

Lee Grady: Why the Hearts of Desperate People Are Opening for God

A few months ago, I preached at a church in Michigan called New Life Christian Fellowship. At the conclusion of the service, while I was praying for the congregation, the Lord showed me that someone was struggling with a strong addiction. I shared this with the people and invited the unidentified person to reach out to Jesus for help.

Immediately, a young man made his way to the front. He was already crying and he knelt near the stage without any prompting. My friend Cliff quickly got up and knelt beside the man to pray with him.

Within a few minutes, the young man gave his life to Jesus, along with a friend who came with him. They had never been to the church before. In fact, they had only recently moved to the area; they found the congregation by typing the word "church" into Google. These two were desperate to find help from God. They found salvation, along with a loving, spiritual family to support them.

I'm starting to see this same spiritual hunger everywhere I go. In October when I was speaking at a church in Syracuse, New York, a man named John attended a men's breakfast the church sponsored on a Saturday morning. I didn't give an altar call after I shared because I assumed everyone there was already saved.

I also assumed John was a member of the church when he came up to talk to me after the message. But after I began to tell him about the love of the heavenly Father, his eyes got moist and his voice cracked. When I offered to pray for him, he fell into my arms, sobbing. In that moment, he surrendered his life

to Jesus. I found out later that two of John's brothers had prayed for 30 years that he would give his life to Christ.

Later that same day, during a special renewal service, I mentioned John's decision from the podium. Immediately, his two brothers jumped up out of their seats and celebrated their brother's salvation—and everyone in the auditorium cheered. I couldn't help but imagine that angels were also partying because John had decided to return to God.

Do you feel the same thing I'm sensing? There's a growing openness to the Lord right now. People have been overwhelmed by fear, anxiety and depression. The pandemic has not only taken lives, but it has also triggered mental and emotional anguish. Racial tension, political polarization and a pervasive negativity in the media have pushed people to the brink. Murder rates have skyrocketed, and suicide is spreading.

The darkness in our culture has created a perfect storm. The chaos, financial uncertainty and fear of an invisible virus have driven people to seek alternatives.

Pastors tell me the same thing when I ask what they are seeing in their churches and communities: 1) A percentage of their congregation has either dropped out of church completely or is not ready to come back to in-person meetings; and 2) New people seeking spiritual reality have appeared out of nowhere.

I believe we will see a wave of this spiritual desperation in 2022. More and more people will show up in our services and small group meetings who have never been in church before. Some may Google the word "church." Others may simply ask you a probing question. People are looking for spiritual reality.

Not everyone, however, is going to show up at a church service. During my trip to Michigan, I talked with a man in a hotel lobby (I'll call him Nate) who told me he's almost ready to give his heart to Jesus. When I invited him to church, he

told me, “I could never go there. Those people know my past. They would ask me to leave.”

I assured Nate that everyone there would welcome him warmly, and God would forgive him. He wasn't convinced. It may take several conversations with genuine Christians before Nate realizes God can remove the stain of his sin.

Please prepare your heart to share the love of Jesus with people like John and Nate who are desperate. I know we live in challenging times, but God uses crisis moments to push people to Him.

Instead of complaining about the darkness, open your eyes. A ripened harvest is all around you.

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Holy Ghost Gas Station

From chapter 1 (“‘Follow Me’—The Call of the Savior”) of J. Lee Grady's newest book, *Follow Me*

In early 2020, two months before I ever heard the word coronavirus, I stopped at a convenience store near my home in LaGrange, Georgia, to fill up my gas tank. When I went inside to purchase a few items, I noticed the clerk at the cash register had a thick Indian accent. “What part of India are you from?” I asked the man, who looked as if he was in his late forties.

The man seemed surprised that I knew his ethnicity. He asked: “You know India?”

I told him I had visited there four times and that I had good friends in several cities in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

“I am from Hyderabad,” he told me as he handed me my change.

“Oh, so you speak the Telegu language,” I said. Now I had the man’s full attention. He couldn’t believe a guy from a small town in Georgia knew anything about his country or his regional dialect. He seemed surprised that I cared. He smiled and bobbed his head from side to side in typical Indian fashion.

In that moment all the other customers left the store, and I was able to have a focused conversation with my new friend. I learned that his name is Mahipal, that he has a wife and family back home, and that he grew up in a nominal Christian family. When I explained that I’m a minister, and that I have some close disciples in Hyderabad, he asked me point-blank: “Would you disciple me?”

I can promise you I had never heard those words before while standing at a store counter!

That began a fascinating friendship that grew more interesting when the coronavirus pandemic shut down all my travels and forced most businesses to close. Fortunately for Mahipal, his store was considered an essential business, so it stayed open. And since he worked seven days a week, I started visiting him on most mornings to help him grow in his faith.

