

Prayer Binge

“Then He came and found them sleeping and said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not keep watch one hour?” (Mark 14:37).

I don't pray enough.

I came to this startling conclusion after a recent binge-watching experience. There was nothing wrong with the show, but there was plenty wrong with how much time I frittered away—even while producing content on my laptop through the entire series.

But this behavior did not cause conviction until my recent Greenelines interview with Dr. Dick Eastman. He is the international president of Every Home for Christ, a ministry that has planted over 4.7 billion gospel messages home to homes worldwide since 1946, resulting in over 243 million follow-up decision cards and responses.

It's Eastman's prayer life that shook my heart to consider my ways of prayer. I thought I prayed a lot until we discussed his book *Talking with God—A Practical Plan for Personal Prayer*.

“Over four decades ago, I resolved a very big issue in my life,” he says. “I decided to never allow a day to go by for the rest of my life that I did not spend a minimum of an hour in the presence of Jesus. I'm telling you that God allowed that to continue up to this day. And I would never ever say it in a boastful sense. But I say it now in gratitude that God drew me into that habit. It's the most wonderful hour of the day.”

I read *Whisper* by Mark Batterson last year, and I made a note that Batterson remembered Eastman as one who “sings in a grove of trees.”

Eastman recalls how that story developed. "Back in the mid-'80s, I had a tremendous desire to spend one entire day in my life where I did nothing but praise the Lord out loud from the time I got up in the morning and went to bed at night," he says. "I was headed to Washington, D.C., for our National Day of Prayer. They involved me in the event, so they put me up in a beautiful country club ... I woke up the next morning and sang praises to the Lord and continued all day as planned. I went to a park and was singing praises so loud that my voice became hoarse. I ended up in a grove of trees and continued to sing praises.

"And I looked up, and I said, 'Lord, I just knew I needed to do this,'" Eastman says. "And I said, 'I've done everything I know to do the praise You all day.' And He said, 'Now there's one thing you've never done in My presence.'

"A thought quickened in my spirit, and I danced before the Lord as David did," he adds. "I jumped and kicked my legs, and even the trees must have laughed at me. But I clearly heard the Lord say to me, 'You'll never know how much joy you're giving Me right now.' And I just started sobbing, sobbing."

Eastman says that after his day of prayer and praise, his ministry opened up as it has at almost no other time in his ministry.

We can tell a lot about a man by how he orders his binge steps.

Listen to my entire interview with Dick Eastman at this link, and subscribe to the *Greenelines* podcast on your favorite podcast platform. {eoa}

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Foolish Obedience

It seems so long ago that my wife and I ministered in parking lots in the Baton Rouge area with our newly launched church. At age 19, married and on fire for Jesus, we joined a church team and spent Saturdays asking grocery shoppers if they knew Jesus. There, God taught me many lessons that still bear powerful fruit.

Our church had a flatbed truck for music teams. The Power Company was our lead group and sang worship music of the day while most of us had conversations. I sang with the Light Company, and our job was to keep the anointing fresh while the A-team rested a bit. Thankfully, the Gas Company never formed.

I recall many conversations with seekers from 48 years ago. Sure, there were many rejections and much mocking, but my memory serves up hungry faces of people looking for help. I learned to simply tell folks what Jesus did for me, hand out tracts and offer to pray with them. Those were truly the good ol' days.

In my Greenelines *podcast* interview with Donna Sparks this week, she shares a story that reminded me of my experience in busy parking lots. The Holy Spirit asked her, "Are you willing to look foolish for Me?"

As an evangelist for the Assemblies of God, Sparks travels to speak and minister at churches. She admits to a tendency to slip into introversion. But she works hard to prepare and find the favor of pastors she visits.

"I had to think about that for a minute," she says. "Because as an evangelist, I don't want to look foolish. The Holy Spirit began to speak to my heart about my focus and to quit

trying to sound intelligent, quit trying to sound smart. The Spirit told me to 'just do what I asked you to do.'"

Donna says she learned to seek simplicity. She stopped trying to impress and simply pressed in.

