

How I Adjusted My Spoiled American Attitude

I spent two weeks in February ministering in Uganda, where I've made some of the best friends on the planet. But life is not easy there—at least not for a *Mzungu* (white person) who has become so accustomed to American conveniences.

I've traveled to Africa 19 times, so it's not like I expect to have air conditioning there. I'm not shocked when the electricity goes out or I have to take a bucket bath because the water system stops working. I'm just grateful if I have access to an oscillating fan on really hot nights.

I've even grown to love the local food, which includes *matoke* (mashed green bananas) with peanut sauce, *posho* (cooked cornmeal, similar to grits) and grilled goat meat. Two years ago, I tried fried grasshoppers for the first time. On this trip, one of my hosts also slaughtered a pig in the front yard and roasted it for dinner. It was delicious.

I find it easy to adapt to Ugandan culture because I absolutely love the people, and I love what the Holy Spirit is doing in this country. Churches are alive, and Christians are serious about their faith.

One friend of mine there, Robert Kaahwa, has planted 19 churches since he planted his first in the town of Masindi in 2010. Another friend, Medad Birungi, has started a school for desperately poor children. It now has 600 students who are growing into mature disciples of Jesus. Uganda is fertile soil for the gospel.

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in the east, I was a very grumpy man.

Uganda does not have what we Americans would call interstate highways. The roads meander through many towns and villages, and each town has at least a dozen speed bumps to discourage fast drivers. It feels like you are driving on a washboard most of the time.

The speed bumps are so large that passengers are sometimes tossed into the ceilings of vehicles upon impact. By the time I arrived in Rwentobo, my nerves were rattled, my neck was sore and my fleshly nature was agitated.

After I settled in for the night and thanked God that I actually could take a hot shower for the first time in a week, I felt convicted by the Holy Spirit. I was reminded of Philippians 2:14, which says: "Do all things without murmuring and disputing."

Before going to sleep, I argued in my mind for a while with God. *Is it really wrong for me to complain about the terrible condition of Uganda's roads? There should be a law against speed bumps that jolt your body like that!*

The next morning, I was talking to a Ugandan friend about the road conditions. I learned that some communities demanded that speed bumps be placed in their towns after a speeding vehicle killed a child. "Many of those speed bumps in remote areas were put there to prevent more deaths on the roads," my friend said.

I swallowed hard and repented in my heart for my prideful attitude. I realized that the same speed bumps I was grumbling about very likely could have saved my life on that six-hour journey. I might have a sore neck, but I am alive!

I was also reminded in that moment about one of my spiritual heroes, Corrie ten Boom, who was sent to a German prison camp during World War II because she had protected Jews in her home

in Holland. After she complained about the lice in her bed at the camp, the Holy Spirit showed her that the prison guards didn't come into the barracks to interrupt her Bible study because they were afraid of the lice.

Corrie found a reason to be thankful for lice. And in Uganda, I found a reason to be thankful for giant speed bumps!

I encourage you to examine your attitude. Most Americans have no clue how the rest of the world lives. We complain when the Wi-Fi signal goes out, when our Amazon order doesn't arrive in two days or when we don't have enough legroom on our flight to our Orlando vacation. And then we post our childish complaints on social media so we can infect everyone with our toxic self-centeredness.

Remember Philippians 2:14. You can post it on your bathroom mirror before you enjoy your next hot shower in your air-conditioned house. Don't be a spoiled American. Be thankful for what you have.

Lee Grady was editor of Charisma for 11 years and now serves as contributing editor. He directs *The Mordecai Project* (themordecaiproject.org), 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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The Greatest Secret I've Learned About Prayer

I'll never forget where I was sitting in the Orlando airport in Florida several years ago when I heard an unusual announcement on the public-address system. A male voice said: "George Mueller. George Mueller. Please contact a service desk for a message."

George Mueller? I suppose there really was a man by that name in the airport at that moment. But I couldn't help but think about the George Mueller of history, a courageous Christian leader from England who died in 1898. I had his biography but hadn't read it in a while.

In that moment I felt as though the Holy Spirit were tapping me on the shoulder. God used that announcement to remind me to go back and read Mueller's story again.

He lived a life that we need to remember today.

Mueller is best known for his work with orphans. During his lifetime he fed and cared for more than 10,000 orphans—yet he never once asked anyone for money. He trusted God for the funds to feed those children. He also exercised enough faith to establish 117 Christian schools during his lifetime.

He was also an amazing preacher. At age 70 he embarked on a 17-year-long missionary journey that took him from England to other parts of Europe to Canada and the United States, then back to Europe, then back to the United States, then to Egypt, Russia, India, China, Japan, Australia and then back to Europe. At a time before airplanes, he traveled more than 200,000 miles and preached the gospel in English, French and

German.

