

Michael Sweet of Stryper

My favorite Christmas album is Nat King Cole's *The Christmas Song*. For me, it highlights the perfect Christmas spirit, and it also has the most anointed version of "O Holy Night" that I've ever heard. Nat's voice and the arrangements always make me feel like it's Christmas, even in Las Vegas in the middle of July. *-Felicia Abraham*

Julie Elias

I think Mariah Carey has one of the most impressive voices of all time. Even though her album *Merry Christmas* came out in 1994 (20 years ago!), it's still my favorite. "All I Want for Christmas Is You" is one of the most joyful, upbeat Christmas tunes I know of. Range-wise, her version of "O Holy Night" is untouchable. I love that she includes some songs about Jesus, even though she's a pop artist with a secular audience. "Jesus Born on This Day" is so heavenly. You can have your lights, decorations, cookies ... but for me, as far as creating a Christmas atmosphere, it's all about this album! *-Felicia Abraham*

John Bevere Answers: 'Should

I Leave My Church?'

I'm often asked, "When should I leave a **church** or ministry team? How bad does it have to get?"

I respond, "Who sent you to the church you presently attend?"

The majority of the time they answer, "God did."

"If God sent you," I reply, "do not leave until God releases you. If the Lord is silent, He is often saying, 'Don't change a thing. Do not leave. Stay where I have placed you!'"

When God does instruct you to leave, you will go out with peace, no matter what the condition of the ministry: "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace" Is. 55:12, KJV). Therefore, your departure will not be based on the actions or behavior of others but rather on the Spirit's leading.

So **leaving a ministry** is not based on how bad things are. To leave with an offended or critical spirit is not the plan of God. It is reacting rather than acting on His guidance. Romans 8:14 (NKJV) says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

Notice it does not say, "For as many as react to difficult situations, these are sons of God."

Almost every time the word *son* is used in the New Testament, it comes from the two Greek words *teknon* and *huios*. A good definition for the word *teknon* is "one who is a son by mere fact of birth."

When my first son, Addison, was born, he was John Bevere's son by mere fact that he came from my wife and me. When he was in the nursery in the midst of all the other newborns, you could not recognize him as my son by personality. When friends and family came to visit, they could not pick him out except

by the nametag above his crib. He did not possess anything that set him apart. Addison would be considered a *teknon* of John and Lisa Bevere.

We find *teknon* used in Romans 8:15–16. It says that because we have received the spirit of adoption, “the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children [*teknon*] of God.” When a person receives Jesus Christ as Lord, he is a child of God by fact of the new birth experience. (See John 1:12.)

The other Greek word translated *sons* in the New Testament is *huios*. Many times it is used in the New Testament to describe “one who can be identified as a son because he displays the character or characteristics of his parents.” As my son Addison grew, he started looking and acting like his father. When Addison was 6, Lisa and I took a trip and left him with my parents. My mother told my wife that Addison was almost a carbon copy of his daddy. His personality was like mine when I was his age. As he has grown, he has become more like his dad. He now can be recognized as John Bevere’s son, not only by the fact of his birth but also by the characteristics and a personality that resemble his father’s.

So, to put it simply, the Greek word *teknon* means “babies or immature sons,” and the Greek word *huios* is most often used to describe “mature sons.”

Looking at Romans 8:14 again, it reads: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons [*huios*] of God.” We can see clearly here that it is the mature sons who are led by the Spirit of God.

Immature Christians are less likely to follow the leading of the Spirit of God. Most often they react or respond emotionally or intellectually to circumstances they face. They have not yet learned to act only on the Spirit of God’s leading.

As Addison grows, he will progress in character development. The more mature he becomes, the more responsibility I will entrust to him. It is wrong for him to stay immature. It is not God's will that we remain babies.

One way the character of Addison has grown is by facing difficult situations. When he started school, he met up with some "bullies." I heard some of the things these rough kids were doing and saying to my son, and I wanted to go and deal with it. But I knew that would be wrong. For me to intervene would hinder Addison's growth.

So my wife and I continued to counsel him at home, preparing him to face the persecutions at school. He grew in character through obeying our counsel in the midst of his suffering.

This is similar to what God does with us. The Bible says, "Though He [Jesus] was a Son [*Huios*], yet *He learned obedience by the things which He suffered*" (Heb. 5:8, emphasis added).

