

What Will You Do Now That God Has Pushed the Reset Button for 2021?

Did you ever wonder if 2020 was just a bad dream? I've had that fantasy many times since the COVID-19 pandemic started in March of last year. But I always wake up and realize the nightmare is real!

Life hasn't been easy. Some of us got infected with the virus, or we know people who got sick or even died. People with loved ones in nursing homes haven't been able to visit in months. Many Americans lost jobs or experienced a drop in income. Families have had to deal with closed schools and shuttered businesses.

And besides the pandemic, we've had forest fires, racial tension, political turmoil and the most named tropical storms since meteorologists started keeping those records.

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on churches, too. After months of virtual meetings, churches that now are meeting in person have learned that many of their members are too afraid to be around people, or they've grown too accustomed to watching church in their pajamas at home. Church budgets have been slashed, and pastors are wondering if having 50% of their previous members will be the new normal.

We've been challenged. We've been hit with overwhelming discouragement. We've been stretched to a breaking point.

Yet those of us who love Jesus know we can't despair. The pandemic didn't take heaven by surprise. God has been with us during our worst trials, and He promises to work all things together for our good.

When my ministry travel was canceled in March, I had no idea where I would get my income. I had a few freak-out moments. Then the Lord underscored these words from John 15:2: "Every branch in Me that bears no fruit, He takes away. And every branch that bears fruit, He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

There's an uncomfortable truth in this verse. If we want to grow spiritually, and if we want more spiritual fruit, we must submit to the Father's plan, not ours. He cuts things away so new growth will appear.

British preacher Charles Spurgeon, when preaching about John 15, said: "All fruit-bearing saints must feel the knife." Ouch! That means we can't just skate along in comfort, always getting what we want. If we desire the fruit of a mature Christian life, we must welcome the unexpected interruptions He uses to reset our lives.

Pruning is a painful and embarrassing experience. If you've ever seen a row of pruned trees, you know what I mean. They are ugly. They look stripped and hopeless. Grapevines that have been pruned look dead. Are you willing to live the pruned life?

Going Under the Knife

Pruning cuts off what is ineffective. This pandemic has been painful, but when we look back in a year we'll realize that God used it to eliminate things in our lives that weren't working. Some churches, for example, realize they were pouring tons of financial resources into programs or buildings that had no real impact. Pruning has revealed what is essential for us to make a powerful, book of Acts-style impact on our communities.

Before Jesus came, John the Baptist had to prepare the way. He called people to repentance and a cutting away of the old. Whenever God is about to do a new thing, He lays the axe to

the root. He recalibrates us so we don't go back to our old ways. He can't put new wine in old wineskins.

A tree that has never been pruned looks good. But unless the dead wood is cut away, along with the showy leaves, we will never see new blooms. We need the knife. The church will not look the same in 2021. The way we did things in previous seasons won't work in this next move of God. Ask Him to trim away the dead branches of stale religion in your life and in your church.

Right now we are an ugly sight, stripped of our packed buildings. We have been reduced to basics. But with the cutting comes something fresh and powerful, something that is so much better than church as we knew it prior to the pandemic.

More than anything, pruning brings us into a deeper connection with Jesus, the "true vine" (John 15:1). He promises that those who submit to His cutting process will abide closely with Him. Isn't this what we want?

We can't abide in Him if a thousand other things are distracting us. Life prior to this pandemic was too busy and too cluttered. Jesus wants our gaze to be on Him. The process of pruning cuts away everything else so we can love Him and trust Him fully.

When I invited the Lord to reset my own life during this turbulent time, He showed me three important steps I needed to take. I invite you to take the same journey:

Refocus

The Lord showed me that the church has been weighed down by fear and worry because of what we listen to. So many Americans are depressed because they are glued to the mainstream media for hours each day. The constant barrage of negative news has triggered anxiety and caused insomnia. The media's dishonest

manipulation of information has created a mental health crisis that in some ways is more serious than the virus itself.

Sometimes Christians are as guilty as secular journalists for creating this toxic atmosphere of negativity. I can't count how many times people have sent me emails and videos about the latest conspiracy theory or a certain pastor's doom-and-gloom prophecies. It's no wonder some believers are throwing up their hands and saying they hope Jesus returns soon.

But God does not want us to have a gloomy perspective on the future. Psalm 2 tells us that His throne in heaven is the most permanent, stable place in the universe. We don't have to worry about God's enemies because He promises to "speak to them in His anger, and terrify them in His fury" (v. 5b, NASB). He's in charge. Why don't we rest in that reality?

I have a prediction. The pain of 2020 will pass. Life will go on. The pandemic will end, we will take our masks off, flights will resume, the global economy will start humming again, churches will reopen, and we will discover that even in the darkest days God was at work.

That doesn't mean we won't struggle. We will face ups and downs, hardships, persecution and every other form of spiritual resistance. But nothing will stop God's work. We must get our eyes off the problems around us and look up. We must see His throne—and trust in His sovereign power. We must stop wringing our hands in fear and begin lifting our hands in prayer.

Jesus told us His kingdom is like a seed that grows so large it "becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches" (Matt. 13:32b, NASB). The growth may be slow. But no matter what the media says, nothing will stop Christ's kingdom from expanding. No matter how dark it gets, the light will come. Learn to refocus, and you'll see glimmers of hope everywhere.

Refuel

Unless you were hiding under a rock for the past 10 months, you know gasoline hit record low prices when the pandemic began. In Georgia, where I live, we were paying \$ a gallon in March. Some states reported the price was below a dollar a gallon.

There were two reasons for the price drop: Not as many people were buying gasoline, and Russia and Saudi Arabia are engaged in a price war, causing the oil supply to swing up. Market analysts said they had never seen such a glut of oil.

