

We Need the Prince of Peace, Not Divisive Politics

During the past week people kept asking if I planned to write anything about the Trump impeachment vote, last week's *Christianity Today* article denouncing Trump, or the response to that article from Christian leaders I love and respect.

I honestly didn't want to respond because I'm grieving. I'm already sad because Christmas reminds me of my dad's death two years ago, and the loss of my mother-in-law this year. To make things even sadder, my 91-year-old mother is in a nursing home suffering from dementia. Politics is the last thing I want to talk about. I've already told my family I want a Christmas free of political arguments.

But loss of family members isn't the only thing I'm grieving. I'm also sad that our nation has become so hateful and divided. I remember a time when Christians from various viewpoints could still love one another. Now the intolerant spirit in the world has invaded the church. The Bible says we are one body, but with our cruel words we are hacking that body into bloody pieces. I'm weeping over it, and I believe Jesus is weeping too.

It seems we've all become so opinionated in this era of outrage. We all claim to have the moral high ground, and we are eager to tweet about it. Some Christians view President Trump as the devil incarnate; other evangelical believers see him as a messiah figure. Then there are the believers in the middle, like me, who don't endorse everything Trump does, but, at the same time, don't see many attractive alternatives.

I have friends on all sides of this debate. I know African-American Christians who believe President Trump is a racist; yet I also know conservative black pastors and churchgoers

(including Martin Luther King Jr.'s niece, Alveda King) who support Trump because of his pro-life policies. I know Hispanics who are fearful that Trump will deport them; I also know Hispanic Christians who support Trump because he has courageously defended the nation of Israel from organizations that want to destroy the Jewish state.

I have intellectual friends, some even leaders in academia, who want the president impeached just because he doesn't behave like a tactful statesman or because he questions the science of climate change. I also have blue-collar, working-class friends who wear MAGA hats, drive trucks, own guns and read the Bible daily. Their faith is not any less genuine than those who have theological degrees.

I am grateful for all of my friends. My relationship with them is not based on their political positions. I need their encouragement and prayers when I am going through a hard time, and I know they appreciate my friendship as well. But our relationships are at risk today because the devil is using politics to turn us against each other.

We are a divided church. When writing about the one body of Christ, the apostle Paul wrote: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Cor. 12:21)—yet this is exactly what are doing.

In the days leading up to Christmas I listened several times to Casting Crowns' version of the Christmas song "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." That classic hymn was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow during the Civil War, when our nation was consumed with hatred. It was later put to music, and became hugely popular after Bing Crosby recorded his version in 1956.

Part of the song says:

And in despair I bowed my head/

*There is no peace on earth I said/
For hate is strong and mocks the song/
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men!
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep/
"God is not dead; nor does he sleep!
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail/
with peace on earth, goodwill to men!"*

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a host of angels appeared to the shepherds and said: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). The peace that Christ brought will endure forever. Jesus was not elected, and He cannot be impeached. His peace will be tested until His return, but in the end we know who wins the final war.

This Christmas my focus is on the Prince of Peace. He is our only hope in this season of angry dissension. May the bells of Christmas be heard above the constant bickering. May the bells of Christmas drown out our self-righteous media. May the bells of Christmas override my own offense at those who don't agree with me.

I pray Jesus will tenderize our hearts and remove the deceitful root of bitterness that makes us think we have a right to hate our brothers and sisters. And I pray that Christians will work to unite the church rather than throw gasoline on the raging fires of discord. {eoa}

Don't Let Holiday Depression Drag You Down

Christmas has always been my favorite time of year. But I've noticed it hasn't been the same for the past two years since I lost my dad. He died in January 2018—and two Christmases ago he was sick with the flu and gasping for breath. My memories of that holiday were bittersweet—especially because his nursing home was under quarantine and I couldn't visit him on Christmas day.

I've since learned that many people deal with various levels of depression during the Christmas holidays because they have lost loved ones. Memories of loss can trigger sad thoughts. Depression can also hit hard because of cold weather, longer winter nights, loneliness or holiday stress.

If you are struggling with holiday depression, here are a few suggestions to help you survive:

1. **It's OK to grieve.** Christmas can trigger memories of divorce, the death of a loved one or the loss of other important relationships. You don't have to pretend your pain isn't there. You may even want to put a photo of your lost loved one in a special frame for others to see. It's OK to cry, but invite the Holy Spirit to be your Comforter (see John 14:16). Let Him hold you close as you grieve.
2. **Don't hide under the covers.** Many people with seasonal depression don't want to be around people. That's understandable—but being alone is not the best solution. You don't have to hang around in crowded stores or go to every party, but spend time with supportive friends even

if you are tempted to avoid them. I know people who skip church functions during the holidays because they don't like to see happy families together. Go to church anyway. God may put someone in your path to encourage you.

