

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

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 six months after the shutdown, some congregations are reopening—with masks, social distancing and even 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 smile and bump elbows—or maybe not. We also have noticed that a large percentage of church members haven't returned.

In August, church growth coach Thom Rainer predicted that between 20-30% of people who attended church before the pandemic will never come back, including 1) the non-committed, 2) those who never joined small groups 3) the “church critics,” 4) cultural Christians and 5) 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 of isolation? 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. This virus is still a cause for concern. We need to protect each other, especially those in our congregations who are the most vulnerable. But if you or someone you love is

feeling tempted to never go back to church—I offer six reasons why you need to be connected to God’s people instead of living in perpetual isolation.

1. The church is still God’s Plan A. Heaven does not have a Plan B. Jesus is the head of His church (see Col. 1:18) and we are His hands and feet. Jesus announced before He went to the cross: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Jesus intends to use the church—even in its weakness—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.

2. The Holy Spirit has called us to be together. When we were born again and baptized, the Bible says we were mystically unified with all other born-again believers and connected to each other by the Holy Spirit. The Lord also connects people in local congregations. This connection is holy, and we should never make light of it or damage it. 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.

3. God accomplishes more through His corporate people than through isolated individuals. The Holy Spirit dwells in every Christian believer, and the corporate church makes a much bigger impact than one person does. This is why Jesus told His disciples after He went to the cross that we would do “greater works” than He did on earth (see John 14:12). And because 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.

4. God’s authority flows through His church, not through “Lone Ranger” Christians. Some people I know who’ve been hurt by

church leaders say they can never submit to another pastor again. Yet God has delegated to certain people the task of building up the church (see Eph. 4:11-12). It's totally acceptable for you to leave an unhealthy church with poor leadership, but you should quickly find a new church where you can be equipped to fulfill your ministry. You can't grow in your faith if you have a "my way or the highway" attitude.

5. It is by living in Christian community that we learn to love and serve. Paul told the Hebrews: "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 find it difficult to develop character, and they often get discouraged; those who walk together in close fellowship inspire each other, and they improve each other just as iron sharpens iron.

6. If you leave the church because of hurt or resentment, you make it more difficult to find healing and reconciliation. 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 related 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. Take a risk and keep loving.

Please don't check out of church or give up on God's flawed saints. Even if you stay home until this pandemic is completely 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}

Can't Pray for President Trump? Try This Prayer

I didn't agree with all of President Obama's policies when he was in the White House, but I prayed for him regularly because 1) he was my president for eight years, and 2) I'm a Christian, so I try to follow God's Word. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says believers should pray "for kings and for all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty."

Since the 2016 election I've also prayed for President Trump. He's my president. I don't agree with everything he does or says (or everything he tweets), but I have his photo in my visual prayer list on my phone. I pray for him almost daily for wisdom, God's divine guidance and protection—and mostly for peace and justice to prevail in our nation during his term in office.

I got very sad last week when I heard people's vile reactions to the news that President Trump and his wife had tested positive for COVID-19. Responses on social media ranged from "I hope he dies" to "Trump is making the world worse by existing." Some people even wrote on Twitter that they hoped all of the president's cabinet members would get infected and die.

The online hatred was so severe that Twitter's monitors had to issue a warning that they would remove posts "that wish or hope for death, serious bodily harm or fatal disease against anyone." The situation reminded me of comedian Kathy Griffin, who was fired from CNN in 2017 after she posted a photo of herself holding up a mock severed head of President Trump.

I wasn't shocked by Kathy Griffin's shameless stunt. But I have been surprised to learn that many Christians actually refuse to pray for President Trump. When one Biden-supporting evangelical leader asked people to pray for Trump, regardless of his political positions, several Christians responded by saying "I think I'll pass" or "I just can't do that."

And a few even sounded happy that Trump had been infected, posting comments like, "Good. Maybe this will teach him that this virus is not a hoax," or "Maybe this will make him think about the 200,000 people he killed with this virus." I expect cold-hearted comments like that from unbelievers, but not from people who have experienced the love of God.

Thankfully our president seems to have had only a mild case of COVID-19, and he is already recovering. Mainstream journalists seem disappointed that he didn't end up on a ventilator. I think they really did want Trump to die. But is that the attitude Christians should have? We need to be reminded of Proverbs 24:17 (NIV), which says: "Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice."