As I pondered this situation, the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart: "Now is the time to fill up." I knew He wasn't talking about my car's gas tank. Sometimes there are things in the natural world that send spiritual messages. The Lord has been asking the church in this season of lockdown to fill our spiritual reserves.

Jesus talked about the importance of having enough oil. The five wise virgins in Matthew 25 made sure they had enough oil for their lamps, while the five foolish ones weren't prepared. They were locked out of the wedding feast because they didn't consider oil an essential commodity. The Lord wants us to be ready for what's coming.

We've been like the foolish virgins. The oil of the Holy Spirit hasn't been important to us. We can take it or leave it. We don't think we need God's supernatural power because we have technology, comfortable church buildings, economic prosperity, hip preachers and slick contemporary worship.

We figured out a way to do church without God's help. We even have books and church growth gurus to teach us how to manufacture a cool vibe, entertain people for 60 minutes and get them out quickly. Revivalist A.W. Tozer said it this way: "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95% of what we do would go on and no one would know the

difference.”

Many churches today are devoid of the Holy Spirit’s power. Our processed version of Christianity doesn’t resemble the book of Acts. I believe God wants to send a global awakening of the Holy Spirit after this coronavirus pandemic. But we must prepare. Do we have enough oil in our lamps? You may need to seek a refilling.

When Paul went to Ephesus he met some men who believed in Jesus in an intellectual way, yet they had never been filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact they didn’t know there was a Holy Spirit (see Acts 19:1-7). This reminds me of many American churches. We go through the motions of church, but we are clueless about Pentecost.

Now is the time to ask the Baptizer to anoint you and refill you. Don’t wait until your regular routine resumes. The last thing we need is to go back to last year’s “normal” setting. What God has in store for us in 2021 is unprecedented. Only those with full tanks will be able to handle it.

Reprioritize

Some people have stayed strictly quarantined during the coronavirus crisis. I know people who haven’t been to social gatherings in months. I’m not going to criticize anyone for following protocols and procedures to protect themselves from the virus.

But just because we quarantine, wear masks and stay 6 feet away from people doesn’t mean the Holy Spirit has gone into hiding. He is still working! And He certainly doesn’t socially distance from people.

I have a young friend in the nation of Malawi named Nickson. In July, he moved to the village of Mpamba to plant a church. His home congregation in Mzuzu, 30 miles away, could only afford to give him \$25 to help. But in one month, Nickson led

51 people to Jesus, and they began meeting for worship under a plastic tent.

Nickson is discipling them in spite of the pandemic. "I came here to be a voice for Jesus to these people so they can become a part of the family of God," he told me. In November, he and his members began construction on a sanctuary.

Nickson's challenges are overwhelming, but he is always smiling when he texts me photos from Malawi. And he doesn't realize his church is growing faster than most churches in the world.

I love to hear testimonies from people like Nickson because they remind me the Holy Spirit is still working today, and that the challenges we are facing can't stop the spread of the gospel. COVID-19 is contagious, but the gospel spreads even faster.

I experienced my own "pandemic miracle" in 2020 when I led an Indian man named Mahipal to Christ. Mahipal worked at a gas station near my house. I was able to disciple him every day because my schedule had been canceled. He learned the Scriptures, and he was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. By the time he went home to India in July, he had led 11 other people to faith in Jesus!

My experience with Mahipal taught me that God was not "socially distancing" from people during this crazy time. God wants to get close to people, regardless of what kind of crisis is happening in the world.

I became bolder in 2020 at a time when many people were hiding in fear. I pray you will do the same in 2021. People all around you need the Lord. Let them see your hope and joy, and tell them the reason you are still smiling during a global crisis. {eoa}

READ MORE: Find encouragement to hold on during hard times at

.

J. Lee Grady is an author, speaker and director of The Mordecai Project—an international missions organization confronting the mistreatment of women in developing countries. He was the editor of Charisma for 11 years, and he continues to serve as a contributing editor. He lives in LaGrange, Georgia. You can learn more about his ministry at .

This article was excerpted from the January-February issue of Charisma magazine. If you don't subscribe to Charisma, click here to get every issue delivered to your mailbox. During this time of change, your subscription is a vote of confidence for the kind of Spirit-filled content we offer. In the same way you would support a ministry with a donation, subscribing is your way to support Charisma. Also, we encourage you to give gift subscriptions at , and share our articles on social media.

The Most Important Habit You Will Need in 2021

When I was a teenager, my mentor, Barry, taught me to have a daily devotional time. This has become the single most important habit in my life, and I'm convinced no one can grow as a Christian without it.

I memorized Proverbs 8:34 when I was just 18: "Blessed is the man who hears me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the

posts of my doors.” I started getting up early and praying in my dorm room. I discovered that God promises a blessing to those who spend time with Him. More than 40 years later I’m still setting aside that special time with God.

But how do you structure a daily quiet time in today’s overscheduled culture? Many Christians today say they are too busy to set aside time to pray and read the Bible. Instead, they multitask their devotional lives by listening to Christian podcasts while commuting to work or praying under their breath while showering or brushing their teeth.

If you never set aside time to focus wholeheartedly on prayer or the Bible, your relationship with God will feel cluttered and superficial. It’s not too late to develop new habits. Here are a few ways you can make your time with God richer and more intimate.

Set a regular time for your “date” with God. There is no rule about when to pray. Some people prefer mornings; others find an evening hour easier. Devotional time works better for me early in the morning before life’s pressures crowd my time. Once you develop your unique habit, and you realize how much you benefit from it, you’ll find you simply can’t live without time with God.

