

J. Lee Grady: Whatever Happened to Discernment?

A few days ago I listened to Mike Winger's lengthy video about Shawn Bolz. I know all of us were horrified by the obvious abuses that have been overlooked in the prophetic movement. I hope this time we learn our lesson, but honestly I'm skeptical. I've seen this tragic scenario played out too many times in the past.

I've been identified with the charismatic renewal movement since the 1970s when I had a profound experience with the Holy Spirit at age 18. I became a Christian journalist, and I ended up working for Charisma magazine for 18 years, from 1992 to 2010. I was the editor of the magazine for 11 of those years, and then I went into fulltime missionary work in 2010.

During my tenure at Charisma I saw the good, the bad and the ugly. It was a joy to report on revivals, church growth, missionary breakthroughs and genuine miracles—and that is what kept me encouraged. But there wasn't a week that went by that we weren't investigating and reporting on the tragic failures of ministers.

I know ministry scandals happen in every segment of the church, yet I always wondered why it seemed that those of us in the "Spirit-filled" segment of the church are so prone to deception, fraud and misconduct of the worse kind.

In Mike Winger's video, he criticizes charismatic leaders because they haven't demanded accountability from fraudulent ministries. Actually, during my days at Charisma, we did speak out strongly against the financial, sexual and spiritual abuse that was prevalent in so many charismatic ministries. And yet people still defended them.

I personally wrote articles about Jim Bakker (after he

defrauded donors and went to jail); Eddie Long (who abused young men in his church), Earl Paulk (who created a sickening culture of sexual abuse in his Atlanta megachurch), Todd Bentley (who made false claims, promoted weird theology and then left his wife for another woman), evangelist W. V. Grant (who used hidden microphones to fake words of knowledge), and megachurch pastor Robert Tilton (who used fraudulent schemes to raise funds).



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I could go on and on. The list is so much longer than this.

In light of the claims against Shawn Bolz, I wanted to bring out some additional background about Paul Cain, who was considered a powerful prophet in the 1980s. I met him during those years, and I was aware that there were some serious accusations circulating about him from the earliest days. In 1989 I attended a Christian campus-ministry conference in Fort Worth, Texas, where Cain was a featured speaker.

During that meeting he gave several "words of knowledge" from the platform to eight or nine individuals. All but one of these people were leaders in the ministry that was hosting the event. In each case, Cain gave a number, and then he shared a vague personal prophecy to the people. In every case the number was a street address – and the audience was wowed that he supposedly knew this number by divine revelation. However, in one case the address he gave was actually the person's previous address. Because I worked for the ministry and I was familiar with addresses from our ministry phone list, I realized that Cain had looked at the phone list to manipulate these "prophecies." Sound familiar?

This was 1989, long before the internet or social media. But Cain was doing the same thing Bolz did, allegedly. He was "data mining," as Mike Winger terms it, to appear to be a

powerful prophet. (Cain apparently was offered a copy of the phone list to pray over it.) Many people fell for his tricks.

In 1993 I arranged a phone call with Paul Cain, and I asked Mike Bickle to be on that call because I knew Cain would want him there. During that conversation, I asked Cain if he did indeed use street numbers from the phone list. He denied it. He also told me that the reason the prophecies didn't come true was because he was depressed after his mother's death. I documented all of this in my 2010 book, *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale (Chosen)*, which mentions numerous other scandals in the charismatic movement.

I'm sharing this partly to confirm Mike Winger's findings, but also to tell you that there were people way back in those early days who did in fact speak out publicly about abuse of the prophetic in our movement. Back in the 1990s, we didn't have podcasts or social media posts; I did my work in old-fashioned paper and ink. But the people were warned and the perpetrators of the fraud were confronted.

Why do these scandals keep happening? Obviously our common enemy, Satan, is still working overtime to deceive and destroy. But this is not just about the devil's work. I believe many charismatics are so fervent about experiencing supernatural spiritual gifts that they end up being gullible when crafty charlatans pretend to have those gifts.

I always teach the churches I visit that if we truly want to see spiritual gifts in operation, we need ALL of them—and that includes the gift of discernment mentioned by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:10. Without discernment we are powerless when the imposters invade the church. I have also emphasized that a minister who wants spiritual gifts must make sure to build a foundation of the fruit of the Spirit.

Gifts without fruit, Paul told us, are like loud gongs—noisy, distracting and devoid of eternal impact. Anointing without

character is dangerous!

Jesus said imposters would come. Don't fall for their tricks! Pray for discernment. The Spirit provides discernment so we can tell the difference between the genuine and the fake. If you pray for discernment, you will feel a warning in your gut when someone teaches false doctrine or uses manipulation to deceive or swindle you.