3. **Avoid consumerism.** Many people get depressed at Christmas because they feel pressure to buy expensive presents. You can resist. You don't have to compete with anyone else's Christmas giving. Throw away the catalogs, tune out the advertisements and avoid the crowded stores. Keep your gift-giving simple and live within your means. You don't want more reasons to be depressed when the bills come in January.
4. **Don't get on a sugar high.** Sometimes holiday depression is caused by your diet. The eggnog, gingerbread and Snickerdoodles alone are enough to send anyone into a diabetic coma—but then some people pour on the alcohol, too. Too much sugar will take you high and then drop you into an emotional pit. It's best to limit sweets and start your New Year's healthy-eating plan early.
5. **Take time to relax—and laugh.** Some of us get depressed because we are so frazzled. We overschedule, overeat and overstress during our "time off." Don't work so hard that you need a vacation when it's time to go back to your job. Learn to relax. Take a nap. Talk a walk. Smell the coffee and the pine boughs. Hold a baby or play with a child. And remember to laugh—it is "good medicine," according to Prov. 17:22. Laughter releases chemicals in our bodies that overcome stress and boost the immune system.
6. **Give to others.** Depression causes us to focus on ourselves, so the best remedy is to focus on someone else. You can prepare a meal for a needy family or visit a homeless shelter or a nursing home. Or just send personalized Christmas messages to people on social media. Remember: You are not the only one who might be hurting emotionally this Christmas. Your words of

kindness might free someone else from the holiday blues.

Finally, it's good to focus your thoughts on the original Christmas story, which had nothing to do with glistening treetops or boughs of holly. The first Christmas was not a happy time. It was marked by intense family drama, terroristic threats, strange visitors, a sudden evacuation, the slaughter of innocent children and the stress of an unplanned pregnancy. And I'm sure Mary and Joseph weren't drinking spiked eggnog while they were fleeing from King Herod.

Yet despite their depressing circumstances, God brought His Son into this dark world. The angel who announced His birth said: "Listen! Do not fear. For I bring you good news of great joy, which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10b). This "great joy" was not found in gifts, decorations, shopping or parties. It was found in Christ, who came into this world to take away our sins.

Regardless of how you feel this Christmas, you can look up in wonder and behold the source of true joy. He brought us an unspeakable joy that transcends our emotions and outlives this sad world. And His abiding joy will be waiting for us when this life is over.

The Faith-Based Movie of the Year: 'Harriet'

Christian filmmakers brought several inspirational messages to movie theaters in 2019, including *Breakthrough*, *Overcomer* and

Unplanned. But my favorite faith-based film of the year was not produced by a Christian company for Christian audiences. *Harriet*, the first film ever made about abolitionist leader Harriet Tubman, will end up being my favorite movie of the year.

From the moment we are introduced to Tubman on the Maryland farm where she was a slave in 1849, we see her brave determination. When it becomes obvious that her owner plans to sell her down South, she does the unthinkable—she escapes in the night and walks 100 miles to Pennsylvania to become a free woman.

In Philadelphia she finds support from other abolitionists and becomes what locals in Maryland began to call “Moses”—a daring slave liberator who wades across rivers, carries a loaded gun and risks her life to bring hundreds of slaves north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

It’s sad that it took this long for someone to make a film about Tubman. Her work with the Underground Railroad made her one of the most famous women in American history. Yet I’m actually glad we waited until 2019 for director Kasi Lemmons to take on this project, because she did a masterful job of portraying Tubman’s vibrant faith as well as the faith of so many slaves who trusted God to end their misery.

In one key scene, Tubman tells the son of her owner: “God don’t mean people to own people.” This defiant woman, who stood only 5 feet tall, wasn’t afraid to look evil straight in the eye and confront it.

Tubman’s struggle is depicted in the film as a series of prayers. On the night she flees from her Maryland overlords, she stops to see Rev. Green (Vondie Curtis-Hall), a pastor who prays for her safety. When she gets near the Pennsylvania border she finds protection from a compassionate Quaker. And she often hears God speaking directly to her about which path

to take or which road to avoid.

History confirms that Tubman suffered from a brain injury that she sustained when a slave owner accidentally hit her in the head with an iron weight. The wound caused periodic fainting spells. In the film, as in real life, Tubman often felt God was speaking to her during her unconscious moments. Apparently she relied on the Holy Spirit's supernatural gifts to guide her mission.

Actress and singer Cynthia Erivo was perfectly cast in the role of Tubman, and she will most likely get an Oscar nomination for her work. (She already received a Golden Globe nomination for best actress in a drama.) Not only does Erivo accurately portray the gutsy conviction of a national hero, but she sings many of the same haunting African American spirituals that Tubman would have used to signal to slaves that it was time to run north.

The original song "Stand Up," performed by Erivo, has already been nominated for a Golden Globe. With soulful passion she sings: "I'm gonna stand up / take my people with me / together we are going / to a brand new home / far across the river / I hear freedom calling / calling me to answer / gonna keep on keepin' on / I can feel it in my bones."