A few weeks later he realized he had never actually been born again. Like so many nominal Christians in India, Mahipal went to church only once or twice a year and did not take his faith seriously. He followed a dead religious tradition. So we prayed together at a table in the rear of his store, near the video poker machines. He invited Jesus to take over his life.

Thus began my journey of discipleship with Mahipal. He wore a

mask and gloves on the job, and we stayed six feet away from each other to comply with pandemic rules. We greeted each other with elbow bumps instead of hugs. But Mahipal's smile got brighter each day as I shared Christ's love with him as a mentor and friend.

Every morning I would stop at the store to have a coffee and an informal Bible lesson with Mahipal. We talked about prayer, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the differences among Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. (When we first started our Bible studies, he assumed that John the Baptist wrote John's gospel.) Mahipal often had to run to the counter to sell cigarettes, beer, or lottery tickets to customers, but then he rushed back to read another Bible verse or to ask another question. This went on for months.

One day we began talking about the importance of water baptism, and Mahipal asked if he could be baptized. Most churches weren't having in-person services at that time, but a pastor I knew offered to fill the baptismal tank in his church on a Sunday afternoon. I invited about ten friends, and they distanced themselves all over the sanctuary and wore masks. I got tearful when Mahipal stood in the water and testified that Jesus Christ is the only true God. His boss, who was a Hindu, was watching from the back of the church.

I call this my "pandemic miracle" because I never would have expected to take on such an important ministry assignment when the world was in total lockdown. Mahipal helped me understand that even during a world crisis when people were sheltering in place, God was still drawing people to Himself. The Holy Spirit is never in quarantine.

After Mahipal's baptism, I shared with him about the importance of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Being unfamiliar with the biblical term, he thought we needed to fill up the baptismal again with water for a second dunk! I explained to him that we only needed to pray and that God

would fill Him with the Holy Spirit and anoint him for ministry. We prayed together the next week in his backyard on a hot Georgia afternoon, and Mahipal was gloriously filled with the Spirit's power and boldness as he sat in a lawn chair.

The next day I got a text from Mahipal. He said: "Can you follow up with this person? I just prayed with him to receive Jesus." He had led a man to Christ in the gas station!

Over the course of the next few months, Mahipal prayed with eleven people to become Christians. In each case they were paying for cigarettes or other items, and he started a conversation with them about faith while they were standing at the cash register. One lady who was buying cigarettes even began crying as she prayed with my friend.

A few more months went by and Mahipal realized he needed to go home to India to tend to his family there. Before we said our goodbyes, he told me his plan. "Pastor Lee, when I get back to Hyderabad I am going to invite all my nominal Christian friends and my Hindu friends to my house for a meal. I am going to share my testimony with them and tell how I was born again in America. I want to lead many people to Jesus when I return," he said.

I encouraged Mahipal to watch some old Billy Graham sermons on YouTube so he could learn how to present the gospel message clearly. And the day I took him to the Atlanta airport to fly home, I prayed with Mahipal's Hindu boss to become a Christian. The man who had watched the baptism from the back of the church in May decided to follow Jesus too.

A chain reaction of grace had started before Mahipal arrived home on the other side of the world.

It is impossible for me to fully express the joy I feel when I see how this dear Indian brother is following Christ today. We talk often on video calls. He got connected to a healthy

church in Hyderabad, and he is growing spiritually.

I didn't know I would meet him when I went into a gas station in early 2020 to purchase a bottle of water. I had no idea that this chance encounter at Exit 14 off Interstate 85 in Georgia would lead to hours and hours of discipleship meetings in his store. And I had no clue that this seemingly soft-spoken man with a thick foreign accent would end up going back to India to lead others to Christ.

For more information on Follow Me, visit My . {eoa}

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Will We Know Our Friends in Heaven?

The year 2021 was a painful year for me personally because I lost three good friends. Robert died of lymphoma in February; Fernando died last week after a heart attack he suffered while on an international flight; and James died suddenly last weekend of heart failure. All three men left grieving wives and families behind.

To cope with my own grief, I've been looking at photos and writing down memories. But it's hard. James and I talked or texted almost every day so it's surreal to see his number in my phone with no "What's up, bud?" or "You doin' OK?" messages from Alabama.

One thing that has helped me so much in the grieving process is meditating on the reality of eternal life. We know the Bible tells us our loved ones go immediately into God's presence in heaven when they die, if they were believers in Jesus. We love to tell our grieving friends and relatives, "He's in a better place" or "She's enjoying heaven now."

Those words don't always help me, to be honest. That's great for them but what about those of us here on earth who are missing them? I know my friend James is in heaven but I can't text him there. My phone plan with AT&T doesn't include coverage in glory. (I would pay extra for that!)

What encourages me most is not that my friends are safely in the arms of Jesus but that when this world as we know it ends, I will be with my Christian friends again.

Some Christians have a weird idea that heaven is an ethereal, dreamy place that is more shadow than substance. They imagine that we all show up there as disembodied spirits, floating around in white robes while choirs sing 24 hours a day. Some Christians even believe we will have totally new identities and that our memories of this earth will be totally erased.