God can train your senses so you can hear the alarm and detect spiritual danger. Then you can warn and protect others.

J. Lee Grady is an author, award-winning journalist and ordained minister. He served as a news writer and magazine editor for many years before launching into full-time ministry. Lee is the author of six books, including 10 Lies the Church Tells Women, 10 Lies Men Believe and Fearless Daughters of the Bible. His years at Charisma magazine also gave him a unique perspective of the Spirit-filled church and led him to write The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale and Set My Heart on Fire, which is a Bible study on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Beware of Hyper-Spiritual Narcissists—They Will Split Your Church

A few years ago a prominent evangelist gained a wide following when he said an angel was visiting him regularly during his televised revival meetings. This angel was supposedly dispatched to unleash the next great healing revival in the United States. One big problem: The revival wasn't real. It

was all hype.

Yet month after month, the tales of this evangelist's wild spiritual adventures grew more and more incredible. At one point he claimed to have met the apostle Paul in heaven—and then said that Paul told him he was the author of the book of Hebrews. Looking back on these events now, it's hard to believe so many people fell for this man's wild claims.

Anyone with the most basic level of discernment knows God doesn't allow us to talk to dead people to get spiritual information. So why are some of us so gullible?

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In some Spirit-filled church circles, there are super-spiritual people who know how to impress others with their revelations and experiences. In some cases these people are sincere but may have emotional problems or even mental illness. In other cases they are classic narcissists who are full of spiritual pride.

I believe all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are valid today. But we need to clean up our act and stop allowing fringe elements to discredit the power of God. Nothing is more dangerous to a genuine revival than a hyper-spiritual attention-seeker who lacks character but flaunts his gifts.

Below are seven indicators of a hyper-spiritual person. If you see this type of fraud on display, use discernment and warn others.

1. Their feet rarely touch the earth. Super-spiritual people aren't in touch with normal life. They live in the ozone

layer. They may spend a lot of time in prayer and fasting (or claim to), but their relationships are dysfunctional. Jesus didn't live like a guru, floating around while dispensing ethereal wisdom. He lived in the real world and interacted in a healthy way with people. So should we.

2. They place too much emphasis on dreams, visions and spiritual manifestations. God speaks to us through His Spirit, and He can use dreams, visions or prophetic words. Yet His message always flows with love and brings peace. Paul warned the Colossians about people like this when he said: "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen..." (Col. 2:18). A spirit of weirdness always follows hyper-spiritual people who claim to receive constant revelations.

3. They don't submit to authority. Hyper-spiritual people believe they are more gifted than pastors or other spiritual leaders. They love to criticize pastors, and they find it impossible to receive correction from anyone. They become renegades, and they separate themselves from the body of Christ; meanwhile they cultivate a "ministry" on social media that focuses on finding fault with churches.

4. They crave attention. A super-spiritual person often lacks affirmation and love. Their emotional deficit pushes them to seek attention from people, and they find it by impressing others. Some people who seek to serve as intercessors or counselors, or even as members of the worship team, may actually need inner healing before they can be effective in these roles. If you give unhealthy people a microphone before they are healed, they will misuse their platform.

5. They develop a victim mentality. Hyper-spiritual people believe they are constantly being attacked by the devil—as if they are his biggest threat. The slightest problem—from a traffic ticket to a hangnail—becomes evidence of a demonic

conspiracy against them. We need to help people realize that Satan actually has a lot more important things to do than stop Brother Jimmy or Sister Karen from singing a song in church on Sunday.

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6. They become harsh and judgmental. People with narcissistic tendencies can become bitter and resentful if they don't find an audience for their visions and prophecies. They may even condemn everyone to hell for rejecting them. I know of some angry Christians who ended up splitting a church because they became convinced the pastor was evil or the whole congregation was in sin. Bitter people eventually become destructive. Don't let them hurt others.

7. They often end up in serious deception. Super-spiritual people who reject correction or accountability are headed toward disaster. Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, started his cult after he declared that all Christian denominations were false churches. He cut himself off from the body of Christ and started the biggest heresy of the 19th century—claiming that an angel gave him secret information.

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People who become so focused on their spiritual superiority end up denying Jesus and justifying their own sinful behavior. Don't let hyper-spiritual narcissists take your congregation down the wrong road. Let's cultivate humility, promote healthy character and guard the flock from dangerous wolves.

How to Overcome the Spirit of Condemnation

I have a friend who is a gifted worship leader, a loving husband and an affectionate father. He's funny, smart, passionate about his faith and wholeheartedly committed to his church. People who know him say he's a model Christian.

But underneath this joyful exterior he hides a lot of pain. He struggles with depression, and then he condemns himself because, as he says, "Christians are supposed be happy." When emotional heaviness drags him to a low point, he knows how to put on his convincing church face. Nobody knows the dark thoughts that torment him.