If you have so much disgust in your heart for President Trump's character or his policies, remember that Jesus said we should even pray for our enemies (see Matt. 5:44). Jesus knew that when you pray for someone you hate, or show kindness to them, you cut out a malignant tumor of bitterness from your heart. Prayer doesn't just affect the person you are praying for; it changes you too.

I challenge you to pray for our president using the simple prayer below.

"Heavenly Father—I pray for our president, Donald Trump. We know he is not a perfect man, but You can use him to carry out Your will. Give him Your supernatural wisdom, Lord, just as you gave Solomon divine wisdom to lead Israel.

“Give President Trump a heart of mercy and compassion, Lord, so he will care for the poor, the marginalized, immigrants and minorities. May his policies result in justice and righteousness for all the people of our nation. Surround him with wise and godly advisors. Give our president the grace to listen to wise counsel. And deliver him from those who secretly plot to harm him or deceive him.

“Deliver our president from the pride that tempts all people who are in positions of great power. Bless him with humility. May he always speak the truth. Set a guard over his mouth so he will control his tongue when he is angry. And give him the spirit of a peacemaker, so he can help the nations of the world live in harmony.

“Most of all, we pray that President Trump will trust in the Lord. Just as King Josiah turned to the Lord and honored God’s Word in the sight of all, may our president honor you in all that he does. Psalm 33:12a says: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” May our president know You personally, and may he point our nation to follow You. Amen.” {eoa}

Why You Must Pray Like Your Life Depends on It!

My friends overseas are worried about the United States. When people I know from Uganda or India see news reports of stores being looted in Chicago and cars burning in Portland, Oregon,

they assume I live a few miles from the violence. I explain that America is a big country, and that these riots aren't happening in my city.

Christians in other countries have always considered the United States a "Christian nation" because we have so many churches and we send many missionaries to the world. Now they hear of police killing unarmed Black people. They see anarchists setting government buildings on fire. They hear politicians defending abortions up to the point of birth.

"I am very worried," a pastor from Nigeria told me this week. He says he views what is happening in the United States today as "an attempt by hell to divide the church along political lines in order to bring about a satanic strategy for America."

One pastor of a megachurch in Singapore told me, "We are horrified by what is happening in the United States. It is painful to see anarchy and lawlessness so rampant. We are praying constantly for America."

One of my pastor friends from Uganda says he is praying for a healing of divisions: "The devil fights the hardest when he knows we are making a difference. He laughs at the evil, riots and violence. But we say, 'No more.' We are asking God to turn His people back to Him."

I am constantly pleading with my foreign friends to pray for my country. The alarm has sounded. When they ask me how I'm praying, I share the list below.

Pray that the COVID-19 pandemic will end. God can stop a plague. Pray that the coronavirus will stop spreading so people can go back to work, kids can return to school and churches can meet again. And remember that this pandemic is having a much more devastating impact on developing countries.

Pray for an end to riots and violence. The peaceful protests that began in May to honor George Floyd have morphed into

something unrecognizable. Anarchists have hijacked a movement. Portland, Seattle, Denver, New York and Kenosha, Wisconsin, have all suffered irreparable damage from lootings, shootings and arson. In Chicago, business owners are leaving the city because they feel unprotected. Pray for peace.

Pray for a peaceful election Nov. 3. People are on edge these days because of fears of voter fraud. And there are rumors that violence will break out if the election doesn't turn out the way certain groups want. Pray for fairness and accurate ballot counts—and no rioting.

Pray for leaders who have character, moral values, courage and wise policies. The church is divided politically. But I hope all Christians can agree that we need leaders who have respect for God's standards. Pray for voters to select the best candidates to lead our country—and keep in mind that the 2020 election is not just a contest between President Donald Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden. We will also choose 35 U.S. senators and 96 members of Congress.

Pray for racial justice. We can't ignore the fact that people of color have suffered in this country because of discrimination and racist attitudes. Pray for a true change in people's hearts, keeping in mind that racist attitudes have also affected immigrants as well as Native Americans.

Pray for reconciliation and an end to hatred and division. I don't remember a season in my lifetime when Americans were this hateful. Whether they are feuding on social media, arguing on TV talk shows, shouting profanity at each other in the streets or throwing bricks at crowds, many people have become ticking time bombs. Pray that God will defuse the hostility.

Pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, our nation is sunk if we continue on a path toward atheism and godless humanism. An election is not going to save us. A

political party cannot save us. We need the rain of heaven. Our ultimate prayer must be, "Lord, send revival."

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).

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People Are Literally Dying From Stress in 2020

If you are in crisis, please call 1-800-273-8255 or visit . You are not alone.

2020 has been a bad year for so many people. Some have lost jobs. Families have been separated from loved ones in nursing homes. Health care workers have endured daily trauma, wondering if they might get infected with COVID-19. Parents are trying to teach their kids at home when classroom technology doesn't always work. And the media reminds us every day that more than 200,000 Americans have died from the virus.

What we don't hear much about is the alarming number of people who are committing suicide because of the stress of 2020. We've been so focused on the virus that we forgot about the invisible effects of this health crisis.

Paul Gionfriddo, president of Mental Health America, said of the pandemic's emotional effect: "If we don't do something about it now, people are going to be suffering from these mental health impacts for years to come."

The *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* announced in August that the number of people contemplating suicide jumped from 4% in 2018 to 11% in July 2020. And a federal agency that operates a hotline for people in emotional distress said it registered a 1,000% increase in the number of calls compared to the same time last year.

Americans are freaking out, and it's not just because of the pandemic. Our nation is in a divisive season. We are so polarized that married couples are divorcing because of politics, and friendships have ended. Some protesters are looting businesses and burning buildings to show their outrage about police brutality—while others are just screaming at each other about Trump, Biden, racism, abortion, immigration and whether we should wear masks.

This mental health crisis became very personal for me recently when a Christian I know killed himself. I don't know what was going on in his mind. I don't know if he reached out to anyone for help. I just know that his death could have been prevented.

If you have been feeling overwhelmed by the stress of 2020, if you are sinking into depression, or if you have thought about suicide, please consider these steps:

1. **Stay connected to friends and family.** God called us to live in community, but the devil isolates people. When we are emotionally down, we tend to hide—and then the

loneliness makes our depressive thoughts darker. Masks, social distancing and the closing of churches has made this worse. If you can't visit people in person at this time, call or text your friends and let them know you need their support. Come out of hiding!

2. **Tune out negative voices.** I honestly believe some media organizations are criminally liable for spreading fear during this crisis. I'm not going to hold my breath until journalists are held accountable for their lies, exaggeration and manipulation of news. Meanwhile, limit your intake of toxic media—and that includes social media posts. The vindictiveness, profanity and bitterness being spewed all over Facebook and Twitter is enough to trigger high blood pressure.
3. **Keep your mind focused on the Lord and His goodness.** It's amazing how much peace I experience when I start my day with prayer and Bible study. I learned this habit when I was a teenager, and now my daily "quiet time" is not an option if I want to manage my stress. In this crazy season, we must learn to "fix our eyes on Jesus," as it says in Hebrews 12:2 (NIV). The Psalms are especially helpful if you need to calm your soul. And there are 150 of them!
4. **Don't let anxiety control you.** Worry can make you sick. When we are stressed, we tend to overeat, our blood pressure goes up and our immune systems are weakened. Worrying about COVID-19 could actually make you more susceptible to getting it! You must get a grip. Put your faith in Jesus, knowing that He cares about every single detail of your life. Isaiah 41:10 says: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
5. **Don't medicate your stress.** Mental health professionals

say many people are abusing opioids or other medications to find an escape from the stress of 2020. Others are turning to alcohol, marijuana, junk food or other substances—and their bodies are paying a high price. It really isn't possible to "escape" from the realities of life—you must face them. If you are becoming addicted to something unhealthy during this crisis, reach out to a mature friend, a pastor or a counselor now.

If you are drowning in stress, don't wait until your head is underwater to scream for help. God has put the right people around you. Let them see you, and let them throw you a lifeline.

(And if someone you know is struggling with anxiety or stress-related depression, please forward this article to them.)
{eoa}

Don't Let Doomsday Prophecies Fill You With Fear

I've lost count of the number of people who have asked for my opinion on Dana Coverstone, the pastor from Kentucky who released videos this year predicting destruction and chaos in the United States in 2020. I've listened to his messages. He seems like a friendly, humble guy who was surprised when the warnings he posted on YouTube went viral.

I don't doubt Rev. Coverstone's sincerity. He is my brother in

Christ. And I know God can speak through dreams. My main concern is his predictions are spreading a virus of fear that is more dangerous than COVID-19.