Choose a special place with privacy. Jesus said: “But you, when you pray, enter your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret” (Matt. 6:6a). This doesn’t mean you can’t pray while driving to work. But you need a quiet place in order to focus.

Turn off your phone. Would you talk to friends, reply to texts or answer emails during a date with your spouse? Not unless you trivialize that relationship. The same principle applies when you spend time with the Lord. We need to reclaim the art of undistracted devotion.

I’ve found it necessary to silence my phone during time with

God. And if you use your phone to read the Bible, consider switching to an old-fashioned hard copy of the Scriptures. The temptation to check messages or post Instagram photos can ruin your devotional life.

Don't put yourself under pressure. You don't have to read 50 chapters of the Bible or pray three hours. Pace yourself. Be realistic and take small steps. If you have not been seeking the Lord regularly, start by reading a chapter a day in the Bible and praying for 15 minutes. Eventually you will want more. It is better to be a tortoise than a hare.

Learn to "chew" the Bible. One of the simplest ways to study the Bible is to read one book at a time and slowly digest each verse. The biblical word "meditate" means "to chew," as a cow chews its cud over and over. The more you read a passage, the more "juice" you squeeze out of it.

Listen for God's voice. Some people have complained to me, "I just never hear God speaking." Yet when I ask if they read the Bible regularly, they say they're too busy. God wants to speak directly to us through the pages of His Word. When you read Scripture with a prayerful heart, God can cause a verse to jump off the page as a direct personal message.

Use a prayer list. Years ago, I started the habit of praying for certain people God had put in my life. Pouring my heart out in prayer for them has become one of the most fulfilling spiritual disciplines I engage in.

The apostle Paul feared the Corinthians might be "led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3b, NASB). Our media-saturated culture gives us a million ways to occupy our time, but simple devotion remains the antidote to all distraction. As you step into 2021, reset your priorities and make it your goal to spend consistent time with God.

J. Lee Grady was editor of Charisma for 11 years and now serves as contributing editor. He directs *The Mordecai Project* (), an international ministry that protects women and girls from gender-based violence. His latest book is *Set My Heart on Fire* (Charisma House).

This article was excerpted from the January/February issue of Charisma magazine. If you don't subscribe to Charisma, click [here](#) to get every issue delivered to your mailbox. During this time of change, your subscription is a vote of confidence for the kind of Spirit-filled content we offer. In the same way you would support a ministry with a donation, subscribing is your way to support Charisma. Also, we encourage you to give gift subscriptions at , and share our articles on social media.

Don't Throw Stones at Carl Lentz

Many of us groaned collectively back in November when we learned that Carl Lentz, pastor of Hillsong's New York City congregation, had been fired because of a moral failure. The 42-year-old preacher, known for his hipster style, admitted in a public statement that he had engaged in an extramarital affair.

"This failure is on me and me alone, and I take full

responsibility for my actions,” Lentz said in the Nov. 5 post on Instagram.

Lentz and his wife, Laura, and their three children have reportedly relocated to California to seek therapy and healing. Meanwhile the Hillsong network of churches must deal with the fallout, along with the larger body of Christ—which has been shaken multiple times recently by high-profile moral failures.

A church scandal is not just traumatic for the leader at the center of the storm; it also destabilizes everyone around them. Whole churches or ministries can be shaken to their foundations when a leader makes poor choices.

During my 18 years at *Charisma* I had to cover many stories of moral failure—sexual scandals, financial scams or horrific abuses of power. My trust in the people involved was shattered. In fact, my trust in all leaders was tested. Fortunately, I never walked away from my faith because a leader failed. But many people do.

You may have been tempted to pick up a few stones to throw at Lentz. It’s certainly understandable to feel some anger in this situation. And the Lord knows we didn’t need another reason for the world to call us hypocrites. But this situation is not about what the world thinks of us. It’s a family matter, and Lentz is a brother in Christ who needs our compassion right now.

Here are a few steps I always recommend in the aftermath of a moral failure in the church:

1. **It’s OK to grieve.** Jeremiah wrote an entire book of the Bible—Lamentations—to process his grief over Israel’s unfaithfulness. He cried out: “Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers ... Our fathers sinned and are no more” (Lam. 5:2a, 7a). Jeremiah did not minimize the impact of the sins of Israel’s leaders. But he didn’t

sit in judgment; rather, he cried for them—and for the effect their choices had on others. Sin has huge implications. It is appropriate to shed tears over it.

2. **Extend mercy to the leader who fell.** The apostle Paul often had to bring correction to first-century leaders who failed God. He wrote: “Brothers, if a man is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore such a one in the spirit of meekness” (Gal. 6:1a). That means we shouldn’t be harsh or vindictive, even if we must remove the person from leadership.

Biblical gentleness is not cheap grace. Being merciful doesn’t mean we overlook sin or minimize its consequences. (In Lentz’s case, Hillsong fired him.) But gentleness does require us to recognize that if it were not for the grace of God, we could have made the same mistakes the offending leader did. Treat the fallen brother or sister as you would want to be treated!

3. **Forgive from your heart.** I’ve met Christians who still nurse the same grudges 30 years after a pastor hurt them. They keep their pain alive by reliving the offense over and over. As a result, they are stuck in a time warp, and no one wants to be around them because their sarcasm is so toxic. You must learn to say what Jesus said on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34a).
4. **Learn from the offending leader’s mistakes.** The Bible provides us with both good and bad examples of leaders. I have mentors who taught me much about God, leadership and ministry. But I also learned a lot from watching the mistakes leaders made—a few times at my expense. If someone in ministry hurts you, make a mental note: “That is not the way I want to treat people.” You can turn your disappointments into blessings if you learn from them.
5. **Keep communication open.** I’ve seen cases in which

leaders were asked to step down because of a scandal, and suddenly everyone they knew stopped talking to them. That's understandable because often we just don't know what to say. And it can be awkward if the fallen leader is justifying his behavior or trying to convince people of his version of the story.