My friend isn't unique in this struggle. Countless Christians I know engage in a daily battle with the enemy of their souls. Satan is described in Scripture as "the father of lies" (John 8:44), and the "accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10). He wags his bony finger of condemnation and tries to deny us access to the Lord's love and mercy.

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You'll never find victory in the Christian life if you don't confront and renounce Satan's accusations. If the devil has been replaying his lies in your head, you must hit the eject button now. The spirit of condemnation will always hurl outrageous lies at you like these listed below:

"Jesus can't use me because of my weakness." The devil is always ready to remind you that you are stupid, ugly, prone to depression or addiction, unwanted, inferior or broken beyond

repair. And yet the people God used in the Bible were far from perfect. Every Christian has flaws. God made us weak so we would find our strength in Him. If you were perfect, you wouldn't need a Savior.

“I should give up because I constantly struggle with sin.”

Some Christian men I know feel disqualified because they haven't totally overcome their addiction to porn. They feel bad for being tempted, and then if they stumble, they feel defeated for weeks. This can lead to discouragement and despair—and then they lose all hope of overcoming the habit. The secret to victory is not sweating and straining to resist; you must meditate on the love of God and allow His grace to enable you to override sin's power.

“God's promises are for other people, not me.” Do you feel God's goodness always bypasses you? You may have an orphan spirit. Many Christians don't believe the heavenly Father loves and accepts them. They may have been rejected by their parents, or lacked parental affirmation. Life's pain can block our ability to see God as the loving Father He actually is. If you have given your life to Christ, the Father has adopted you, He delights in you and He has given you full inheritance rights. His promises are yours to claim!

“God is always mad at me.” Many believers base their relationship with God on performance. The devil loves this legalistic mindset because it prevents us from experiencing God's grace. The Father doesn't love you for what you do; He loves you because you are His child. Psalm 103 says God is “compassionate and gracious” and “slow to anger” (v. 8); it also says He has removed our sins “as far as the east is from the west” (v. 12). You will enjoy true intimacy with Jesus when you allow this truth to soak your soul.

“My past mistakes have disqualified me.” I met a Christian man recently who loves God with all His heart, yet he sits in the back of his church every week feeling inferior because he committed adultery four decades ago. His wife forgave him, and he repented for his sin, but he assumes he wears a scarlet letter around his neck and that he has been banished to a spiritual wasteland. That’s a lie! If you have repented for your sin, God has forgiven and forgotten it! Nothing can separate you from God’s love—not abortion, divorce or any unspeakable mistake you regret.

“I have committed the unpardonable sin.” I’ve counseled troubled Christians who read Matthew 12:31-32 and decided that they had blasphemed the Holy Spirit and therefore could not be saved. This is a ridiculous notion, because a person who committed the unpardonable sin mentioned in that passage wouldn’t care if they had blasphemed. If you are worried that you did this, then you haven’t! Your heart is turned toward God and you want to please Him. That alone is evidence of His grace working in you.

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Romans 8:1 is one of the most liberating verses in the Bible. It declares: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” This promise is for you! Jesus took your punishment and removed all guilt from your record. And His blood is more powerful than any lie Satan can throw at you.

You are now qualified—not because of any of your good works, but simply because of Jesus’ amazing gift of salvation. Your past is irrelevant. You don’t have to work to win God’s love. When the Father looks at you, He doesn’t see your past sins or present struggles; He sees a robe of righteousness. Renounce the devil’s lies and receive God’s indescribable,

unfathomable, unconditional love.

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How Did Jesus Endure the Agony of the Cross?

When *The Passion of the Christ* was released 21 years ago, Hollywood critics mocked it because it offered a realistic depiction of Jesus' torture and death. I know people who couldn't watch the movie because it offered such an accurate portrayal of a brutal Roman execution.

Actor Jim Caviezel, who played Jesus in that film, was only pretending to feel pain when he was flogged and nailed to a cross. But the unimaginable agony Jesus endured at Calvary was real.

Nobody performed an autopsy on Jesus' mangled body after He was taken down from the cross. But doctors who have studied the Bible's description of His death say the pain would have been beyond excruciating. In fact, the word "excruciating" means "out of the cross."

After His arrest, Jesus was flogged so mercilessly that His skin was stripped off His back, exposing muscle and bone. After being slapped, punched, crowned with thorns and beaten with reeds, He was covered with a red robe and led to Golgotha. There, soldiers drove nails (more like seven-inch spikes) into His wrists—most likely hitting the median nerve, causing more blinding pain. They nailed another long metal spike into His feet.