Today, I'm praying the Lord will remind me how to multiply spiritual simplicity.

"I thought, *My goodness, this is the simplest message ever,*" Sparks says. "And the Holy Spirit just asked me to stick with it. And I said, 'OK, I will preach what You have asked me to preach.' Hundreds were baptized in the Holy Spirit in that service that morning. The power of God just moved in such a miraculous way. That night, I preached on healing with another very simple message, and many were healed in that service. The Spirit just wants us to be obedient."

The foundation of any ministry is obedience to the Holy Spirit. Whether in a parking lot, coffee shop or church meeting, when we press in to the Lord with obedience, powerful miracles, signs and wonders follow.

"We must consider whether the Holy Spirit compels us to do a certain ministry," Sparks adds. "That's it. And that's where my focus is; He is my best friend. I rely on Him completely to lead me and guide me in every church that I go into.

"I pray specifically for that congregation and ask, 'What do You want me to speak to them?'" she says. "And I believe that He will give me a fresh word for every congregation. He always provides.

☒ Listen to my entire conversation with Donna Sparks on *Greenelines* at this link, and be sure to subscribe to *Greenelines* on your favorite podcast platform for more inspiring stories like this. Check out Sparks' latest book, *The Masquerade*, wherever fine books are sold, and listen to her podcast, *Navigating Life in the Spirit*, also on the

Charisma Podcast Network. {eoa}

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Why We Must Be Intentionally Intergenerational in Ministry

It was only a five-minute encounter. But that brief meeting changed my life.

I've written before about Dr. Charles Green and what I now know was our divine appointment. It happened when his son Michael and I, both 17-year-old high school seniors, made a quick stop by the Word of Faith Temple. Our choir would soon sing in the church's huge auditorium, and our music teacher sent us to work out a performance detail.

I'd heard of Green's effective ministry with high school students. But I didn't expect a busy pastor to notice me, much less stop and speak to me.

I don't remember just what he said. I do remember that the words of life he spoke over me blossomed in my salvation two years later. They also grew within me the same desire he had to impact generations.

I spent many years replicating Green's impact in the young souls God sent my way. We shared life, love, laughter and a

whole lot of my wife's shrimp etouffee and jambalaya.

But I also had the opportunity to speak words of life and to share Spirit-birther truths—to go call the next generation up higher by listening to them more than I spoke.

Years later, when Green and I had another divine encounter at the memorial service for Chancellor Oral Roberts at the University he founded under instructions from the Lord, I took time to thank him for the significant spiritual deposit he made on that day in his church. We continue to speak regularly, and he never fails to impart wisdom and stories only he could tell.

When I think back over my years in education, marketing, ministry and now publishing, I see how God has woven the call to reach, teach and impact the younger generation(s) throughout my life. My staff knows the Lord called me to Charisma to change lives, particularly of those in succeeding generations. And that's how I see Him using me every day. I'm called to speak life into the next generation.

Not long ago, I had the privilege of spending time with Apostles Craig and Colette Toach and their team of Next Gen Prophets. The Toaches have an international ministry of speaking, writing and hosting the Next Gen Prophets podcast on our network and their own prophetic training school. They pour their lives and hearts into equipping the next generation for kingdom ministry.

“As the Lord led us from country to country, and He opened the door slowly, the vision came into view, because it's progressive,” Colette says. “Nobody decides this is what they're going to do. Nobody decides they're going to have a next-generation ministry until one day you wake up and you realize that all the steps you've taken in ministry have led to your answer to that question.”

“God is bringing back the fullness of the fivefold ministry,”

she says. “And I see in each one of these new generations, not just a passion to want to belong, but to be part of a team; they get it: ‘I can’t do this solo anymore.’”

But the desire to impact coming generations doesn’t arrive in the natural, she says. “Make no mistake—spiritual parenting is not a career choice—it’s a mandate and call,” she writes on their website at .

Craig adds another essential word about next-generation ministry: Character counts.

