

# Would Jesus Require a \$54 Million Private Jet?

Faith preacher Jesse Duplantis told the world last month that God wants him to own a \$54 million Falcon 7X private jet. And he's challenging donors to help him buy it.

"Some people believe preachers shouldn't have jets," Duplantis said in a video he posted online on May 21. "I really believe that if Jesus was physically on the earth today He wouldn't be riding a donkey. ... He'd be in an airplane preaching the gospel all over the world."

The popular Louisiana minister, who is 68, is known for his folksy Cajun accent and downhome humor. But he was not cracking a joke when he announced his need for the pricey three-engine plane, which can fly up to 592 miles per hour. He was dead serious.

Duplantis' request didn't go over well when his video went viral. Secular news reporters called him a charlatan. Some Christians condemned him as a con artist. In a social media post, gospel singer Kirk Franklin accused Duplantis of exploiting poor people.

"Many of these 'ministries' [like Duplantis'] built their wealth on the backs of poor, rural minorities that put their trust in the hands of 'God's shepherds,' only to see the prosperity benefit those doing the preaching," Franklin said in an Instagram post.

Duplantis' fans, however, weren't shocked by his request. They have helped him buy three previous jets. The jovial preacher, who lives in a \$3 million, 35,000-square-foot mansion, believes financial prosperity is his reward for preaching the gospel. He tells his followers that they, too, can be rich if they give generously.

In a response to the jet controversy, which was posted on YouTube this week, Duplantis said God clearly spoke to him about acquiring the jet to replace an older one. "The Lord said, "I didn't ask you to pay for [the plane], I asked you to believe for it." The evangelist is fully expectant that the money he needs will be provided.

I won't be surprised if Duplantis gets his Falcon 7X. A wealthy donor is likely to fork over the entire \$54 million. But as a traveling minister who has flown to 32 countries on commercial airlines—usually in cramped tourist class seats—I still don't believe Duplantis' theology about private planes is sound. In fact, I believe Duplantis is in danger of hurting the cause of the gospel.

Here are the top reasons I wouldn't support his private jet plan:

1. Private jets are a wasteful use of donor funds. Preachers can give you a litany of reasons why they need to fly direct to their destination: Time saved, less stress, no worries about lost luggage. (Not to mention more legroom!)

But the Bible calls us to be good stewards of God's resources. Private aircraft cost an exorbitant amount of money compared to commercial flights because owners must provide service and upkeep on the vehicles. If a preacher insists on renting a private jet, the cost to fly from Fort Lauderdale to New York would be in the ballpark of \$59,000, compared to a \$652 ticket on a commercial plane. People who own private jets spend as much as \$4 million a year just on maintenance.

If an evangelist needs to fly to the most remote village of Borneo, and there are no commercial planes going there, then I can understand the need for a private plane. But Duplantis is not going to Borneo. According to his website, some of his upcoming meetings are in Nashville, Tennessee; Detroit,

Michigan; and Tacoma, Washington. Even first-class seats on Delta Airlines to those locations are a fraction of the cost of private air travel.

2. Ministers who demand luxury deny the core of the gospel. We are confronted every day by the reality of poverty and suffering in our world, and we know that true followers of Christ are called to give and share, not take and hoard. We also know that a preacher who gets rich off of the offerings of poor people is actually involved in exploitation—a sin which Scripture strongly condemns. When the skeptical younger generation sees this, they assume all Christian ministers are fakes and frauds.
3. The world doesn't need a message of greed. The prosperity gospel became hugely popular during the 1980s, when many Christians in the United States were riding a wave of American capitalism. But many of the get-rich preachers of that era either landed in jail or fell morally, and we reaped a whirlwind of bad fruit. We were supposed to learn a lesson from that failed experiment. God blesses us not so we can become selfish consumers but so we can become selfless channels of His blessings to others.
4. Jesus did indeed ride a donkey. If Jesus had used Jesse Duplantis' logic during His ministry on earth, He would have asked His disciples to collect money from the crowds to buy a gold chariot drawn by Caesar's best horses. But He didn't do that. He rode on the back of a rented donkey, the transportation of a poor man. He didn't require a first-class seat or a luxury vehicle.

Jesus took the lowest seat and invited all of us to model servanthood. I pray we will rediscover humility. Let's show our cynical culture that God's ministers don't demand luxury treatment.