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At that point, Jesus would have suffered dislocation of His shoulders, cramps and spasms, dehydration from severe blood loss, fluid in His lungs and eventual lung collapse and heart failure. Yet, according to Matthew 27:34, Jesus refused to take a pain-killing solution. He endured the pain for us.

How did Jesus handle this pain? Many scholars say He recited Psalm 22 throughout His ordeal. These words, which are quoted more often in the New Testament than any other Old Testament passage, describe in detail the death of the Messiah. In the Gospels, we read that Jesus quoted this psalm while He hung on the cross.

He had most likely memorized Psalm 22 since He was a boy in the synagogue in Nazareth. I encourage you to meditate on this psalm this week as we remember the crucifixion.

Matthew 27:46 says Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 from the cross: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Any Jew who heard this would have known He was quoting David’s psalm. It’s possible that He muttered the whole psalm under His breath.

Verse 6 says: “But I am a worm and not a man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people.” Imagine Jesus reciting these words as a crowd of angry mockers insulted Him as they gathered near the cross.

Verse 14 says: “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted inside my body.” Some victims of Roman crucifixion took as long as nine days to die, but Jesus’ death came in a matter of hours—probably because He had been flogged so cruelly before

He was nailed to the rough wood. As He recited Psalm 22, He knew that David's prophetic words were about Him.

Verse 15a says: "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws." Victims of crucifixion typically developed serious dehydration because of a lack of blood and oxygen. Jesus felt the thirst that David wrote about.

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Verse 16b-18 says: "They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." Jesus' tormentors stripped Him of His clothes, and He bore our shame. John's Gospel tells us that soldiers gambled for his tunic.

Psalm 22 doesn't just predict the pain Jesus experienced. It ends in victory. Verse 22 says:

"I will tell of Your Name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You." Even as Jesus hung in pitiful agony, there was a great expectation of triumph. He praised the Father as He thought of His coming Resurrection.

The last verse of Psalm 22 says: "They will come and will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has performed it." The original Hebrew in the last phrase ("He has performed it") can be translated, "It is finished." This is exactly what Jesus declared in John 19:30 as He breathed His last! He finished reciting the Psalm before He gave up His spirit.

David's prophetic psalm helped prepare Jesus for His agonizing death. He knew He was the promised Messiah. He knew His destiny was to pour out His blood to atone for the sins of the world. He was willing to endure the pain because of the great

joy set before Him.

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God Isn't in a Hurry—Learn to Respect His Speed Limit

Have you ever wanted to go to a secluded place and scream at the top of your lungs, “God, why are You taking so long?” I have. Everything about my life has seemed too slow. My last name even means “gradual.”

Some people might look at my life and say, “You are blessed and successful.” But I waited a long time to see that fruit. Nothing came quickly.

My first job lasted eight difficult years, and the pay was horrible. Then, at age 31, the ministry I worked for imploded. After that, I went through lengthy seasons of dryness. I often wanted to quit.

I watched as many of my friends seemed to achieve financial success while I felt as if I were stuck in a holding pattern. God's blessings eventually came, but not as fast as I expected. I didn't start preaching until I was 43, and I didn't enter full-time ministry until I was 52.

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Now, I'm mentoring younger Christians who are eager to be used by God. But they are also encountering delays, disappointments and total roadblocks. They are asking me tough questions:

- ** Why am I not married yet?
- ** Why does it seem like I can't get ahead financially?
- ** Why can't I discover God's purpose for my life?
- ** Will I ever have a family? And should we even try after a miscarriage?
- ** Why can't I develop a strong network of friends?
- ** What do I do with promises from God that seem like they have expired?

Through all my delays, I've learned that we must learn to drive the speed limit on the road of life. When God wants to change us into His image, He slows down the process.

British preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote: "God is in no hurry. His purposes can be accomplished without haste, and though He would have us redeem the time because our days are evil, yet in His eternity He can afford to wait, and by His wisdom He so orders His delays, that they prove to be far better than our hurries."

God's blessings rarely happen overnight. The Lord's timing is different from yours. We want Him to answer our prayers instantly, but before He answers He may lead us into a wilderness of testing to shape our character. The apostle Peter wrote: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Pet. 5:6). The "proper time" is God's time, and it rarely syncs with your schedule.

If you rush through life, anxiously pursuing your own goals, or manipulating people and circumstances to force your own desired outcomes, you will miss His best. Give God your schedule and take your hands off of it. Let Jesus reign over your hours, days, months and years. Be patient, and you will

see a harvest in the end.

If God has imposed a speed limit in your life right now, slow down and enjoy the journey. Revving your engine or spinning your tires won't help. God's delays burn out the spoiled attitudes in our hearts. Adjusting your speed limit will crucify your flesh.