Of course, this idea of intergenerational impact has a powerful precedence in Scripture. As the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “You share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice. And I know that faith continues strong in you” (1 Tim. 1:5b, NLT).

Timothy’s mother and grandmother invested in him, and the resulting fruit blessed Paul and impacted the nations. No doubt, that knowledge lay behind Paul’s later word to the young pastor to “teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others” (2 Tim. 2:2b).

Do you have five minutes? Consider investing time in a young person. The next life you change could impact generations to come.{eoa}

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The Crucial Element That Can Preserve the Unity of Christ

We make a subtle choice when we enter a meeting. We choose unity or division by our words and body language.

Pause for a moment to consider how Christ would join our meeting. We don't have to stretch too far to understand the impact of that question.

Add this verse to your consideration: "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16b).

A tiny personal pronoun Paul includes here rocked my thinking. "We" have the mind of Christ. When I'm working, I walk into rooms filled with people who are Christ-minded. We work together with the mind of Christ.

When I walk into a room in my home, I see people who have the mind of Christ. The same is true when I enter my church. The truth is, I really don't care to walk into a room that isn't occupied by the mind of Christ.

But I realized I may have been praying this verse with the wrong mindset. As I pray, I ask God to help me think with the mind of Christ. I also hope everyone thinks the way I do because I love short meetings.

How many meetings have you attended where confusion springs up and small spats spark? Voices rise and tensions heighten. Suddenly, more people talk and fewer speak.

“In all labor there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty” (Prov. 14:23, author’s emphasis).

“Yes, my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak right things” (Prov. 23:16, author’s emphasis).

These verses build a case for opening every meeting with prayer for the mind of Christ to unify our hearts.

This is how we pass the test of Ephesians 4:3: “Be eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” The mind of Christ energizes our eagerness for unity.

Our meetings should be staffed with preservation agents. We should ask God to send us keepers of “the unity of the Spirit.” I’ve attended meetings with security guards at the door, but true security in our meetings permeates when peace abounds. We need peace preservers more than we need life preservers.

Peace preservation matters even more as we leave a day of meetings to return to our homes. The most important minute of the evening is the first minute after walking in the door.

I experienced the consequence of forgetting this instruction one evening when, upon arrival, I Doberman-barked a message to my wife. Her response humbled me and informed right thinking:

“You need to turn around, go back to your car and leave your manager-voice in there somewhere, then come back home with a little love in your voice.”

I've always been thankful God made me one with a peace preserver.

When our mind and spirit are right, we don't need to manufacture peace. It comes with the mind of Christ. I prefer to think peacefully and diligently preserve unity in the Spirit.

And unity seems to be the main catalyst for abundant living. "Preserve" becomes an action verb as we preserve the unity of peace. Is it better to live in peace or bask in our ability to win an argument? Sometimes being right is not such a big deal after all.

We must come to that place where we focus on preserving the relationship. If we work in the bond of peace, we'll have the mind of Christ.

When we do this at work, we can expect godly outcomes and godly growth. It's not about pounding our desk on behalf of the strategy. It's about pouring out our heart for peace.

When we do this at home and at work, we can expect godly relationships with God-glorifying outcomes. We don't labor to impress the neighbors. We make every effort to exalt Christ.

The mind of Christ produces peace.

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No Matter What, Believers Should Not Be Moved

The question of the hour seems to be “What do we do now?” What do we do now that we have a new president in the White House? What do we do now that things didn’t go as many of the prophets told us? What do we do now that we’re still fighting COVID-19?

I don’t know about you, but I know what I’m going to do. My intent comes through the words of one of my favorite old hymns: “I shall not be moved.”

My faith is not rocked by man’s error. Even though many charismatics and evangelicals supported one candidate, that candidate did not become president. Even though a number of prophets believed they heard from God, changes came in the opposite way they predicted. Even though leaders gave us various dates when the pandemic might end, more than a year has gone by, and we’re still coping with its effects.

But my faith or trust in the Lord has not been moved. Nothing in the natural world has the power to do that. I will continue to say, “Like a tree planted by the water/ I shall not be moved.”