But fallen leaders need friends too. If you were close to the person who fell, try to maintain the friendship—knowing that your words might not be appreciated at first. If you did not know the leader well, a kind letter sent at just the right time can be like water in a desert to a soul who thirsts for encouragement.

6. Stay in fellowship. Many people who experience a church scandal leave church altogether. It's okay 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.

Years ago, a pastor who is affiliated with the Hillsong movement asked me: "Lee, you've seen so many leaders fail during your years at the magazine. How do you not become cynical about that?" I quickly responded: "Seeing their brokenness only reminds me that we are all flawed vessels, and that I am capable of the same failure."

Please don't judge Carl Lentz for his sin. He has admitted it; he has repented, and he is now working with his leaders to recover. Instead of throwing stones, consider your own weakness as you pray for his restoration. {eoa}

Need a Word From God? Seek It the Right Way

I meet many people who tell me they need a word from God. I've seen Christians line up in front of prophets, hoping for a quick solution to their problem. I've also seen those same Christians stand in line a second time in front of the same prophets because they didn't like the word they received the first time! I call these people "prophecy chasers."

Don't abuse or misuse the precious gift of prophecy. God loves to speak to His people, and I believe He has a fresh word for all of us at the right time. But there is a right way and a wrong way to seek God for His prophetic direction. Here are some guidelines that will help you:

1. **Read God's Word regularly.** Many Christians crave a "direct" word from God, yet they refuse to spend time reading the Bible. They may even consider reading Scripture religious or boring—yet they love the thrill of getting a prophetic word in a public meeting. Carnal Christians aren't willing to be disciplined students; they want their prophetic words handed to them on a silver platter.

You will never become a mature Christian if you don't learn to hear from God on your own through His Word. And if you don't read Scripture regularly you won't know the difference between a true prophecy and a fake one—because prophecy never contradicts the Bible.

2. **Look to God for direction, not man.** I seek God daily for direction. I don't chase prophets to tell me what to do or to show me my spiritual purpose. God can certainly

use a prophet to speak to me—prophets are gifts to the body of Christ—but my focus is on God, not on the men or women He uses. If you ever start looking to a human being as your source of divine guidance, you are heading toward unhealthy idolatry.

People who have the gift of prophecy must be careful they don't allow people to put them on pedestals. We are not mediums who read people's fortunes, and prophets should never allow themselves to be put in such a position.

- 3. Stop looking for the sensational.** We've all heard of charismatic prophets who provide phone numbers or addresses in their prophetic words to confirm a message from God. It's true that God has the power to reveal such personal information, but in some such cases the "prophets" were actually con artists who preyed on the gullible. Beware of prophets who use sensational means to bring a word to you. In all my years of ministry, the most solid prophets were humble men and women who never drew attention to themselves.

The apostle Paul told us that true prophecy is about three things: encouragement, comfort and exhortation (see 1 Cor. 14:3). True prophecy strengthens us, confirms God's promises and propels us into our divine destiny. Beware of words that create goosebumps or draw people's attention to the messenger.

- 4. Don't be impatient when seeking prophetic guidance.** I've talked with Christians who were desperate for a word from God, but they informed me they were on a deadline. They needed instant spiritual gratification. Sometimes they even seemed to be threatening God—as in, "If I don't hear from God by tomorrow, I quit!"

Don't allow impatience to derail your Christian journey. God moves according to His sovereign calendar, not yours. Don't throw a tantrum; mature disciples must learn to wait for God's word. Waiting will require you to adjust your timetable to

God's.

Sometimes God deliberately pushes the mute button. If His voice is not clear right now, it may be because He is leading you into a quiet wilderness season. You must learn to trust Him even when He's quiet. Wait on the Lord, and let your roots grow deep.

5. **Make sure your heart is willing to obey.** Many people are eager to hear a word from God, especially if it tells them they will have a worldwide ministry or that they are going to become independently wealthy. But God's Word is never sent to puff us up, flatter us or stroke our egos. A true word from God cuts deep to our core; it requires surrender and demands holiness.

Make sure you are willing to embrace a true word from God before you ask for it. Henry Blackaby once wrote: "Our difficulty is not that we don't know God's will. Our discomfort comes from the fact that we do know His will, but we do not want to do it."

It is pointless to ask for God's prophetic word if we are not fully yielded. I'm concerned that we've encouraged a culture of prophecy chasing. Before you seek a word from God, lift your hands and be willing to obey what He says. The best way to welcome God's prophetic message to you is with an attitude of unconditional surrender. {eoa}

Don't Put a Lid on the Holy Spirit

Last month a pastor named Antione Ashley invited me to speak in his church in Deland, Florida, near Orlando. Ashley is only 33, but he has seen the Holy Spirit move powerfully in the past few years. When he began leading Arise Church two years ago, he made it clear that he wouldn't apologize for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

So on that Sunday night we had a special service designed to introduce new people in his church to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I preached from John 7:37-39 about how the Spirit wants to flow out of all believers, like "rivers of living water" (see v. 38). And guess what happened? Many people were filled with the Spirit for the first time.

If your church allows this kind of freedom, you are blessed—because many pastors today are afraid to allow the Spirit to move. We've put Him in a box. We have a long list of seeker-friendly rules these days, telling us No.1, American churchgoers only want a 60-minute church experience; No. 2, the only "cool" way to do church is to offer three songs, a short TED Talk and video announcements; and No. 3, altar calls scare people away.