Coverstone, who is on staff at Living Word Ministries in Burkesville, Kentucky, says he had the disturbing dreams in the fall of last year and then in December 2019. The dreams seem to predict the coronavirus pandemic, the riots of the summer and a frightening outbreak of lawlessness in November.

“I’m not claiming to be a prophet,” Coverstone says in his video. “But I know when I hear God’s voice. ... We’re going to see major chaos in our country. We’re going to see troops in our cities. We’re going to see the protests get even worse. We’re going to see buildings burn. We’re going to see what can only lead to civil war in this country.”

So far, a million people have seen Coverstone’s videos, so you can imagine the level of panic that is rising among Christians who were already traumatized by the coronavirus and the burning buildings in Portland, Seattle and other cities. The pastor advises people to buy guns and stock up on food, ammunition and alternative currencies to protect themselves when more riots erupt and banks run out of money.

To people who are frightened by these videos, or who feel obligated to share them, I offer some basic biblical advice:

1. **Keep your eyes on the invisible realm, not on the problems.** Coverstone says in one of his videos that he reads 40 newspapers a day. If I soaked my mind in that much negativity every day, I would have nightmares too. The only way I’ve been able to sleep peacefully during this crazy season has been to increase my time in prayer and God’s Word.

Keeping our minds on Jesus is a challenge when the media bombards us daily with bad reports.

Isaiah 26:3a (NKJV) says: "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You." Remember Elisha's servant. When he saw the enemy's chariots surrounding the city he felt depressed and fearful, but when Elijah prayed for him, his eyes were opened to see that God's invisible angelic armies were more numerous (see 2 Kings 6:15-16). Perspective is so important in this troubling season!

- 2. Don't put anyone's prophecy on the same level with Scripture.** We charismatics have a tendency to sensationalize prophecies. In 1999 many preachers predicted we would enter a new Stone Age when all computers failed on Dec. 31, 1999. Many Christians hunkered down and expected global disaster. But when the clock advanced to the year 2000, the Y2K debacle proved to be an embarrassing hoax, and all the hand wringing proved to be a waste of time.

I'm not saying we won't see scary headlines in November. It doesn't take a prophet to see we are heading for a serious crisis on election day. If there is widespread voter fraud, or if certain groups don't get their way, it's almost certain there will be serious outbreaks of violence. Because we are so divided politically, we may face a Constitutional crisis. Some politicians, journalists and activists have already used the word "war" to describe their intentions. But the Bible should fill us with hope that our God will protect us through this storm!

- 3. Instead of worrying, pray fervently—and expect God to answer.** Many pastors I know view Rev. Coverstone's dream as a dire warning of what *could* happen—not a prophecy of what *will* happen. Satan wants to steal, kill and destroy, but our loving Father wants to renew, restore and rescue us from our enemies. God calls us to pray Matthew 6:13b (MEV): "Deliver us from evil."

No matter how dark it gets, no matter how many riots erupt in

our cities and no matter what happens on Election Day, our response should be to ask for divine help. We don't have permission to freak out, give up or hide in fear. We trust Him because we know His invisible angelic armies are stronger than the dark forces that threaten and intimidate us.

This weekend thousands of Christians will gather on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., for a national and global day of prayer and repentance. Even more believers will join the event virtually, with simulcasts in 90 languages. Find out more here. I believe the portals of heaven are open to hear us on Sept. 25-26, as we pray for mercy for our wayward nation.

Instead of expecting doom and gloom, let's ask our merciful God to heal our land. Instead of hiding in our homes with guns and canned goods, let's shout it from the housetops that Jesus can heal our divided country. {eoa}

Is Netflix Promoting Child Exploitation?

"Disgusting." "Nauseating." "Disturbing." "This should be illegal."

That's how average moviegoers described the controversial new film *Cuties*, which began streaming on Netflix last week.

The movie has earned only a 5% approval rating among audiences on the Rotten Tomatoes website. Yet it received a 90% percent

approval rating among film critics. And when it was screened at the Sundance Film Festival in January, it was awarded a Best Director prize.

Netflix subscribers immediately launched a #CancelNetflix hashtag on Twitter after they learned about the film. So far more than 600,000 people have signed a petition asking the streaming service to take the film off its site. And thousands of viewers have canceled their Netflix subscriptions, causing the company's stock to drop 2.5%.

