

7 Ways the Holy Spirit Transforms You

Last week I was preaching in Canada, and my hotel was only two miles from the host church. But it took almost 30 minutes to drive that short distance because road construction crews in Toronto had blocked all but one lane in a major intersection. Orange traffic cones were everywhere. Traffic was at a standstill.

It was especially frustrated because no workers were on site. I wanted to roll down my window and yell at the traffic cones. The lanes were blocked but nothing was happening! The delay was pointless!

When I finally got to church I was annoyed, and it took me a while to enter into worship. That's when the Lord gently corrected me. He showed me I was as impatient with Him as I was with the road crews. I had to repent for my bad attitude. And I had to surrender my life afresh to God's dealings.

Many times God creates roadblocks in our lives because He's working on us. We may not understand what He's doing, but we must trust Him anyway and accept whatever delays He is causing. The delays are always for our good.

He may be widening our capacity to love others, or removing a serious obstacle in our character. The Holy Spirit knows what we need. Our job is to surrender to His work in our lives. He is God. We are not!

The whole experience of sitting in that traffic in Canada made me ponder the work of the Holy Spirit in my life. He is working 24/7 to make me like Jesus. He is doing the same for you. I hope you appreciate the different ways He is transforming you:

1. **He is rebuilding you.** Just as Nehemiah rebuilt the ruined city of Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit reconstructs your life. Nehemiah actually means “Comforter,” a name Jesus used to describe the Spirit. You are under construction, and He has strategically placed orange cones and roadblocks in areas of your life. Let Him rebuild all your broken places!
2. **He is teaching you.** The Holy Spirit, who is called “the Spirit of truth” (John 16:13), knows how to bring us to maturity. He shines His supernatural light on the Bible and opens our minds to understand His truth. He allows us to hear His still, small voice inwardly. He reveals His mysteries so we can know Him intimately.
3. **He is refining you.** The Holy Spirit is a fire, and He wants to burn up anything that does not resemble Christ. Like a smelter of gold, He melts us, skims off the toxic alloys and melts us again to remove all impurities. Don’t be afraid when the Spirit turns up the heat.
4. **He is testing you.** One man builds with gold, silver and precious gems; another builds with wood, hay and stubble (see 1 Cor. 3:12-13). Both might look good on the outside, but the testing of the Lord proves what a man is made of. The Spirit’s relentless fire will test what you are building for God so that only He will get the glory for it.
5. **He is renewing you.** Titus 3:5 mentions the “renewing of the Holy Spirit,” and we can be thankful that He offers such a blessing. He does not anoint us once and then leave us to live on one jar of oil. The Spirit sends fresh anointing when we are tired, poured out or discouraged. He opens up bottles of new wine and fills us with new joy. He pours the fresh oil of heaven on those who are desperate for more of His presence.
6. **He is subduing your flesh.** We don’t have to grit our

teeth or trust our own willpower to overcome sin in our lives. We have the indwelling power of the Spirit to help us live holy lives. Romans 8:13 says we can put to death the deeds of the body “by the Spirit.” He is like a warrior who plunders the enemy in our lives. We may feel weak in the face of temptation, but He has defeated the power of sin once and for all.

7. **He is revealing His glory in and through you.** The apostle Paul reminded us that because we have the Spirit inside us, we are now beholding the glory of the Lord “as in a mirror.” And the result: We “are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” Don’t focus on your flaws. Fix your eyes on Jesus. When you focus on yourself, you will be disappointed; when you focus on Him, you will be transformed. {eoa}

Let’s Pause and Honor the Texas Shooting Victims

Mass shootings and terrorist attacks have become so common that we tend to just stop for a moment, listen to the grim statistics and then go on with our business. Some of us don’t even stop to hear the news anymore.

We are baffled. We are numb. And we feel powerless to stop the madness.

America is in a state of shock. We haven’t had time to recover from the news of the October 1 Las Vegas massacre, which left 58 people dead after gambler Stephen Paddock rained death on a crowd at a music festival. Then an equally disturbed man, Sayfullo Saipov, used a pickup truck on Oct. 31 to mow over

pedestrians and cyclists in New York City. That attack left eight dead.