That's my answer. It's the only answer I have. It's the only answer I need.

During my 10 years as a senior pastor, I repeatedly asked one question to the congregation: "What will move you away from the cross? To another church? Out of your home? To another job?"

It seems important for me to know what rattles my cage. It's why I pray throughout the day, "Lead me not into temptation." In the catacombs of my heart, I know that whatever happens, I shall not be moved. Not the president, not the prophecies, not even the pandemic can move me away from the cross. I shall not be moved.

More than 300 years ago, the Pilgrims first set sail for America to seek religious freedom and to seek revival. They wanted more of God.

We need modern-day pilgrims who will stand up for religious freedom, who will seek real revival and press us to seek more of God. We need godly leaders who will encourage us to stand firm in our faith. We need a forest of trees planted by the water.

Of course, waves of doubt will rush in. But the tide ebbs as God's Word compels us to stomp our feet on solid ground.

The book of Nehemiah provides powerful encouragement to those who find their feet in mushy turf. In Chapter 1, Nehemiah is far from his Jerusalem stomping grounds but burdened by the "gloom, despair and agony" there. His response provides some guidelines for us to follow:

Fasting and Prayer (Chapter 1): Instead of remaining stuck in discouragement, Nehemiah turned to the Lord. He confessed and called on God's mercy.

Respect for Authority (Chapter 2): When King Artaxerxes

noticed Nehemiah's dismay, he asked about what troubled him. Nehemiah honored his leader by answering honestly and respectfully. And God used the pagan king to bring him back to his homeland with resources for rebuilding.

Thoughtful Leadership (Chapter 3): As he examined the destruction of the wall, Nehemiah could have thrown up his hands and cried, "Woe is me!" Instead, he let the great task move him toward great leadership. He developed a positive plan to share the load.

Perseverance Under Pressure (Chapter 4): Despite open taunts from their enemies, Nehemiah and his team persevered. They had determined not to be moved, and they completed the task. Nehemiah's reminder to his fellow Israelites is surely a word for today: "Our God shall fight for us" (Neh. 4:20b).

Nehemiah had his own song about the position of his feet. When bad guys tried to convince him to come down from the wall he was dedicated to complete, he bellowed one of the most powerful replies in the Bible: "I am doing a great work and cannot come down" (Neh. 6:3, BSB).

Stable feet produce godly outcomes.

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Dr. Steve Greene's 5 Things I Heard Last Week

Here are 5 things I heard last week through podcast interviews, reading, and research that are worthy to be shared with you.

1. Kris Vallotton is a long-time senior leader at Bethel in Redding, CA. He's written a book titled *Spiritual Intelligence*. If you want to grow in spiritual understanding of the things of God, this book will serve as core reading material. Here is one of the many, many takeaways I heard in our interview:

"In Ephesians, chapter four, verse 23, we find 'be renewed in the spirit of your mind.' And I'm like, the spirit of your mind? Oh, wow, look at this. We actually think tri-dimensionally. We think biologically and we think from emotionally from the soul. And we also think, from the spirit. And I started realizing, I don't hear anyone talking about developing your spiritual intelligence. The emphasis is on developing your IQ and EQ, but there is also the SQ. How could I become more spiritually intelligent? That led to, you know, a 10-year journey of listening, learning growing, equipping, and activation."

2. A golf athlete told me it takes 100 successful shots to build confidence. And it takes only one miss to lose confidence. I'm thankful that we serve a God who restores us when we miss. "Let us then come with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16, MEV).

3. I heard about spaced repetition way too many times last week. I finally figured out why the Lord continued to ping me about it. As I set a goal to memorize all 16 verses of Psalm 91, I began using principles of spaced repetition to study the scripture. I love it when the Lord gives me an unction and then provides the method.

Think of spaced repetition as frequent testing. Rote memorization is highly ineffective for storing anything in long-term memory.

Here's a link to an electronic version of flashcards. (Many study decks are available but it's more fun to make your own decks).

ANKI makes memory a choice.