The worship songs of slaves provide much of the soundtrack for the film. In one scene, Rev. Green leads a group of slaves in "Hold On," which calls on believers to "hold on to the plow." Other tunes such as "Go Down Moses," "Wade in the Water" and "Goodbye Song" show how slaves found comfort in the earliest forms of gospel music.

Some people have criticized *Harriet* because it doesn't show the bloody brutality of slavery. But director Lemmons has said in interviews that she wanted to make a film about freedom, not slavery. There is enough violence in the film to get it a PG-13 rating (we see the scars on the backs of slaves, and

some abusive treatment), but instead of gore and screams we see Tubman's conviction to stop injustice. I'm glad the violence is downplayed so that younger audiences can watch the film without it triggering nightmares.

"I would give every last drop of blood in my veins until this monster called slavery is dead," Tubman says near the end of the film.

The best thing about *Harriet* is that this woman is not a comic-book superhero like Wonder Woman or Captain Marvel. She was a real person. She was a justice warrior in her day who fought for women's suffrage after the Civil War ended. Hopefully her life story will inspire a whole new generation of justice warriors to trust God and to follow His voice.

Harriet is rated PG-13 for some violence and coarse language, including some racial slurs. {eoa}

What I Admired Most About Reinhard Bonnke

I met Reinhard Bonnke several times during my days as editor of *Charisma* magazine. But my favorite memory of the German evangelist occurred in a small meeting with pastors on the east coast of Florida, near Stuart, sometime around 2005. Bonnke had gathered the pastors to float the idea of hosting a large evangelistic event in the region.

I sat on the front row and listened to this passionate preacher, who was famous for his booming voice and thick accent. He talked about what he loved most—reaching the

lost—and then he announced that he wanted to pray for everyone in the room to receive a burden for evangelism.

People began scrambling in every direction. Chairs were carried to the back of the room so all the leaders could get near the stage. Everybody wanted the gifted evangelist to touch them. They wanted his anointing so badly they were willing to shove other people out of the way to get it.

But I could tell this attitude bothered Bonnke. He told the audience sternly that he couldn't give them his anointing. And he also warned them not to fall backward if he prayed for them. "If you fall, fall at your own risk," he said.

That was not a common attitude among other celebrity charismatic ministers I knew. Many of the more flamboyant preachers in our movement were known to hand out "special anointings" right and left—and a few of them suggested that you might get a stronger anointing if you gave \$1,000 in the offering.

Those same guys would also encourage people to fall on the floor. And if you didn't fall, they might push you down.

But Reinhard Bonnke didn't play charismatic games. He didn't whack people on the head to make himself look powerful. He didn't need titles or swagger or religious theater to boost his ego. He never mishandled money. He was a simple man who had one priority—preaching the gospel to the unsaved. Bonnke always kept the main thing the main thing.

"Proclaiming the cross is not a side thought, an afterthought," he said in an interview with . "It's not on the back burner; it must be the front burner. ... When I see how souls are coming to the arms of Jesus by the hundreds of thousands in my own crusades, I'm awed. And I know that there's great joy in heaven."

Bonnke died last week in Orlando, Florida, at the age of 79.

The ministry he founded, Christ for All Nations (CFAN), says more than 79 million people made decisions for Jesus in his massive evangelistic campaigns, most of which were held in Africa.

Known affectionately as “the Billy Graham of Africa,” he was driven by a dream he had as a young man. After moving to Lesotho at age 24 with his wife, Anni, he saw a vision of the entire continent of Africa washed in the blood of Jesus.

His passion to preach to the masses is what motivated him to construct the largest tent ever made—one that held 34,000 people. But after a windstorm destroyed it, he realized tents were too small to hold the crowds he was destined to reach. It was not unusual for 100,000 Africans to come to his outdoor meetings. His largest evangelistic campaign, held in Lagos, Nigeria, in the year 2000, drew a crowd of 6 million.

Bonnke was a brave man. He was never content to stay inside the comfortable walls of the church and preach to the choir. He had to be on the front lines—even when it was dangerous for him.

His closest brush with death occurred in 1991 when he tried to sponsor a massive outdoor gospel rally in the city of Kano, Nigeria, where militant Muslims sometimes burn churches and murder pastors. Riots broke out. Bonnke had to cancel the meetings and flee the city because Christians were being killed.

“It appeared Satan had won,” Bonnke said of the Kano campaign. Yet nine years later, that record-breaking crowd came to his campaign in Lagos. A whopping 1 million people made decisions for Christ in that one event.

Bonnke never apologized for being a Pentecostal. He believed in the power of the Holy Spirit, and his many books—including *Evangelism by Fire*, *Mighty Manifestations* and *Hell Empty, Heaven Full* emphasize the need for the Spirit’s gifts in order

to reach the lost. But Bonnke never cheapened the Spirit's power with charismatic games.