By the time I heard of the mass shooting in Sutherland Springs, Texas, last Sunday, November 5, I thought I was trapped in a recurring nightmare. It was the deadliest shooting in a house of worship in U.S. history, even eclipsing the horrific 2015 Charleston massacre—in which a white supremacist killed nine African-American worshipers at a Bible study.

And now this. Another deranged man, Devin Kelley, walked into a Baptist church in a tiny Texas town and randomly shot at everybody in the building. Like a modern version of the Grim Reaper, the killer was dressed in black and was wearing a skull mask. He killed 26 people, half of them children.

I didn't know any of the victims, but they were part of my spiritual family. Below are the names of those who have been identified. I simply ask that you pray for the families of the victims. And pray for First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, a congregation that has been forever changed by this demonic onslaught.

Eight members of the Holcombe family: Bryan, Karla, Danny, Noah (who was only 1 year old), Crystal (who was eight months pregnant), Emily, Megan and Greg. Crystal's unborn baby also died. Bryan Holcombe was associate pastor of the church. Survivors say he was stepping to the platform to pray when the gunman began shooting from outside. Crystal, a homeschooling mom, had recently sponsored a bake sale to help victims of Hurricane Harvey.

Dennis and Sara Johnson: This couple, ages 77 and 68, had recently celebrated their 44th wedding anniversary. Sara had worked in the church nursery for more than 30 years.

Haley Krueger, 16: This vivacious teen had dreamed of becoming a neonatal nurse. She had been at the church early that

morning fixing breakfast for other members.

Robert and Shani Corrigan: Robert was retired from the Air Force, and the couple is survived by two sons who are on active military duty.

Lula White, 71: Because she was related to the gunman, authorities suspect she may have been the reason the gunman directed his rage at the congregation. She supposedly had received threatening texts from Kelley. But her friends told *USA Today* she was a “God-loving person” who also loved her church.

Scott and Karen Marshal: This couple was visiting First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs for the first time on that fateful Sunday. They had moved to Texas from Pittsburgh and were looking for a church home.

Richard and Teresa Rodriguez: This retired railroad worker and his wife faithfully attended First Baptist Church every week.

Tara McNulty: This young woman was a bartender at a local restaurant near Seguin, Texas. Her two young children, now motherless, were wounded in the massacre.

Joann Ward and her two daughters, Brook, 5, and Emily, 7: This single mom’s stepson, five-year-old Ryland, survived the shooting even though he sustained five bullet wounds. He is currently in stable condition at a hospital in San Antonio.

Annabelle Pomeroy, 14: She was the adopted daughter of Pastor Frank Pomeroy and his wife, Sherri. Family members said Annabelle begged to sit on the front row of the church every Sunday to hear her Daddy’s sermons. Her mother told reporters: “As senseless as this tragedy was, our sweet Belle would not have been able to deal with losing so much family yesterday.”

There are 10 other victims who were injured in the shooting who are now in critical condition at local hospitals. Kelley,

the assailant, died of a gunshot wound after two local men pursued him in a car.

I can't imagine what it must be like for Pastor Frank Pomeroy, or his wife, Sherri. They happened to be out of town last Sunday. Then they learned that half their church had been killed, including their daughter. And now Frank will be conducting funerals for weeks—and struggling to find words to console a grieving community.

Our grief is heavy and the pain is intense in moments like this. But I find comfort by reading the very last chapters of the Bible—where we learn that the darkness and gloom of this life will be overcome by Jesus in the life to come. Revelation 21:4 says, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. There shall be no more death. Neither shall there be any more sorrow nor crying nor pain, for the former things have passed away.”

We Really Need Another Reformation

Five hundred years ago this week, Martin Luther staged the most important protest movement in history. He was upset because Roman Catholic officials were promising people forgiveness of sins or early escape from purgatory in exchange for money. So on October 31, 1517, Luther nailed a long list of complaints on the door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany.