But Mueller's greatest legacy was what he did on his knees when no one else was listening. He expected God to answer his prayers. That is why he kept prayer journals, in which he recorded more than 50,000 answers to prayer. He claimed that 30,000 of those answers came in the same day or the same hour that he prayed them!

It is believed that Mueller raised more than half a billion dollars in today's currency to manage his ministry work. And all that money came in answer to prayer. He said of his success in prayer: "The joy which answers to prayer give, cannot be described; and the impetus which they afford to the spiritual life is exceedingly great."

How did Mueller see so many answers to prayer? What was his secret? He wrote that for many years he would struggle to pray, and his mind often wandered. But then he learned to approach God as a Father and friend, and he would talk to God about what he was learning in the Scriptures.

The result was a deep intimacy with the Holy Spirit. This led Mueller to share with God his requests—and he quickly learned that God was eager to respond. The blessings began to pour in—enough to fill notebooks and notebooks with answers. The more answers he experienced, the more he desired to pray.

His prayer life changed. It shifted from a rote religious routine to an exciting adventure.

Would you like to experience this same joy of answered prayer? I recently began an in-depth study of the book of Psalms. I've read the psalms many times, but this time, I've been struck by how many times the word "answer" appears in that part of the Bible.

Our God is a God who hears and answers. He responds when we cry to Him. David said: "I cried to the Lord with my voice,

and He answered me from His holy hill” (Ps. 3:4). Psalm 17:6a says: “I called on You, for You will answer me, O God.” Psalm 38:15 says: “For in You, O Lord, do I hope; You will answer, O Lord my God.”

The word “answer” appears 27 times in Psalms. God does not tune us out or ignore us. He’s listening! He is waiting for us to share our burdens and requests. He is ever ready to demonstrate His goodness. And even on our worst days we can experience answered prayer. Psalm 86:7 says: “In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me.”

You may feel distant from God. You may be tempted to believe God has given up on you because of your failures. Or maybe prayer has just become a boring routine. Go back to the Psalms and discover the secret of George Mueller. You too can experience an adventure in prayer.

I have started my own “answered prayer journal,” and I’m already recording the miracles. I encourage you to do the same. Don’t put a lid on your prayers. Don’t be shy to bring your requests—come before the Lord with the boldness to ask. Dare to be a George Mueller in this generation. {eoa}

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Jesus Doesn't Ignore Sexual Abuse—He Confronts It

Catholic leaders will meet for four days this week at the Vatican for an unprecedented summit on sexual abuse. The meeting comes just days after Pope Francis took the surprising step of defrocking Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, D.C.—after proof that he abused both minors and adults and even solicited sex from parishioners during their confessions.

The Vatican meeting seems like too little, too late for the hundreds of thousands of victims of sex abuse by Catholic clergy. Pope Francis already admitted in January that the scandal has undermined the church's credibility. Some critics are calling for the pope's resignation because they claim he knew about the allegations against Cardinal McCarrick for years—and did nothing.

But clergy sex abuse is not just a Catholic problem. Last week, a bombshell report in the *Houston Chronicle* and the *San Antonio Express-News* revealed that leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) have been asleep at the wheel while pastors, church staff and volunteers abused many church members. The newspapers reported that there have been 700 reports of sex abuse in SBC churches since 1998. Most of the victims were children.

Thankfully, the leader of the Southern Baptist Convention, J.D. Greear, did not drag his feet before responding to this crisis. He told CNN on Monday that he will deal with the problem forcefully.

“Our churches ... ought to be safe places for the vulnerable, and predators ought to have no place in our midst,” Greear said. “Our goal here is to put on display what we believe about God, that our God is a God who gave His life to protect

the vulnerable.”

I’m grateful for a leader like Greear, who showed us what courageous leadership looks like. I’m tired of hearing that church leaders are “studying” sex abuse, hosting seminars about it or forming committees to “explore” the problem while victims are bleeding. Jesus didn’t “study” abuse. He confronted it head-on.

In fact, J.D. Greear quoted Jesus’ words in Luke 17:2 during his CNN interview, saying, “It would be better for [abusers] to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.”

If the Catholic Church had adopted that aggressive policy several decades ago, many lives would have been spared unspeakable anguish. As both Catholics and Protestants devise policies on how to deal with this problem, I hope we will include these important points:

We must stop avoiding the topic. What we avoid from the pulpit will thrive in darkness. We can’t sweep this ugly issue under the rug. Christians need to feel free to admit that sexual abuse happened to them, and churches should offer the counseling and healing needed. And all churches today must have carefully worded policies on how to address abuse when it happens.