Physical growth is a function of time. No 2-year-old child has ever been 6 feet tall. Intellectual growth is a function of learning. Spiritual growth is a function of neither time nor learning, but rather of obedience. Now look at what Peter says: "Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for *he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*" (1 Pet. 4:1, emphasis added).

A person who has ceased from sin is a perfectly obedient child of God. He is mature. He chooses God's ways, not his own. Just as Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered, we learn obedience by the difficult circumstances we face. When we obey the Word of God that is spoken by the Holy Spirit, we will grow and mature in times of conflict and suffering.

Our knowledge of Scripture is not the key. Obedience is.

Now we understand one reason why we have people in the church who have been Christians for 20 years, who can quote verses and chapters of the Bible, who have heard a thousand sermons and have read many books but still wear spiritual diapers. Every time they meet with difficult situations, rather than responding by the Spirit of God, they seek to protect themselves in their own way. They are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). They never come to the knowledge of the truth because they do not apply it.

Truth must be allowed to have its way in our lives if we are going to grow and mature. It is not enough to give mental assent to truth without obeying it. Even though we continue to learn, we never mature because of disobedience.

John Bevere is a popular speaker at conferences and churches and the author of best-sellers The Bait of Satan and The Fear of the Lord. He is host of The Messenger TV show and directs Messenger International ministry. This article was excerpted from his popular book The Bait of Satan.

Rod Parsley: The Cross of Jesus Christ Is ‘Scandalous’

In his new book, *The Cross*, Rod Parsley shares how he believes society has diluted an important focus on the symbol of Christ’s sacrifice and why Christians should actively strive to recapture its significance in this critical season for the church. *Charisma* recently checked in with Parsley to ask him about the book, its inspiration and why the cross is “scandalous.” Here’s what he had to say.

Charisma: Do you feel this is the most important book you've written? Why?

Rod Parsley: I'll leave it for others to sort out which of my books are the most important. Certainly I consider it a timely message for the body of Christ. It has been a two-year labor of love for me, and I've thoroughly enjoyed the process.

I do believe this is a critical season for the church. When I was researching *Culturally Incorrect* a few years ago, I was shocked to learn that just 4 percent of Generation Y—my daughter's generation—were Bible-believing Christians. That compares to 35 percent of my generation and 65 percent of my parents' generation. We certainly can't afford any greater erosion of the church!

The **cross** has been the centerpiece of my preaching for more than 30 years. In part, I felt impressed to write this book now in order to bring some neglected truths back to the forefront of our national conversation. I'm convinced that the answers to today's major moral issues will not be found in the halls of Congress, the decisions of the Supreme Court, within the platform of a political party or in the talking points of elected officials. The answers are found at the foot of an old rugged cross. The sooner we realize this, the more readily we'll see the moral decline of our nation turnaround.

Charisma: You write that we live in a cross-less generation. How has the cross lost its significance in our modern world?

Parsley: I've noticed a trend for the past few years where the cross is more commonplace than ever, yet it's being trivialized as never before. They dangle around the necks of entire constellations of godless gyrating pop-stars. Professional athletes brand their bodies with cross **tattoos** of every size and variation imaginable. But for many of them, their lifestyle portrays a stunning ignorance of the cross's meaning.

Additionally, the culture has marginalized the cross to a greater degree than at any other moment in my lifetime. In the public square, a fatally flawed interpretation of the Constitution has essentially driven the cross from our public landmarks and cityscapes.

And sadly, the church has followed suit. Many modern churches don't render the cross as the focal point of its architecture, and it has largely disappeared from the interior and exterior of our church buildings. Maybe we've listened to too many consultants who have convinced us that the cross belongs to the last century or that it's bad marketing.

As I've been saying for many years, there is much to be gained by a return to the discarded values of the past. Certainly that includes a reverence for Jesus's sacrificial death on the cross.

Charisma: When did the gospel drastically change your life?

Parsley: My family attended a number of Free Will Baptist churches on the south side of Columbus, Ohio, when I was a boy. Even at a young age I was fascinated by the stained-glass windows in those churches, each depicting a biblical scene that was superimposed upon a large cross. In those days, there were no self-imposed taboos about the preaching of the cross. That's why I dedicated this book to the Free Will Baptist preachers who painted a vivid picture in my mind about the **sacrifice of Christ**, the love displayed on Calvary and the desire to help humanity find their way to the foot of the cross.