We see this painful process in David's life. During his long journey to become king, David ended up in an obscure town called Ziklag. Scholars aren't sure where this place was, only that it was in the remote Judean wilderness. Ziklag means "pressure," and it refers to the process of shaping molten metal. While David was in this dark place, he wrote, "My soul thirsts for you...in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Ps. 63:1).

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David didn't lose faith while he was in the Lord's lonely school of testing. He stayed thirsty for God. He prayed constantly—knowing that he was in the fire of preparation. God was applying heat and pressure to shape him for greater responsibility. In the end, David got out of Ziklag and sat on the throne in Jerusalem. The pain of delay shaped him for the promise.

What was David's secret to enduring trials? Just as the apostle Paul and Silas sang hymns of praise in the Philippian jail, David wrote most of his psalms in the bleak wilderness, and he sang them there. He worshipped while he waited. He trusted God when there was no visible sign of a breakthrough.

Paul told the Corinthians: "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17). God uses our delays to shape our character and spiritual fruitfulness. If we understand this

deep truth, we will respond differently when He imposes a speed limit in our lives.

If you are in a holding pattern right now, don't despair. A breakthrough is coming. God is preparing you to handle the promise when it comes.

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Satan Loves to Divide and Isolate Christians—Don't Be His Victim

Everywhere I go, I meet Christians who were hurt in a church or wounded by the words and actions of other believers. Some people become bitter because of these experiences. Others throw up their hands and give up on church altogether. And a few even leave the faith. The typical scenarios of "church hurt" might include these:

- A pastor may have demanded too much from you as a staff member or a volunteer, and you felt unappreciated or even abused
- An immature church member was put in a leadership position and ended up hurting you or others
- A Christian you trusted betrayed your confidence by sharing your personal secrets with others
- A pastor or leader you admired had a serious moral failure and you felt betrayed by his or her

sinful choices

- A church you attended experienced a serious split because of doctrinal differences or denominational politics

When church hurt happens, the devil has a field day. He loves to divide and conquer by sowing discord. His ultimate goal is to keep Christians angry at each other so we can't join hearts in a common purpose.

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Have you given up on church because of betrayal, disappointment, mistreatment or offense? If you or someone you love has been hurt in church, I recommend taking these steps:

Forgive from your heart. The first step is always forgiveness. Don't fall into the trap of justifying your right to be offended. You may be tempted to scream, "But you don't understand what they did to me!" God understands – but He requires you to let go of the pain. The Word is clear: "Even as Christ forgave you, so you must do" (Col. 3:13b, MEV).

Learn from the other person's mistakes. I have mentors who taught me much about God, leadership and ministry. But I also have learned a lot from watching the mistakes leaders make. If someone in ministry hurts you, make a mental note: "That is not the way I want to treat people." You can actually turn your disappointments into blessings if you learn from them.

Remain humble. Pride thrives in bitter soil. If you allow anger or resentment to lodge in your heart, it won't be long before your character is completely poisoned. Your desire to prove your point will inflate your ego—and God will resist you. Paul told the Galatians: "For if someone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Gal. 6:3). Don't let someone else's mistake turn you into a

monster.

Try to make peace. Never let an offense destroy a relationship. It's childish just to walk away. Does the leader know how he or she hurt you? Make an appointment and share your heart. Give the other person a chance to apologize or give an explanation. Our tendency is always to magnify the other person's mistakes while we excuse our own wrong behavior. It's never wise to break a relationship without making every effort at reconciliation. If you feel you can't talk to the person because of intimidation, write a letter and explain the situation.

Stay in fellowship. The devil is like a wolf – he isolates his victims before he attacks. Many people who are hurt by leaders leave church altogether. It's OK to take a short break to recover. But if you go two months, then six months and then a year without being in close fellowship with other Christians, you are making yourself vulnerable. You may be tempted to believe that there are no healthy pastors or churches in your area – but I dare you to disprove that.

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Get godly counsel. It is never wise to walk through a relationship breakup without getting an outside perspective. You may think you are the victim – until a friend points out your own blind spots. Share what happened with trusted, spiritually mature people and ask them how you should respond. If what a leader did to you was criminal (like sexual abuse or financial exploitation), you may have to consult a lawyer. But in most cases, you will simply need to forgive and renounce

any desire for revenge. Practice Romans 12:17a: “Repay no one evil for evil.”

Move on. I’ve met Christians who still nurse the same grudges after 30 years. They keep their pain alive by reliving the offense over and over. As a result, they are stuck in an endless loop. And no one wants to be around them because their sarcasm is so toxic. You must let go. Say what Jesus said on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Don’t wait too long to reconnect. We need relationships to be healthy. Don’t let an offense keep you from building friendships, and don’t let the enemy whisper lies to you about a pastor or a church. You cannot thrive in isolation. Leave your offenses at the cross and don’t let anyone’s mistakes prevent you from being a part of God’s family.