Our policies must be swift and tough. The Catholic Church’s sluggish response to its own abuse crisis is a recipe for disaster. If a church does not act swiftly and decisively to protect victims and punish abusers, we send the signal that we care more about our reputation than about showing Christ’s compassion. The apostle Paul taught that when the church tolerates gross immoral behavior, the sin spreads like an infection (see 1 Cor. 5:9-13). We must never, ever tolerate proven sexual abuse.

We must stop blaming victims when sexual harassment happens.

When a Christian woman is raped or abused, the conversation often turns to how she was dressed. I've even heard believers blame a woman who was abused by accusing her of having a "seducing spirit." Let's make it perfectly clear: Abusers, not victims, are guilty of abuse.

It's sad that many Christian women won't come forward to talk about their rape or molestation experience because they know a tribunal of Pharisees will point a bony finger at them. I also know a man who was criticized for not fighting back when he admitted to being sexually molested by another man. Why do we kick people when they are down? We need a crash course in godly compassion.

It's past time to re-examine our policies on women in ministry. When you look at sexual abuse statistics, you'll find that the vast majority of victims are women. Yet in many denominations today, women are excluded from leadership positions. Are we surprised that the perpetrators of abuse can so easily cover their tracks and continue their abuse with no accountability?

While we continue to argue about whether women should preach from a pulpit, Christian women are being raped, abused and harassed—and then their cries are muffled or they are paid to be quiet. There is something insanely unjust about that. The issue of sexual abuse will not be fairly addressed until women are seated at the table and given the equal right to speak as prophetic voices. Women have something very important to say about this!

We must launch a revolution in Christian men's ministry. Evangelical men's ministry often focuses on how to be strong husbands, fathers and leaders. That is commendable, but in our effort to restore "godly manhood" we focus too much on power and not enough on humility. We don't realize that one of the reasons Christian women suffer so much is that their husbands or boyfriends are so focused on wielding male power that they

become brash, domineering, insensitive and even abusive.

Pornography has taught men for decades to look at women as inferior objects to be used and abused. Our corporate culture has taught us that women can be manipulated, seduced and played to our advantage. Locker rooms have taught us to be sexist and vulgar. No wonder we have an epidemic of abuse and sexual harassment.

When a man comes to Christ, he should renounce the culture of exploitation and learn how to respect women and treat them as equals. Let's get honest and repent. Let's get all sexual abuse and harassment out of the church now.

Don't Ignore This Key to Spiritual Awakening

A small miracle occurred in my hometown of LaGrange, Georgia, a few weeks ago. Christians from dozens of different denominations and ethnic backgrounds gathered at First Baptist Church—the biggest church in town—to thank God for His goodness and intentionally shatter divisions.

Cade Farris, pastor of First Baptist, was beaming from ear to ear when he welcomed the people as they streamed into the auditorium. Yet Farris didn't preach. He gave his pulpit to two African-American ministers from the city, along with pastors from Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist backgrounds. The five preachers were given only seven minutes each to speak on the subject of thanksgiving, from Psalm 100.

But when pastor Lamar Hardwick of the nondenominational New Community Church preached, he shared some of his time with the

audience.

"I'm giving up some of my time because I want y'all to praise God!" Hardwick said, inviting people to stand for an undignified celebration.

People all over the building clapped and shouted praises, lifting their hands in the air. In that moment, this didn't feel like my grandmother's Baptist church. But nobody complained.

I've been in many worship services with talented music teams. But there was something special about this night. Five different teams led us in praise—including a group from a local Spanish congregation, another from a Pentecostal church and a multi-racial band led by a young African-American woman. With every song, it felt as if Jericho's walls were falling. At one point, the atmosphere was so thick with God's presence that people had to sit down. That was right before Pastor Cade called four people to the podium to read Psalm 100 in languages spoken by immigrants in our community—Korean, Portuguese, Romanian and Spanish.

LaGrange, which is about 45 minutes southwest of Atlanta, is a quiet, working-class community of 30,000. Most churches are still segregated, even though the population is almost equally black and white, with an added Korean minority due to the nearby Kia plant. Nobody had to address the elephant in the room. We know LaGrange is divided. But Brazilian youth pastor Nelson Furtado stated the obvious before reading Psalm 100 in Portuguese.

"We are one family," he said. "This is what heaven looks like."

I had a profound experience at the closing of the service, when everyone in the auditorium joined hands across the aisles to pray. I heard in my spirit the creaking of a huge, old door. I sensed the Lord saying to me, "I am opening the door

of Pentecost to this city.”

I don't believe this promise is just for my small town, either. In this season of intense political division, the Lord is calling His people to a new level of connection. I'm not talking about a contrived show of unity where we just smile at each other once a year and go home. What we need is authentic togetherness combined with heartfelt repentance for our divisions. God wants the church to get serious about tearing down the walls of race, denominationalism and politics.