Charisma: Why do you call the cross of Jesus Christ scandalous?

Parsley: Because that's what Scripture says! Paul records in 1 Corinthians 1:23, "But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." The Greek word rendered "stumbling block" is *skandalon*. That's where our English word

scandal comes from. It actually describes something that causes a person to trip or an obstacle that stands in his or her path.

The message of Jesus and the cross was a stone of stumbling for the religious, tradition-loving Jews and an absurdity to the trendy, intellectual Greeks. And those are essentially the same responses of those who reject that message today.

The cross is **scandalous** because it's an affront to man's pride, to his wisdom and intellect, to his self-righteousness. There is something deeply ingrained in the collective heart of fallen mankind that demands a better, nobler, prettier narrative than the cross offers. In our fallen state, we can't believe that the pathway to redemption is so simple and straightforward. Only when we embrace God's offer of **salvation** can we see this scandal for the truth that it is.

Charisma: We see revival crusades happening more frequently. Do you see more of a need for the gospel emerging in the United States?

Parsley: This generation has the same desperate need for the gospel that every generation before it has had. Those of us who grew up in the Church sometimes adopt the mindset that we inherited our faith from our parents. But we are each responsible for our response to God's **offer of salvation**. Ultimately, the goal of this book is for readers to be so radically transformed and motivated that their life's mission becomes to introduce others to the love of God that motivated Him to send His one and only Son as our substitute and provide us with life everlasting.

If there are more revival services today, that is probably a function of more people in need of reviving! My prayer is that the lasting fruit that comes from these revivals is an influx of the jewels of souls being placed in the crown of our Savior.

Charisma: How can we as a culture regain reverence for the message of the cross?

Parsley: There has been a lot of bad theology spread by theologians of prosperity regarding the cross in the past 10-15 years, with a stream of books calling for a “reimagining” or “reinterpreting” of the cross.

The cross does not need to be rethought. It needs to be proclaimed. As ministers of the gospel fulfill their divine calling and preach the cross, people will give it the **reverence** it deserves.

Jesus said it best: “And I, *when I am lifted up* from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32, emphasis added).

Charisma: How can Christians evangelize effectively to their friends and family?

Parsley: The most effective means of evangelism is one the evangelist will do—and that includes the evangelists who sit in our pews.

I am proud of our work with [my television show] *Breakthrough*, and we have the documented results to prove that we are adding daily to the **kingdom of God**. But my image and voice via television are not nearly as effective as a faithful saint simply telling friends and family members what Jesus Christ has done for him or her and what He will do for them.

But it takes commitment! That’s why the church, in addition to winning the lost, needs to be about the business of edifying and encouraging the saints to be ministers of the gospel where they are most influential.

Still Standing Despite Disease and Death

Mary Pappas wasn't sure she'd have a shot at a normal life. Diagnosed with a rare form of cancer of the thymus gland at the age of 23, she then battled cancer no less than six times—plus suffered a miscarriage—and lived to tell about all of it.

In her new book, *Courage, Hope and Healing*, Pappas writes of the first tumor doctors found when she was a young newlywed, which turned out to be just one of many. She endured radiation, chemotherapy, experimental treatment and surgery after surgery.

“You learn who you are and who Christ is when you're right in the middle of your needs—when you are weak and God is strong,” she says.

Pappas says she learned to rely on this truth again when she had her miscarriage. It was devastating, as she believed God had promised her a child.

“I thought, ‘Lord, You blew it.’ I said, ‘I'm not getting up off this floor until You tell me something,’” she says.

God did speak, promising restoration and a double blessing. A year later, she gave birth to healthy twin boys.

“He makes a way when there seems to be no way,” she says. “Even though we go through really hard things in life, God sees the big picture that we don't see.”

For Pappas, who is finally cancer-free after 30 years, God has not only restored life, but also is using her to speak into the lives of others. Today, she is an advocate for cancer patients and survivors, using her story to offer encouragement

at churches, conferences and retreats, saying God used her to help those who suffer with sickness or loss even when she was in the middle of her own cancer battles.