Like a modern-day Elijah, Bonnke has now been taken to heaven. But his mantle has been passed on—to the many young leaders he mentored in his evangelistic training school, and through the many books he wrote. (I plan to dive into his autobiography, *Living a Life of Fire*, during the Christmas break.)

In this challenging season when style is often celebrated more than substance, and preachers play it safe, I want more of the humility, simplicity and courage that Reinhard Bonnke modeled for us all.

How to Recharge Your Spiritual Batteries for a New Year

I look forward to the beginning of each year because I set aside some days for special prayer. I don't like to finish one year and start another without taking time to thank Jesus for the ways He blessed me during the past 12 months and to ask Him for supernatural strength for the next season.

For me, these days of prayer offer a holy recharge. Without that time, I feel weak, directionless and unprepared for new challenges. What about you? Are your spiritual batteries drained from the battles of 2019? The Holy Spirit offers a jump-start. Here are seven ways you can turn up the heat in

your personal prayer life:

Develop your spiritual confidence. Many Christians live on the far edges of God's blessings because they don't believe they have been made righteous by Christ's sacrifice. You will never expect answers from God if you think He's mad at you.

Don't act like a slave who begs for things. You are His heir, and He wants to give you the kingdom. God tells us to "draw near *with confidence* to the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16, NASB, emphasis added). You can ask Him for anything. Be bold!

Be specific. Zig Ziglar used to say: "If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time." That's why vague prayers are inferior to specific ones. I have recently begun the habit of making a "Top Seven List" of prayer requests. When I did this during an out-of-state move a few years ago, the Lord answered six of my seven requests within two months. One of my prayers was that when I bought my new house, my house payment wouldn't be more than my old one. It turned out to be one dollar less! I was reminded that James 4:2b says: "You do not have because you do not ask."

Don't limit God with small prayers. Psalm 2:8a (MEV) says: "Ask of Me, and I will give the nations for Your inheritance." We need to learn to ask big. Why would we settle for less when God can do the impossible? Elisha boldly asked his mentor, Elijah, for a double portion of the Holy Spirit—and God gave him that mantle. God may want to double what you are requesting of Him. His vision for your life is far greater than what you supposed.

Be aggressive against your spiritual enemies. Status quo prayers won't be enough when the spiritual battle is fierce. There is a time to go to war in the spirit, and this will require a militant attitude toward the enemy.

When Elisha told King Joash to take arrows and strike the ground in preparation for a battle, the king halfheartedly hit

the ground only three times. Elisha said: "You should have struck five or six times, then you would have struck Aram until you would have destroyed it" (2 Kings 13:18-19, NASB). Too often we are satisfied with small victories because we didn't pray with enough intensity. Your zeal will often determine your outcome.

Combine fasting with prayer. Fasting is not a way to bribe God. You do not need to forfeit food to get His attention. But fasting helps you focus on the Lord—and it can intensify prayer power.

There are certain spiritual obstacles that need an extra push. When speaking of a demon that needed to be cast out, Jesus told His disciples: "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21). If you are hitting a spiritual brick wall, it may be time for fasting.

Pull an all-nighter. I am not the kind of guy who typically gets up at 3 a.m. to pray. But there are moments in our lives when the Lord may woo you to spend time with Him in the night hours. In Song of Solomon, the bride hears her Beloved calling her to get out of bed (5:2-6), and she doesn't respond quickly enough.

Many of us are too distracted by the busyness of life to hear God call us to a season of focused prayer. Yet the Lord is looking for people who will carry His burdens. Will you let Him pray through you?

Let God amplify your feeble prayers. I used to fight discouragement about my prayer life because I didn't feel my prayers were powerful enough. But then I read Ephesians 3:20b in a new light. It says God is able "to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think." That means after I pray, God adds His own miraculous ingredient.

Like the tiny lunch of five loaves and two fish, Jesus can take something insignificant and feed a multitude. When you

pray, expect Him to increase the impact. What you whisper in your closet can shake the world.

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Don't Underestimate the Power of 'Small' Prayers

The new film *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* celebrates TV's famous Mister Rogers by looking at how his Christian kindness impacted the life of a cynical journalist who was assigned to write about him. In one scene, Fred Rogers (played by Tom Hanks) is shown kneeling by his bed, praying with a note pad and mentioning the journalist by name.

That scene was not fiction. Roger's wife, Joanne, told Religion News Service that her Presbyterian husband—who died in 2003—got up every morning at 5:15 to pray before he went to the studio to record his legendary kids' show. She said Rogers

always read his Bible and used a legal pad to write down the names of people he wanted to pray for. This was his spiritual routine for years.

In the movie, the writer, Lloyd Vogel, experiences a conversion of sorts. After meeting Rogers, he forgives his cruel father and becomes a better husband and dad to his own infant son. The message of the film is that Rogers' caring attitude—along with his simple prayers—transformed a man's life.

Can a short prayer change someone's life, even if it's just the mention of a name scribbled on a note pad?