Luther's famous 95 Theses were translated from Latin into German and spread abroad. Like a medieval Jeremiah, Luther dared to ask questions that had never been asked, and he challenged a powerful pope who was supposedly infallible.

Through this brave monk, the Holy Spirit sparked the Protestant Reformation and restored the doctrine of grace to a church that had become corrupt, religious, dysfunctional, political and spiritually dead.

I'm no Luther, but I've grown increasingly aware that the so-called "Spirit-filled" church of today struggles with many of the same things the Catholic church faced in 1517. We don't have "indulgences"—we have telethons. We don't have popes—we have super-apostles. We don't support an untouchable priesthood—we throw our money at celebrity evangelists who insist on flying in private jets.

In honor the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, I'm offering my own list of needed reforms in the modern charismatic/Pentecostal movement. And since I can't hammer these on the Wittenberg door, I'll post them online. Feel free to nail them everywhere.

1. **Let's reform our theology.** The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is God and He is holy. He is not an "it." He is not a blob, a force or an innate power. We must stop manipulating Him, commanding Him and throwing Him around. (And we should also stop ignoring Him, as if He is an optional "add-on" to our scripted agendas.)
2. **Let's return to the Bible.** The Word of God is the foundation for the Christian experience. Any exotic experience must be tested by the Word and the Holy Spirit's discernment. Visions, dreams, prophecies and encounters with angels must be in line with Scripture. If we don't measure them against Scripture, we could end up spreading deception.
3. **It's time for personal responsibility.** We charismatics must stop blaming everything on demons. People are usually the problem.

4. **Stop playing charismatic games.** Spiritual warfare is a reality, but we are not going to win the world to Jesus just by shouting at demonic principalities. We must pray, preach and persevere to see ultimate victory.
5. **Stop the foolishness.** People who hit, slap or push others during prayer should be asked to sit down until they learn that gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.
6. **End all spiritual extortion now.** Christian television ministries must cease and desist from all manipulative fundraising tactics. We must stop giving platforms to prosperity preachers who make outlandish claims of supernatural financial returns, especially when Scripture is twisted, deadlines are imposed and the poor are exploited.
7. **No more Lone Rangers.** Those who claim to be ministers of God—whether they are traveling evangelists, local pastors or heads of ministries—must be accountable to other leaders. Any who refuse to submit their lives to godly discipline should be corrected.
8. **Expose the creeps.** Preachers who have been hiding criminal records, lying about their past marriages, preying on women or refusing to pay child support should be exposed as charlatans and shunned if they do not repent.
9. **Stop faking the anointing.** God is God, and He does not need our “help” to manifest Himself. That means we don’t sprinkle glitter on ourselves to suggest God’s glory is with us, hide fake jewels on the floor to prove we are anointed or pull feathers out of our sleeves to pretend angels are in the room. This is lying to the Holy Spirit.
10. **Let’s return to purity.** We’ve had enough scandals. The

charismatic church must develop a system for the restoration of fallen ministers. Those who fall morally can be restored, but they must be willing to submit to a process of healing rather than rushing immediately back into the pulpit to cause more damage.

11. **We need humility.** Ministers who demand celebrity treatment, require lavish salaries, insist on titles or exhibit aloofness from others are guilty of spiritual pride. Christians should avoid prideful leaders instead of rewarding them with applause.
12. **No more big shots.** Apostles are the bondslaves of Christ and should be the most impeccable models of humility. True apostles do not wield top-down, hierarchical authority over the church. They serve the church from the bottom up as true servants.
13. **Never promote gifts at the expense of character.** Those who operate in prophecy, healing and miracles must also exhibit the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And while we continue to encourage the gift of tongues, let's make sure we don't treat it like some kind of badge of superiority. The world needs to see our love, not our glossolalia.
14. **Hold the prophets accountable.** Those who refuse to take responsibility for inaccurate statements should not be given platforms. And "prophets" who live immoral lives don't deserve a public voice.
15. **Stop the politics.** Our deadly mixing of nationalism and party politics with the gospel has diluted our message and ruined our credibility. We are not Democrats or Republicans first—we are followers of the Lamb. Our allegiance is to Jesus, not Trump or Obama. Christ's kingdom transcends presidents.
16. **Quit trying to be so cool.** Our desire to be popular has

ruined our witness. Today we care more about our giant LED screens, our coffee bars and our stage lighting than whether people have an experience with the Holy Spirit.

