue taking back from His able hands.

Jesus understood the danger of worry. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus went off on a bunny trail about worry in Matthew 6:25-34 that goes like this:

“Therefore I say to you, do not **worry** about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by **worrying** can add one cubit to his stature?

“So why do you **worry** about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

“Therefore do not **worry**, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Breaking Free From Satan's Stranglehold

Jesus warns us repeatedly not to **worry**, but He also tells us

what to do instead. He inspires our faith for provision by telling us to look at nature and assuring us of our value to Him. Then He instructs us to get our mind off what we need—and that could be anything, from provision to healing to protection to relationship-mending and beyond—and seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

In His infinite wisdom, Jesus knows that if you focus on what the enemy shows you—the lack, the symptoms, the trial, the trouble—you’ll worry and fall into Satan’s stranglehold. But if you focus on the kingdom and His righteousness, you’ll build your **faith** to overcome any circumstance. If you seek first the kingdom and His righteousness, Satan can’t get you into a stranglehold.

If you’ve already fallen into the enemy’s trap, you can do what Peter suggested before he warns us to be vigilant, “because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8): You can cast all your **worry** on Him, because He cares for you (v. 7). And when you feel that anxiety and **worry** rising up in your soul, you can take Paul’s advice:

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

When you do these things, the enemy can’t keep his grip on you. Amen.

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Finding God's Grace for the Unlovable

In an hour, I leave for a school **Christmas** program, and I know at least two of my Spanish students have solos. I can hardly wait to hear them sing.

Because life is more than Spanish and I need to always remember my 45 minutes with nouns and verbs and conjugations is only a little bit of who they are. Some of them aren't so good at pronouncing words correctly, but they can shoot a three-pointer with ease.

They ride horses. They play guitars and flutes and pianos. They paint and draw cartoons and make computer graphics. People are more than we see of them in a day.

"It's leaning," my husband said. "The **Christmas tree** is leaning."

"Not from here," I said.

He was looking from a different place in the room than I was. Trees and people look differently from one angle than they do from another.

Which is why we need to remember our husband isn't just the man who leaves his cup in the living room. He's also the man who spends eight hours at work every day, doing hero kind of stuff, like earning mortgage money.

And our kids aren't just the ones who can step over their wet towels 50 times and never pick them up. They're also the ones being brave at public school and trying to love Jesus in the middle of exploding F-bombs and teenage drama.

Those people of yours? When is the last time you saw them in a different setting and appreciated who they are in all those hours when you aren't with them?

Paul says, "Bear with each other" (Col. 3:13, NIV). One way we can bear with each other is to look at the **person's whole life** and not just the angle we see day in and day out.

So I put on snow boots to watch my students sing, and tomorrow I will love them more because I have pulled back to enjoy a panoramic view of who **God** has shaped them to be.

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5 Ways to Build a Missional Mindset in Your Children

It has been said that **Christianity** is only one generation away from extinction.

It would be so easy to leave the responsibility of **spiritual training** at the door of the Sunday school teacher or youth pastor, but the truth is that if we are going to raise up a generation of world changers, we have to aim higher than simply raising obedient and respectful citizens. The responsibility rests on our shoulders as keepers of our home to go the distance in building in our children a missional mindset that will not let them rest until they have heeded Jesus' call to go into all of the world.

Here are 5 ways to build a missional mindset in our children:

Read stories of past missionary heroes. Amy Carmichael,

Hudson, Taylor, Adironam Judson, Mary Slessor, Gladys Aylward. Their stories are filled with adventure, and will inspire your young children from a young age to seek for more than career with a good salary and benefits. It will challenge them heed a call to lay up treasures in heaven.

Adopt a missionary. Sponsor a missionary, put their picture on your fridge and pray for them daily. Write letters and ask questions and send birthday and Christmas cards. Make them one of them family. Not only will this help your children connect with one of today's missionaries, it will bless the missionary, too. Many missionaries feel forgotten and so far from home. Having someone on the home front (who isn't their mom) who sends cards, letters and candy bars they can't get where they live will mean so much!