“You never know when you’re an answer to someone’s prayers,” she says. “I want people to know that they are valuable. Their life can make a difference.” –*Felicia Abraham*



A Tidal Wave of Baptisms

Six hundred seventy-three young people made public commitments to Christ through baptism on the shores of Daytona Beach, Fla., this summer. New Spring Church in Anderson, S.C., saw more than 2,500 middle and high school students attend an annual summer camp, dubbed The Gauntlet, where more than 300 young people were saved in addition to those baptized.

The event marked the largest occasion of baptisms in the church’s history.

“We have seen so much healing and so much brokenness being completed,” says Brad Cooper, the church’s student director. “We’re just so pumped!” –*Felicia Abraham*

Why the Prosperity Gospel Is Such a Big Hit With Reality TV Show Producers

About two years ago, a casting producer working with a major television studio contacted me about starring in a new reality TV series about women of faith.

The producers wanted to follow me around at work, at church and at home. I prayed about it and decided it wasn't what the Holy Spirit had in mind for my life. I don't think the show was ever produced, but over the last two years, many "Christian" reality TV shows have hit the airwaves. Some, like Kirk Cameron's *The Way of the Master*, are inspiring. Others, like *Duck Dynasty*, are so popular that the faces of the Robertsons stare at me from lunchboxes every time I shop at Wal-Mart.

What's more, a slew of new "Christian" reality TV shows are in the works. Some essentially mock Christians while others just let Christians mock themselves. *Preachers of L.A.* is one of the latter and has sparked so much controversy—and probably high ratings and advertising revenue—that a copycat is already emerging, called *Thicker Than Water*. The new show seemingly hopes to blend *Preachers of L.A.* and *Duck Dynasty* with a jazzy twist.

Bravo describes the show this way: "This southern family integrates their strong religious conviction with their penchant for the finer things in life. With the belief that 'God wants us all to be millionaires,' the Tankards aim to be the best and brightest in everything they do."

The trailer for the new show shows the Tankard family playing croquet in a lush green yard at their Nashville, Tenn., mansion. One of the daughters celebrates hitting the ball

through the wires when you suddenly hear best-selling jazz musician Ben Tankard's voiceover explain, "The Tankard clan is a blended family. We are the black *Brady Bunch*."

The trailer goes on to display the interior of the Tankards' luxury home, complete with its indoor fountain, expensive chandeliers and grand piano.

"We live life on the good side. We live in a three-level mansion ... seven vehicles to drive," Tankard says. "Plus, I love my airplanes. My financial success comes from my musical talent. I've been poor; now I'm rich. Believe me, rich is better."

Tankard's wife, Jewel, then appears on the video, explaining how the first time she realized God wanted her to be rich was when she was a senior in college. She saw a man preaching the Word.

"Honey, there wasn't nothing broke about him!" she says. "I said, 'Oh, Lord, this is the Jesus that I love.'"

The trailer goes on to introduce other members of the Tankard clan, like Brooklyn, who admits things haven't always been easy for her. "I've been in trouble with the law and my family, but I'm a survivor, baby," she says.

Son Benji can see himself being a multimillionaire within five years. He plans on owning two hotels, a couple of McDonalds', and having two or three kids. "I don't want to be like my dad," he says. "I want to be better than my dad. I want to be the man!"

The youngest is Cyrene, who claims, "I know just what to say and just what to do to get what I want."

Another daughter, Britney, says she's the piece of the puzzle that doesn't fit—working her 9 to 5.

The trailer concludes with Jewel proclaiming, "The Tankards,

we will do everything big—his and hers Mercedes, airplanes, houses—but we are doing what God called us to do. Sometimes that bothers people, but somebody’s got to have it, so why not us?”

The trailer fades out with the sound of laughter.

I’m not against prosperity—nice cars and houses. I believe God wants us to prosper. But I don’t believe He wants us to make a spectacle of ourselves in the process or advertise God as a big sugar daddy in the sky just waiting for someone bold enough to approach His throne of grace to ask for the big cars, diamond rings and grand pianos. Likewise, I don’t believe God wants us to gloat about our prosperity or propagate a prosperity-centered gospel on cable television that gives people wrong ideas about Christianity.

They call it reality TV, but it’s not reality. It’s a gross exaggeration—and even an abuse—of the gospel message concerning prosperity.