17. **No more racial division.** Let's get rid of the idea of a "black church" or a "white church." There is only one body of Christ, yet we pretend we are integrated if one person of color serves on our greeter team. True Pentecost is multicultural. The Holy Spirit builds bridges, not walls.
 18. **Let's make the main thing the main thing.** The purpose of the Holy Spirit's anointing is to empower us to reach others. We are at a crossroads today: Either we continue entertaining people with our charismatic sideshows or we throw ourselves into evangelism, church planting, missions, discipleship, and compassionate ministry that helps the poor and fights injustice. Churches that embrace this New Reformation will stop trying to please the crowd so they can focus on God's priorities.
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You Can't Stop Praying Now!

So you pray for something for years and then you wake up one day, breathe a big sigh and say to yourself: *This is crazy. Nothing is happening. God must not be listening.*

Congratulations! If this has been your prayer experience, you are not alone. You've been enrolled in the School of Persevering Prayer, and it's not a one-semester class. It's a lifelong journey designed to stretch your faith, develop your character, purify your motives, test your patience and increase your capacity to experience God's amazing love.

I've been in this school for a long time. I think I may have failed a few classes and been required to repeat them. I don't always make the grade.

This past week, in fact, I was whining about God's delays. For many months I've been bringing the same requests to the Lord, yet the answers seem impossibly distant. My faith wavers from calm assurance to frustrated doubt. In my weakest moments I panic and say stupid things that I regret later, such as: "I'm quitting!"

Yet when I bring my complaint to the Lord, He always reassures me. He recently took me to Isaiah 62:6-7, NASB: "On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

There's just no way around the fact that prayer requires persistence. One friend of mine even coined a phrase to summarize this painful fact: "God is in the waiting."

Jesus told a parable about an unrighteous judge who granted a poor widow's petition because she badgered him night and day (see Luke 18:1-8). Jesus asked: "Will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night?" (v. 7). Whatever request you have brought to the Lord, and regardless of how many times you have reminded Him of it, keep these points in mind as you trust Him for an answer:

1. **The work of God takes time.** Most people in the Bible who asked God for big things waited a long time to receive their answers. Abraham turned gray waiting for his promised heir—and he is called the father of our faith. Joshua and his remnant company wandered in the wilderness 40 years before they possessed Canaan. Hannah endured taunts from Peninnah and insults from Eli while she prayed many years for a son.

Prayer is not a magic formula. Your job is to ask, not to dictate or control. You must let God be God. You must let patience have its perfect work. You will eventually reap if you don't grow weary.

2. **Authentic prayer involves a holy process.** Prayer is often compared to birth. When God gives you a promise, you essentially become pregnant with it. If you plan to carry this promise to term, you must wait—and then you must travail.

Surely this is what the apostle Paul experienced when he told the Galatians he would be “in labor” until Christ was formed in them (Gal. 4:19). We often think of the prayer of faith as triggering instant answers, but this was not the case with Paul. While God can certainly answer immediately, even with fire from heaven, frequently He asks us to carry a promise until we are mature enough to handle the answer.

3. **You have a Helper who is praying for you.** You are not in this process alone. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us, Paul wrote, “with groanings too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). He is praying the perfect will of God, and we are invited to agree with Him. This kind of gut-wrenching prayer is messy and full of anguish; it is not formal or sophisticated.

When we truly pray in the Holy Ghost, we surrender our agendas and allow Him to pray through us. And this takes us deeper with God.