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# The Church, Like Starbucks, Needs More Racial Sensitivity

Starbucks closed 8,000 of its stores this week so its baristas could undergo four hours of racial sensitivity training. The company took the drastic action to counteract negative publicity it got last month when two black men were handcuffed and arrested simply because they sat in a Starbucks store in Philadelphia without ordering any coffee.

The ugly incident on April 12 triggered angry reactions. Some customers began boycotting Starbucks when they learned that a white employee called Philadelphia police after telling the two men they couldn't use the restroom without buying anything. CEO Kevin Johnson then went on an "apology tour" and announced he would give his 175,000 employees a racial sensitivity seminar, but some people viewed the training as a publicity stunt designed to protect Starbucks—which makes \$14 billion a year in profit—from a customer backlash.

I'll admit I don't have high hopes that a four-hour seminar will end racism in America. Yet when I learned about Starbucks' plan, my first thought was: Maybe we need to close our churches for a day and do the same thing. Because racism is alive and well in American congregations—and we need to face it.

If I were going to offer racial sensitivity training to a church, I would include the following steps:

1. **Teach more about the Holy Spirit.** Whenever the Holy Spirit shows up, racial barriers fall. The first Pentecost was a multicultural miracle; no one can be called a Pentecostal if he doesn't embrace racial and

ethnic diversity. Many churches limit the work of the Holy Spirit's gifts and manifestations. Is it any surprise that churches that quench the Spirit are racially segregated? If you want racial diversity in your church, encourage people to be filled with the Spirit. He will tear down the walls that divide us!

2. **Address racism from the pulpit.** Jesus boldly confronted racism, especially the Pharisees' snobbish attitude toward Samaritans. Jewish leaders hated Jesus because He showed compassion to everyone, regardless of ethnicity. And the apostle Paul's decision to take the gospel to Gentiles offended Jewish people who didn't believe God cared about anyone but them. The gospel is not the gospel if it doesn't call people to repent of racial pride!
3. **Lead the way in apologizing for past injustice.** In my city of LaGrange, Georgia, a black man named Austin Callaway was cruelly lynched by a white mob in 1940—and the murder was covered up. But 77 years later, our chief of police, who is white, organized a public apology service at a local church. Pastors, community leaders and descendants of Callaway joined hearts to heal an old wound. If your community has been divided by racial injustice, public repentance can bring transformation.
4. **Model diversity from the church platform.** I've talked to many white pastors who say they want racial diversity in their churches. Yet when I look at their stages, I only see white. At the church I attend, New Community Church in LaGrange, our pastor, Lamar Hardwick, is black; one associate pastor is a white man and another associate is a white woman. The music team rotates each week and is a perfect blend of white and black; even the greeter team at the front door of the church is mixed. It's no surprise that our congregation is about 70 percent black and 30 percent white.

5. **Train leaders from all racial groups.** For years, I've met African-Americans who attended churches led by white pastors; yet it's rare to find white congregants in churches led by black pastors. Why is that? Many white Christians hold an unspoken belief that they could never submit to a black leader. That's silly, especially when you consider that black leaders helped lead the early church. In Antioch, for example, Paul served alongside two black men, "Simeon who was called Niger" and "Lucius of Cyrene" (Acts 13:1). Simeon's nickname literally means "the black guy"!
6. **Give immigrant groups a place to meet.** Have you studied the racial demographics of your city? You may be surprised to learn there are immigrants from many parts of the world in your backyard. Perhaps you could invite a Hispanic, Congolese or Pakistani congregation to meet in your church building on Sunday afternoons.

Many Christians are actually afraid of foreigners, and our current political climate fuels xenophobia. Come alongside immigrant pastors and help them reach their own. Provide translation and headsets for visitors who don't speak English. Better yet, invite a local Hispanic pastor to speak to your congregation.

7. **Identify your "Samaria."** Jesus told His disciples to take the gospel to 1) Jerusalem, 2) Judea, 3) Samaria and 4) the ends of the earth (see Acts 1:8). Many churches sponsor overseas mission trips, but how many of us are reaching our Samaritans?