4. I heard Christina Perera speak with wisdom during our interview on my podcast. She is one to follow and catch her heart for Jesus.

"You know, I see one of the biggest challenges to evangelism as religion. I am not a religious person, but I am so passionately in love with a living, breathing, loving Jesus. There is a very big difference between the two. Religion keeps us from connecting."

5. I heard many shouts of "Happy Birthday" last week. It's a sweet blessing to receive even when I've heard it for a lot of years. My favorite part of the day is when former students call to speak to me and update me on their careers and life.

I was the wedding officiant of one couple who called and told me their first baby is due later in the month and that their careers are progressing with excellence. I suppose this is the greatest gift a teacher can receive. Former students tend to remember a class lesson to “give flowers to the living.”

I’m also truly thankful for the cake I received by mail, my office door decorated with photographs lifted from my Facebook page, and of course the gift of time spent with my colleagues, eating food I shouldn’t eat.

My last call of the day came late in the evening from Pastor Charles Green. I met him at age 17 and he spoke a word over me that impacted the direction of my life. I saw him one time in his church. Then again at the Memorial Service for Oral Roberts almost 50 years later. We’ve remained in touch since then and his calls usher me into awe. A 95-year-old pastor bookended my birthday with words of life.

My life replayed throughout the day in relationships past and present to fortify the why of ministry. Thank you, Lord, for the people on my path. I’m so grateful.

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1. Do you want to write a book or produce Christian content for digital space such as online or in podcasts? I heard from Mark Batterson (*The Circle Maker, Whisper, Win the Day*) that

he read over 3,000 books before he wrote his first paragraph for others to read. He said last week that he's read 7,000 books to date. I don't know of a serious writer who isn't an avid reader.

2. This is the time of year when we are all more conscious of our habits and productivity. We have habits to break and habits to establish. When I asked Mark Batterson about developing productive habits, he offered the following:

"Whatever habit it is, you've got to find a way to weave it into the rhythm of your life. And so that Bible reading plan that you want to 's how I get it done—I stack it. I have an office, right above Ebenzers Coffeehouse. And I usually go in and I get my latte with two shots. And I might add this—the Holy Spirit, plus caffeine, equals awesome. So I get my caffeine. And you know what? The Bible reads even better, with a little bit of caffeine in my system. And so I always do my reading plan, as I'm drinking that morning latte. That's an example of habit stacking, you take something that you do very naturally, and you try to find a way to attach a habit that's a little bit harder for you to do. And it sounds, you know, like a new idea but it's as old as Deuteronomy 6: "When you get up or when you lie down, when you go out or come home, impress these commandments upon your children." In other words, you've got to find a way to couple your habits with some of your rhythms and routines. And so it's about intentionality and coupling these different habits together. Can you do it for a day? Can you do it for a week? Can you do it now?"

Listen to Dr. Greene's podcast with Mark Batterson.

3. Max Lucado wrote a new book (*Begin Again*) about moving on from this coronavirus shut down. I heard him tell a story about a time in Brazil while he was ministering there. It's a blessing to hear a story from our past life to help us through a present need.

“It’s just a simple little story. But many years ago, our family lived in Brazil, from 1983 to 1988. And I recall a time I was in São Paulo, Brazil. I don’t recall the reason I was there. I lived in Rio de Janeiro, but I was in São Paulo for some conference and or something. And a group of us caught a subway train late, late at night, maybe 11pm, 11:30pm heading back to our side of the town. And that subway train stalled in the middle, in between stations. It just came to a dead stop and all the lights went off.

“You know, it’s a scary thing to be in the dark. It’s an even scarier thing to be underground. And then it’s even more frightening to have no solution just stuck, stuck.

“I’ve reflected back on the emotion that we all felt stuck in that subway train. And I realized that’s the way many people lead their lives. They feel like their world is dark and they don’t know where they’re going. And they don’t have any solution.