Cuties is a French film directed by a Senegalese woman named Maïmouna Doucouré. Known as *Mignonnes* in French, it is the tragic story of an 11-year-old girl from a Muslim background who joins a competitive dance team in Paris. The girl allows pressure from her peers, as well as internet culture, to pull her into the world of sexually explicit dancing.

Doucouré says she made the film to explore how young girls are being sexualized by modern smartphone culture. Though that is certainly a serious problem to expose, *Cuties* crosses a dangerous line. Some people fear the movie will attract pedophiles, or indirectly cause more child abuse.

Since this is a family-friendly publication, I won't describe in detail what the children do on stage in this film. I'll just say that prepubescent girls imitate the explicit dance moves of Cardi B or Nicky Minaj. You get the idea. "Disgusting" isn't a strong enough word.

When viewers demanded that the film be removed from its lineup, Netflix released a statement saying that *Cuties* is "a social commentary against the sexualization of young children"—and then added that it is "award-winning."

Meanwhile, conservative commentators have released blistering reviews. Nancy Grace, a Fox News commentator who specializes in crime reporting, said she was "very disturbed" when she watched clips of the film. "It seems to be sexually exploiting

little girls in the name of exposing sexploitation,” Grace said. “I guarantee you every pedophile who can afford Netflix is going straight online ... to watch *Cuties* right now.”

And black conservative activist Anthony Brian Logan, broadcasting on his YouTube channel last week, said he had already canceled Netflix because he saw this trend coming.

“This should not be on Netflix,” Logan said. “This should not be anywhere. ... I think the best thing for anybody to do if they have Netflix is go ahead and cancel it. They are exploiting children on their platform.”

As a father who raised four daughters, I felt sick when I learned that the director of *Cuties* auditioned 650 pre-teen girls for parts in her film (with parental approval, I assume) before choosing the small cast. And even though I share Doucouré’s desire to stop the sexual exploitation of girls, I don’t believe she used the right strategy to do it. Her film could cause more harm than good—while Netflix makes lots of money in the process.

Cuties was the No. 4 film on Netflix on Sept. 12. That says a lot about where we are as a country. We say we are against child sexual abuse, but we are OK with supporting an entertainment company that is making lots of money exploiting children to make a movie that denounces child exploitation.

Here’s an idea: Instead of asking 650 young girls to gyrate on a stage so you can make a film about child exploitation, maybe someone at Netflix could ask adult entertainers like Cardi B, Nicky Minaj, Shakira, Beyoncé and Jennifer Lopez to admit that the sleazy videos they produce are having a sickening impact on young girls today. These girls didn’t learn these moves on their own.

When I prayed about this film and its impact, I was drawn to Matthew 18:6 (NASB): “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him

to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Before Jesus said those sobering words, he called a child to stand near Him. He wanted everyone to see how much He cared about kids—and how serious He was about defending them from abuse. In this age when our culture is abandoning almost every moral boundary we once held sacred, pray that we will never, ever glamorize pedophilia, trivialize it or legalize it.

Our nation is doomed if we do. {eoa}

Don't Bow Down to the Idols of Culture

Certain rights are guaranteed in this country—freedom of religion, the right to assemble and freedom of speech, for example. But a storm is brewing today that threatens to blow away those rights. We are experiencing “cancel culture.”

In a cancel culture, you have the right to say what you believe, but most people keep their mouths shut because an intolerant mob will attack you if you say something they disagree with. The mob determines how everyone should think.

British author J.K. Rowling is the latest example of a “canceled” celebrity. Even though she’s considered leftist in her views, she recently dared to defy the official code of political correctness. She refused to agree with the statement “Trans women are women” because she feels men who undergo sex-

change operations or take hormones don't share the same life experiences of women who are born female and live as women. For this, the transgender community hurled every nasty word in the book at Rowling when they attacked her on Twitter.

This form of intolerance isn't new. Remember King Nebuchadnezzar? He was the granddaddy of all thought control. He demanded that everyone in his kingdom bow to his golden idol. But Daniel's three brave friends—Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego—refused to submit. The king threw them in his overheated furnace, but the three Hebrew boys miraculously emerged from the fire without even the smell of smoke.

Today a growing group of university professors, liberal journalists, Hollywood elites, government leaders and tech CEOs have created a new idol. They hate Christianity because of its moral boundaries. They reject the idea of an all-powerful God, and they want to replace Him with the all-powerful state.