Your Samaria is the part of your local area where "those people" live. Samaria is what people refer to as "the other side of the tracks." It's the part of town you might avoid. Yet Jesus calls us to go there. Why is it that we will fly to another country to share the gospel, yet we rarely venture near the government housing projects, slums or trailer parks

that are only a few miles from our house?

Let's stop pretending that racism doesn't exist inside the church. Let's own it, confront it and renounce it so we can finish the job of sharing the love of Jesus with everybody.

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## **You Can Be Free From a Religious Spirit**

After Elisha watched Elijah ascend into heaven, the prophet went to the city of Jericho and performed his first miracle. The men of that city faced an environmental crisis: Their water was toxic, most likely because of the sulfur and other chemicals that had rained down upon nearby Sodom and Gomorrah years earlier. This poison had made the land barren (see 2 Kings 2:19-22) and it was affecting people and animals as well as plant life.

So Elisha performed a bold, prophetic act. He threw salt in the water and proclaimed: "Thus says the Lord, 'I have purified these waters; there shall not be from there death or unfruitfulness any longer'" (v. 21, NASB). His proclamation brought immediate cleansing.

This obscure story in the Old Testament offers us a picture of the gospel's power. The message of Jesus Christ heals us. The Holy Spirit brings life where death has reigned. He neutralizes the poisons that cause spiritual barrenness. He balances the pH level in our hearts and our churches so that spiritual growth and vitality is possible.

All of us would like to enjoy a healthy spiritual life. And we would love to see our churches thriving and growing. But the

sad truth is that many of us are barren because of hazardous additives. We have embraced a gospel laced with legalism, performance-based religion and salvation by works—when Christ alone is our only source of life.

Jesus Himself referred to these toxins as “the leaven of the Pharisees” (Luke 12:1b). He told us that the Pharisees’ brand of religion, which looked good on the outside, was deadly—and contagious.

Have you been infected? You can take your own pH test by examining these eight characteristics of a religious spirit.

1. A religious spirit views God as a cold, harsh, distant taskmaster rather than an approachable, loving Father. When we base our relationship with God on our ability to perform spiritual duties, we deny the power of grace. God does not love us because we pray, read our Bibles, attend church or witness, yet millions of Christians think God is mad if they don’t perform these and other duties perfectly. As a result, they struggle to find true intimacy with Jesus.
2. A religious spirit places emphasis on doing outward things to show others that God accepts him. We deceive ourselves into believing that we can win God’s approval through a religious dress code, certain spiritual disciplines, particular music styles or even doctrinal positions.
3. A religious spirit develops traditions and formulas to accomplish spiritual goals. We trust in our liturgies, denominational policies or man-made programs to obtain results that only God alone can give.
4. A religious spirit becomes joyless, cynical and hypercritical. This can turn a home or a church completely sour. Then, whenever genuine joy and love are expressed, this becomes a threat to those who have lost the simplicity of true faith.

5. A religious spirit becomes prideful and isolated, thinking that his righteousness is special and that he cannot associate with other believers who have different standards. Churches that allow these attitudes become elitist and dangerously vulnerable to deception or cult-like practices.
6. A religious spirit develops a harsh, judgmental attitude toward sinners, yet those who ingest this poison typically struggle with sinful habits that they cannot admit to anyone else. Religious people rarely interact with nonbelievers because they don't want their own superior morals to be tainted by them.
7. A religious spirit rejects progressive revelation and refuses to embrace change. This is why many churches become irrelevant to society. They become so focused on what God did 50 years ago that they become stuck in a time warp and cannot move forward when the Holy Spirit begins to open new understanding. When religious groups refuse to shift with God's new directives, they become "old wineskins," and God must find more flexible vessels that are willing to implement change.
8. A religious spirit persecutes those who disagree with his self-righteous views and becomes angry whenever the message of grace threatens to undermine his religiosity. An angry religious person will use gossip and slander to assassinate other peoples' character and may even use violence to prove his point. Jesus, in fact, warned His disciples: "There will even come a time when anyone who kills you will think he's doing God a favor" (John 16:2b, MSG).

If the poison of religion has contaminated your walk with God, ask Him to pour a fresh understanding of His grace into your barren spirit—and then expect His new life to flow through you.