The Bible tells us the secret of Pentecost. Before the wind of the Holy Spirit rushed into the upper room, an otherworldly unity knit the hearts of the early disciples: “They were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1b, KJV). The phrase “in one accord” comes from the Greek word *homothymadon*, which literally refers to musical harmony. The Spirit manifests His power when God's people play the same song the conductor is playing! He does not want us simply in unity with each other; true unity is only possible when we are on the same page with Him.

Do we want another Pentecost? We must come together. We must worship together. We must put aside the hurts of the past, the awkward racial tensions and the bitter divisions between Republicans and Democrats. It is time to dismantle what separates us. This also means pastors must stop building their small fiefdoms and recognize that God's vast kingdom includes all born-again believers. There is only one true church. Ephesians 4:4 (MEV) says, “There is one body and one Spirit, even as you were called in one hope of your calling.”

True unity will also require us to drop the guardrails and get uncomfortably personal. The early church not only met in the temple but also “house to house” (Acts 2:46). People who share meals in homes start acting like a real family.

We are one. We must start acting like it, or we'll miss the

moment of our visitation.

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I was also reminded in that moment about one of my spiritual heroes, Corrie ten Boom, who was sent to a German prison camp during World War II because she had protected Jews in her home in Holland. After she complained about the lice in her bed at the camp, the Holy Spirit showed her that the prison guards didn't come into the barracks to interrupt her Bible study because they were afraid of the lice.

Corrie found a reason to be thankful for lice. And in Uganda, I found a reason to be thankful for giant speed bumps!

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Remember Philippians 2:14. You might even want to post it on your bathroom mirror before you enjoy your next hot shower in your air-conditioned house. Don't be a spoiled American. Be

thankful for what you have.

Looking for Love? Don't Just Sit Around Waiting

I have several single friends who hate February. They don't send flowers or candy on Valentine's Day. They don't wait an hour for a restaurant table on Feb. 14 with all the other love-struck couples. This holiday is just a painful reminder that romance has eluded them.

This is also the time when friends and family members step in to offer advice about how to find a mate. It's no wonder a "I Hate Valentine's Day" movement sprang up a few years ago. Singles hate the pressure to pair up; they also hate the feeling that something is wrong with them if they don't have someone to cuddle with on that one day of the year.

My single Christian friends, some young and some not so young, are still waiting for the big introduction. They are often told that all they must do is "wait on God" for a mate. But I believe that phrase is both overused and abused. In many cases, a single person doesn't need to wait on God; the Lord may actually be waiting on you to take some action.

If you want to be married, here are some simple steps that might help move you farther along in the process:

- 1. Make sure Jesus is on the throne of your life.** You can never go wrong when you put God first. Matthew 6:33 says: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you." Marriage is a need, and God is very eager to meet

it. And since it is probably the biggest decision you will ever make, why trust your own instincts to choose the right person? God is the best matchmaker. Ask Him to guide you.

2. **Make spiritual growth your priority.** A marriage is strong when both the husband and the wife are strong Christians. If either is immature spiritually, problems will multiply. That's why you should spend your single years becoming a mature disciple. Paul told the Corinthians that single believers should pursue "undistracted devotion to the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:35b, NASB). Get involved in a church, study God's Word and become a passionate worshipper.
3. **Make a list of your relationship preferences.** It's OK to desire certain qualities in a spouse. How can you know what you really want if you don't articulate it? Maybe you prefer a girl who is short, a guy who is older than you or someone who has a certain educational background. Psalm 37:4 says: "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart." Just check your motives and make sure your desires are not selfish or unrealistic.
4. **Get rid of your false expectations and fantasies.** Many singles have totally unrealistic ideas about what marriage and romance are all about. Some girls have been conditioned by Disney cartoons to expect a guy to sweep them off their feet and take them to his fairy-tale castle. That's not going to happen. Neither will you ever feel the level of heartthrob described in romance novels. Pornography has also ruined romance for people; some guys who are addicted to porn can't even experience normal arousal without it. Come down to earth. Marriage will never resemble your perfect dream world.
5. **Set your moral standards high and never sell out.** Every

unmarried Christian needs a list of non-negotiables. Never compromise your sexual purity. If a sweet-talking guy from your church's worship team tries to lure you into a one-night stand, refuse his charm. If you feel attracted to a girl and then realize she flirts with every guy and doesn't share your values, back off. And never, ever date a nonbeliever with the intention of converting them. "Missionary dating" rarely has a good outcome.