We would do well to read the last chapters of the Bible over and over until we understand that God has so much more in store for us than that. The last words of Revelation remind us of these truths:

This world will be reborn. After God judges the wickedness of humanity at the end of time, He will totally remake this earth and bring heaven down to this domain. It will be "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1, MEV), a paradise like it was at the time of creation. The new earth will have trees, animals, roads and indescribable beauty. And the glorious, heavenly city of Jerusalem, a new and perfect city, will be the capital of the new creation.

We will live and work with each other in a new world.

Revelation 21:24 says “the nations” will walk by the perpetual light of the Son of God, who will rule from His eternal throne. There will be nations in the new earth. We will live as citizens of God’s glorious kingdom, in a world where there is no war, violence, tears, pain, pandemics or death (21:4). The Bible is not clear about what kind of work will we do but those who have been faithful to God in this life will be involved in management of the new world.

We will maintain our identities. We will have new bodies (1 Cor. 15:49) but that doesn’t mean we won’t be ourselves. Jesus said when we are in the new earth we will “recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Matt. 8:11). These great heroes of faith will not lose their identities—they will still be themselves.

I will be myself, you will be yourself and we will have the opportunity to meet saints who lived in different time periods. I am personally eager to schedule appointments with Paul, Timothy, John, Ruth, Mark, Luke, Lazarus and Mary Magdalene, as well as William Seymour, Corrie Ten Boom, Charles Spurgeon and C.S. Lewis.

We will continue our friendships in the next life. When Jesus shared the Passover meal with His closest friends, “He said to them, ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will never eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15-16). Jesus was clearly stating that He would reunite with His disciples and they would fellowship together again.

When this world ends, I’m invited to the greatest party ever celebrated. I’m sure the food will be amazing and the music will be off the charts, but the joy will be uncontainable because all of our friends and relatives who loved the Lord will be in the crowd. We will dance, hug, laugh, share our hearts and visit each other’s new homes. And I plan to enjoy coffee—or some new, heavenly beverage—with Robert, Fernando

and James.

I might also talk and text with them on some type of superior phones and I'm sure the signal will be perfect—with no spam, dead batteries or dropped calls. {eoa}

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Instead of Fighting About COVID, Let's Mourn for Its Victims

Back in August I attended the funeral of a true Christian hero, Beatríz López. She was a brave evangelist who preached the gospel in her native Cuba in spite of opposition from the government. She became the first woman to serve as a bishop in her denomination, the International Pentecostal Holiness Church.

Beatríz was only 58. She died in a Florida hospital on Aug. 18 after battling COVID for more than two weeks. Her two sons, ages 25 and 36, are still in mourning—along with multiple congregations in Cuba who miss their beloved spiritual mother.

In September another pastor I know, Vaughn Clark from Dublin, Georgia, died after fighting the virus. And a few months before that, I lost two other friends to COVID—Moisés Gonzalez

and Claudia Cupido, both pastors in Mexico.

As of October, more than 4.7 million people have died from COVID. An estimated 676,000 of those have been in the United States. Yet from the beginning of this pandemic, I've listened to Christians argue about the virus from every angle:

- Some say health experts are exaggerating the numbers.
- Some say the virus is a hoax and that it's really not deadly.
- Some believe the COVID vaccine is a sinister plot to kill us all.

I usually keep my mouth shut when people share their conspiracy theories and political views. None of us really knows what is behind the curtain. I certainly don't trust all the "experts" because: 1) they don't agree, and 2) the "science" of this virus is not conclusive.

What bothers me most is when people deny the virus is real. Maybe they don't know anyone who got sick? I do. I've seen families and churches devastated by the loss the pandemic has caused.

Consider the Church of God in Christ, one of the largest African-American denominations in this country. The numbers of COGIC leaders who have died since March 2020 is beyond astounding. Those deaths include Bishop Phillip A. Brooks, who was second in command in the church. Observers wonder how COGIC will navigate its future with so many of its leaders gone.

In countries such as Malawi, India or the Philippines, huge numbers of ministry leaders died from COVID, even when their churches were in quarantine. In January of this year, evangelist Stephen Lungu, the "Billy Graham of Africa," succumbed to the disease at age 79.

In Nepal, where Christianity is a minority faith, 130 pastors

had died of COVID by July 2021. One Nepali leader told *Christianity Today* in June: “In the month of May, pastors were dying almost every day. I have never seen something like that.”

My plea is that we would show some kindness, especially to the families of loved ones who died from the virus. If someone you know was a casualty of this disease, now is not the time to share your opinions about mask mandates, antibodies, vaccines, Dr. Fauci or the greedy motives of drug companies.

Nor is it the time to ask, “Were they vaccinated?” Instead, offer your heartfelt condolences. Say a kind word. Share the family’s pain instead of causing more pain with your insensitivity.