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# Why I'm OK With Being a Spiritual Misfit

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

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

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

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

More recently, Christian organizations invented questionnaires and tests to determine a person's spiritual gifts. I've taken all of these tests, and sometimes they helped me understand myself better. Yet I always end up feeling like a misfit

because I don't stay inside the lines. I certainly don't fit the stereotypes.

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

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

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

- Fernando said: "Your ministry is versatile. Don't worry about fitting in a box."
- Kent said: "Don't let people put you in a box."
- Ray said: "You don't need to feel any pressure to fit a mold."
- Grant said: "You can't be put in a box. There is too much 'cookie-cutter' identity in the church today."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# Why Beth Moore's Challenge Can't Be Ignored

Bible teacher Beth Moore is one of the most gracious, polite and approachable ministers I know. This is not just because of her Southern accent or her folksy Texas humor. She is a genuine Christian who takes her calling as a preacher of God's Word very seriously—yet she's humble enough to know she's not all that. She's just a servant of the Lord.

Maybe Moore's humility is the main reason she waited until last week to address the most glaring, unresolved issue in the modern evangelical movement. She dared to open the can of worms we all knew would have to be exposed sooner or later. On May 3, she released a blog titled "A Letter to My Brothers," and it rattled denominational offices, infuriated her critics and even got the attention of the good old boys' club.

Her article, which went viral on social media as soon as it was posted, reminds me of Martin Luther's post on the Wittenburg Door. Beth stuck her neck out further than she ever has, in an act of prophetic bravery, to challenge the spirit of patriarchal pride that has infected our churches for too long.

"Many women have experienced horrific abuses within the power structures of our Christian world," Moore wrote. "I'm asking that you would simply have no tolerance for misogyny and dismissiveness toward women in your spheres of influence."

Moore knows what she's talking about. She has been on the receiving end of chauvinistic put-downs and sexist comments since she began her ministry—which started as an outreach to Southern Baptist women. Today she's one of the most popular speakers on the wider evangelical scene, but her success has been accompanied by a lot of pain.

As Moore points out in her blog, male colleagues have ignored her in public settings or made her the brunt of jokes. Male seminary students have talked down to her. She was even asked to wear flat-soled shoes instead of heels because she might appear taller than another male speaker. And since 2016, hyper-conservative fundamentalists have labeled her a heretic because men listen to her preaching.

Moore's most vehement critics won't even give her a chance to prove her credibility. When she asked one ultra-conservative group if they had actually researched her many Bible studies to confirm that she teaches heresy, they said no—because it is against their religious convictions to study what a woman teaches. (Never mind the fact that these “scriptural” Christians are maligning another believer, in direct disobedience to Scripture.)

About a year ago another incident happened that convinced Moore she had to go public with her uncomfortable prophetic message. She had an opportunity to meet with a male theologian whom she greatly respected. She was excited about sharing a meal with him to talk theology. But it didn't go so well.

Moore wrote: “The instant I met him, he looked me up and down, smiled approvingly and said, “You are better looking than \_\_\_\_\_.” He didn't leave it blank. He filled it in with the name of another woman Bible teacher.”

That's sick on so many levels—but mostly because this crude incident exposes what's at the root of religious resistance to women in ministry today. Too often, even Christian men look at women as sex objects and can't view them as anointed instruments of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we've cheapened women's value and barred them from using their gifts to further Christ's kingdom.

Like Moore, I've listened to countless women who've suffered because of chauvinism and misogyny in the church. I've prayed

with women who were told to submit to their husbands' physical abuse, no matter how violent. I've listened to professional Christian women share how they were viewed with suspicion because they didn't choose the traditional role of wife and mother. And I've wept with women who have obvious gifts of preaching, teaching or leadership but were told they have "a Jezebel spirit."

Things must change. The church must repent of all forms of gender injustice. We need men and women equally empowered for ministry so we can fulfill the Great Commission. This is not just an appeal from a respected woman minister named Beth Moore. This is a cry from the heart of God, who created "both male and female" in His divine image and commanded them both to rule over the earth (see Gen. 1:26-28).

The crude jokes and sexist comments must stop. Domestic abuse in the church must stop. The devaluing of women's spiritual gifts must stop. And we must renounce the attitude that says, "If we just ignore this issue, it will go away." God is using the Harvey Weinstein scandal to expose this problem in the secular world—but we have our own ugly version of it in the church.