Have you ever been around a woman in her ninth month of pregnancy? She is often in a state of agitation—ready to give birth but weary of the strain. I know many Christians today who are in this same uncomfortable stage of spiritual travail. They've held onto promises for a long time. Some are in despair because the gestation period has been so long.

Jesus said: “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks

finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matt. 7:8). The verbs used are Greek present imperatives, meaning *constant* asking, seeking and knocking. Prevailing prayer requires persistence, but when we feel too weak to press forward in faith, the Spirit provides the extra push.

You may be asking for the salvation of a wayward child, the funding of a ministry, the reconciliation of a relationship, the recovery of a business, the reviving of a stagnant church or the healing of a sick loved one. Or if you are really adventurous, you may be praying for the evangelization of a city or a nation that is currently in spiritual darkness.

Keep on knocking. Don't give up. The God who moves mountains has heard your cry. You're closer than you've ever been to a spiritual breakthrough.

Jesus, Hollywood and the Harvey Weinstein Scandal

This past week, we learned that something really ugly lies underneath Hollywood's sparkling glamour. Harvey Weinstein, the billionaire mogul responsible for movies including *Shakespeare in Love*, *Chicago* and *The King's Speech*, was fired from his job and expelled from the Academy for Motion Picture Arts and Sciences after dozens of women accused him of rape or sexual harassment.

The women making the charges include actresses Ashley Judd, Kate Beckinsale, Gwyneth Paltrow, Mira Sorvino and Angelina Jolie. And *The New York Times*, which broke the story, said Weinstein paid off other women after they threatened legal action.

The whole ugly mess also showed us that film industry insiders knew of Weinstein's behavior, yet they swept it under the infamous Hollywood red carpet. The scandal has revealed a sordid corporate culture in which women are expected to give sexual favors in exchange for career advancement.

This is not the Hollywood blockbuster that film executives were hoping for. But it might get worse, especially since more women are talking openly about the reality of sexual harassment in the movie industry. Actresses Jennifer Lawrence, Reese Witherspoon and America Ferrera now have admitted they were harassed or molested at one point in their lives.

This week, actress Alyssa Milano asked women to tweet #MeToo if they had been molested, raped or harassed. Since last Sunday, the #MeToo hashtag has been used more than 1 million times on Twitter. And more than 5 million people around the world have engaged in the "Me too" conversation on Facebook.

There are also many Christians who can tweet #MeToo. Followers of Jesus are not immune to this problem. And there have been times when both women and men have been sexually abused or harassed by church leaders. Rather than pointing a judgmental finger at Hollywood, we should use this scandal to start a needed conversation at church about gender and justice.

Here are a few of the points we should cover:

1. **We must stop avoiding the topic of sexual abuse.** What we avoid from the pulpit will thrive in darkness. Unless we talk about this uncomfortable topic, victims will suffer in silence in our pews. It might help if local congregations launched their own "Me too" campaigns. Christians need to feel free to admit that sexual abuse happened to them, and churches should offer the counseling and healing needed. And let's remember that sexual abuse doesn't happen just to women.
2. **We should create a culture of mutual respect.** The

apostle Paul told Timothy that he should treat older women “as mothers” and younger women “as sisters, in all purity” (see 1 Tim. 5:2). And he wrote those words at a time when women were viewed as property.

The gospel goes against cultural norms. Today, women should feel safer in church than anywhere else. Yet I have known of male preachers who used sexist, derogatory language in their sermons. I have also known of “Spirit-filled” ministers who groped women in counseling sessions or used their spiritual authority to seduce girls. All churches should provide the training and accountability needed to become abuse-free zones.

- 3. We must stop blaming victims when sexual harassment happens.** Men have been blaming women for the world’s problems ever since Eve listened to the serpent. 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.” That is hyper-spiritual hogwash.

Let’s make it perfectly clear: Abusers, not victims, are guilty of abuse. I don’t care if a woman is wearing a skimpy tank top or hot pants—a man does not have to exert his power over her just because her skin is showing. He can walk away. Just as Joseph ran from Potiphar’s wife, men can control their actions.