I don't follow those rules. People need the reality of God's power. I wish we would stop being so worried about how the Holy Spirit might show up in church. Here are seven practical things we can do to encourage the freedom of the Spirit:

1. **Teach about the Holy Spirit often.** The Holy Spirit was rarely mentioned in the church I grew up in, so we never expected Him to do anything. Yet He is described in the second verse of the Bible as "moving" upon the surface of creation (Gen. 1:2), and He has one of the last

messages in the Bible (see Rev. 22:17). He moves and He speaks throughout the Scriptures. But we must invite the Spirit to move and speak in our churches by giving Him the place He deserves. Don't minimize His role.

2. **Leave time for altar ministry.** A church without altar ministry is like a hospital without a maternity ward. New life often begins at the altar—whether it is salvation, healing or prayer for a fresh anointing. Today many churches that offer multiple services often skimp on ministry time because they need to rush the 10 a.m. group out of the sanctuary to get ready for the next crowd. Multiple services are fine, but we are crowding the Spirit out of the church if we don't schedule time for people to respond to the message.
3. **Host small groups where people can use the Holy Spirit's gifts.** It's not practical for everyone to prophesy or exercise other spiritual gifts in a large congregation. But if people are plugged into small groups, there will be opportunities to encourage one another in supernatural ways. And people are more comfortable stepping out in faith in front of 10 people than they are in front of 3,000.
4. **Train people in spiritual gifts.** Many pastors clamp down on spiritual gifts because a few fanatics have tried to pull the church into weirdness. But in our efforts to protect the sheep from "charismania," let's not swing the pendulum to the other extreme by forbidding the gifts. The power of God will flow if we teach people the difference between authentic anointing and strange fire.
5. **Offer "teaching moments" to explain spiritual gifts.** I've been in churches where Brother Herschel or Sister Agnes prophesied in such a harsh, condemning tone that everyone in the church let out a collective groan. Their "words from God" had the same effect on the congregation

as fingernails on a chalkboard. We can't ignore these awkward moments. When the Corinthians mishandled speaking in tongues and prophecy, the apostle Paul used their mistakes to teach about how to use gifts properly.

6. **Expose your church to ministries that flow in the anointing.** God not only gave the church pastors—He also gave evangelists, teachers, prophets and apostles (see Eph. 4:11). Yet many churches today know only pastors. We need life-giving traveling ministries because God sends them to win new converts, heal the sick, unleash prophetic power, train leaders and impart new vision in congregations. We should not be afraid to open our pulpits to the other people God uses to bless the church.
7. **Give time for testimonies.** Nothing raises the faith level of a congregation like someone's raw experience with God. If a man was healed this week in your church, let him tell about it. If an infertile couple got pregnant, let them shout it from the housetops. Stories of supernatural intervention trigger a holy expectation in everyone.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 says it plainly: "Do not quench the [Holy] Spirit." Let's fling open the doors and allow the Spirit to have His way. Instead of being afraid of what He might disrupt, or whom He might offend, let's care more about what the church would be like without Him. {eoa}

Why Some Christians Overseas Fear a Biden Presidency

A few days before the Nov. 3 election, I joined a virtual prayer meeting with pastors from the nation of Colombia. Two pastors originally from Guatemala were also on the Zoom call, as well as pastors originally from Puerto Rico who helped translate for me.

The Colombian pastors told me they were hosting all-night prayer vigils at their churches for America's election. When I asked why they cared so much to host these gatherings, one pastor told me: "We are very concerned. When we see socialism coming to America, we know it could come here too."

One reason the Colombians are so worried is that Democrats have already announced plans to reestablish diplomatic relations with Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro. If Maduro's anti-U.S./anti-Israel regime is strengthened in the region, it will likely send more Venezuelan immigrants pouring across the Colombian border, and give socialists more power in the region.

Just as this presidential election split the Christian vote in America, Christians overseas have widely different views of Trump and Biden. When I reached out to Christian leaders overseas to gauge how they feel about a possible Biden presidency (if Biden is declared the winner after recounts), I found that many conservative evangelicals view Biden as a threat to religious freedom.

In spite of widespread support for Biden in Europe, many church leaders outside the U.S. fear Biden will promote an anti-Christian agenda.

"All the tyrants of the world, including Maduro from Venezuela, are hoping that Biden wins," said a pastor from

Caracas, Venezuela. (He cannot use his real name because he could suffer repercussions from his government for saying that.) “People all across the world who love freedom are hoping the United States remains free.”

The Venezuelan pastor said when he read news reports of voter irregularities in the 2020 U.S. election, he was reminded of fraud tactics used by dictator Hugo Chávez in Venezuela.

Nadim Hedechini, a Presbyterian pastor in Barranquilla, Colombia, fears a Biden presidency will advance a radical socialist agenda throughout the Western hemisphere—“and with it, more restriction on the people of God.” He believes Biden’s support of abortion and other radical agendas will have a negative effect globally.

A pastor in eastern Nigeria told me: “People all over the world look up to the United States for leadership, security and justice. We are afraid that under a Biden presidency the world may not get that. Christians in Nigeria are scared that killings by Islamic jihadists will increase under a Biden/Harris administration.”

Most Pentecostal Christians in Uganda hold to the same conservative values that their counterparts do in the United States. A pastor in western Uganda added: “It breaks my heart that Joe Biden’s political party has little sympathy when it comes to biblical principles and values. My consolation, however, comes from knowing that God will still execute His plan of deliverance for the United States!”