Thank you, Beth Moore, for having the courage to address the elephant in the room.

I'm standing in full solidarity with my sister. The Holy Spirit is speaking through her. I hope we all are listening.

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**North Korea Will Open Its**

# Doors to Christianity

A few months ago, North Korea's dictator, Kim Jong-un, was firing missiles over Japan and threatening to send nuclear bombs in our direction.

But last week, the young leader dropped a different kind of surprise on the world: He met with South Korean president Moon Jae-in on April 27 and announced that the 67-year-old Korean conflict is over. "I came here to put an end to the history of confrontation," Kim Jung-un told Moon in a meeting on the border town of Panmunjom.

"There will be no more war on the Korean peninsula, and a new age of peace has begun," the two leaders said in a joint statement. Kim Jong-un, who has built the fourth largest army in the world—with million soldiers—says he will now focus on rebuilding his country's shattered economy.

Boom. Just like that, swords were converted into plowshares. The two leaders, all smiles for the cameras, agreed they will denuclearize the Korean peninsula within a year. They also agreed to set up reunions with families that have been divided since the Korean War started in 1950.

It feels like we should declare a global holiday and dance in the streets. But most Americans were too distracted by the opening of the new *Avengers* movie to pay attention to the headlines.

What was behind the Korean surprise? Most media outlets didn't notice that Christians in South Korea had been fasting and praying for the peace summit. Pastors held an all-night vigil in the city of Paju, south of the North Korean border. And a group of Christian politicians held a fasting and prayer event in the National Assembly buildings in Seoul, according to Yonhap News.

North Korea's persecuted Christians have also been praying for this moment—for years. They have been horribly persecuted. They have been forced to meet secretly. They have been routinely rounded up and sent to labor camps—or just shot on sight—because they did not worship Kim Jong-un as their god.

Defectors say something began to change when Kim Jong-un became dictator in 2011. His cruel regime, along with the misery of famine and economic ruin, caused people to become disillusioned with the phony utopia Kim claimed to rule over.

“In the past, the people were told to worship the Kim family as their god,” one defector told *The Telegraph*. “That means they are looking for something else to sustain their faith.”

Life in North Korea has been unbearable under Kim Jong-un. About six million citizens are starving and a third of North Korean children suffer from chronic malnutrition. (It is said that North Koreans are, on average, two inches shorter than South Koreans because of starvation.) Most people in North Korea don't have electricity. They certainly don't have the internet or access to news from the outside world.

North Korean “democracy” is a farce; people “vote” in “elections” where only one name is on the ballot—and those who cross out Kim's name are rounded up and jailed. Even certain hairstyles are restricted! Meanwhile, if someone is convicted a crime, he does not go to jail alone—his children and grandchildren are also imprisoned.

The U.S. State Department has learned that between 10 to 45 percent of all people imprisoned in North Korea are Christians who are in jail because of their faith. Yet in the midst of this oppression God has been working. Some defectors have reported that North Korean officials are worried that Christianity will defeat “Juche,” the state-sponsored worship of Kim and his ancestors.

That fear is based on statistics. One report released by the

U.S. State Department says the Christian population in North Korea multiplied five times from 2012 to 2017. There may be more than 400,000 Christians there now.

When I heard the news last week about the Korean miracle—after I pinched myself to see it was a dream—I turned to Psalm 46. It says: “Come, see the works of the Lord ... He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts off the spear; He burns the chariot in the fire” (vv. 8-9).

God has worked this miracle. It is not the work of any politician. He has heard the prayers of his people on both sides of this conflict—and the prayers of the faithful around the world who felt North Korea’s pain. He will engineer a lasting peace in this part of the world, and open the doors wide for the gospel to flourish in a thirsty land.

Before long, the churches of South Korea will freely send teams into the North with food, medicine and the message of Christ. Like a patient who has been in a coma, North Korea will awaken. The world will watch a national transformation. We are witnessing the greatest display of God’s sovereign power over nations since the Berlin Wall fell.

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## **A Pakistani Woman Is Dead—and the World Looks Away**

Asma Yaqub, a 25-year-old woman in Pakistan, was excited about her job as a hair stylist. But two weeks ago her dreams were shattered when a family friend visited her home and then made an unexpected marriage proposal. Asma refused, partly because she didn’t like this man, Rizwan, and partly because she was a Christian and he is a Muslim.