6. **Get busy with your life and career.** The worst thing any single can do is sit around waiting for a mate. Moping is not attractive—it's pitiful. Don't be desperate. God loves you just the way you are, and you don't need a husband or wife to make you valuable. Live your life. Finish your education, achieve your professional goals and get involved in ministry. It's more likely you will find your mate while pursuing your dreams than while sitting in a corner mourning your singleness.
7. **Seek emotional healing.** I know singles who jump from one dysfunctional dating relationship to the next and never realize they have serious issues to address. Don't wait until you are married to realize you have addictions, bitterness or unresolved pain. If you don't get rid of your drama now, your marriage will be filled with drama. Seek prayer ministry at your church or find a counselor.
8. **Take care of yourself physically.** You don't have to be a cover girl or a *GQ* stud to find a mate. We come in all shapes and sizes, and your spouse is going to love you and all your imperfections. But making yourself more attractive doesn't hurt! If you always look like you just got out of bed, ask some honest friends to give you a makeover. If you need to lose weight, stop making excuses and start a sensible food plan and exercise routine.

9. **Develop an active social life.** Some Christian guys I know are afraid to ask a girl out for coffee, yet they play video games all day while complaining about loneliness. That's a bad strategy. You have to break out of your shell and make yourself available. You don't have to pair up when you gather with a group of singles for fellowship. Many dating relationships start as innocent friendships—and then a romantic spark turns into a flame.
 10. **Find a married mentor to help you prepare.** You don't have to navigate the journey from dating to marriage all by yourself. Seek out a trusted older friend to help you. Ask questions. Share your fears. Marriage is a huge decision, but a mentor can give you the courage to embrace your future. And they will be cheering the loudest at your wedding because they've played a small part in God's miracle.
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New York's New Abortion Law Is Cruel and Revolting

At the foot of the rebuilt World Trade Center in New York City, a somber 9/11 monument features the names of the 2,606 people who died in the terrorist attack. Besides those names, it also mentions 11 unborn children. The phrase "and her unborn child" is inscribed after the names of pregnant 9/11 victims.

It is now beyond ironic that on the same plot of ground where those unborn babies are memorialized, New Yorkers are cheering a harsh new law that sanctions abortions of full-term babies. After the state's legislature passed the Reproductive Health

Act on Jan. 22, Governor Andrew Cuomo ordered that the lights on top of the World Trade Center be switched to pink to celebrate abortion rights.

The law lifts a previous ban on abortions after 24 weeks of pregnancy. So now, an unborn child can be aborted right up to the moment of birth. Supporters of the law say it grants abortion rights to women who perhaps didn't know they were pregnant at that stage.

What it actually does is legalize infanticide. I have to agree with New York's Catholic Cardinal, Timothy Dolan, who called the law "ghoulish, grizzly and gruesome."

Even some neutral observers warn that New York's radical new stance on abortion could actually help men who attack pregnant women. In the future, if an unborn child is killed as the result of an assault on its mother, the attacker will likely not be liable for the baby's death.

After all, if it's not a baby until it's outside the womb, then it just a mass of cells that can be scooped out and sent to a parking-lot dumpster. Right?

New York's lawmakers have led this country further down the road to savagery.

I have always felt it was insane to claim that abortion promotes "women's health" when the facts show the opposite. Abortion may be convenient for some women, and it has been legal in this country since 1973, but no health care provider can prove it is healthy to have an unborn child ripped or sucked out of a woman's uterus before it is viable. Here are three reasons you can never convince me otherwise:

- 1. Abortion can harm women physically and emotionally.**
Various studies in recent years, including one by Britain's Royal College of Psychiatrists, show that women who have abortions become much more likely to

develop cervical cancer, sterility, nervous disorders, sleep disturbances, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Another study revealed that women with a history of abortion face higher rates of anxiety (34 percent higher) and depression (37 percent higher), and heavier alcohol use (110 percent higher). It has also been shown that women who abort are twice as likely to become heavy smokers.

2. Abortion is sexist. It has always amazed me that women have campaigned the loudest for abortion rights, yet the majority of abortionists are men who profit from this horrific procedure. It is also a fact that many women, including many pregnant teenage girls, are forced by their fathers or sex partners to have unwanted abortions—resulting in increased trauma for the mothers. Why are feminists not outraged by this?

In India, many families abort female infants because they don't want girls. This is why there are skewed sex ratios—like 1,000 men for every 618 women—in India's Daman and Diu regions. Even though sex-selective abortions were banned several years ago in India, many female babies are aborted or abandoned at birth because of gender discrimination. Why is there not a feminist outcry about this injustice?

Mother Teresa, who ministered most of her life in India, understood the pain abortion causes women. She said: "Abortion kills twice. It kills the body of the baby and the conscience of the mother. Abortion is profoundly anti-women. Three quarters of its victims are women: Half the babies and all the mothers."

3. Abortion is racist. This is the ugly truth few of us are willing to face. African-Americans make up 12.6 percent of the U.S. population, but the Centers for Disease Control reports that black women accounted for 35.4

percent of all abortions in 2009. Of the 61 million abortions in the United States since 1973, about 18 million of aborted babies were black.