The world is experiencing a global tragedy. Millions of people in 2020 and 2021 have buried parents, children, spouses, brothers, sisters and friends. They have even buried their pastors.

We have been stressed out because of ventilators, fevers, inflamed lungs, quarantines, socially distanced funerals and endless political arguments. Yet we have also been reminded that there is an eternity on the other side of this broken, disease-filled world.

While we mourn the deaths of our brothers and sisters in Christ, let’s hold on to faith, knowing that God can cause all things—even a pandemic—to work together for our good.

Ten Deadbeat Men Who are Deceiving Christian Women

My wife and I raised four daughters—without shotguns in the house! We love our sons-in-law, and it's obvious God handpicked each of them to match our daughters' temperaments and personality.

I have always believed God is in the matchmaking business. If He can do it for my daughters, He can do it for you.

Today I have several single female friends who would very much like to find the right guy. Some tell me the pickings are slim at their church, so they have ventured into the world of online dating. Others have thrown up their hands in despair, wondering if there are any decent Christian guys left anywhere. They've begun to wonder if they should lower their standards in order to find a mate.

My advice stands: *Don't settle for less than God's best.* Too many Christian women today have ended up with an Ishmael because impatience pushed them into an unhappy marriage. Please take my fatherly advice: You are much better off single than with the wrong guy!

Speaking of "wrong guys," here are the top 10 men you should avoid when looking for a husband:

1. The unbeliever. Please write 2 Corinthians 6:14 on a Post-it note and tack it on your computer at work. It says, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (NASB). This is not an outdated religious rule. It is the Word of God for you today.

Don't allow a man's charm, looks or financial success (or his willingness to go to church with you) push you to compromise what you know is right. "Missionary dating" is never a wise strategy. If the guy is not a born-again Christian, scratch him off your list. He's not right for you. I've yet to meet a Christian woman who didn't regret marrying an unbeliever.

2. The liar. If you discover that the man you are dating has lied to you about his past or that he's always covering his tracks to hide his secrets from you, run for the nearest exit. Marriage must be built on a foundation of trust. If he can't be truthful, break up now before he bamboozles you with an even bigger deception.

3. The playboy. I wish I could say that if you meet a nice guy at church, you can assume he's living in sexual purity. But that's not the case today. I've heard horror stories about single guys who serve on the worship team on Sunday but act like Casanovas during the week. If you marry a guy who was sleeping around before your wedding, you can be sure he will be sleeping around after your wedding.

4. The deadbeat. There are many solid Christian men who experienced marital failure years ago. Since their divorce, they have experienced the Holy Spirit's restoration, and now they want to remarry. Second marriages can be very happy. But if you find out that the man you are dating hasn't been caring for his children from a previous marriage, you have just exposed a fatal flaw. Any man who will not pay for his past mistakes or support children from a previous marriage is not going to treat you responsibly.

5. The addict. Churchgoing men who have addictions to alcohol or drugs have learned to hide their problems—but you don't want to wait until your honeymoon to find out that he's a boozier. Never marry a man who refuses to get help for his addiction. Insist that he get professional help and walk away. And don't get into a codependent relationship in which he claims he needs you to stay sober. You can't fix him.

6. The bum. I have a female friend who realized after she married her boyfriend that he had no plans to find steady work. He had devised a great strategy: He stayed home all day and played video games while his professional wife worked and paid all the bills. The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians, "If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat,

either” (2 Thess. 3:10). The same rule applies here: If a man is not willing to work, he doesn’t deserve to marry you.

7. The narcissist. I sincerely hope you can find a guy who is handsome. But be careful: If your boyfriend spends six hours a day at the gym and regularly posts closeups of his biceps on Facebook, you have a problem. Do not fall for a self-absorbed guy. He might be cute, but a man who is infatuated with his appearance and his own needs will never be able to love you sacrificially, like Christ loves the church (Eph. 5:25). The man who is always looking at himself in the mirror will never notice you.

8. The abuser. Men with abusive tendencies can’t control their anger when it boils over. If the guy you are dating has a tendency to fly off the handle, either at you or others, don’t be tempted to rationalize his behavior. He has a problem, and if you marry him you will have to navigate his minefield every day to avoid triggering another outburst. Angry men hurt women—verbally and sometimes physically. Find a man who is gentle.

9. The man-child. Call me old-fashioned, but I’m suspicious of a guy who still lives with his parents at age 35. If his mother is still doing his cooking, cleaning and ironing at that age, you can be sure he’s stuck in an emotional time warp. You are asking for trouble if you think you can be a wife to a guy who hasn’t grown up. Back away and, as a friend, encourage him to find a mentor who can help him mature.

10. The control freak. Some Christian guys today believe marriage is about male superiority. They may quote Scripture and sound super-spiritual, but behind the façade of husbandly authority is deep insecurity and pride that can morph into spiritual abuse. First Peter 3:7 commands husbands to treat their wives as equals. If the man you are dating talks down to you, makes demeaning comments about women or seems to squelch your spiritual gifts, back away now. He is on a power trip.