Rizwan felt “dishonored” by Asma’s rebuff. He was angry. So he poured acid on her body and set her on fire. She was rushed to the hospital, where she languished for two weeks with burns on 90 percent of her body.

She died this week.

“It’s so strange that a woman cannot say ‘no’ to a marriage proposal,” says Aila Gill, coordinator for Pakistan’s National Commission for Justice and Peace. Noting that Asma’s attack is the fifth episode of its kind in the past few months, Gill says “we are witnessing a worrying increase in violence and incidents of intolerance and extremism in our country.”

Pakistan is not the only country where violence against women is on the increase. In India, where Hindu nationalists have found support from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a woman is raped every 15 minutes.

In January, an 8-year-old Muslim girl was drugged and gang-raped for several days. Then her assailants bludgeoned her to death with a stone. The case provoked national outrage partly because lawyers and activist Hindus actually defended the girl’s attackers—and Prime Minister Modi waited several days to denounce the crime.

“So much rape and sexual abuse still doesn’t get reported because going to the police is still a nightmare,” says Deepa Narayan, a social scientist and author in India. “If you don’t have political clout or your story doesn’t become a national or international story, forget justice.”

A 13-year-old Indian girl was gang-raped recently by four Hindu men in Haryana state. The girl was kidnapped and repeatedly raped, and then her head was smashed on a wall. Four more rapes and murders of young girls were reported in Indian cities last week.

I looked into the face of similar pain when I was traveling in

Central Asia a few weeks ago. I talked with many women in Kyrgyzstan who have endured the horrendous practice of “bride stealing”—which is a cultural norm in many parts of Central Asia. Tradition says a man has the right to kidnap a woman with help from his friends. He then rapes her and forces her to marry him.

In many cases the woman’s parents agree to the arrangement because her virginity has been taken from her, and they feel she has now been “claimed” by a man.

Even though bride stealing is officially illegal, it happens hundreds of times a month in Kyrgyzstan. Police don’t enforce the law because they were married the same way.

I can’t tell you the intensity of the pain that I felt while listening to women tell me how they, or their sisters, were forced into loveless, abusive marriages that began with rape and beatings. It has been more than a month since I was there, and I am still dealing with residual effects of counseling women who were traumatized like this.

What is the problem here? In many parts of the world women are considered a lower class of human beings—or even another species. Men demand respect and submission, so rape, domestic violence or even the murder of a woman is considered trivial.

It is something to be ignored.

This was the attitude of the Pharisees who dragged a woman into the temple court and accused her of engaging in “the very act” of adultery (see John 8:4). They claimed to have proof of the woman’s sin, but they did not produce any evidence. The man she was supposedly with was a no-show.

Men in the days of Jesus viewed women as filthy sinners who were guilty until proven innocent. But Jesus stepped into the court that day and argued the woman’s case skillfully. No religious leader had ever stood up for a woman like this

before. Jesus defended her and sent her accusers away.

That's who Jesus is. When He shows up, justice is served.

Today Jesus has commissioned His followers to speak out on behalf of the voiceless and the abused. It is the church's job to cry for justice. We can't wait for the governments of this world or the United Nations to do the job that Christ gave us. We can't depend on our sensational media—which would rather focus on what gown a movie star wore to an awards ceremony than on the fact that millions of poor girls in developing countries aren't even allowed to attend school.

The church can either be the salt of the earth—as aggressive change agents—or we can remain passive and irrelevant while the world cries out for someone who cares.

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## **Why Would a Chick-fil-A Sandwich Make Anyone Angry?**

The only food on Chick-fil-A's menu I normally eat is the grilled market salad, since I'm watching my weight. But today I feel like ordering dozens of chicken sandwiches with waffle fries to share with friends. Why? Chick-fil-A is again under scrutiny because of its Christian values.

A few days ago, *The New Yorker* magazine published an astonishingly prejudiced assault on Chick-fil-A by writer Dan Piepenbring. The article bemoaned the fact that Atlanta-based Chick-fil-A has opened its fourth restaurant in Manhattan, and—horrors—thousands of sophisticated New Yorkers are standing in long lines to eat there.