“Gratefully, that time I was stuck underground in São Paulo lasted only maybe 10 minutes, and then the train lights came on and [the train] lurched forward. But many people spend their lifetime with that emotion. And I think the reason that the Lord Jesus talks so much about heaven, so much about eternal life, is that he wanted us to lead a life that looks forward.

“Yeah, we are made to be forward-looking people and to have faith in tomorrow. Now the truth is, it’s hard to have faith in a government because government’s made up of human beings. It’s hard to have faith in money, because money will come and go.

“But heaven is the greatest way for us to bring hope to our souls. We lift up our eyes, and we set our minds on things that are to come. In any moment, we lift up our eyes and think about heaven. It’ll immediately bring a shaft of sunlight into

the darkest heart. We are made to set our minds on things above, not things here on the earth.

“I urge all of us today to think about heaven. Think about a life in which there’ll be no graves, no tears, no fears, in which we will understand, which we’ll see as we have been seen, which we all know Jesus Christ.

“And so for all of you today, who find yourself in need of hope, don’t think that you’ll find it in a Netflix movie, or the most recent spy thriller. Those are entertaining, but they don’t give you hope you need. Meditate long and hard on the life that awaits you.”

Hear the conversation between Max Lucado and Dr. Greene.

4. Angela Donadio interviewed me on her podcast last week and I heard so much from the Lord as I was answering her questions. I’m always surprised at the answers the Holy Spirit prompts me to give when asked questions throughout the day. Jesus asked questions of his disciples as a teaching tool.

Angela asked me about the long and winding journey to the ministry I serve now and I could only respond with the two word power phrase Jesus used so often.

“So that...”

We are healed, blessed and breathed upon SO THAT we can take our gift forward to others.

After the interview, Angela told me she had written two words on a paper that was set in front of her—not related to what we were discussing. The two words were “SO THAT.” The Holy Spirit spoke the same two words to both of us at different times just for the podcast. I’m guessing a few listeners needed those words.

Click for 2 minutes and 50 seconds of worship with Angela from YouTube...Trust You Anyhow

5. During an interview last week, I heard an author talk about blind spots in our relationships. We don't always see what others see. I was reminded of another academic model called the Johari Window.



When I was led to include this model in my list this week, one thought resonated with me to share. Do we have blind spots in our seeing as well as our hearing? Do we miss things God is showing us? Do we walk with Jesus as a good model to the unsaved? Do we hear the Holy Spirit nudge us to “walk this way?” There are several good sermons in the Johari Window. I hope you hear the messages.

Dr. Steve Greene's 5 Things I Heard Last Week

1. In my interview with Dr. Ben Lim, I heard about his interesting new series called The Great Exodus. “We’re talking about how God is raising up a Moses generation... after 40 years of failure, after running away and hiding for 40 years... now returning to the place of shame, and guilt, and how God is going to deliver people out of Egypt.

“It’s where we are today in America. There is a need to deliver people and set the captives free from bondage and principalities. We’re about to see a great Exodus where people exit old lifestyles, patterns, and habits. And we’re going to see people gain the plunder of Egypt as well because God put the Israelites in Egypt for a purpose, which is to plunder seven times full.”

2. Have you ever set up a meeting with someone without designating a time and location? Why do we act as if a meeting with God, a divine appointment should be handled differently than meetings we schedule with our friends, family or colleagues?

“Lord, I’d like to meet with you tomorrow morning at 5 a.m.

in my prayer closet. I’ll come prepared to hear you.”

3. In my podcast interview with Arden Bevere about his book, *Redefined: Confronting the Labels that Limit Us*, he told me, “I want to see our generation to not be labeled by regret and not to look at all the things that are going wrong. I hope my book helps them to not focus on the things that they’ve done in their past. I’m praying for them to be awakened to the opportunities that God has for them.”

4. Check out this leadership model. I studied it in grad school but heard it referenced again last week. I’m reminded that this style of leadership must be pleasing to the Lord. It would be a good exercise to develop the antithesis of this model and consider the culture you affect.