Women who marry religious control freaks often end up in a nightmare of depression.

If you are a woman of God, don't sell your spiritual birthright by marrying a guy who doesn't deserve you. Your smartest decision in life is to wait for a man who is sold out to Jesus.

To get the other side of this story, read "8 Women Christian Men Should Never Marry." {eoa}

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Planning a Big Move? Trust God in the Transition

Americans sheltered in place and worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic but trend watchers say we are on the cusp of a huge moving boom over the next few years. Are we just restless after so many months in quarantine? There are actually many factors driving people to relocate:

– Because so many people began working remotely during the pandemic, workers now realize they can work from anywhere. Research by Upwork found that 36.2 million Americans plan to work from home by 2025—that's 87 percent more than before

COVID struck. That means a huge segment of the workforce plans to relocate to places where they can get cheaper housing or live closer to family.

– Many Americans are moving from big cities to escape rising crime, high taxes or crowded roads. Studies show the biggest numbers of people are moving to Florida, Texas, Arizona and North Carolina; the states losing the most people are New York, California, Illinois and New Jersey.

– Many young families are looking for cheaper houses in more rural or Southern states where they hope to find better schools and an overall better quality of life.

I have many younger friends who began talking about relocation during the tumultuous pandemic era. Most of them feel trapped in cities that are overrun by crime, a rising cost of living and hostility to Christian values. I gave them the same advice I am sharing here:

Put your future in God's hands. Abraham, the father of our faith, began his spiritual odyssey when the Lord said, "Go from your country ... to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1b, MEV). Moses had to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. David had to move to Jerusalem. And Jesus' last words to His disciples were about moving to foreign countries.

It's comforting that the Bible is full of stories of people who were directed by God to move. But never make a decision to move unless you know the Lord is leading you. If He wants to take you from one place to another, He will confirm your decision, open doors and direct your steps. (And don't move just to get away from bad influences! God may want you to stay and shine the light of Jesus in a dark community.)

Be brave. When Joshua was preparing to relocate the people of Israel to Canaan, God said three times: "Be strong and courageous" (Josh. 1:6a, a7, 9b). Moving requires a leap of faith and doubters always get cold feet. Has God given you a

big promise about the land you are about to possess? Take a deep breath, resist fear and forge ahead.

Take one step at a time. Counselors say relocation is one of the most stressful things in life—ranking right up there with the death of a loved one. It's a huge combination of stressors—selling a house, buying or renting a new house, hiring movers, leaving friends and stepping into the dark unknown. Not fun!

You don't have to handle everything at once. And you don't have to figure out your relocation plan by yourself. You have a Shepherd and He is good. He leads you "beside still waters" and He guides you "in paths of righteousness" (Ps. 23:2-3). Trust your Shepherd's leading. He will make your transition peaceful.

Let go of the old. When God wanted to bless Naomi, He told her to leave the forsaken land of Moab and move to Bethlehem. Her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth pledged to go with her but her other daughter-in-law, Orpah, couldn't tear herself away from her culture, even though God was doing good things for His people in Bethlehem (Ruth 1:14-16).

Sometimes when God calls us to a new place, we discover that we are hindered by many soulish distractions. You must love Jesus more than you love your comfort zone. It's good to have roots in a place but you must never let those roots become stronger than your willingness to follow God anywhere.

Be open to God's detours. One important lesson I learned in a recent transition is that we must never lock ourselves into "our" plan. You may sense the Lord leading you to leave where you are but when you begin moving to your new destination, God may redirect you. The apostle Paul was heading to Rome to preach the gospel but a shipwreck took him to Malta—where he led an unscheduled revival. Don't be so headstrong about your destination that God can't gently nudge you in a different

direction.

Expect miracles. When I knew for sure God was calling my wife and I to move from Florida to Georgia five years ago, we asked our friends to pray with us. I shared seven specific prayer requests and the first item on the list was: “Quick sale of our house.” Guess what? Our house sold in less than 24 hours—to the first people who walked in the door!

Moving can be a thrilling adventure when you invite God into the process. When the Holy Spirit says go, He goes with you. When He calls you to leave the old and step into the new, He propels you to a new spiritual level. {eoa}

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The Eight Biggest Mistakes Leaders Make

I’ve been blessed to know many wise and courageous ministry leaders over the years. Some have been examples from a distance and others have been mentors up close. But I have also known many leaders whose churches or organizations failed because they didn’t adopt the solid principles of leadership found in the Bible.

Today I constantly remind young leaders what I’ve observed.