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.

- 4. We must launch a revolution in Christian men’s ministry.**

In many evangelical churches today, 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.

But we don't have to be like the world. When a man comes to Christ, he should renounce the culture of exploitation and learn how to respect women and treat them as equals. If we men will take a long look in the mirror, we might see Harvey Weinstein looking back at us. Let's get honest and repent. Let's get all sexual abuse and harassment out of the church now.

God Has a Truckload of Grace for You

Earlier this week, I felt overwhelmed by anxiety. The worry was mostly caused by financial pressure and by a nagging fear of failure. I tried my best to put into words my fears and frustrations, but my prayers were basically a series of groans.

So many doubts assaulted my mind: *Will the money run out? Did I follow God's plan correctly? Did I even hear God in the first place?*

Then a clear picture popped into my mind, and I knew it was an impression from the Holy Spirit. I saw an aerial view of the street where I lived in the Atlanta suburbs during the 1970s. And I saw a huge semitruck parked in front of my house. I asked the Lord what He was showing me.

My mind was flooded with memories of what God did in my life when I lived in that house in 1976. I experienced a divine intervention in the fall of that year, just weeks before I was to leave home for college. I was filled with the Holy Spirit that September, and my life was radically redirected. The Lord saved me from following my own selfish plans, and He put me on the right path.

I asked the Lord why He was showing me a semitruck parked in front of my house on Autumn Hill Drive. He spoke to my heart: "It was when you lived in that house in 1976 that I brought you a load of my grace and mercy."

I immediately thanked Him for all He had done for me. I was reminded of Psalm 103:4, which says in the International Children's Bible: "He saves my life from the grave. He loads me with love and mercy."

But then I saw another picture in my mind, and this time, the semitruck was parked in front of the house where I live now. The Lord said: "I am bringing you another load of my mercy and grace." And I was reminded of Ephesians 1:7-8 (MEV), which says we have redemption and forgiveness "according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us."

Again, I had to pour out my heart in thanksgiving. God's grace doesn't just come once. His grace is not rationed in small quantities. The word "lavish" means "to cause to abound and overflow." What happened at Calvary did not end there. He

opened a fountain then, but it continues to gush today. He brings His grace to us in truckloads, and then He brings more!

Perhaps you have wondered if God's grace toward you is running out. Maybe you thought He was tired of your mistakes, upset about your doubts or frustrated with your inconsistency. Maybe you wondered if you misheard His divine direction. Maybe you even worried that He had disqualified you.

You can be encouraged today. His grace never stopped. We have received "grace upon grace" (John 1:16) and "the abundance of grace" (Rom. 5:17). Jesus told the apostle Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9). God will supply you with all the grace you need if you simply humble yourself and acknowledge your need for Him. James 4:6 tells us that God "gives more grace" when we come to Him in humility.

As you ponder the miracle of abundant grace, remember this:

His grace delivers you from your past. You should thank God daily that you aren't where you would be if you hadn't met Christ. You might not even be alive today if it weren't for His merciful intervention! Be grateful that He broke the power of sin in your life, forgave you for your many wrong choices and freed you from guilt. You are a walking miracle because of what Jesus already did for you.

His grace empowers you for the present. Even though you often feel weak, and you know you are a flawed vessel, God's grace works through you supernaturally. His Spirit lives in you. His anointing is a precious treasure that flows out of imperfect saints. When Jesus told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you," He added, "for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Quit trying to be perfect; just relax, knowing that He is working in you.

His grace guides you into your future. We all reach moments when we feel we've hit a wall. Elijah saw God's fire fall on Mount Carmel, but then he found himself in a cave of fear and

depression. He even thought of ending his life. But then he heard the still, small voice of God again. He received such a fresh outpouring of grace that he outran Ahab and saw the promised downpour of rain.

This is not a time to give up. Spiritual warfare may be intense, and you may be painfully aware of your own flaws. But God's grace is greater than the devil, his demons and your mistakes. Open your eyes, and you will see a truckload of grace heading your way.