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Always Be Sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s Promptings

During the apostle Paul’s second missionary journey, he was determined to go from the Galatian region to a place called Bithynia, in what is now northern Turkey, near the Black Sea. There was nothing wrong with Paul going to that place—the people there needed the gospel. And yet Acts 16:7 says: “...they were trying to go to Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them.”

This must have been frustrating. The fire of the Holy Spirit burned in Paul. He wanted to tell more Gentiles about the salvation of Jesus. But the Spirit put on the brakes.

Acts 16:6 says Paul, Silas and Timothy were “forbidden by the Holy Spirit” to go north. The Greek word for “forbidden” can refer to the way a horse is restrained by a bridle. The Holy Spirit was literally pulling on the reins and saying, “Whoa!”

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Thankfully Paul did not trudge ahead willfully. He wasn't bullheaded. He paid attention to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, and he tried to be sensitive to His voice. Shortly afterward, Paul had a vision in the night of a man from Macedonia saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us,” (see Acts 16:9).

Everything shifted when Paul took a left turn and went westward. When he arrived in Troas, a city on the Aegean coast, the pronouns in the narrative in Acts change from “they” to “we.” This is where Luke joined Paul's team. Together they sailed to Philippi, and the gospel began to spread throughout Greece.

Has the Holy Spirit ever put the brakes on your plans? Have you ever had your entire journey mapped out, and then the Spirit changed the directions? Here are three ways you can develop the ability to follow the Lord's supernatural leading:

Surrender your schedule to God daily. James tells us that we should walk in humility when it comes to making plans. It's perfectly fine to have a

schedule, but we should surrender that schedule to the Lord since He is our ultimate authority. James 4:13 and 15 says, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and make a profit.' ... Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this and that.'"

Many Christians lose their joy if they experience a disruption or a delay. But I've learned that God allows our schedules to be interrupted so He can have His way. Don't be so proud that you can't accept it when God overrides your plans. Embrace His unexpected detours.

Ask the Lord to break any stubbornness in your life. King David prayed for God's clear guidance, and the Lord promised him: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go," (Ps. 32:8). But then the Lord gave David a warning: "Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check..." (v. 9).

Mules have to be dragged to go in the right direction. Don't be a spiritual mule. Stubbornness frustrates the Holy Spirit. Some Christians are obstinate when it comes to God's leading. They make plans without consulting the Lord, and then they lock in their coordinates. If you look at their journey with God, you will see skids along the path! They Lord may give them continual promptings and even warnings to change course, but

they are inflexible.

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Expect God's leading. This week I began feeling troubled about an event I was scheduled to do in a few months. Whenever I prayed about it, I felt a sense of heaviness. I began to realize that the timing for this event was off track, and the right people were not on the team. So I decided to postpone it until next year. When I did I felt an overwhelming sense of God's peace.

Paul told the Romans: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God," (Rom. 8:14). The Lord uses different means to guide us. He can speak through a Bible verse, a dream or vision, a pastor's sermon, a gentle nudge, a nagging sense of urgency or a prophetic message from a friend or a minister. Always keep your spiritual eyes and ears open for heaven's directives. And learn to obey.

God has a specific path for you to follow. Just as Paul was willing to scrap his original plan, always yield your itinerary to Him. Don't be so self-willed and headstrong that you can't change course. Give the Lord your "yes" daily, and He will guide you.

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Slaughter In Syria: 'No One Is Protecting Us'

Last week, hundreds of Christians were caught in the political crossfire that has raged in Syria for 14 years. Among those killed were women and even babies.

"I feel there is no safety," said one witness of the massacres that occurred on the coastal region of Syria, in the city of Latakia. "There is nowhere to escape to, and no one to defend us."

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that 830 civilians were killed last week in the attacks, along with 231 Syrian security forces and 250 militants that were loyal to deposed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The new government, which is loyal to the Islamic militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, is viewed as hostile to the minority Christian population.

An anonymous Christian who spoke to Fox News said Islamists "want to kill all of us. They don't want us in Syria. We have to flee Syria. They are seeking revenge from the former regime. I am asking for protection and to live in dignity, because we can be killed at any moment."

Ruwayda, a 36-year-old Christian woman, told Agence France-Presse: "There's a feeling that no one is protecting us."

Syria is home to a sizeable population of Syrian Christians, most of them part of an Orthodox community that has lived in this country for centuries. Father Bahjat Karakach, who leads the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in the city of Aleppo, told the media: "I ask you to pray for us, we need it so much, let us raise our prayers to the good Lord who knows how to work miracles."