The newest location on Fulton Street is the company's largest store—12,000-square-feet on five floors. But *The New Yorker* believes something sinister lurks behind the charming red-and-white façade of this Atlanta-based business. Piepenbring says Chick-fil-A's arrival in New York City "feels like an infiltration" because of the company's "Christian traditionalism." He says the restaurant has the "homespun ambiance of a mega-church."

Piepenbring adds that "there is something especially distasteful about Chick-fil-A" because the company's stated corporate goal is "to glorify God." He notes that the restaurant chain is closed on Sundays for religious reasons, and that there is a statue of Jesus washing a disciple's feet inside Chick-fil-A's headquarters in Georgia. All this, Piepenbring says, is "creepy."

I suppose this information is supposed to make intelligent New Yorkers gag on their chicken nuggets. But so far they haven't gotten the message. These chicken sandwiches must taste really good. Meanwhile *The New Yorker*, which I love to read for its biting cultural commentary and very funny cartoons, has just resorted to outright bigotry.

Chick-fil-A got in hot water a few years ago when the media reported that founder S. Truett Cathy, and his son, Dan Cathy, support traditional marriage. An effort was made to demonize Chick-fil-A as anti-gay. In 2012, Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel said he would ban Chick-fil-A from opening a store in his city because Dan Cathy said he supports "the biblical definition of a family unit."

Then, in 2016, New York City mayor Bill de Blasio urged New Yorkers not to eat at Chick-fil-A because of its "anti-LGBT" stance. His message apparently didn't stop New Yorkers from thinking for themselves. Today, in just one of Chick-fil-A's locations in New York City, a chicken sandwich is sold every 6 seconds.

Why the hostility? Chick-fil-A doesn't discriminate against homosexuals—or anyone else who orders its sandwiches, chicken nuggets or milkshakes. It does support Winshape Marriage, a ministry designed to help couples avoid divorce. Because Chick-fil-A's founders are Baptists, Winshape's marriage retreats are only for heterosexual couples.

I am struggling to understand why some people would attack Chick-fil-A because its founders have certain religious views. The company does not discriminate against customers for any reason, and it has been committed to serving local communities since it was founded in 1967.

Chick-fil-A's corporate mission includes this statement: "We believe kindness is a higher calling." To fulfill that goal, the company gave more than \$9 million in college scholarships to its employees last year. It also sponsors Shared Table, a program to feed needy families. The company encourages its local stores to host events to help military families and local school fund-raisers.

The company also provides assistance during moments of national crisis. In 2016, after the tragic Pulse nightclub massacre in Orlando, a Chick-fil-A store opened on a Sunday to provide free meals to first responders, blood donors and families of victims. When the Atlanta airport lost electricity in 2017 due to a fire, a Chick-fil-A store broke its own rules and handed out free chicken sandwiches on a Sunday to thousands of stranded passengers.

If this type of Christian kindness is an "infiltration," bring it on. We need more of it.

I'm scratching my head to understand why journalists would stoop so low to attack a company for having religious opinions. If a Muslim restaurant chain were opening in New York City, I doubt *The New Yorker* would call for a boycott just because the restaurant's owners support traditional

marriage. (That is the stated Muslim view.) I also doubt the magazine would attack a kosher Jewish restaurant because it's owners believe marriage is for one man and one woman.

But in America in 2018, it's okay to skewer Christians for their religious views. Cultural elitists feel they can justifiably trample on our religious and first-amendment rights. In the name of "tolerance," they wage a campaign of intolerance. In the name of political correctness, they promote hateful prejudice. Who is being more mean-spirited here?

I'm not calling for a boycott of *The New Yorker*. I still think their cartoons are funny, and I love their movie reviews. But I hope the editors will swallow their pride—along with some Chick-fil-A nuggets with Polynesian sauce—and then apologize for this unfortunate article.

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## **Don't Be a Prophecy Chaser—Be a God Seeker**

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

I love the gift of prophecy, and I'm grateful that the church today has made room for this precious gift. God has used me to give many prophetic words. Yet it concerns me that some people in the Spirit-filled community have dragged this gift down to their own level—to misuse, abuse and cheapen.