In my early years, I was tempted to believe that prayers had to be long, drawn-out and intense in order to be effective. I put a lot of pressure on myself. I even tried a 10-day fast.

But when I look at the apostle Paul, who is surely the New Testament authority on powerful prayer, I see that he not only fasted and travailed in prayer for hours, but he also offered God many short requests. I don't know if he had a prayer list scribbled on a piece of parchment, but he knew the power of mentioning.

He told the Ephesians: "For this reason I ... do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers" (Eph. 1:15-16b, ESV). He told the Thessalonians: "We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers" (1 Thess. 1:2). And he wrote to Philemon: "I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers" (Philem. 1:4, NASB).

Short prayers are powerful. The average psalm takes only a minute or two to recite, and Psalm 117—the shortest psalm—only takes nine seconds to say. Jabez' prayer is even shorter: "Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it may not pain me!" (1 Chron. 4:10a).

I'm not suggesting it's wrong to pray for hours. But I think some Christians give up on prayer because they assume God is timing us. He's not. He welcomes our words, even the simplest of requests. The Bible even says he hears our "cries" (see Ps. 18:6). Sometimes a prayer doesn't have words! It can actually be an unintelligible groan or a desperate "Please, God, help me!" Or even simply, "Jesus!"

A few years ago, I started the habit of praying for certain people using a collection of digital photos stored in my smartphone. During my quiet time in the mornings, I scroll through these images and pray for my family, close friends, mentors and people I'm discipling.

Sometimes I stop and pray for these people's specific needs. At other times I simply say, "Lord, I ask you to bless Paul, Brandon, Dante, Doyle, Samson, Felipe, Mike, Khuram and Ben. Meet their needs and cause them to grow spiritually." Then I scroll to the next set of photos and mention those names.

For more than five years I've prayed simple, short prayers for my spiritual son Alex, asking God to give him and his wife a baby. Two months ago, he announced that his wife is pregnant. For more than nine years, I prayed for Felipe to get his U.S. citizenship. That miracle is now in the works. And I prayed for my friend Dennis for at least three years that he would find a wife. He just got engaged.

Don't make prayer complicated. When the apostle Paul invited us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) he was calling us to enjoy a daily conversation with God. Prayer can be as simple as breathing. And it should become a joyful habit, not an exhausting burden. Paul also said in Philippians 4:6: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

I pray we can all learn Mister Rogers' secret. Make a list.

Invite God to move in the lives of the people you love. Even small prayers, offered in sincere faith before the throne of heaven, will unleash big miracles. {eoa}

This Thanksgiving, Count the Blessings You Take for Granted

Christians in parts of the Middle East are in danger of total extinction. That was the conclusion of a report released last month by Aid to the Church in Need, an international Catholic charity. The report said that Christianity has disappeared from towns in Iraq and Syria because of the wave of genocide carried out by ISIS.

In Iraq, the number of Christians in Iraq has fallen by 90%, the study said. In Syria, the Christian population has fallen by two-thirds since the country's civil war began in 2011, when there were 2 million believers there.

A report in *The New York Times* last year confirmed that most of Syria's once-Christian villages are now ghost towns. ISIS fighters kidnapped villagers and executed them. Women disappeared and became sex slaves to terrorist leaders. Churches were bombed and burned. Traumatized believers fled the country. The defeat of ISIS fighters in 2019, and the death of bloodthirsty ISIS commander Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on Oct. 26, will not bring martyred Christians back from the dead or convince refugees to return to their homeland.

As you celebrate Thanksgiving this year, I hope you are grateful that your church wasn't bombed or that you weren't forced from your home. I encourage you to make a list of blessings you may take for granted. My list for 2019 might help you think of others:

1. **Do you have religious freedom?** The majority of the world's population—75%—live in areas with severe religious restrictions. And Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution simply because of their belief in Jesus Christ. About 1.6 billion people in the world live in repressive societies where they have no say in how they are governed.
2. **Do you make your own decisions?** There are 29.8 million people living as slaves today, according to the Walk Free Foundation. These people live as forced laborers, forced prostitutes, child soldiers and child brides in forced marriages. Walk Free investigated 162 countries and found slaves in every one.
3. **Do you have money in a bank?** More than 2.5 billion adults around the world are unbanked, according to data based on Gallup polling in 148 countries. Two-thirds of people without accounts said they simply don't have enough money to use a bank.
4. **Do you own shoes?** About 300 million children around the world don't own a pair of shoes. It is estimated that 2 billion people worldwide are currently plagued with parasitic diseases that could be prevented simply by wearing proper footwear.
5. **Do you drink clean water?** About 1.1 billion people in the world don't have access to clean drinking water. Because of that, about 9 million people will die this year because of water-related illnesses. The next time you open a bottle of Dasani or drink from your tap, remember that millions of women around the world spend

an average of four hours daily walking to get water.