Sponsor a child. Connect with World Vision or another child sponsor program to adopt a child. Remind your children that this is a command of Jesus and that when we feed and clothe those in need; we are feeding and clothing Jesus, too! Introduce the child you are sponsoring to them and hang his picture on your fridge so they can connect with him on a more personal level. Talk about the country they live in, find it on a map and then pray for the child every day.

Get involved in local missions. Volunteer as a family at a local soup kitchen, collect toys for a Christmas toy drive, or pack shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child. As you work together, share with your children about the how the work you are doing not only provides for the physical needs of those you are helping, but also for their spiritual needs. Pray together for the work you are doing as a family and for the people you will be ministering to.

Make a mission wall. Purchase a map of the nation your missionary serves in, gather pictures, statistical data and other interesting information about their country and make a mission wall in your home to help you remain connected to the work they are doing.

As I have talked with fellow missionaries, one thing has stood out in our conversations: they feel that general interest in missions is waning. Perhaps it is because of the economic struggles many are facing, so in their struggle to just survive they have let their interest in missions slip to the back burner. Whatever the reason, one thing is certain – we can't afford to let the idea of missions – whether local missions or world missions – fall by the wayside. We must pass on the importance of Jesus' command to the next generation!

Reprinted with permission from Missional Women. Rosilind Jukic is an American girl married to a Bosnian guy who lives in a small village just outside of Zagreb. They have two crazy boys 3 and under who are as opposite as boys can be. When Rosilind isn't writing, she is dreaming up recipes and searching for ways to organize her home better. You can find her at A Little R & R where she writes about missions, marriage and family, toddler activities, and her recipes.

Michael Brown's 'Authentic Fire' Book Answers John MacArthur's Accusations

John MacArthur set off a firestorm of debate in November when he launched his *Strange Fire* book and conference flatly charging the **charismatic** church with irreverence to the **Holy Spirit**, heresy through prosperity teaching and other offenses.

Now **charismatic** Bible scholar and theologian Michael L. Brown is offering an in-depth response in an e-book entitled *Authentic Fire: A Response to John MacArthur's Strange Fire*. Indeed, the book confronts one of the most

explosive current debates among Christians.

“We feel there’s a real urgency to get this message out,” says Tom Freiling, director of Excel Publishers and founder of Xulon Press. “That’s why we’re releasing *Authentic Fire* as an e-book. MacArthur unfairly criticizes **charismatics** in his book, and the body of Christ deserves a response. There’s no better scholar and author than Michael L. Brown to make the biblical case for **charismatic** theology.”

In direct contrast to the “collective war” launched by MacArthur, Brown makes a biblical case for the continuation of the New Testament **gifts of the Spirit** and demonstrates the unique contribution to missions, theology and worship made by the charismatic church worldwide.

Brown also calls for an appreciation of the unique strengths and weaknesses of both cessationists and **charismatics**, inviting readers to experience God. And he demonstrates how **charismatic** leaders have been addressing abuses within their own movement for decades.

“This project is innovative on many levels,” Freiling continues. “First, the author wrote the book miraculously in less than one month—all 420 pages with hundreds of endnotes. Second, we designed, typeset and produced the e-book in a mere two weeks.”

Bags of Hope for Abused Children

The Rev. Pebbles Thompson spends much of her time doing something she dislikes—fundraising—to bring hope to neglected

and abused children, whom she considers society's most powerless members.

Some 6,900 cases of child abuse and neglect are reported annually in North Dakota, where Thompson's organization, Project Ignite Light, operates—and that number spikes to 3 million annually at the national level.

Launched on a shoestring budget—and still operating without government funds—Project Ignite Light provides a “Bag of Hope” to youngsters who are brought to child advocacy centers in the state so workers can investigate abuse claims. Costing about \$50 apiece, these bags contain fleece blankets, pajamas, socks, underwear, a toothbrush, a copy of Max Lucado's book *You Are Special* and other items.

More than a supply of functional items, the bags provide young children in frightful circumstances with a measure of control and security along with a statement of their value. Since April 2008, the ministry has distributed more than 2,000 of these care bags to children in reported abuse cases as it aims to shine God's light in the darkness of abuse.

The organization hopes to one day host summer camps for foster children on the 40-acre site where the Bags of Hope are packed and distributed.