God loves to speak to His people, and I believe He has a fresh word for all of us at the right time. But there is a right way and a wrong way to seek God for His prophetic direction. Here are some guidelines that will help you:

1. **Read God's Word regularly.** Many charismatic Christians crave a "direct" word from God, yet they refuse to spend time reading the Bible. They may even consider reading Scripture "religious" or boring—yet they love the thrill of getting a prophetic word in a public meeting. Carnal Christians are not willing to be disciplined students—they want their prophetic words handed to them on silver platters. You will never become a mature Christian if you don't learn to hear from God on your own through His Word.
2. **Look to God for direction, not man.** I seek God daily for strength and direction. I don't chase prophets to tell me what to do or to show me my spiritual purpose. God can certainly use a prophet to speak to me—prophets are gifts to the body of Christ—but my focus is on God, not on the men or women He uses. If you ever start looking to a human being as your source of divine guidance, you are heading toward unhealthy idolatry.

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

3. **Stop looking for the sensational.** We've all heard of charismatic prophets who provide phone numbers or addresses in their prophetic words to confirm a message from God. It's true that God has the power to reveal such personal information, but in some such cases the "prophets" were actually con artists who preyed upon the gullible. Beware of prophets who use sensational means to bring a word to you. In all my years of ministry, the

most solid prophets were humble men and women who did not attract attention to themselves. They simply brought a sound message that was fully in line with Scripture.

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

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

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

Sometimes God deliberately pushes the mute button. He calls us to walk through quiet wilderness seasons. You must learn to trust Him even when you don't hear His voice. Wait on the Lord and let your roots grow deep.

5. **Make sure your heart is willing to obey.** Many people are eager to hear a word from God, especially if it tells them they will have a worldwide ministry or that they are going to become independently wealthy. But God's Word does not come to puff us up, flatter us or stroke our oversized ego. A true word from God cuts deep to our core; it requires surrender and demands holiness.

Make sure you are willing to embrace a true word from God

before you ask for it! Henry Blackaby once wrote: “Our difficulty is not that we don’t know God’s will. Our discomfort comes from the fact that we do know His will, but we do not want to do it.”

It is pointless to ask for God’s prophetic word if we are not fully yielded. I’m concerned that we have encouraged a culture of selfish prophecy chasing in today’s church. The only remedy will be to develop a culture of wholehearted surrender.

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## What to Say to a Sex Abuse Victim

There are probably people in your church who have experienced sexual abuse, and they need love and support. When you minister to a victim of abuse, he or she needs to hear encouragement and affirmation, not suspicion or judgment. Here are five things you should say in this situation:

**1. “I’m really sorry that happened.”** Galatians 6:2 says we are to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” People who go through something traumatic need to know we are there to support them. Victims of abuse are tempted to think no one will believe their story. You can say, “That must have been horrible.” You can also tell them you believe them.

**2. “You are not alone.”** Remind the person you are part of a faith family that offers love and healing to people in their situation. Abuse victims are tempted to hide their experience because it is embarrassing—yet true healing comes when we bring our darkness into Christ’s light. If you are counseling an abuse victim, stay in touch and set up another time to

meet—or get the victim connected to a support group.

**3. “It was not your fault.”** The most common lie an abuse victim believes is, “I must have done something to deserve this.” The devil is an accuser, and he uses abuse to destroy a person’s identity and self-worth. Use your words to counteract those lies. (Note: If the person who abused the victim is still alive, and it happened when the victim was underage, report the incident to the police.)

**4. “May I pray with you now?”** Jesus Christ has the power to heal an abused heart, and any follower of Christ has the anointing to pray for abuse victims. Isaiah 61:1a says: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted.” Jesus can remove the emotional stain abuse brings. (Some abuse victims may feel uncomfortable being touched when you pray, so be sure to ask their permission before you lay hands on their shoulder.)

**5. “May I help you find counseling?”** Prayer ministry at an altar can be powerful, but most abuse victims need additional follow-up. Do not just pray and then announce, “Now you are healed!” Encourage the person you are praying for to seek more counseling, preferably from a professional who has Christian values.

Most abuse victims have layers of hurt piled on top of their pain, and they will need time to process their healing. Sexual abuse is like a serious car accident—it may require extended time for healing.

Jesus brings good news to the abused, not shame, condemnation or put-downs. When victims of sexual abuse come to your church, make sure it is a safe place for them to find total transformation. {eoa}

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