A pastor from western Kenya told me this week: “I am so concerned for the future of the United States and its role in the world. Thousands of Christians seem to be celebrating Biden without understanding the implications.” The Kenyan pastor told me he fears the American church has compromised on basic moral issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage and protecting Israel.

A pastor of an influential church in Singapore told me that many Christians in his country are praying President Trump is declared the winner after recounts. "To hear that Joe Biden has won, barring a miracle in the courts, was disappointing and disheartening to us. The sentiment here is that President Trump lost because of fraud in the counting," the pastor said.

And even though Canada leans liberal politically, some conservative evangelical pastors in Canada are anxious about a Biden presidency. One pastor from Manitoba told me he is worried about the Democratic agenda, especially "open borders, continued deaths of the unborn through abortion and the spread of socialism in America." He is praying for a Trump win—even though he can't vote in the election.

Although recounts and legal challenges could postpone the final outcome for weeks, some world leaders have already hailed Biden as president-elect. These include leaders of England, France, Germany and Greece. Meanwhile the president of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, said he would not congratulate Biden until the 2020 election results are certified.

And as voting irregularities are investigated in Pennsylvania and other states, the Venezuelan pastor says believers in his country will continue to pray. He said: "We are believing that God will spare the United States. If Biden wins, the loss of liberties will be swift, not only in this country but in the rest of the world." {eoa}

How to Discover Your Unique Spiritual Gifts

It annoys me when Christians try force people to fit in narrow categories. For years, we've done this with gender. I wish I had a dollar for every time a preacher has claimed that "all men hide their feelings" or "all women love to shop" or "all men refuse to ask for directions."

Those are stereotypes. While God made only two genders, men and women come in all types. Our uniqueness is shaped by our bodies, skills, interests, personality quirks, communication styles, ethnicity, life experiences and so much more.

Christians also love to fit people into personality types. The ancient Greek physician Hippocrates invented the concept of the "four temperaments"—choleric, sanguine, melancholy and phlegmatic. He believed the levels of our bodily fluids caused these traits, and his goofy theory stuck around even though it was totally unscientific. Christians started imposing these rigid personality types on each other after author Tim LaHaye wrote the book *Transformed Temperaments* in 1971.

In the 1990s, family counselor Gary Smalley updated the concept of the four temperaments by describing them as animals: "Beaver," "lion," "otter" and "golden retriever." This began a cottage industry of "personality assessment" that continues to this day. It's based on the idea that every human being on Planet Earth fits into four groups.

More recently, Christian organizations invented questionnaires and tests to determine a person's spiritual gifts. I've taken all of these tests, and sometimes they helped me understand myself better. Yet I always end up feeling like a misfit because I don't stay inside the lines. I certainly don't fit the stereotypes.

For years I've struggled to put a label on what I do in ministry. Am I a prophet? (Prophecy often flows out of me when I minister in a church setting.) Am I a teacher? (I teach regularly in ministry schools.) Am I a pastor? (I don't lead a local church, yet I mentor and disciple many young leaders.)

Not long ago I went through an identity crisis. I was tired of people asking me, "What are you?" My response was to blankly stare back. I wanted a label. I wanted to fit in a clear-cut category. Yet I felt like a weirdo because I don't see my odd combination of gifts and talents in most surveys.

I decided to take my own gifts assessment test by asking some friends to describe my ministry in their own words. I asked them to text me one sentence, but many of them wrote paragraphs. They often used words like "prophet," "teacher," "encourager," "apostle," "mentor" and "father's heart." But I noticed one common thread:

-Fernando said: "Your ministry is versatile. Don't worry about fitting in a box."

-Kent said: "Don't let people put you in a box."

-Ray said: "You don't need to feel any pressure to fit a mold."

-Grant said: "You can't be put in a box. There is too much 'cookie-cutter' identity in the church today."

I wanted to categorize myself. But God's answer was a pleasant surprise: I don't need to fit in! Rather, I just need to stay connected to God and let Him manifest Himself through me however He wants!

Many people follow horoscopes because they think their destiny is determined by which zodiac sign they were born under. That's dumb, because people don't fit in 12 cosmic categories, much less four personality types. And even though there are a

limited number of spiritual gifts listed in the Bible (the “power” gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 and the “motivational” gifts of Romans 12), these gifts come in an infinite number of combinations.

Besides that, the “package” those gifts come in—you—is totally unique. Did you know that one DNA molecule in your body has enough coded information to fill 100 30-volume sets of encyclopedias? That’s more than million pages of computer code! If all the DNA in your body were joined from end to end, it would stretch 94 billion miles. And that code is different from any other person who has ever lived.

We know our fingerprints are unique from everyone else. Now, researchers have discovered that scanning the iris of the eye is five times more effective than fingerprinting because there are 240 unique features in your iris to prove it’s yours! Scientists are also discovering the same uniqueness in our retinas, our faces, our insulin and the protein molecules in one strand of our hair.

David wrote: “I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well” (Ps. 139:14, NASB). If you are this unique in a biological sense, how much more is it true in the Spirit? We have been fashioned by the Creator to manifest His power in a unique way.

Don’t be so eager to put a label on yourself. Don’t try to be a copy of someone else. It’s okay to break the mold. You can’t be summarized, categorized or boxed in. You are a unique vessel of the Holy Spirit. Let Him flow through you without limitation. {eoa}

Don't Stay Disconnected From Church When the Pandemic Is Over

Churches have been on lockdown for months. COVID-19 forced us to go virtual, and the pandemic has turned pastors into awkward television evangelists who preach to empty auditoriums using smartphones.