Thompson has also trained her sights on expanding the work beyond North Dakota through a training program that will take the nonprofit nationwide. Though the organization can ship its supplies anywhere, she believes prayer and personal support need to originate at the community level.

“We don't have a [starting] date in mind,” Thompson says of the anticipated training program. “We're growing and changing and praying constantly. We're in uncharted territory.”

But to get there, Thompson has set a goal to raise at least \$1 million a year.

“I didn’t get into ministry to be a fundraiser,” she says, “but fundraising makes this possible. The Lord was beaten and abused for these children. The cause is worth it.”

For Project Ignite Light, this cause comes down to the promise of Micah 7:7-8, which concludes with the words, “The Lord will be a light to me.”

“I love that stance,” Thompson says of the phrase. “It says to these children, ‘I’m going to get back up, and God’s going to help me.’” —Ken Walker

When You’re Persecuted for Praying in Tongues

When I sent my daughter on an inner-city mission trip in another state, I was shocked to later learn that her temporary home church did not believe in **miracles** or some **gifts of the Spirit**.

Indeed, this revelation was more shocking to me than the Hawaiian church where parishioners believe that a painting and a cross miraculously produce myrrh or the fake miracle scandal that rocked a church in Uyo recently.

In other words, it’s more surprising that a Bible-believing church that claims to fully embrace the Trinity would shun the miraculous than it is to read about people who believe questionable miracles or even downright scams.

When it comes to **miracles**, it seems we have at least four camps in Christendom: those who believe the Word of God at face value, including the **gifts of the Spirit**; those who are

easily deceived by gold dust, gemstones and miracle soap; those who want to believe in the miracle-working power of God so much that they see **miracles** where there are no miracles; and those who believe God stopped being God at the conclusion of the book of Acts.

For all my writing about merchandising **prophets** who seek to fleece the sheep with hyped-up **prophecies** and fake miracles, those who don't believe in the power of God to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons (Matt. 10:8) also grieve my spirit. That's because although the motives of a cessationist are not dark and deceptive like a **false prophet** or false teacher, these highly vocal nonbelieving believers are nevertheless doing damage to the church.

My daughter was actually persecuted by some leaders and members of this non-miracle-believing church, which argues that some of the Holy Spirit's gifts, including speaking in tongues and the gifts of healing and miracles, were temporary and intended for confirmation in the early church before the New Testament was completed. The pastor had unkind words to say to my daughter—and at least one mother wouldn't allow her daughter to come near to mine because I believe in **praying in the Spirit**, casting out devils, waging **spiritual warfare** and all the rest of what mainstream **Pentecostals** and **charismatics** believe.

The **Holy Spirit** offers nine gifts, and Paul wanted to make sure we weren't ignorant of them. Let's review Scripture:

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the

same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

You can't pick and choose which gifts of the **Holy Spirit** you want to believe in any more than you can pick and choose which Scriptures to live by: "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Ps. 12:6). Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8). The gifts of the Spirit did not cease when Luke crossed the last *t* and dotted the last *i* in the book of Acts. It's the **spirit of religion** that denies the power of God. Indeed, Paul warned Timothy:

"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

I am witnessing a disturbing trend, and it goes beyond miracle soap sellers, gold dust and gemstone collectors. I'm seeing more people who have a form of godliness but deny the power of God. As we move deeper into the end times, we need to build more faith in the **supernatural power of God** to provide for our needs, keep our bodies strong, keep our minds free from deception and the like. But it seems the enemy has already deceived many into thinking God isn't who He says He is and can't do what He says He can do. It seems many in the church are already deceived. And none of us are immune to being deceived.

God, open our eyes—all of us—to our wrong thinking and wrong believing so that we can see You rightly and respond to Your Spirit quickly in the name of Jesus!

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Despite the Doom and Gloom, Jesus Is Still Lord

As news editor for *Charisma* magazine, I read hundreds of stories every week about the good, bad and ugly. Unfortunately, most of it is bad and ugly.

Through this lens, it's clear that **anti-Christ** agendas and **false gospels** are rising. In the world, we see the homosexual agenda, the socialist agenda, the atheist agenda and so on. In the church, we see the hypergrace movement, sexual scandals in the church and cessationist wars that grieve the **Holy Spirit**.