5. Pam Christian was a guest on Greenelines last week and has a powerful kingdom message. “I would say people there are many who are dissatisfied with life who think that there must be something more than life—there must be something more to the Christian faith. Why is my Christian faith not getting me the victory that people talk about? So it’s these areas of life, where we should be overcoming based on what the Bible has to say and what Christ taught that we need to learn how to apply. Fear is rampant right now with all that we’ve been going through with COVID and the many other things that have occurred.

“I want to help people understand how to deal with the fear and get in a position of strong faith, confidence, and a faith that allows them to truly overcome adversities.”

How We Must Depend on Holy Spirit to Tame Our Tongues

The first step to understanding why we do what we don't want to do begins with probing the root cause of the behavior.

Most of us exercise regular opportunities to repent from spreading a story we heard about a friend, neighbor or colleague. As we toss and turn in bed, trying to understand why our tongue betrayed us, answers evade us, and we pray for strength to do better tomorrow.

Mark Travers reported in *Psychology Today* that the average person gossips 52 minutes per day. He cited research that concludes “sanctions against gossip may be futile and underscore the importance of understanding gossip at a descriptive level.”

Researchers define three categories of gossip:

Positive: flattery oriented.

Neutral: neutral observations about others.

Negative: malicious commentary.

The researchers concluded that 75% of all gossip fits the category of nonevaluative or neutral.

In a recent episode of the *Greenelines* podcast on the Charisma

Podcast Network with author Susannah B. Lewis, she and I discussed many topics from her book *How May I Offend You Today?* Lewis offers “rants and revelations from a not-so-proper Southern lady” and opines with great clarity about “nipping gossip in the bud.”

Lewis says, “Nipping the gossip bud is so hard to do, especially in these small Southern towns. I’ve been caught up in some of the juiciest gossip while sitting on the bleachers at a ballfield. Then, I always ask myself, ‘What? What just happened?’”

The answer to Lewis’ question always comes from the Holy Spirit. Psychologists do their best to describe and categorize, but the Spirit of God brings conviction.

“I will tell you that I have conviction every time I run my mouth,” Lewis says. “I thank God for His conviction—for that nudge to repent. Without that, I would be a mess. We all hear so many things, and we have this desire to run and tell everyone what we know.

“I say to the Lord, ‘I can’t spread this; it must stop with me,’” she adds. “I want to be more conscious of the words I share. I know we crave that juicy talk and love the excitement to share goodies with others. I don’t want to be a person who causes more harm than good.”

If we are to squelch the gossip monster, we must walk in the Spirit and “let no corrupt communication proceed out of [our] mouth” (Eph. 4:29a, KJV). The New Living Bible translates this biblical phrase as “Don’t use foul or abusive language,” while The Message paraphrase says bluntly, “Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth.”

No matter how we describe it, gossip has the power to hurt us all. Careers have been broken, relationships destroyed and churches split through the power of misplaced words.

We shudder at the regular news stories that highlight pastors and other Christian leaders who have made an error—often multiple errors—in judgment. As a result, they lose their employment.

But we don't wait for the leader's repentance and potential restoration. Instead, we eagerly spread the ugly rumors. We delight in discussing another's sin but don't dare stop to consider our own. As the Spirit intervenes, Jesus' words about logs and specks come to mind (see Matt. 7:5).

As the gossip virus spreads, it multiplies and morphs, escalating far above the original story. In the New Testament, James offers specific advice for dealing with gossip in relationships: "Do not speak evil of one another, brothers. He who speaks evil of his brother and judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4:11, MEV).

When God's still, small voice urges us to stop a rumor before it starts, we must pray in the Spirit, asking God to help us "walk by the Spirit and [we] will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16b, NIV).

The only effective gossip inoculation comes from the Holy Spirit. {eoa}

Dr. Steve Greene is the publisher and executive vice president of the multimedia group at Charisma Media and executive producer of the Charisma Podcast Network. His Charisma House book, *Love Leads*, shows that without love, you cannot be an effective leader. Sign up for his free "5 Things I Learned Last Week" and "Greenelines" newsletters, and download his *Greenelines* and *At Work With God* podcasts at .

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