Abortion kills minority children at more than three times the rate of white children. Today, abortion is the leading cause of death for African-Americans, more than all other causes combined, including AIDS, violent crimes, accidents, cancer and heart disease.

So when people talk about how abortion providers offer “health care for women,” I guess they only mean white women. Let’s not forget that Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger was an avowed proponent of eugenics—the elimination of “unfit” races. She worked tirelessly to keep minorities supplied with birth control (even though she herself believed abortion should be avoided). This might explain why 62 percent of Planned Parenthood clinics are located in areas with high black populations.

New York can try to color the issue of abortion pink, but there is nothing festive about this new law. Instead of shining pink lights, Governor Cuomo should have totally shut off the lights in the World Trade Center on Jan. 22, 2019. It was a dark day for the United States.

Why Did We Listen to R. Kelly, Anyway?

Singer and songwriter R. Kelly has been an American music sensation since the early 1990s. He’s sold 30 million albums, and he’s worth \$150 million. But now, millions of his fans are suddenly purging his music from their playlists and asking

radio stations to “mute R. Kelly.”

The reason: Allegations have been piling up for years about this man, suggesting that he sexually abused minor girls and held women against their will as sex slaves. But in early January, after the Lifetime network aired a bombshell documentary series, “Surviving R. Kelly,” a national emergency erupted.

People are now demanding that Kelly be held accountable. Spotify, the music streaming service, has stopped promoting his songs on their platform. Apple Music and Pandora then took the same action. Kelly, meanwhile, glibly fought back—denying the allegations and announcing: “Only God can mute me.”

My question: Why did we wait until now to hit the mute button?

It’s bad enough that a majority of Kelly’s music was essentially hard-core pornography in an audible form. Some of his most famous songs include “Bump n’ Grind” and “Your Body’s Callin’”—and most of his lyrics could not be printed here. His music is what my friends used to call “smut.” It’s nasty.

But today, apparently, it’s okay to listen to nasty music until we find out that the man behind the microphone had relationships with 15-year-old girls and allegedly controlled small harems of women using threats, emotional torture and physical violence.

The saddest part to me is that Christians—including young Christian guys—listened to R. Kelly’s music because they “liked the beat.” They didn’t realize that if you allow a polluted sewer to flow through your soul, the sleazy sludge will affect the way you think and act. Kelly’s music (and a lot of other popular music today) is a big reason why so many American men have a degrading view of women.

When I mentor young guys, I remind them that Jesus is very much concerned about the way they treat females. Christ’s

values were invented a long time before the #MeToo movement. Here are five rules I live by:

1. **Train yourself to look at a woman's heart, not her figure.** In our culture, women often are objectified, as if their entire identity were about their breasts or other body parts. That's stupid. A woman has God-given dignity: She has intellect, a unique personality, a sense of humor, talents, compassion and so many other special qualities. Learn to focus on those aspects and stop defining women by physical attributes. And if your music objectifies women, get a new playlist.
2. **Don't blame a woman for your sexual weakness.** I hear guys complaining that girls at church show too much cleavage or wear their pants too tight. Yes, that is a problem we can discuss at another time. But if a guy can't control his libido when Delilah bats her eyelashes, how can he stand for holiness when Potiphar's wife gets aggressive? Men, your responsibility is to show integrity and keep your pants zipped and your hands to yourself no matter how much temptation is thrown at you. Quit blaming women for your lust problem.
3. **Don't use your words to stir up sexual passion.** We joke about silly Christian pickup lines ("Last night I was reading the book of Numbers, and I realized I didn't have yours!"), but it's no laughing matter if you are inappropriately using your words to stir up sexual desire in a woman. If you are filling your mind with songs full of graphic sexual innuendo, those same words will eventually come out of your mouth.
4. **Respect sexual boundaries.** Every guy should read the story of Sarah in Genesis 12. Abraham lied about his wife's identity to Pharaoh, so the leader of Egypt decided to make a move on Sarah. Then God "afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues" (v. 17), all because Pharaoh thought he could romance a woman whom God had especially set apart as a "princess" (see Gen.

17:15). She was off-limits—and God was about to “mute” Pharaoh! Consider yourself warned if you even think of crossing a boundary with one of God’s daughters. That means hands-off. It also means no sexting, flirting, groping, seducing or date-raping.

5. **Honor your marriage vows.** When I got engaged to my wife, my mother gave me my grandfather’s wedding band that he wore when he married my grandmother in the 1920s. I keep this antique ring prominently on my finger at all times. I want women to see it, and I talk about my wife in conversations to remind everybody that I am “taken.” Any Christian man who flirts with women while hiding his marital status is picking a fight with God—and is in danger of a head-on collision with moral failure.