Syria is no stranger to New Testament-style miracles. The apostle Paul—who persecuted Christians when he was a zealous Pharisee—had a dramatic conversion in Syria, on the road to Damascus. The book of Acts tells us that Paul later made disciples while preaching in Syria, at the beginning of his ministry (see Acts 9:19-25).

God is still in the business of revealing Himself to people who are hostile to Christianity. I observed this up-close a few weeks ago when I interviewed a man named Isa in eastern Uganda. Isa was raised in a strict Muslim family, but he began to explore the Christian faith when he faced a health crisis at age 18.

“I developed a tumor on my arm, and I was very scared that it was cancer,” Isa told me. He went to witchdoctors as well as to Islamic clerics to find a cure, but the lump was still there. Yet after he met some Christians, he started listening to a radio broadcast that featured a Pentecostal preacher.

“I heard this man preaching about Jesus, and then he began talking about healing,” Isa said. “He then invited listeners to lay their hands on the radio, and he said Jesus can heal.” So Isa put his hands on the radio, and he prayed from his heart for a miracle.

When Isa woke up the next morning, the tumor was gone.

“Immediately I went to a Christian church, and I told the people that I was now a believer,” Isa said. But later, when he informed his parents that he had become a Christian, his father got so angry that he disowned his son.

Yet today, this man who was rejected by his parents is the pastor of a growing church in his city—and he is reaching many Muslims for Christ.

Isa’s story gives me great hope for the Syrian people, because

I know that the Holy Spirit is moving in supernatural ways to reveal Jesus to those who are trapped in old religious traditions.

Here are some key ways to pray for Syria:

> Pray that Syria's new interim president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, will not promote the wholesale killing of civilians in his country, and that all genocide plots will be exposed and stopped.

> Syria has one of the highest percentages of displaced people in the world—7.2 million. Many of them have fled to Turkey, Lebanon or Europe. Two million Syrian children are unable to attend school, and 90 percent of Syrians live below the poverty line. Pray that the international community will offer aid.

> A huge percentage of Syria's Christians have been driven from the country. Pray for the tiny minority of believers who remain there to be a bright light in the darkness. ** Pray that the Muslims in Syria will be open to the gospel as the message spreads through online sermons, films, videos and local believers. Pray that those who are full of hate will experience dramatic conversions just as Paul did 2,000 years ago on a dusty Syrian road.

The Brutal War in Africa That No One Is Talking About

Just three weeks ago, rebel soldiers came into the town of Mayba, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and rounded up 70 people, many of them Christians. Once the people were brought

inside a Protestant church, the rebels beheaded everyone with machetes. It was a senseless slaughter meant to intimidate everyone in the region.

The Open Doors ministry, which serves persecuted Christians, said it took weeks to bury the dead in Mayba because of insecurity in the area. The rebels are part of the Allied Democratic Forces, or ADF, which has been spreading mayhem in the country for many years.

“We’ve had enough of massacres,” a church leader told Open Doors. “We don’t know what to do or how to pray.”

Most Americans don’t know anything about the conflict in Congo. The three-year war in Ukraine has dominated headlines. As many as 430,000 soldiers and civilians have died since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

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The conflict in Congo deserves our attention, too, yet the mainstream media has been strangely silent about it. The war is far away—more than 5,000 miles due south of Ukraine. In the DRC, which is three times the size of Texas, rebel soldiers have clashed with government forces and vulnerable civilians have been caught in the crossfire.

It is estimated that 5.4 million Congolese people have died since this conflict began in 1998. But few Americans know about it, and it’s complicated to explain. The war has been fueled by tensions between ethnic tribes, political corruption and efforts to control Congo’s valuable mineral wealth—including so-called “conflict minerals” such as tin, gold and cobalt.

I saw the war up close and personal a few weeks ago, when I spent time with a Congolese pastor who has become a close friend.

Udjasiri Wakahasha leads a Pentecostal church in the city of Goma, near the border with Rwanda. Several months ago, a group of women from the Kivu region in the northeastern sector of the DRC came to Goma seeking safety. All of them had been raped by rebel soldiers. The terrorists killed some of the women's husbands. And the parents of one of the women were burned alive by the rebels.

Udjasiri and his wife, Josephine, rented a house for the traumatized refugees, and they raised the money to feed them. But a nightmare began in late January when ADF soldiers marched into Goma. The electricity was turned off, internet connection was disrupted and the rebels began terrorizing the city.

The rebels even broke into a women's prison, raped the inmates and then burned the prison with the women inside. More than 150 women died in that brutal incident on Jan. 27.

Concerned about his own family and the refugee women he was sheltering, Udjasiri decided to flee to a different part of the city to find safety. They hid in an abandoned house as gunfire and bombs rained on Goma. Then, after an eerie silence settled over the area, one of the women refugees asked if she could go outside to see what was happening.