Now, more than eight months after the shutdown, some congregations are reopening—with masks, social distancing and temperature checks. Instead of hearing a worship leader say, “Turn to the person next to you and give them a hug,” we have learned to bump elbows. We also have noticed that many church members haven't returned.

In August, church growth coach Thom Rainer predicted that 20-30% of people who attended church before the pandemic will never come back, including 1) those who never joined small groups 2) the “church critics,” 3) cultural Christians and 4) those who already went to church infrequently before the quarantine began.

I was a bit perturbed when I first read Rainer's article. Why wouldn't anybody be excited about going back to church after this painful season? The truth is many Christians don't see church as essential. And some Christians are nursing grudges against fellow church members. COVID-19 has become an easy excuse to stay home.

I'm not advocating that people return to church if their health is at risk or they don't feel comfortable being around crowds yet. We need to protect each other, especially our most

vulnerable members. But if you or someone you love is feeling tempted to never go back to church—I offer these reasons why you need to be connected to God's people.

The church is still God's plan A. Heaven doesn't have a plan B. Jesus is the head of His church (see Col. 1:18), and we are His hands and feet. Jesus intends to use the church as His primary tool to reach the world with the gospel. To reject the church is to reject God's ultimate strategy to bring heaven's kingdom on earth.

The Holy Spirit has called us to be together. The Bible says we have been mystically joined with all other born-again believers. The Lord also connects people in local congregations. Paul told the Ephesians to "be eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" by being in close fellowship with each other (Eph. 4:3). To reject this union of believers is to dishonor the work of the Spirit.

God accomplishes more through His corporate people than through individuals. The corporate church makes a much bigger impact than one person does. Healthy churches can pool resources and organize volunteers. They are able to offer ministry to children, youth, families, singles, the needy and the lost overseas—in a way you could never do while sitting home alone.

God's authority flows through His church, not through "Lone Ranger" Christians. Some people I know who have been hurt by church leaders say they can never submit to another pastor again. It's totally acceptable for you to leave an unhealthy church with poor leadership, but you should find a new church where you can be equipped to fulfill your ministry. You can't grow in your faith if you are flying solo—or carrying a grudge.

It's by living in Christian community that we learn to love and serve. Paul wrote: "Let us not forsake the assembling of

ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but let us exhort one another, especially as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). People who live in isolation get discouraged and are easy prey for the enemy; those who walk in close fellowship inspire and improve each other just as iron sharpens iron (see Prov. 27:17).

If you leave the church because of resentment, you make it more difficult to find healing. It might sound spiritual to say you are pulling away from people to focus on God. But the New Testament says your relationship with God is directly tied to how you relate to others. People may have hurt you, but God will use people to heal you. Don't let the hurts of the past paint you into a lonely corner. Choose to forgive.

Please don't give up on God's flawed saints. Even if you stay home until this pandemic is over, make a decision now to return to church when the threat has passed. There is a place for you in God's eternal family. {eoa}

J. Lee Grady was editor of *Charisma* for 11 years and now serves as contributing editor. He directs *The Mordecai Project*, an international ministry that protects women and girls from gender-based violence. His latest book is *Set My Heart on Fire* (Charisma House).

This article was excerpted from the December issue of Charisma magazine. If you don't subscribe to Charisma, click here to get every issue delivered to your mailbox. During this time of change, your subscription is a vote of confidence for the kind of Spirit-filled content we offer. In the same way you would support a ministry with a donation, subscribing is your way to support Charisma. Also, we encourage you to give gift subscriptions at , and share our articles on social media.

How I'm Praying for Justice

Amy Coney Barrett

After watching the tense confirmation hearings for Amy Coney Barrett, we learned that 1) she is a devoted mother of seven children; 2) she and her husband shared homeschooling duties during the pandemic; 3) she can explain constitutional law and legal precedent without the aid of notes; and 4) she can remain calm while politicians try to dissect her with loaded questions.

She's brilliant, poised, dignified, articulate and able to maintain her composure under pressure. And yet she's been called a "racist" and a "colonizer" because she and her husband adopted two children from Haiti, and "dangerous" because she has attended pro-life events. She was also described as a "nut" on Sept. 25 by atheist commentator Bill Mayer—because Barrett is a charismatic Catholic who believes in the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Mayer's rude comment (it was accompanied by the worst profanity) proves that the media elite and the political establishment believe Christians should be automatically disqualified from holding office or a judicial appointment. It also reveals the kind of vicious animosity that is aimed at people of faith who dare to step into the public arena today.

Now that Amy Coney Barrett has been confirmed to Supreme Court, she needs our prayers. Here's how I'm praying:

1. **Pray for protection for her family.** Barrett and her husband of 20 years, Jesse, decided early in their marriage to have a large family. Their children are Emma, 19; Tess and Vivian, both 16; John Peter, 13; Liam, 11; Juliet, 9; and Benjamin, 8. Vivian and John Peter were adopted from Haiti, and Benjamin has Down

Syndrome. Barrett had said in past interviews that she believes raising children is the best way she can make a significant impact on the world.

Barrett is the first sitting Supreme Court justice to have school-age children, which means she is wading into uncharted territory. In late September a professor at Boston University accused Barrett of racism, calling her a “white colonizer” who uses her Haitian kids as “props.” Pray for a shield of protection around the Barrett children so they won’t be traumatized by their mother’s critics.

2. Pray that her faith will remain strong. Barrett’s father, Mike Coney, is a strong Catholic who attended a Life in the Spirit seminar during the early days of the Catholic charismatic movement. He was baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. He told the *National Catholic Register* about that day: “I was filled with an insatiable appetite for reading Scripture and spiritual books. Making time for personal prayer became important. I sensed a call from the Lord to serve.”