The heat has been turned up in Nebuchadnezzar's oven. You will be tempted to keep your mouth shut because the intolerant mob will attack you if you talk about your faith (which they consider "narrow minded") or your moral values (which they say are "hateful").

This shouldn't surprise us. Paul told Timothy: "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12, NASB).

I've noticed there are certain topics that always trigger the mob. If you say these six things on social media, in workplace conversations or even in a sermon, you may be shamed, reported to the "thought police" or even fired:

God created the world. Nobody on an American university campus today is allowed to question the official doctrine of evolution. Scoffers will cancel you if you believe in the fairy tale of a wise Creator.

Marriage was created for one man and one woman. If you don't believe God sanctions gay marriage, you will be labeled homophobic. Never mind if I love gay people as individuals. If I don't promote the gay lifestyle, I will be discredited.

Sex is intended for marriage. When I was a kid, most families on TV shows had a mother, a father and children. But the culture manipulators changed all that—and HBO and other media made gratuitous sex the norm. We went from Father Knows Best to Californication in 50 years.

Abortion is the killing of an unborn child. When African American pro-life activist Alveda King reminds people that Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger promoted abortion to reduce the Black population, her comments are ignored. Today, “Black lives matter” doesn't apply to Black babies.

There are only two genders. Even though we are daily reminded to believe in science when it comes to COVID-19 masks, science is thrown out the window when it comes to biology. Today, we are expected to applaud when a person announces he is a she, or she is a he, or when someone “feels” they have no gender at all.

Jesus Christ is Lord. This phrase got many Christians killed in the first century. Nero couldn't tolerate Christians because they wouldn't bow down to him. Yet in the face of persecution, the early apostles said, “For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

Don't bow to the idol. Ask God to give you a stronger spine so you can stand straight when cancel culture pressures you to conform.

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).

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God Is Still Working During a Global Shutdown

Last Sunday, a young preacher named Nickson Ngwira stood in front of his small congregation in the village of Mpamba, Malawi, and taught the people a song in their Chichewa language. Nobody knew the words because they were all new converts to Christianity.

They sang: "Palibe ofana naye ndi Yesu / Sazapezekanso." It means: "There is no one like Jesus / There is no one like Him."

Nickson, who is 32, moved to this village four weeks ago. His home church in Mzuzu, 20 miles away, could only afford to give him \$25 to help him plant the new Pentecostal Holiness congregation. But in a month Nickson has led 51 people to Jesus. He is now discipling them in spite of the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I came here to be a voice for Jesus to these people so they

can become a part of the family of God,” Nickson told me. “The people are suffering so much because they don’t know Christ.”

Before the pandemic hit, this area near the shores of Lake Malawi was already suffering from family breakdown and a rise in AIDS infections. Many young people dropped out of school because they lack money for school fees. When COVID-19 hit, people began starving because they weren’t allowed to work.

Witchcraft is also a serious problem. Just this week Nickson had to meet with a woman who had previously been involved in sorcery. He had to cast a demon out of her.

I met Nickson four years ago during a trip to Mzuzu, where he was serving as a worship leader for his church. He went to Bible college in Kenya for two years and then sensed the call to Mpamba. He is trusting God to meet his needs because the cost to rent a small room is more than he receives in support.

Last Sunday when he took up the offering in his new church, the total given was 680 Malawian kwacha. That’s less than one U.S. dollar.

These challenges may seem overwhelming, but Nickson always has a smile on his face when he texts me photos from Malawi. And he probably doesn’t even 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—just as He did in the book of Acts—and that the challenges we are facing during this pandemic can’t stop the spread of the gospel.

I meet so many Americans who are depressed because they listen to the mainstream media for hours each day. The constant barrage of negative news—about COVID-19 deaths, violent protests and constant bickering about politics—is triggering anxiety and causing insomnia. The media’s dishonest

manipulation of news is creating a mental health crisis that is more serious than the coronavirus itself.

Sometimes Christians are as guilty as secular journalists for creating a 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 dreams or prophecies. It's no wonder some believers are throwing up their hands and saying they hope Jesus returns before 2020 ends.

I have a prediction. We will live through 2020. Life will go on. The pandemic will soon 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 of 2020 God was at work.