6. **Did your mother survive when you were born?** Approximately 800 women die every day from complications during pregnancy and childbirth. This is equivalent to 33 women an hour. Almost all these deaths occurred in developing countries, and most could have been prevented.
7. **Did you live past age 5?** Some 21,000 children die every day around the world because of poverty and preventable diseases. That is equivalent to one child dying every four seconds. The annual death toll is 7.6 million children a year.
8. **Do you eat three meals a day?** The World Health Organization estimates that one-third of the world's population is overfed, one-third is underfed and one-third is starving. Approximately 925 million people in the developing world are chronically undernourished.
9. **Do you enjoy reliable electricity?** About 1.5 billion people in this world have no access to electrical power. Do you enjoy that oven in your kitchen? The next time you prepare a meal, remember that 2.5 billion people in the world still use wood or charcoal to cook their food. Do you enjoy your washing machine? About 5 billion people in the world still wash their clothes by hand.
10. **Do you have a roof over your head?** The U.N. Commission on Human Rights says there are 100 million homeless people in the world. One in 3 children in the world live without adequate shelter. And today there are about 42 million people who are living as refugees. Most were displaced by war and live in crude camps.
11. **Do you own a car?** The United States still has the highest number of motor vehicles in the world. Globally, only 1 out of every 8 people has access to a car. Many

of the others either walk, take crowded buses or public vans or ride on bicycles, rickshaws or animals. Did you fly somewhere in the past year? You are blessed. Only 5% to 7% of people in the world have ever flown in an airplane.

12. **Do you have a flushable toilet?** The United Nations Development Program reports that 2.6 billion people do not have access to any toilet facilities. India has the largest percentage of people who lack adequate sanitation. About 638 million Indians must go outdoors.
13. **Can you read?** Nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names. There are 72 million children who should be in school but are not enrolled. And if you have a college degree, you are in a privileged minority; only 6.7% of people in the world have a college diploma.
14. **Can you see?** Over 285 million people in the world are visually impaired. About 39 million of these are blind and 246 million have a moderate to severe visual impairment. India is home to the world's largest number of blind people, due to the country's acute shortage of optometrists.

King David wrote: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Ps. 103:2). Thanksgiving is not an optional virtue. Without it, our pride swells and our selfishness consumes us. Thanksgiving is an important exercise because it adjusts our attitude. It calibrates our hearts so that we stop complaining and instead remember how we are blessed and who deserves the credit for our blessings. Happy Thanksgiving!

What's the Thermostat Reading of Your Heart?

Just before the prophet Elisha died, he put the king of Israel to a test. Elisha told Joash to take a bow and arrows. Then he put his hands on Joash's hands and asked him to shoot an arrow out the window as a prophetic sign of God's coming victory over the enemy. "You will defeat the Arameans at Aphek until you have destroyed them," Elisha promised (see 2 Kings 13:17).

But then Elisha tested Joash further. He told him to take some of the arrows and strike the ground. Following those orders, Joash half-heartedly tapped the ground three times and stopped, and Elisha got angry. "You should have struck it five or six times. Then you would have stricken Aram until you had finished them," Elisha said in verse 19. "Now you will strike Aram just three times."

Remember, Elisha is the prophet who wore the mantle of Elijah. He had watched the older prophet being carried into heaven in a fiery chariot. Elisha carried a double portion of the Holy Spirit. During his ministry he performed twice as many miracles as his powerful mentor. Elisha was full of spiritual zeal.

Elisha got angry with King Joash because he was apathetic. Joash lacked passion for the fight. He went through the religious motions that Elisha required of him, true, but he had no real fire in his heart. Perhaps ministry had just become a cold act of professional duty instead of a burning desire. And because he was lukewarm, Elisha said Joash wouldn't see a complete victory on the battlefield.

The moral of 2 Kings 13 is simple: Half-heartedness will deny

you of success. The temperature of your heart will determine your outcome!

This story convicts me to the core every time I read it, because I know the Lord measures the temperature of my heart. He is looking for the blazing fire of the Spirit, but there are times when I allow fear, compromise, discouragement or weariness to quench my passion. What about you?

Paul told the Romans that Christians should be “fervent in spirit” (Rom. 12:11). The word for “fervent” in the Greek, *zeo*, can mean “to be white hot, or to boil.” The same word is used to describe Elijah’s “fervent” prayer life in James 5:17. God doesn’t want us to be lukewarm and spiritually passive. He wants us to be so enthusiastic and excited about His kingdom that we set spiritual fires wherever we go.

I’m not talking about hype or fleshly excitement. We have plenty of that today. True spiritual zeal isn’t measured by the volume of a preacher’s voice, or by how high you jump in church. Many Christians have learned how to put on a show of fake zeal.

But let’s also remember that the word “enthusiasm” comes from the root words “possessed by God.” When someone is really filled with the Holy Spirit, the passion inside them will manifest in words and actions. They will become louder, bolder, more intent on fulfilling God’s mission, more sincere in their love for others and more aggressive about sharing the gospel.