Still, Jesus is Lord.

Over the Thanksgiving break, I was encouraged by some seemingly trivial observations. For example, the **Gideon Bible** was still in my drawer at the Embassy Suites in downtown Tampa. When I went down for breakfast, a couple sitting next to me held hands and prayed over their meal in the **name of Jesus**. In nearby St. Petersburg, a nativity scene was displayed in all its glory.

Yes, the **culture wars** are real. The atheists really are trying to drive Christianity out of the public square, and radical gay activists really are trying to redefine traditional marriage. Yes, there is trouble in the church. High-profile pastors really are falling into sexual immorality or committing suicide. Yes, it's likely to get darker in the days ahead.

Still, Jesus is Lord.

Peter warns us, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). And to that I say a hearty amen. But nowhere in that verse does it call us to be paranoid or to be afraid of what will happen next. In fact, the Bible tells us repeatedly to "fear not."

Paul warned us not to be ignorant of the devil's devices (2 Cor. 2:11). Again, I say amen. But the apostle didn't intend for us to exalt the enemy over Jesus. We need to put on our spiritual armor because we are wrestling against principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness and spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12). But God always leads us into triumph in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14).

Each and every week, I sound the alarm through this column because we need to be sober and vigilant; we need to be educated about the devil's devices; we need to be equipped to wrestle against that which is wrestling against us. But this week I am blowing the trumpet in Zion and sounding an alarm in God's holy mountain (Joel 2:1).

I would encourage you to read Joel 2 in its entirety. We need to heed God's Word in this hour. We need to continue issuing the call to repentance in the church. Then the Lord will be zealous for His land. Then God will pour His Spirit out upon us so we won't grow weary in this wrestling match—and we won't grow paranoid or fearful either.

Spiritual warfare is a reality, but Jesus is still Lord.

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What Satan Doesn't Want You to Know About Spiritual Warfare

When God called Jeremiah as a **prophet** to the nations, it came with a sixfold prophetic-apostolic mandate to root out, pull down, destroy, throw down, build and plant. A humble Jeremiah accepted the calling and, despite the **spiritual warfare** that raged against him, he walked in obedience and fulfilled his mission in God.

Prophets or not, God's people are still called to root out, pull down, destroy, throw down, build and plant. We don't engage in physical battles, but we wrestle "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12, NKJV). We have spiritual weapons for offense and defense, including the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit and prayer (vv. 14-18).

As Paul said, "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not

carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled" (2 Cor. 10:3-6, KJV).

3 Things Satan Doesn't Want You to Know

First, Satan doesn't want you to know that you have the authority in Christ to root out, pull down, destroy, throw down, build and plant. Or, as Paul describes it, pull down strongholds, cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Second, Satan doesn't want you to know that you are wrestling against persons without bodies that are launching fiery, faith-stealing darts against your mind in the form of thoughts contrary to God's Word.

However, most savvy Christians understand their authority in Christ and realize they are in a battle that's targeting their minds. Yet there's still one thing Satan doesn't want you to know about **spiritual warfare**: You can't effectively pull down strongholds, cast down imaginations and bring every thought into captivity without casting down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God in your own mind. Consider the Amplified Bible's version of 2 Corinthians 10:3-6:

"For though we walk (live) in the flesh, we are not carrying on our warfare according to the flesh and using mere human weapons. For the weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood], but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds, [inasmuch as we] refute arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the [true] knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away

captive into the obedience of Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One), being in readiness to punish every [insubordinate for his] disobedience, when your own submission and obedience [as a church] are fully secured and complete.”

Casting Down Your Proud Thoughts

We all know we can't battle Satan in the flesh, yet the temptation is to rely on the flesh in warfare in subtle ways. As I've noted in the past, in an article entitled "You're Resisting the Devil, So Why Won't He Flee?" we can take pride in our **spiritual warfare** skills. But it's not just pride in our warfare skills that can hinder our effectiveness in destroying strongholds. It's pride in any area of our life.