The Bible is not a pessimistic book. It tells us that God loves us so much He sent Jesus to forgive sinners, overcome death and throw the devil into hell. It also tells us that Jesus gave us a global mission to take the message of salvation to every nation and that the Holy Spirit will empower us to finish that task.

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. The gospel will continue spreading in spite of pandemics, natural disasters, wars, political turmoil, financial collapse, Marxist movements, church scandals and dangerous heresies.

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 this kingdom from increasing. No matter how dark it gets, the light will come. Open your eyes, and you'll see glimmers of hope everywhere. {eoa}

If We Really Care About Black Lives, We Need Police

Many Americans participated in peaceful protests in June to decry the senseless killing of George Floyd. Police brutality is wrong, and all forms of racial injustice should be denounced. Thankfully in this country we have the right to march in the streets and to give speeches to speak our minds.

Sadly, protests in some cities devolved into anarchy—especially after white “antifa” activists joined in. After rioters burned down or looted businesses in Minneapolis in June, violence spread to other cities. Chaos erupted in Portland, Seattle, New York and Chicago. Police officers and protesters alike have been wounded or killed (including Black cops), but in some cases mayors and governors didn’t intervene to stop the violence.

Suddenly it became politically incorrect to defend the police. Instead, mobs began demanding that we defund them.

When militant activists took over six city blocks of Seattle in June, calling the area a “cop-free zone,” Mayor Jenny Durkan defended the protesters in a CNN interview and called the whole situation a “summer of love”—as if people illegally occupying a police station is a good thing. A few weeks later, after a fatal shooting of a 19-year-old in the supposed love zone, Durkan apologized.

That was a contrast to what happened in Atlanta after George Floyd’s murder. When protesters there became agitated and began looting, Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, a Black Democrat, scolded them harshly. “You are disgracing our city. You are disgracing the life of George Floyd and every other person who

has been killed in this country,” Bottoms said. “We are better than this. We are better than this as a city. We are better than this as a country. Go home.”

Amid all the shattering glass, gunfire and shouting, I hear another noise. It’s the sound of millions of average Americans, from every racial background and party affiliation, scratching their heads. We are asking, “What has possessed people to act so crazy?”

The truth is, most Americans want peace in their streets. The majority of Blacks in America reject rioting and violence. They want police protection—but they also want cops to respect them and to treat them and their loved ones fairly. But a vocal minority of radicals has grabbed the bullhorn, and they are shouting louder than everyone else.

You may have heard of Vicky Osterweil, a radicalized white author who just released a book titled *In Defense of Looting*. She says protesters have the right to break into stores to steal big-screen televisions and athletic shoes because “looting gets people what they need for free immediately, which means that they are capable of living and reproducing their lives without having to rely on jobs or a wage.”

Seriously? Who would publish a book that is basically a field manual for rioters? The only reason I mention Osterweil’s insane views here is that National Public Radio recently gave her a sympathetic interview. One of NPR’s journalists promoted her idea that looting “is a powerful tool to bring about real, lasting change in society.”

A growing number of Black Christian conservatives—including Brandon Tatum, Bevelyn Beatty, Leo Terrell, Terrence K. Williams, Anthony Brian Logan, Candace Owens, South Carolina Senator Tim Scott, the Lucas Brothers, Lynnette Hardaway and Rochelle Richardson—have huge followings on YouTube. But the mainstream media doesn’t take them seriously because they

don't promote the groupthink narrative about race.

Yet these Black conservatives deserve to be heard. They know that Black-owned businesses were torched in Minneapolis. They know that an 8-year-old girl, Secioriea Williamson, was shot and killed by protesters in Atlanta in July. They know that if we defund the police, more black lives will be snuffed out.

"Let's be clear—the police are needed," popular Black commentator Anthony Brian Logan said in July. "When you take the police away, when lawlessness becomes the norm, you are going to endanger those that you claim to be protecting."

We need to understand that not all African Americans support the Black Lives Matter organization. Why? Because the leaders of Black Lives Matter have adopted a radical agenda that doesn't represent mainstream American values. Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors has gone on record that she and her colleagues are "trained Marxists." Opal Tometi, the other co-founder, traveled to Venezuela in 2015 to attend a conference with Nicolas Maduro—one of the world's most brutal dictators. Tometi later hailed Venezuela's election system as "the best in the world."