Holy zeal moved Jesus to throw the merchants out of the temple. Today zeal moves us to pray, preach, give to the poor, fund missionary work and love the lost people around us. Yet when we lose our zeal we become inactive pew-sitters. When our fire cools off we lose interest in God’s Word, neglect prayer, compromise with sin and seek out preachers who are just as cool as we are—because we don’t want our lukewarm hearts to be

confronted.

Would you allow the Lord to check your internal thermostat today? How hot is your zeal?

–Have you lost your desire to spend time with God daily? If your Bible has been collecting dust and your prayer life has grown cold, you’ve lost your zeal.

–Has it been a long time since you shared your faith with someone else? If the Holy Spirit is not flowing out of you to touch others, your zeal has grown cold.

–Have you allowed compromising sins to regularly distract you? Have you become addicted to worldly habits that are sapping your spiritual strength? The devil wants to replace your passion for God with sinful desires. Beware of his traps!

–Have you allowed resentment to turn down the temperature of your love? Nothing will freeze your heart faster than bitterness.

–Have you been overcome by discouragement, worry or spiritual weariness? Sometimes our zeal wanes because we need a fresh encounter with God’s presence. Give Him your fears, your frustrations and your anxieties and ask the Holy Spirit to blow on the coals of your heart. Enlist others to pray for you. He will renew your strength and your zeal!

Don’t let your hot zeal cool off. Be fervent. Stoke the fires of your spiritual passion with God’s Word and prayer. Don’t just go through the motions. Take your arrows and smash them forcefully on the ground six times. Be filled with the Holy Ghost so you can be a serious threat to spiritual darkness.
{eoa}

Why John MacArthur Owes Women an Apology

Fundamentalist preacher John MacArthur, known for his “Grace to You” radio broadcast, didn’t show any grace back in the fall when he was asked what he thought about popular Bible teacher Beth Moore. During a pastor’s conference in Sun Valley, California, held Oct. 16-18, MacArthur said he thought Moore should “go home” when he was asked on a panel what he thought of her. To make his words even less gracious, the audience laughed and cheered. “I think the church is caving in to women preachers,” said MacArthur, a Reformed Baptist who has preached for 50 years that women have no biblical right to stand behind a pulpit or serve in church leadership.

I respect some of MacArthur’s theological contributions. But his dismissive attitude toward women who are called to ministry is rude, crude and incredibly unhelpful in a day when we need every available minister—male or female—on the front lines.

MacArthur sincerely believes he’s upholding Scripture when he demands an all-male clergy. Like so many fundamentalists before him, he builds his narrow doctrinal interpretation on one verse in 1 Timothy while ignoring women leaders in the Bible, including Deborah, Miriam, Huldah, Priscilla, Nympha, Chloe, Euodia, Syntyche and others who served with the apostle Paul.

Would MacArthur tell Deborah to “go home” rather than organize an army to defend Israel? Would he tell Priscilla to “go home” rather than travel and teach in New Testament churches?

I wonder if MacArthur and other fundamentalists realize what

they are saying when they demand that the Beth Moores of our day sit down and shut up. Do these leaders wish the spiritual contributions of women would go away?

Where would we be if the powerful women God used in past generations never had a place in ministry? To suggest that our sisters have no role to play in the spreading of the gospel reveals the highest level of male arrogance. Thankfully, women throughout the centuries who had the fire of God burning in their hearts did not listen to the religious naysayers who criticized them.

What would have happened if the great missionary Amy Carmichael had been content to stay in her comfortable house in England because of the misguided belief that women are never to speak for God? Because Amy obeyed and preached with fervor, thousands in India found salvation. Scores of young Indian girls were pulled out of the evil system of Hindu temple prostitution.

What if Jarena Lee, a poor black woman living in the early 1800s in America, had ignored the voice of the Holy Spirit that told her, "Preach the gospel! I will put My words in your mouth"? She traveled thousands of miles on foot preaching and winning converts.

What would have happened if Southern Baptist missionary Bertha Smith had adhered to her own denomination's policies about women in ministry? Because this pioneer knew she couldn't keep silent about her faith, she took her message to China and sparked a revival that is still felt there 70 years later.

What if healing evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson had embraced the lie that says women cannot speak in church? She never would have blazed a trail across the United States with her Pentecostal message or started the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel—a denomination with millions of members around the world.

What if the great Bible teacher Henrietta Mears had assumed that 1 Timothy 2:12 forbade her from teaching men? She would have never hosted the large discipleship conferences she sponsored in the 1940s and 1950s or had the opportunity to mentor Bill Bright and Billy Graham when they were young. Those men, by their own admission, led millions to Jesus because of Mears' influence on their spiritual growth.

What if Salvation Army co-founder Catherine Booth, healing evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman or Bible teacher Corrie ten Boom had kept their mouths shut when the Holy Spirit called them to shout their message from the housetops? And while we are on the subject of Beth Moore, let's remember that she has published more than 25 books and Bible studies and has indirectly disciplined countless women and men. I don't even want to imagine a world without her contributions.