Based on the eight biggest blunders any leader could make, I offer this cautionary advice:

1. Never treat people like projects. Many leaders are so caught up in their heavenly vision that they view people like pawns to achieve their dreams. If you don't love and respect people, you will run over them. Learn to value people by offering encouragement, affirmation and rewards for service. When Paul said goodbye to the elders of Ephesus, they wept and embraced him because they knew he genuinely loved them (see Acts 20:36-38). Love people; don't use them. If you treat them like cogs in a machine, they won't feel sad when you leave!

2. Never try to do everything yourself. Can you imagine if Nehemiah tried to rebuild the crumbling walls of Jerusalem by himself? Yet some leaders try to manage multiple projects rather than delegating the work to people who have the skills and the passion to achieve a common goal. Stop thinking you can do every job better. Help each team member find their place "on the wall" where they can work effectively. If you never take the time to train others, your ministry will remain small and you will eventually burn out.

3. Never focus on your critics. All leaders receive negative comments from armchair quarterbacks and petty people. Get over it—this is just one of the many occupational hazards of ministry. Never become obsessed with what people are saying behind your back. Their words are like the buzzing of insects; what Mrs. Jones told Mr. Smith after hearing Mrs. Williams' criticism of your sermon will not affect you. Keep your heart focused on Jesus and let the sound of your joyful praise crush Satan's accusations.

4. Never make big decisions without wise counsel. Some leaders jump from one big project to the next, jerking their church or organization to the left and then to the right as if they don't really know where they are going. These erratic leaders never submit their ideas to others for accountability—or they

surround themselves with yes men who rubber-stamp every foolish idea. Proverbs 11:14 (NASB) says, "Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory." Stop jerking people around and ask wise advisers to pray with you about your plans.

5. Never avoid confrontation. Every ministry will develop problems. But a good leader will see a problem when it first buds and take the initiative to correct it. Leaders who fear confrontation will let things fester until the problem spreads like a poisonous vine that eventually chokes the life out of the ministry. When the apostle Paul stepped in to correct a problem in the Galatian church, he warned them: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9). Never assume that a problem will "take care of itself." Deal with it!

6. Never try to pour into others when you are empty. Even Jesus had to go to a lonely place to pray after ministering to the crowds (see Luke 5:16). Yet many leaders will run on fumes for weeks without resting and recharging. If you work your fingers to the bone without taking care of your own spiritual life, your axe will get so dull that hours of work will become fruitless and exhausting. Pull away regularly to sharpen your blade.

7. Never close your heart to personal ministry. One ministry school in the United States taught its students that pastors should never share their struggles with anyone—because people would gossip about them or stab them in the back. I feel sorry for any pastor or leader who doesn't have a network of mentors and friends with whom they can share their deepest struggles. Leaders are just as flawed as anyone else and they need to confess their sins, process their pain and receive healing prayer. Leaders who stay isolated will end up emotionally unhealthy and they do not finish well.

8. Never lose your spiritual passion. King Saul is a sad example of failed leadership. He started well but ended

miserably. May the Lord deliver us all from the spirit of Saul, who felt the call of God and experienced the oil of the Spirit's anointing in his youth but departed from God's ways in his later years.

We cannot stay faithful to the Lord if His flame is not continually blazing in our hearts. Even when the apostle Paul was in prison, he wrote, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). Paul continually stoked the fire of the Holy Spirit in his life because he had a secret life with God. He prayed continually, he soaked his mind in God's Word and he lived on the altar of surrender every day. May Paul's passionate devotion be ours. {eoa}

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Seven Ways to Prepare Now for Spiritual Harvest

Fifty years ago, Time magazine featured Jesus Christ on its cover to document an unusual spiritual revival that was sweeping the nation at that time. At the height of the Jesus movement, which began around 1967, thousands of teenagers and young hippies found salvation as an alternative to psychedelic drugs, free sex and Vietnam War protests.

But this spiritual awakening exposed a big problem. Many churches weren't prepared for an influx of new souls—especially young people with long hair, tie-dyed T-shirts and love beads. Some Christians actually rejected the new converts because they couldn't handle the change.

I sense we are on the cusp of a similar awakening. People who have been traumatized by the social upheaval of this pandemic are now looking for spiritual reality. Many of them are watching church services online—and then venturing out to make their first visit. I've seen firsthand in my travels that spiritual desperation is growing.

But are we ready for an invasion of newcomers? The Bible urges us to be prepared. Proverbs 10:5 (NASB) says, "He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully." Are you alert in this critical time? Here are seven ways you can prepare for this season of revival:

1. Rekindle your own spiritual fire. You can't pour into others if you are empty yourself. You won't be equipped to help new Christians if you have become spiritually apathetic or if you aren't following Jesus passionately. Jesus warned the church in Ephesus: "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Rev. 2:4). Turn from sin and sluggishness and begin pursuing God again.

2. Open your heart to people. Some Christians are perpetual spectators, standing on the sidelines while they watch others share the gospel and minister to others. Make a decision to get in the game. Jesus has called every believer to love people and make disciples.