Think again if you assume "all Black people" support Marxism. Think again if you think "all Black people" support defunding the police. It's actually racist to hold to such a generalization, since you are suggesting that Black Americans can't think for themselves.

In this crazy time when looting is promoted as an acceptable form of protest, let's return to common sense. Let's pray that peaceful protests will triumph over looting and arson, and that truth will triumph over insanity. Let's overcome injustice, improve our policing methods and preserve peace in our streets. {eoa}

Pray Like Your Life Depends on It

I have friends overseas who are worried about the United States. When people I know from Uganda or India see news reports of stores being looted in Chicago and cars burning in Portland, they assume I live a few miles from the violence. I explain that America is a big country, and that these riots aren't happening in my city.

Christians in other countries have always considered the United States a "Christian nation" because we have so many churches and we send many missionaries to the world. Now they hear of police killing unarmed Black people. They see anarchists setting government buildings on fire. They hear politicians defending abortions up to the point of birth.

"I am very worried," a pastor from eastern Nigeria told me this week. He says he views what is happening in the United States today as "an attempt by hell to divide the church along political lines in order to bring about a satanic strategy for America."

One pastor of a megachurch in Singapore told me: "We are horrified by what is happening in the United States. It is painful to see anarchy and lawlessness so rampant. We are praying constantly for America."

One of my pastor friends from Uganda says he is praying for a healing of divisions in our nation. "The devil fights the hardest when he knows we are making a difference. He laughs at the evil, riots and violence. But we say, 'No more.' We are asking God to turn His people back to Him."

Another Singapore pastor told me that he feels “destructive forces” are at work in America right now: “America is a great country, but it is now at a tipping point. If you are not careful it will fall over a cliff. Christians must no longer keep silent.”

I am constantly pleading with my international friends to pray for my country. The alarm has sounded. When they ask me how I am praying, I share this list below—which I am constantly updating. I hope you will share it with your praying friends, whether they are from the United States or abroad:

1. **Pray that the COVID-19 pandemic will end.** If God can heal the sick miraculously, He can end a plague. Pray that the coronavirus will stop spreading so people can go back to work, kids can return to school and churches can meet again. And remember that this pandemic is having much more devastating impact on developing countries.
2. **Pray for an end to riots and violence.** The peaceful protests that began in May to honor George Floyd have morphed into something unrecognizable. Predominantly white anarchists have hijacked a movement. Portland, Seattle, Denver, New York, Chicago and Kenosha, Wisconsin, have all suffered irreparable damage from lootings, shootings and arson. In Chicago, where I visited last weekend, business owners are leaving the city because they feel unprotected. Pray for peace.
3. **Pray for a peaceful election on Nov. 3.** People are on edge these days because of fears of voter fraud. And there are rumors that violence will break out if the election doesn't turn out the way certain groups want. Pray for fairness and accurate ballot counts—and no rioting.
4. **Pray for leaders who have character, moral values, courage and wise policies.** We are a sharply divided

country, and your definition of “moral values” might differ from mine. But I hope all Christians can agree that we need leaders who have respect for God’s standards. Pray for voters to select the best candidates to lead our country—and keep in mind that the 2020 election is not just a contest between President Trump and Joe Biden. We will also choose 35 U.S. senators and 96 members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

5. **Pray for racial justice.** We cannot ignore the fact that people of color have suffered in this country because of discrimination and racist attitudes. Pray for a true change in people’s hearts, keeping in mind that racist attitudes have also affected immigrants as well as Native Americans.
6. **Pray for reconciliation and an end to hatred and division.** I don’t remember a season in my lifetime when Americans were this hateful. Whether we are feuding on social media, arguing on TV talk shows, shouting profanity at each other in the streets or throwing bricks at crowds, many people have become ticking time bombs. Pray that God will defuse this hostility.
7. **Pray for freedom to preach the gospel.** Currently Christians in some states are enduring suffocating restrictions on gatherings because of COVID-19. But I am more concerned about the restrictions that may come in the future if government leaders begin telling the church what we can and can’t say from a pulpit or online. Pray that our religious freedoms will be safeguarded.
8. **Pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.** Ultimately, our nation is sunk if we continue on a path toward atheism and godless humanism. If America turns totally away from God, we will drift so far morally that we will fall off the cliff, as my friend in Singapore warned.

But an election is not going to save us. A political party cannot save us. We need the rain of heaven. Our ultimate prayer must be, "Lord, send a revival." {eoa}