Stop letting R. Kelly define how men should treat women. Mute the filthy music. Let’s show the world that men can treat women with dignity.

Let’s Share Jesus With a Confused World

Late in 2018, a Dutch man, Emile Ratelband, asked a court in the Netherlands to permit him to change his legal age from 69 to 49. He said he “feels 49,” and he said his doctor agrees that he looks young for his age. Ratelband complained that he has suffered from age discrimination—especially when looking for dates with women online.

Comparing himself to transgender people who change their sexual identity, Ratelband claimed in his lawsuit that age is not a fixed reality.

“Time is just a figure,” he said. “I say it is not fixed.”

Unfortunately for Ratelband’s dating life, the Dutch court ruled against him. While recognizing that “some people today feel fit and healthy in their old age,” the judges did not regard this as a valid argument for amending a person’s age. They affirmed that Ratelband’s birthdate is still fixed at March 11, 1949.

We can be thankful that these Dutch judges ruled on the side of sanity. But in today’s bizarre world of “self-identification,” Mr. Ratelband’s attempt to alter reality will likely become more common. Consider these recent examples:

We all remember Rachel Dolezal, a white woman who pretended to be black while leading the local NAACP chapter in Washington state. When her deception was exposed in 2015, she told reporters that she “identifies as black”—as if her personal feelings about her race can automatically overrule genetics. Dolezal later explained that she believes race is “a social construct” that has no basis in science. She said: “I really just prefer to be exactly who I am, and black is the closest race and cultural category that represents the essence of who I am.”

In November 2018, Irish singer Sinead O’Connor went on a racist rant on Twitter, announcing that “white people are disgusting.” The former pop star said, “I never want to spend time with white people again,” even though she herself is white. Known for her shaved head, O’Connor said she has changed her name to Shuhada Davitt and has started wearing a head covering because she is now a Muslim.

You may never have heard of “therians,” but it probably won’t be long before you meet one. Therians don’t believe they are humans and celebrate their animal identity on Instagram and YouTube. One Norwegian woman named Nano said she realized at age 16 that she has been a cat all her life. She walks on all

fours and claims she can see in the dark and hear things humans can't.

Dennis Avner, a famous therian who committed suicide in 2012, was so convinced he was a cat that he had his ears reshaped, got whiskers implanted and had cat stripes tattooed all over his body. (Today there are also "polytherians" who identify as more than one animal.)

Things are becoming even more confusing when it comes to gender. Ever since athlete Bruce Jenner announced in 2015 that he was transitioning from male to female, the trans movement has exploded. There are now 63 different official designations for gender on record. One of those, "gender fluid," refers to a person who believes they are a mix of both genders and their gender designation is not fixed.

What do we make of all this? For centuries people have assumed that things like gender, age and race are set realities based on science. Yet today all absolutes are being questioned. More and more, in this age of the selfie, self has become the standard.

The new mantra is: "I can choose who I am. I am what I 'feel.' If I 'feel' like I am 49, I am 49—no matter what my birth certificate says. If I 'feel' like I am a dog, I am a dog. I determine reality."

I'm not shocked when I see this trend in our culture. The Bible warned us this would happen. The apostle Paul predicted that in the last days "men will be lovers of themselves" (2 Tim. 3:2). When we reject God and focus on ourselves, we actually lose our true identity. We cannot know who we really are if we cut ourselves off from the Creator.

Without a connection to the true God, we become hopelessly confused. The only hope for this growing confusion in our culture is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is not a time to judge people. Don't get angry at those who "identify" as something else. Love them anyway—and introduce them to the one who can restore their true identity. In the midst of today's selfishness, sexual confusion and family breakdown, Jesus has given us a chance to show His love to people who don't know who they are. {eoa}

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A Venezuelan Pastor Pleads for Prayer

While people in the United States are arguing about immigration, health care and President Trump's wall, a once-prosperous nation 1,200 miles from Miami is imploding. It would be an understatement to call Venezuela a nightmare. The once-prosperous South American nation is now hell on earth.

Venezuela's socialist economy collapsed in 2014 under dictator Nicolas Maduro's regime. Today, hyperinflation is so bad that most people can't eat. At least 8 percent of the population has fled the country. Those who stay stand in lines for hours

every day to buy rationed food—or they rummage through garbage dumps for scraps.

Many school-age boys have chosen to live in storm drains or public parks since they don't have food at home. Some end up in violent gangs.

The New York Times reported in late 2017 that thousands of Venezuelan children are dying from malnutrition. There is no infant formula on store shelves. More than 1,100 children under the age of one died in 2016, but the government has now declared a blackout on reporting medical statistics.