3. Learn to discern people's spiritual needs. When Jesus went to Samaria, He sat down by a well and waited until a rejected woman came during the hottest part of the day. Jesus was busy but that didn't stop Him from conversing with this woman who

needed answers. He perceived her struggles, met her spiritual needs and then sent her to her village to reach others.

As an ambassador of Jesus, your job is to offer hope to the people God puts in your path. Whether you are at a gas station, a grocery store, at your child's school or in an office, people who struggle with depression, anxiety, stress, fear and loneliness are everywhere around you. The Holy Spirit wants to give you a word for them.

4. Make room in your schedule. When new people start visiting your church or asking you spiritual questions at your job, you must make room for them in your life. Don't miss the opportunity. Invite them for coffee, host them for dinner in your home or take them to a Bible study. Don't be surprised when the harvest totally disrupts your routine!

5. Renounce any judgmental attitudes. Many Christians post caustic messages on social media complaining about social problems. You have a right to your opinions but how will unbelievers feel when they learn about your faith and then see those messages?

God may want you to minister to someone with piercings, tattoos or blue hair: or you may find yourself praying with someone who is confused about their gender or sexuality. Don't let your politics or your religious views prevent you from showing Christ's unconditional love. When you show true love, sinners will find the grace to repent.

6. Get more training. Many Christians shy away from praying for people or sharing their faith because they feel ill-equipped to counsel or use the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Yet we have more opportunities today than ever to train believers for ministry. Sign up for a class at your church, join a small group study or enroll in online seminars to prepare you to pray for others.

7. Mend your nets so you don't lose people. Many churches are

so accustomed to preaching to the choir that they don't have proper systems to care for visitors or new converts. If your nets have been out of use, you will lose people. Train your prayer ministry team and implement a system of small groups so that new converts can plug in immediately for discipleship.

A harvest is coming. Jesus told us in John 4:35 (NKJV): "Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest." New people are heading in your direction—and they are weary, stressed out and looking for the answers that our dysfunctional culture can't provide. Let's roll up our sleeves and be ready for the influx. {eoa}

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Pray for Haiti Like Your Life Depended on It

The nation of Haiti is the last thing most Americans are thinking about these days. It's the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere and its problems seem unsolvable. So we basically don't care.

But last week, a group of church and ministry leaders gathered in Haiti for three days of emergency prayer and fasting.

American missionary Danita Estrella Watts, who has worked to help Haitian children for 22 years, says 200 churches participated in the prayer event from October 29-31 to ask for God's intervention in the troubled nation.

"The people of Haiti have had enough and are fighting back!" said Danita, whose ministry—Danita's Children—runs an orphanage, school and hospital in the eastern side of the country. "We know that the battle belongs to the Lord!"

Haiti has been in news headlines multiple times this year, all for the worst reasons. On July 7, Haitian President Jovenel Moise was assassinated after months of political unrest. Then on August 14, Haiti was hit by a 7.2 earthquake—and relief workers who tried to bring supplies to the shattered country couldn't reach victims because Tropical Storm Grace slammed ashore two days later.

And throughout 2021, violent gangs have taken control of much of the country, forcing some people to abandon their homes. The gangs have kidnapped more than 600 people this year, demanding exorbitant ransoms. They have kidnapped students from schools and they have even abducted pastors while they were preaching their sermons.

And then on October 17, a group of 17 American missionaries—including five children—were kidnapped by a gang known as 400 Mawozo. The mission workers, all from an Ohio-based group known as Christian Aid Ministries, are still in custody near Haiti's capital of Port-au-Prince and their captors are demanding \$17 million for their safe return.

A Christian Aid spokesperson has said that the gang has threatened to shoot the missionaries. Local Haitian leaders say this is one of the most brazen acts by the terrorists yet because in the past they were not likely to attack foreigners.

I'm asking Christians all over the United States to unite with our Haitian brothers and sisters to cry out for a divine

intervention. Please mobilize your church to pray. Call a fast and intensify your intercession (I plan to fast on Thursday, Nov. 4 but you can pick a day soon that works for you and your church.) Here are specific things we must pray:

1. Pray for a release of the 17 abducted missionaries. Christian Aid, which represents many Amish and Mennonite churches, released a statement in late October that said: "As we approach the two-week mark, we continue to pray that God would protect the hostages and give them grace to respond with Christ-like love in the face of evil. We pray for the kidnappers, that God would soften their hearts and draw them to Himself. Our prayers are also with the families as they wait day after day for the release of their loved ones."

2. Pray for an end to the reign of voodoo in Haiti. A majority of Haitian people still believe in witchcraft and practice some form of voodoo, which glorifies Satan and unleashes demon spirits to wreak havoc on the country. This dark idolatry has brought indescribable suffering to Haiti—and is the only explanation to why chaos reigns there. Take authority over this spirit of witchcraft and pray that the light of the gospel will replace the darkness.