Of course, we all have a measure of pride in our carnal nature. But when the **Holy Spirit** is dealing with us about pride in some area—or when we see our own pride and don't cry out for the grace of humility—we're walking in sheer disobedience. The Bible says we are to have a "readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled (2 Cor. 10:6, KJV). I believe the more we seek to walk in obedience to the Word of God, the more effective we'll be in **spiritual warfare**.

So we return once again to the admonition of James: "He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:6-8, NKJV).

In our flesh, we're no match for the devil. We need the power of the **Holy Spirit** to back up our authority in Christ to root out, pull down, destroy, throw down, build and plant. We can't drive demons into obedience to the Word of God when we're blatantly disobeying the Word of God in any area, whether it's walking in pride or some other sin.

Before you engage in **spiritual warfare**, examine your heart, and take the time to break agreement with the enemy, repent before God and ask for His guidance. It could be that you've opened the door to the spiritual enemies that are attacking you and that simply renouncing agreement with them will stop the attack. In any case, we should enter **spiritual warfare** with confidence but not arrogance. We can be confident that God will lead us into triumph over our enemies if we lean and depend on Him and not on carnal weapons or pride. Amen.

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The God Watchers

Don Nori Sr. (Destiny Image)

Don Nori Sr.'s latest book release, *The God Watchers*, speaks of a simple yet profound truth to live by: Jesus did what He saw the Father in heaven do, and we can follow in His footsteps. Writing with a humble heart, searching eyes and spiritually sensitive ears, the author urges us to set aside our personal agendas for God's plans.

Nori's seamless, soul-stirring message produces in us a desire to hear the Spirit and perceive the Lord at work in our day-to-day lives. According to the author, God is a prolific talker. He is always speaking, but our ability to hear what He is saying requires a quieted soul.

The secret to being a God watcher is found in Jesus'

surrendered life, Nori says. When we're positioned to see, sense, feel and hear God's heart, we can then embrace a greater reality of God and of His manifest presence. In the realm of the Spirit, we see Him, discern His presence and participate in His earthly plans.

Nori writes that yielded brokenness allows God to build His church and radically transform lives that are seeking to do His will. The search for recognition, titles and authority are set aside to heed the call to decrease so He may increase. This allows God's nature, passion and power to flow through our every living so it's no longer "business as usual" in our personal and corporate lives as God's Spirit leads us into a vibrant faith walk.

Nori has vested us with a revolutionary read that pulls the rug from under religious mindsets that have boxed God into theologies, church services and the structures of man. God watchers are those who have ears to hear and eyes to see the new things God is saying and doing.

The God Watchers is a provocative book—the sort that only comes along once in a while. And its immeasurable worth is inherently found in its focus: Jesus, the ultimate God watcher, becomes our example. It's a simple path to follow that unburdens us from self-centered ways as we trust God's heart and participate in His plans for the world. —*Ibelisse Sánchez*

Taking a Christmas Stand

After more than eight years giving national commentaries on Fox News, Todd Starnes is familiar to millions of TV viewers. The longtime journalist has never hidden his Christian

beliefs, whether in books, on his radio program or in other venues.

And Starnes is outspoken about Christmas. Last December, that included shout-outs on his website to groups such as Lee University's a cappella ensemble choir and the University of Mobile's *Twelve Days of Christmas* production.

However, the commentator doesn't need a huge audience to take a stand. One time he walked out of a major department store in New York after he greeted a checkout clerk with "Merry Christmas" and she replied, "Season's greetings."

"I said, 'Which season are you talking about?'" Starnes says. "She said they weren't able to say 'Merry Christmas.' I asked them to give me my money back. I just didn't do business with those folks. From my standpoint, [everyone] has those decisions to make."

Even though Starnes uses "Naughty and Nice" lists to guide his Christmas shopping, the host of radio's *Fox News & Commentary* would like to see fellow believers take stronger stands in public venues. Starnes, who devotes a chapter to Christmas controversies in his upcoming book, *God Less America*, thinks too many Christians are content to confine their support for Christmas to home and church.

To emphasize the need for greater activism on the part of Christians, he shares the story of the elementary school in Indiana whose Christmas pageant featured a student singing, "Allah is great; praise be to Allah."

"There was no uniquely Christian moment to the pageant," Starnes says. "It went so far as to praise Islam, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa, but Christians were left out in the cold."

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