I have been in the media business long enough to know how producers—even Christian producers—craft a story around your life that the market finds appealing to sell products. I understand the pressure to go along with the story line. I’ve seen people coached and editors cut video clips out of context to make people’s words sound as extreme as possible so people will tune in or shell out money.

I’m sure the Tankards sincerely love God and are clearly blessed, but secular producers are having a field day with their prosperity story. That’s the problem with some of these so-called “Christian” reality TV shows. Secular producers have found a cash cow in the prosperity gospel and are exploiting it for all its worth. Don’t be surprised to see more *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* with Christians agreeing to be primed and pimped out on shows like *Preachers of L.A.* and *Thicker Than Water* on your cable network in the

months ahead.

Let's just pray these shows don't contribute to the love of many growing cold and the Great Falling Away as people pursue the God for prosperity instead of salvation and the character of Christ in these last days.

Jennifer LeClaire is news editor at Charisma. She is also the author of several books, including *The Spiritual Warrior's Guide to Defeating Jezebel*. You can email Jennifer at @ or visit her website here. You can also join Jennifer on Facebook or follow her on Twitter.

Filmmaker Spotlights God's Grace on the Big Screen

Brad J. Silverman was climbing the ladder of Hollywood success as an actor, producer and screenwriter when he discovered his vocational success wouldn't lead him to the happiness he was searching for. After giving his life to the Lord and finding lasting joy, Silverman made the difficult decision to walk away from the movie industry. Almost a decade later, he's back in action as the writer and director of a new mainstream film, *Grace Unplugged*, geared to families. *Charisma* sat down with the filmmaker to discuss his latest move.

Charisma: Why did you initially walk away from the movie industry?

Silverman: I was just so unsatisfied with life. Nothing was bringing me joy. My career was actually doing fine, and I thought if I got to the next level of success, then I'd be

happy.

Failure was easy for me; but success is tough. Every level of success just didn't bring the happiness I thought it would. And I went through a couple of years where I was just crying out, saying "What is real in this life? What is true?"

I had a sense of desperation: "Nothing is making me happy and I don't even know up from down anymore." I questioned everything.

Through that process a friend of mine invited me to church. And over time, it was like, what do I have to lose? Then I started reading the Scriptures and going to church. And I decided it was time.

Charisma: So what made you return to the film industry after being away for 10 years?

Silverman: I came from Hollywood. I got saved in Hollywood. I walked away for a decade and the Lord just opened up a door for me that I never saw coming.

Charisma: Your new film, *Grace Unplugged*, opens in theaters Oct. 4 and is a modern-day retelling of the prodigal son story. As the screenwriter, what were you wanting to accomplish by basing it on that narrative?

Silverman: I'm hoping we prompt a lot of dialogue between families, and that this movie can be a conversation starter. At the end of the day, I don't miss the fact that this is entertainment—and I think we've made a very entertaining movie. But when the movie is over and the audience reflects on what they've seen, I want Christians to say, "Wow. I love God."

Charisma: The film is about a worship pastor's tumultuous relationship with his talented daughter, who wants to leave the church and explore a career in the secular music business.

Why was this story important for you to tell?

Silverman: This is a big issue in churches today—kids growing up and struggling with making their faith their own. That's the journey [the lead character] Grace goes on. But I also had to tell that story in a PG way. I have four children, and if I can't make a film that my teen daughters can watch, I don't want to make it.

Charisma: On that note, how difficult is it to be a Christian making films that honor Christ in Hollywood?

Silverman: It's important that Christians don't give up creative control. As believers, we must have that contractually, because we are the light in the darkness. On the flip side, Hollywood is so much a part of my life. I was an actor here, and it was a faithful brother in the Lord who led me to Christ here, so I don't shy away from that. I believe I'm called to go into battle; I don't believe I'm called to hide in a bunker and only deal with Christians. If some people are called to that, great. Personally, I feel I'm called to be in the streets with the tax collectors and to do my job as a filmmaker.

Henry Blackaby Goes Missing, Family Issues Urgent Prayer Request

Henry Blackaby, author of *Experiencing God* and many other books, is missing.

Thom S. Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay Christian

Resources, blogged about an emergency prayer relating to Blackaby's disappearance.

"This morning we learned of an urgent prayer request for noted author and pastor Henry Blackaby. Dr. Blackaby lives in the Atlanta area and has been missing since yesterday. His son Richard tweeted this morning: 'Please pray. Henry Blackaby has been missing since 4 p.m. Thursday. He is in black Lincoln without his diabetic medicine in Atlanta area.'"