“Infant malnutrition is as high as 30 percent for children under 2,” says a pastor living in Venezuela whom I will refer to as Lucas Jimenez. “The brains of these children are irreversibly damaged. They won't be able to go to school and learn like children in other countries.” I cannot use this man's real name because pastors who speak out against the government face the real threat of imprisonment.

Pastor Jimenez began his church when Venezuela was known for its booming economy and rich oil fields. But under dictator Hugo Chavez—a disciple of Fidel Castro—the nation became a textbook case of economic failure. Maduro made it worse.

I interviewed Pastor Jimenez last week and learned that the Venezuela's crisis is worse than it has ever been. Here are parts of that conversation:

How has the crumbling economy affected you and your family, as well as the people in your church?

Pastor Jimenez: Hyperinflation has made food, medicines, vehicle parts and everything else that is imported extremely expensive. We have cut down our church budget as much as possible, but it's difficult to keep up with the acceleration of prices, which rise almost daily.

The economy is in such disarray that the current socialist regime has been forced in the last 11 years to take away 8 zeros from our currency. One U.S. dollar was worth 5,000 bolivars at the end of 2007; at the end of 2018 the same dollar rose to 80,000,000,000 bolivars. Yes, 80 billion!

How has the mass exodus of millions of Venezuelans affected the country?

Pastor Jimenez: Studies by the United Nations show that at least 2.3 million people have left the country—but the number could be as high as 3 million. Young parents are leaving their children behind; they send money back home to feed them. This exodus has created complex immigration problems for nations like Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Chile and Argentina. Many immigrants who fled Venezuela sleep in the streets and work any job they can find to survive.

How do Venezuelans survive with no money or food?

Pastor Jimenez: A Venezuelan engineer who graduated recently earns the equivalent of \$23 a month. An engineer with a Ph.D. and 30 years of experience earns less than \$100 a month. Many people in the cities live on less than \$6 a month, and rural workers can earn as little as \$3 a month. This is barely enough to buy two dozen eggs!

Our church has supported my family and me for several years. But they cannot pay me a salary now because our church income goes to maintenance, utilities and a secretary's salary. The Lord has provided for me through offerings we receive from family and friends abroad. Many people that survive in this country depend on family members who have left the country.

Many Christians actually supported the Chavez regime, and now Maduro's government. Why?

Pastor Jimenez: For a long time, Christians were ill-treated in this country. Chavez began to pay attention to evangelical

churches in his speeches, and he started seducing them with his leftist discourse. Then evangelical pastors began to receive financial support from the government. Other pastors were just prosperity preachers who supported the regime because they love money and power more than the truth.

They did this in spite of the fact that Chavez openly admired Fidel Castro and the Cuban communist regime. Today, about 50 percent of Venezuela's pastors support Maduro, either openly or quietly.

Can you describe the hunger crisis?

Pastor Jimenez: People who don't have help from families or friends survive by eating only once or twice a day. Those who live in rural areas can grow vegetables and fruit. In urban areas, it's common to see people searching garbage dumps for food. Even middle-class people with university degrees have been seen searching for food in the garbage. Studies have shown that more than 60 percent of Venezuelans have lost an average of 18 pounds since the crisis began, because of the lower intake of food.

How has the crisis created spiritual opportunities?

Pastor Jimenez: People are much more open to the gospel now. The brokenness has opened the hearts of people so that churches are growing and more and more new churches are being planted. Our church has planted other congregations in recent years.

How can Christians in the United States pray for your nation?

Pastor Jimenez: This is a big spiritual battle. Chavez promoted the occult religion of Santeria in Venezuela. He participated in witchcraft to retain his power. Aided by Cubans, all kinds of sacrifices, pacts, spells and curses have been cast and are being cast. This witchcraft has brought our country to this nightmare.

Our divided church has not been able to keep up in this war, mainly because many church leaders helped to establish this regime. They were seduced by Chavez' charisma, craftiness and occult practices. Some of these leaders realized the consequences and results of their error, but it was too late.

Instead of assuming the responsibility and repenting, some pastors distanced themselves from the regime—but they are afraid to confront the battle head on. They are afraid to speak, pray openly and make a stand against the widespread evil. Instead of repenting of their past idolatry of Chavez, they prophesy that revival and prosperity is right around the corner.

I have heard these so-called prophecies for years, and things have only worsened. So we ask for intercession. Please pray that leaders will repent of idolatry, love of money and power. Pray that the Lord will cleanse us, so that we can have victory in this spiritual war. Pray that this regime falls and that God will raise up competent leadership.

American Christians can also help Venezuelans financially. Many pastors and missionaries feel they have no choice but to leave the country to survive. A gift of \$100 a month (although any amount will help) could make the difference for a pastor's family. We must keep laboring in this field, because it is ripe for harvest.