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Her name was Dorcas, and she had fled to Goma with her six young children. After she left the house, a deafening boom shook the house. Udjasiri knew a bomb had struck nearby. When he walked outside to see the damage, he found Dorcas's body in

a pile of rubble. She had been killed by the explosion.

“We all cried. The children cried,” Udjasiri told me. But before they could process the tragedy, rebels knocked on the door and began interrogating him.

“They thought I was a government soldier. They refused to believe I was a pastor,” Udjasiri told me. The rebels held a gun to Udjasiri’s head. But eventually they believed his story, and they left him alone. Udjasiri took his family and all the refugees back to his house, where they have been staying ever since.

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It’s Time to Challenge the Transgender Hoax

President Trump was surrounded by female athletes of all ages on Feb. 5 when he signed a ruling called the “No Men in Women’s Sports Executive Order.” From the Oval Office, Trump said: “The radical left has waged an all-out campaign to erase the very concept of biological sex and replace it with a militant transgender ideology. With this executive order, the war on women’s sports is over.”

But as it turns out, one stroke of a pen didn’t end this war. Sixteen days later, the governor of Maine—Janet Mills, a Democrat—defied Trump by stating that she would take the

ruling to court to keep biological boys and men in women's sports. Trump replied by threatening to withhold federal funding from Maine until Gov. Mills complies.

Things got worse for Mills when a video surfaced of her gyrating on a stage during a Halloween drag show in 2022. She is loud and proud about her defiance. She has thrown her full support behind the trans community, and she's willing to ignore an executive order to push her views.

Not many Americans are willing to dance with Mills on this issue. A new poll from The New York Times has found that 79% of Americans—both Republicans and Democrats—do not want transgender-identifying men in women's sports. And that number is 12% higher than a poll taken two years ago. That means a small minority of political radicals are pushing this agenda, and they really don't care what the average American believes.

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Many of my foreign friends now ask me regularly, "What's going on with the United States?" They are baffled. They are also losing respect for America because a growing number of our leaders have made drastic shifts when it comes to moral values—particularly in the area of sexuality and gender.

Meanwhile, we are expected to accept this madness because it's "inclusive." And if you challenge the transgender movement or dare to label gender confusion as a psychological disorder, you will be called a hater.

It's time for rational people to cry foul. This is not just an attack on family values; it's an attack on basic intelligence. Here are three reasons the "logic" of transgender activists is faulty:

1. Gender is a biological reality, not an emotional feeling.

In 2015 an Oregon woman named Rachel Dolezal was exposed as a fraud because she claimed she was Black even though she was born to white parents. Dolezal even became a local leader of the NAACP until her scam unraveled. She told NBC: "I identify as Black." But she was laughed off the national stage because everybody knows you can't change your race just because you want to. DNA determines race. You can't "become" Black.

The same scientific standard applies to gender. Today's code of political correctness says if you were born a man but you now "feel" you are a woman, you can use the women's restroom, change your gender identity and play in women's sports—no matter how that might affect others. But this is illogical, unscientific and highly unfair.

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2. Gender must be affirmed.

I don't know what people are smoking these days, but something has clouded the judgment of educators who think children should be encouraged to "explore" gender possibilities. While gender is genetically inborn, a boy must be trained to be a man, and a girl must be trained to be a woman. Parents play a huge role in developing healthy gender identity in their children.

We live in a fallen world, thus people are susceptible to gender confusion. Sexual abuse, bullying, shaming, fatherlessness, lack of parental nurture and other factors can cause a child to question their maleness or femaleness. Yet if a person with gender confusion gets counseling and encouragement, they can overcome their emotional scars. So why are educators and psychologists today against helping children overcome gender dysphoria?

3. "Gender fluidity" is a scam.

Secularists view the Bible as

archaic and irrelevant, so they ignore the first chapter of Genesis, which says God created mankind as “male and female” (Gen. 1:27). In the past, even non-Christians believed in what America’s Founding Fathers called “the laws of nature and of nature’s God.” We’ve operated fine for thousands of years on this earth with two genders. Why is it that all of a sudden people can choose from an ever-growing list of 64-plus gender options?

When people rage against God and rebel against His laws, they become foolish. Educators today have adopted the wacky idea that gender is fluid and changeable—and in some cases they are forcing these ideas on vulnerable kids. If a man decides he is really a woman “inside,” he is urged to take hormones, get breast implants, start wearing makeup and dresses and then post photos of his “transition” to social media to win acceptance.

One day, we will look back on this era and ask, “Who brainwashed these people?” It’s all a hoax, and it originated in hell. Thankfully our president called it out. So should we.

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