Rainer is asking his readers to join him in praying for Blackaby's safe return to his family and for strength for his wife, Marilyn, and his children and other family.

Henry and Marilyn Blackaby served in churches in California before serving 18 years in Canada, where they saw many new churches begin. They raised their five children in Canada. It was also at that time that God taught the Blackabys the truths concerning walking with God that would eventually become the basis for the best-selling book *Experiencing God*.

Raised in that environment, all five children sensed a unique call of God into ministry. Their oldest son, Richard, currently serves as president of Blackaby Ministries International and resides in Greenville, S.C. Thomas Blackaby is the former senior pastor of North Sea Baptist Church in Stavanger, Norway, and now is director of international ministries for Blackaby Ministries International. He and his family reside in Maple Ridge, British Columbia. Melvin Blackaby is senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Jonesboro, Ga. Norman Blackaby is a professor at Dallas Baptist University in Dallas, Texas. Carrie Blackaby-Webb is a career missionary serving in Germany.

10 Ways the Word of Faith Movement Went Wrong

As a product of the Word of Faith movement in the early 1980s, I will forever be indebted to the books and teachings of Kenneth Hagin Sr., Smith Wigglesworth, John G. Lake, T.L. Osborn and the like. These were holy men of integrity who turned the world upside down with their faith and teaching.

I learned how to pray for the sick by reading Osborn's book *Healing the Sick*, and I learned how to resist the devil by reading Hagin's *The Believer's Authority*. In reading many biographies of Smith Wigglesworth, I have always been challenged by his utter consecration to Christ and to walk in the light of His Word whether in or out of the pulpit. I shudder to think where I would be right now if not for being influenced by these men and this movement.

That being said, as I continued to grow in the Lord and His Word, I saw several flaws in the teaching and in the movement in general. This article is not meant to dampen anyone's faith but to bring a more balanced picture of the ways of God—especially since many have been discouraged in this movement because they did not understand the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) and did not have a theology that included certain things that challenged their faith.

I have found that whenever we preach or emphasize one truth of God's Word to the exclusion of the others, it becomes a mixture and produces both good and bad fruit. For example, this has happened with the hypergrace movement, as well as the view of hyperfaith. From an overemphasis on outward holiness, we get legalism. And we come into a form of fatalism when we emphasize God's sovereignty at the expense of human responsibility.

However, I will go on record saying that I would much rather be with people attempting to walk in faith and victory than be hanging out with depressed saints filled with unbelief and

doubt. Also, like most other movements, the Word of Faith movement restored to the body of Christ a biblical truth that was neglected by the church—and in doing so, overemphasized it. But after several years, more balance comes as folks like myself “eat the meat and spit out the bones.” Also, I believe that Brother Hagin never approved of some of the excesses that came out of the faith camp—especially regarding the unbalanced teachings on prosperity that came from some of his more radical followers.

The following are some of the flaws of the Word of Faith movement from my perspective (and I realize these are generalizations that don't fit exactly every person classified as “Word of Faith”):

1. They preach a “rights centered” gospel rather than a “stewardship centered” gospel.

Perhaps influenced by our Jeffersonian heritage of individual rights in America, the way the gospel is applied to individuals in the Word of Faith movement is based on personal rights in Christ. Although this is partially true, the New Testament balances our rights in Christ with our responsibility that goes along with these rights.

For example, in Deuteronomy 8:18, we learn that God gave believers “power to get wealth, that His may establish His covenant.” This passage clearly teaches us the primary purpose of prosperity is for the kingdom—not only for our individual comfort and pleasure. Many in the faith movement used to “claim” houses and cars and attempt to use their faith merely for their own individual needs, which, in and of itself, goes against our call to seek first His kingdom (Matt. 6:33) as a prerequisite for our individual needs and wants being fulfilled.

2. Their dispensational belief precludes the role and importance of the Old Covenant in the New Covenant age.

I heard Brother Hagin brag several times in his teaching sessions that he did not read the Old Covenant because we have

a new and better covenant now in Christ. The challenge with that teaching is that he did not understand the relevance and role of the moral and civic law of God found from Exodus to Deuteronomy—especially the Ten Commandments that were repeated over and over again either exactly or in principle by the New Testament writers. Without the moral law of God, we have no standard for holiness and will lack the conviction of sin the moral law gives as our standard of holiness and ethics.