3. Pray for the establishment of a new government of peace and order in Haiti. The level of crime and civil unrest has grown so bad in Haiti that the U.S. State Department issued a Do Not Travel advisory in August. The absence of order has disrupted education, ravaged the economy and plunged the nation into despair. Hospitals have shut down because of lack of electricity, neonatal intensive care units have run out of oxygen, gasoline costs \$15 a gallon—thus shutting down most transportation—and truck drivers who are still on the road risk being kidnapped.

Haiti is experiencing a literal nightmare. And yet we know our God is able to intervene when His people humble themselves and pray. Let's link arms with our friends in Haiti. Let's call on

God to rescue a troubled nation:

Lord Jesus,

You taught us in Matthew 6:13 to pray, "Deliver us from evil." We pray this now for the nation of Haiti. Deliver the Haitian people from violence, poverty, disaster and chaos. Establish godly leaders in positions of power so they can rebuild the government, the economy and the social structure. Deliver the Haitian people from violent gangs and bring criminals to justice. Deliver the Haitian people from superstition, witchcraft and the idolatry of voodoo so that spiritual darkness can be replaced by love and righteousness. And establish true peace in Haiti, so that aid workers, missionaries, doctors, nurses and carriers of Your mercy can travel once again to this land to bring hope. And most of all, let the Gospel of Jesus Christ spread rapidly in Haiti until all know about Your love and forgiveness. Amen. {eoa}

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The Devil Is Real But He Is Defeated!

Halloween is big business. The National Retail Federation reported last week that American consumers will spend a scary

\$ billion on Halloween candy, decorations, costumes and parties. That's way more than the \$8 billion spent in 2020, during the pandemic, and more than the \$ billion we spent in 2019.

Scary movies are also big business. The supernatural thriller *The Conjuring 3*—about a young man who commits murder after being possessed by a demon—has made \$202 million since it was released in June. And the new film *Halloween Kills* hit theaters last week—the twelfth movie in the Halloween franchise that focuses on the murderous rampages of a deranged mental patient. The slasher films have made a combined total of \$640 million worldwide.

What's ironic is that while films about demons are more popular than ever (a sequel to *The Exorcist* is slated for 2023), fewer people say they believe the devil is real. A 2020 Barna poll showed that only 56 percent of Americans believe Satan exists.

For many people—even many Christians—Satan is a silly idea rooted in medieval superstition. But if you are a follower of Christ, you also need to have a clear understanding of who the devil is and why he's not fiction. Here's a summary of what the Bible really says about Satan:

The devil is not all-powerful. God is omnipresent but the devil doesn't have that kind of influence. Jesus said He saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning (Luke 10:18)—referring to the moment when our enemy was cast out of the highest heaven. Satan posts his demons in various regions but he is not watching you 24 hours a day. And if you are in Christ, you are hidden in Him (see Col. 3:3) and the devil cannot detect you on his radar.

The devil is a fallen angel. Satan was originally created to serve God (see Ezek. 28) but he was cast out of heaven because of his pride. Hollywood has perpetrated the idea that Satan

has horns, a red cape and a pitchfork but this is based on folklore, not the Bible. In fact, the Bible says the devil is a master of clever disguises and that he prefers to appear as “an angel of light” (see 2 Cor. 11:14). Without spiritual discernment, most people don’t even recognize that the devil is working because he is so cunning and attractive.

We can’t blame the devil when we sin. A lot of Christians have the idea that the devil caused them to sin. (“The devil made me do it!”) No, the devil was probably nowhere near. The book of James says we must own the responsibility of our sin. “Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust” (James 1:14, NASB). Don’t blame the devil for what you did; take responsibility and repent.

Christ has defeated Satan. When Jesus died on the cross, He disarmed satanic powers and made a public spectacle of them (see Col. 2:15). I love the way The Message translates this verse: “[Jesus] stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.” Satan’s authority has been taken from him and all he can do now is lie, steal, kill and destroy—much like a renegade terrorist army—until the church finishes the job of preaching the gospel to the world. Satan knows his end is near.

The devil will eventually go to hell. Popular artwork often shows the devil running his diabolical operation from a headquarters in the midst of hell’s flames. But that is not a biblical concept. Ephesians 2:2 describes Satan as “the prince of the power of the air” because he runs his show from a remote, heavenly location. The good news is that he won’t be there for long.

Jesus said hell has been prepared for the devil and his angels (see Matt. 25:41) and Revelation 20:10 says after the final judgment, God will throw Satan into the lake of fire and brimstone where he will be “tormented day and night forever

and ever.” That is the horror movie the devil fears most.

If you are a believer in Christ, you have no reason to fear the devil. We should not be ignorant of Satan’s schemes and you should develop discernment to know where he is working, but you do not have to be afraid of him. The apostle Paul’s words in Romans 16:20 (MEV) remind us of our victory: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” If you are strong in faith, aggressive in prayer and filled with the Holy Spirit, you are a threat to Satan’s kingdom. {eoa}

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