What a shame that our brother MacArthur would devalue Moore's spiritual gifts and then suggest that her ministry is illegitimate. I believe he owes Moore, and all women preachers, a swift apology.

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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Don't Get Caught in the Comparison Trap

Football is a religion in the South, where I grew up. Every boy I knew dreamed of becoming a star quarterback. When my relatives gathered for meals, the conversation usually revolved around whether Auburn would beat Alabama that year.

I felt like sliding under my chair during those moments. I was not a football player—and there was no chance of me becoming one. I didn't have big enough biceps to throw a 50-yard pass, and I didn't have the frame to tackle a 200-pound guy. I felt like a wimp. I assumed that when God handed out physical talents, I was stuck at the back of the line.

Thankfully, my lack of athletic skills didn't cripple me entirely. I had other abilities, like writing. But a cloud of inferiority followed me everywhere. No matter how successful I was in other areas, I branded myself a failure because I didn't measure up as an athlete.

It was only through the power of the Holy Spirit that I eventually overcame this painful sense of disqualification. Yet I meet people every day who are slaves of inferiority.

Some feel intellectually challenged; some struggle with a physical disability; others are terrified of speaking publicly because they are insecure about their appearance or weight. Others were bullied or abused, and the cruel words they heard on a playground or at the dinner table were stamped into their brains with an invisible branding iron.

What about you? Do you find it difficult to describe your positive qualities? Are you haunted by labels that were pinned

on you by parents, siblings, teachers or classmates? Were you ever called “stupid,” “fatso,” “dunce,” “dork,” “lazy,” “slut” or the N-word?

People can be vicious. Their words can be like knives, and they can leave permanent scars. If inferiority is hindering you in your relationship with God and others, consider taking this journey toward healing:

1. **Let God change your self-image.** The Bible is full of stories of insecure people who ended up doing heroic things. God loves to use “powerless” people “to shame those who are powerful” (1 Cor. 1:27, NLT). Sarah was barren, yet God called her a mother of nations. Moses was a stutterer, yet God called him to confront Pharaoh. David was an embarrassment to his father before he became a king. If you feel inferior, you are in good company!
2. **Bury the lies you’ve believed.** False beliefs will not collapse without a fight. You must identify the lies you believe about yourself, and then renounce them. This is not something you can do alone; you must be willing to talk about your inferiority with a counselor, a pastor or trusted friends.

When I was in my 20s, I asked two friends to pray with me because I felt so inferior. This deep insecurity made me shy and fearful, but I wanted to be confident so I could grow spiritually and discover my calling. That prayer put me on a path toward full-time ministry that has taken me to 36 nations! I would have stayed in my prison of insecurity if those men had not helped me see that God had something important for me to do with my life.

3. **Confess your new identity.** Gideon felt like a weakling when the angel of the Lord came to him and announced: “The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior!” (Judg. 6:12b,

MEV). At that point, Gideon did not believe he was a fighter. Yet God redefined Gideon's identity and changed his name to Jerubbaal, which means (my paraphrase) "The devil is in trouble."

You must boldly proclaim who you are now. Joel 3:10b (NASB) declares: "Let the weak say, 'I am a mighty man.'" If you were told you are a failure, say: "I am more than a conqueror" (see Rom. 8:37, NIV). If you were told that you are fat and ugly, say: "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is for me" (Song 7:10, NASB). And keep saying it until you believe it!

4. Stop comparing yourself with others. At the core of sinful human nature is the desire to have what isn't ours. That's why one of the commandments God gave Moses is, "Do not covet" (see Ex. 20:17). We live in a culture that celebrates beauty, athleticism, celebrity and wealth—and our media constantly reminds us of what we don't have by bombarding us with images of "perfect" people.

Do you get depressed looking at everyone else's posts on social media? Facebook and Instagram have caused many people today to fall into a trap of comparison. Stop it! Rather than focusing on what you aren't, celebrate the person God made you to be. If I had spent my life lamenting the fact that I couldn't make the football team, I would have never discovered the other talents God gave me.

5. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. You can never overcome mental strongholds of worthlessness and inferiority in your own strength. It is the Holy Spirit who changes us. He strips away the lies we have believed about ourselves and heals us from the words and experiences that crippled us. Ask Him to fill you so full that those lies can't hang around any longer.

If inferiority has gripped your soul, you can say this prayer now: *"Lord, You are more powerful than any label that has ever*

been put on me. I renounce the lies I have believed about myself. I am not weak; I am strong in You. I am not stupid; I have Your wisdom. I am not worthless; You died on the cross to redeem me. Thank You that because I am in Christ, I am a new creation. I am not bound by my old identity—I have a new identity in Jesus. Help me to see myself the way You see me—as Your beloved child and as a powerful, anointed, gifted disciple. Amen.