Furthermore, Hagin and others like him would only quote the Old Testament when convenient—when it comported to his view of faith. For example, he would quote Exodus 23:25, where God told the Jews He would take sickness from them, but he neglected to also teach that in order to walk in health, they had to follow the strict dietary code as found in Leviticus 11. Thus, healing for the Jews included not only claiming a promise of God but also staying away from unclean food. (In my opinion, walking in physical health also involves having a healthy diet and lifestyle—or else we are tempting God by intentionally violating His natural laws and then expecting Him to heal us.)

3. They have a semi-gnostic dualism regarding their view of God.

Word of Faith preachers have a simple view of God: Everything that is good is of God, and everything bad is from the devil.

While I totally agree God is a good God, sometimes He has to bring judgment or allow things to take place that in our natural minds may be interpreted as bad. What do Word of Faith preachers do with passages like Isaiah 45:7, in which God says He not only brings prosperity but also disaster? Or 2 Samuel 24:13, where God told King David to choose one of three calamities He would bring upon the land of Israel as punishment for his sin? Or Amos 3:6, which clearly says God sometimes brings disaster to a city? What about the book of Job, where God allows Satan to afflict Job physically with boils as well as bring disaster to other areas of his life?

I remember Brother Hagin teaching that Job doesn't count in

the New Testament because Job 42:10 says God turned the captivity of Job and that Luke 4:18 says Jesus set the captives free. That would all be fine, except for the fact that the book of James carries the life and story of Job into the New Testament for the church age—specifically, James 5:11 offers a lesson for us regarding God’s ways and dealings. (Also, without the book of Job, we have nothing to say to Christians who unexpectedly lose a loved one or experience great personal challenges and loss. Job is comforting to me as a pastor because it shows me that God is sovereign over all things—in both the good and the bad—even when it is hard to explain and understand in the natural. Furthermore, God never gave Job an explanation for why He allowed disaster to strike.)

Finally, what do Word of Faith teachers say about Revelation 2:22-23, where Jesus says that He will cast people on a bed of sickness and even strike people dead? This does not go along with the simple dualism they teach.

Now, I will be the first to say that God’s general will, as revealed in the Gospels, is for divine health (see also 3 John 2) and that, in general, He always wants us healthy in spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23) and that Jesus came for us to have an abundant life (John 10:10). But those in the Word of Faith movement have such a narrow view of the Word of God that they do not have any explanations for mysterious things that happen to us that challenge our faith. It is not always true that something bad happened to a person because they had sin (John 9:1-3) or that they didn’t get healed or calamity came to them because they lacked faith. Of course, the instance where Jesus brought sickness and death in Revelation 2:22-23 had to do with disobedience, which took people out from under the covering of the Lord (Ps. 91:1).

In summary, it is still generally God’s will to bring us health and prosperity in the context of obedience to His Word.

4. Positive confession sometimes leads to dishonesty and superficial Christianity.

I have been around many believers who are afraid to be honest and admit they are struggling with their faith. This brings people into bondage and even a form of superficial religion. Some believers are like robots—when you ask them how they are doing, they routinely say, “I am blessed and highly favored!” However, I know some of these people, and they are merely trying to keep a positive confession even though their world is falling apart.

Now, I do believe in speaking the Word of God to our challenging circumstances and not giving in to negative talk, but that is different from what James 5:16 tells us when he exhorts believers to confess their faults one to another. Positive confession is good and biblical (Prov. 18:21) as long as it doesn't stop a person from getting pastoral counsel and being honest with fellow believers when they need prayer.

5. Their view on prosperity is only based on giving.

While it is true that the Bible teaches we reap what we sow and that if we give, it will be given back to us (Luke 6:38), one of the flaws of the Word of Faith movement is that it only teaches people one side of prosperity. I believe the church needs to equip the saints not only to give but also to get, as well as how to manage what they get while investing and saving for the future.

When we only teach the saints how to give, we limit the amount of creativity and blessing some people can experience—because without combining giving with hard work, education and an understanding of how to manage and create a budget, many folks will continue in cycles of poverty even though they may experience elements of God's provision based on their giving. God can only bless in proportion to our ability to manage what He gives us!