Coney raised his seven children (Amy is the oldest) in a Catholic charismatic community called People of Praise. Today, Barrett still holds to her charismatic Catholic faith, even after attending law school at Notre Dame and becoming a federal judge in 2017. She has recently served as a women’s leader in her church.

Critics have attacked Barrett because the Christian school her children attend in South Bend, Indiana, has a policy that doesn’t allow LGBTQ teachers on its staff. That policy, of course, is legal in this country because churches and religious organizations can’t be forced to hire people who don’t agree with their teachings. But the Supreme Court will likely confront this crucial issue again soon. Pray that Barrett will always uphold religious freedom, and that she will rely on God’s wisdom to judge difficult cases.

3. **Pray that she will defend unborn life.** Amy Coney Barrett is only the fifth woman in U.S. history to sit on the Supreme Court. You would think everybody would be celebrating that landmark, but many feminists have opposed Barrett since President Trump nominated her because they expect her to jeopardize access to abortion.

It's fascinating that a mother of young children now sits on the bench—and not only a mother of her own biological children but also a mother of adopted children and of a son with special needs. In some countries, pregnancies are automatically terminated if a woman is pregnant with a Down Syndrome child. Is America headed in that direction? Or could Barrett help us navigate a new path that respects both the rights of women and their unborn children?

Perhaps Barrett has been uniquely positioned to demonstrate Christian compassion for those unborn citizens who are not considered “worthy” of life. Perhaps she will help our nation look at the issue of abortion from the perspective of a selfless mother—and not from that of an abortion clinic that harvests body parts for profit.

Perhaps Barrett will help us reframe the abortion debate, making it less about a woman's body and more about the unborn child who cannot stand on a street corner to protest injustice. Pray that our newest member of the Supreme Court will have the courage of Esther to defend those who have no voice. {eoa}

3 Urgent Prayers for the 2020 Election

I remember the Civil Rights era and the Vietnam War. I even remember the assassination of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. And of course I was alive during the Watergate scandal, President Nixon's resignation, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Iraq War, the Clinton scandal and 9/11.

All those times were turbulent. But I've never known anything as intense as 2020. The combination of a global pandemic, mass unemployment, the George Floyd killing, street protests, antifa riots, forest fires, hurricanes and the most polarizing presidential election in our history has made this the most intense year I've ever known.

All this turmoil has sent me to my knees. I've prayed and fasted—for racial healing, for peace in our cities, for our divided leaders and for protection for my 92-year-old mother who is in a nursing home and vulnerable to COVID-19.

While I was praying for the election recently, I had a strong visual impression. I saw a voting machine in front of a dark curtain. Then I saw a hand coming out from behind the curtain, moving slowly toward the back of the device. I knew the Holy Spirit was telling me that sinister forces were at work to manipulate this election. I was able to pray with insight because the Lord gave me a clear picture of what is happening.

As Americans go to the polls over the next 14 days—with some standing in lines and others mailing in ballots—we need to soak this election in serious prayer. 2020 is not a normal year. Spiritual alarms are sounding, and God is calling His intercessors to be the first responders to this crisis.

Jesus gave us authority to pray that His will in heaven will become a reality on earth. He said in Matthew 18:18 (NASB):

“Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” We need heaven’s intervention.

Here are three specific things I’m praying as Nov. 3 draws near:

1. **Pray that any voter fraud will be exposed.** Voter fraud is nothing new. In past elections, both Republicans and Democrats have engaged in this criminal behavior. They have been convicted of fraud by rigging voting machines, forging absentee ballots, trashing ballots, voting for dead people, buying votes, falsifying identities, “ballot harvesting” or voting as non-citizens. Fears of fraud are heightened in 2020 because so many people will be voting by mail.

Pray for the exposure of corrupt behavior, regardless of party affiliation. God sees what is done in secret. Pray that those who pull strings to unfairly manipulate an outcome will be brought to justice. Pray that poll workers as well as city and county officials will lead with integrity to stop all attempts at cheating.

2. **Bind the power of deception and manipulation in the media.** After the 2016 election, Democrats accused President Trump of winning the White House unfairly because the Russian government supposedly influenced voters through social media. There’s no doubt that foreign hackers—from Russia and other countries—enjoy interfering with our elections. But my biggest concern in this election is not Russia but U.S. media and tech companies.

When I was young, journalists were committed to objectivity, and they rarely showed bias. Today I use quote marks around the word “journalist” because most reporters are driven by an obvious political agenda. Headlines have become propaganda.

Important stories are buried. And gullible Americans have been hypnotized by the media's spin doctors.

Pray that this deceptive spell is broken. Bind the power of misinformation and indoctrination. Pray that people will think for themselves rather than being pressured to conform to groupthink—not only as it comes from television and newspapers but also from big tech companies that have demonstrated blatant willingness to censor information that doesn't match their preferred narrative. (That includes Twitter, Facebook and Google.)

3. Pray for a peaceful outcome to this election. This summer we watched violent protesters burn buildings and take over whole city blocks because they wanted to get rid of all police. What will happen if the result of the 2020 election doesn't make these people happy? We could see unimaginable chaos and destruction.

Ask for God's divine intervention. Pray that voters will accept the results of the election with dignity and that God will help us love each other across this bitter political divide. And most of all, bind the forces of anarchy and violence, whether they come from the left or the right.

King David prayed: "Let there be no outcry in our streets!" (Ps. 144:14b). My prayer is similar: "Lord, have mercy on America. Protect our cities from looting, shootings and mayhem. We cancel the power of the assassin's bullets and the anarchist's bricks. Deliver us from evil and establish Your righteousness and justice in our nation. In Jesus' name, amen." {eoa}