In poor countries, I have found that when the only solution presented to the people for breaking poverty is “giving to the church,” the only person who becomes prosperous is the preacher. In the kingdom of God, the church is called to have a more empowering and holistic approach in regard to

prosperity and breaking cycles of poverty.

6. They have faith in their faith as a principle rather than it emanating out of the person of Christ.

I have found in many instances where this movement presented faith almost as an impersonal force, like the law of gravity. This led to teachings like “having faith in your faith.” When this is taught, it can disconnect faith from intimacy with the Lord. The more I get to know a person, the more I can trust them. Faith is not a force. It is a result of growing in simple trust based on growing in an experiential knowledge of the Lord. Faith is relational. It is not an impersonal force.

7. Some pastors have modeled their church preaching after these “specialists” in the body.

Brother Hagin, T.L. Osborn, Smith Wigglesworth and the like were not typical pastors called to oversee a flock. Thus, they were able to preach based on their primary assignment, which was faith and healing.

The challenge is, many pastors who don't understand this began to mimic these great men of God and attempted to build congregations only around those three themes—faith, prosperity and healing. That is OK if you are a traveling teacher or evangelist, but a congregation needs to have a balanced diet of the Word that includes the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). A pastor needs to preach on healing but also holiness; faith but also tests and trials; moving mountains but also marriage; giving financially but also stewardship and hard work. I love preaching on faith and healing, but as a pastor I often had to preach subjects I really did not have a great passion for but knew others needed to hear to fully mature in the Lord.

8. It can put guilt and bondage on believers.

I have heard of many people who walk around in guilt because they are not healed or because they are struggling financially. In some cases, I have even heard of famous faith

preachers who checked into a hospital under a different name so word would not get out that they were sick and under a doctor's care!

We need to have a culture of faith in our churches, but we also have to engender a culture of humility, honesty and brokenness—admitting that we don't always walk in victory over sin and sickness as well as making allowances for mystery. The fact is, we don't always understand why certain things happen to believers. (See again the book of Job.)

9. It can produce independent, narcissistic believers.

When the Word of Faith movement went from a stewardship-centered gospel to a rights-centered gospel, it also attracted many self-focused people—people who used God as an excuse for their lavish lifestyles and who frowned upon those living in simplicity. Unfortunately, this teaching often appealed to the narcissistic tendencies in all of us, and many large ministries were built more upon the American Dream of having a nice house and a nice car than upon taking up our cross and following Jesus. Jesus said in Luke 14:33 that we have to lose everything in order to be His disciple, but many in this movement only focus on what we gain. Truly, you can't be resurrected until you first go to the cross!

10. It is not connected to the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28.

Last but not least, the Word of Faith movement did not go far enough. Instead of limiting faith to merely believing for individual healing and health, the Word of God teaches that our faith should also transform whole cities and subdue kingdoms! (See Isaiah 61:4 and Hebrews 11:33.) The gospel is a blueprint to disciple and baptize whole people groups, not just individuals (Matt. 28:19-20). It not only deals with individual sinners but systemic evil. The Word of Faith movement, though, brings faith for individual victory but doesn't say much about corporate victory. However, regarding the community of believers, faith is also based on the corporate culture and anointing of a congregation. (First

Corinthians 11:27-32 and Hebrews 3-4 teach that whole congregations can be negatively affected by a culture of unbelief or disobedience.)

The Word of Faith movement in general separated the gospel from the kingdom and, in doing so, made it more about individual prosperity than societal transformation. When you separate the gospel from the kingdom, you tend to become more self-focused because the Good News gets disconnected from our responsibility to steward the earth. With the gospel of the kingdom, we believe in individual, congregational and societal transformation!

Finally, I believe with all of my heart that there was more good than bad in the Word of Faith movement and that it was God's intention that biblical faith for the supernatural be restored back to the church. All of us only know in part and see through a glass darkly—even the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 13:9,12). Consequently, it often takes years for the body of Christ to discern how to have balance when old truths are restored. One of the keys to life is balance—and biblical balance cannot come until we attempt to embrace the whole counsel of God!

Joseph Mattera *is overseeing bishop of Resurrection Church, Christ Covenant Coalition, in Brooklyn, N.Y. You can read more on or connect with him on Facebook or Twitter.*