Turn Up Your Love, Tone Down Your Anger

We may never know what possessed Nevada gambler Stephen Paddock to fire his deadly automatic weapons at an unsuspecting crowd of country music fans this week in Las Vegas. Why would a guy whose family and acquaintances describe as "friendly" sneak more than 23 handguns and rifles into a hotel room, fire them at a crowd of 22,000 people and then shoot himself?

Paddock was 64, the age when most guys his age would be slowing down to enjoy vacations or grandkids. He lived in a nice suburban home. He had no financial problems and no extreme political or religious views. But something snapped the night of Oct. 1.

This "friendly" man is now responsible for the worst mass shooting in modern American history. At least 58 people are dead and more than 500 are wounded. And Americans are wondering if it is safe now to go to a concert or even walk down the street.

In my column last week, "Is America About to Explode?", I explored the culture of hostility that has been growing in our country in recent years. I noted that our sharp political differences have created a dangerous minefield. And I stated: "Violence could break out at any moment in today's atmosphere of rage."

I was not predicting the Las Vegas massacre when I wrote those words. It doesn't take a prophet to know that more violence is likely to erupt if we don't do something. We are living in a time of intense spiritual conflict. You can feel it in the air. It reminds me that Jesus described the last days as a time when "the love of many will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12).

I don't believe we can end this senseless violence unless the church "resets the thermostat" by turning up our love. It may sound trite, but God's love is the greatest weapon in our arsenal. Here are six practical ways you can help solve this crisis:

1. **Dial down your anger toward your political enemies.** Do you find yourself blowing up in anger when you watch newscasts or when you discuss politics with co-workers? Are you known for being a hothead because of your diatribes about politicians or social issues? Remember this: Proverbs 29:11, NASB, says, "A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back." The Bible calls angry people fools!
2. **Check your heart for racial prejudice.** If harsh, hateful words are spewing out of your mouth it's because you have hate in your heart. Jesus said in Matthew 15:18 (MEV), "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile the man." I'm baffled when I see how many people still use racial slurs when posting comments on online forums. Shame on you if you are a white Christian and you use [a derogatory term] to describe a black person. Let's grow

up and leave grade-school foolishness behind. If racial slurs come out of your mouth, your soul is poisoned.

3. **Wash your mouth out.** I don't think Christians should use profanity. But just because you don't curse doesn't mean your words are acceptable. I'm amazed when I hear the venom that comes out of Christians' mouths these days—toward celebrities, the media and politicians on both sides of the divide. Every time we lash out at our enemies through our self-righteous tweets and smug Facebook posts, we are driving a deeper wedge between Jesus and the people who need Him. If you can't tone down your harsh rhetoric, go on a social media fast until you can control your addiction to ranting.
4. **Speak words of kindness to others.** My 89-year-old mother taught me that if I don't have anything nice to say, I should keep my mouth shut. I hope good manners don't die with her. You have the power to diffuse anger by blessing people with a smile, a hug, a sincere compliment or a word of encouragement. Be aware of the people around you. Learn to "season" your words with grace, as the apostle Paul said, "as though seasoned with salt, that you may know how you should answer everyone" (Col. 4:6).
5. **Reach out to loners.** Jesus often showed love toward people whom society shunned. He dined with the lonely Zacchaeus, He empowered a Samaritan woman who was an outcast and He drove the demons out of a madman in a cemetery. Mass shooters are usually loners who experienced deep rejection. Why are we afraid to love people who keep to themselves or who struggle with emotional or mental problems? If Jesus befriended them, so should we.
6. **Turn up your love for your Christian brothers and sisters.** Jesus didn't say the world would respect us

because of our Christian bumper stickers or T-shirts, our convincing apologetics or our trendy megachurches. No, he said: “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, *if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35).

As long as the church is toxic, unbelievers will avoid us. As long as we are divided by race, doctrine and political opinions, we will be weak in the face of a skeptical world—and they will not be drawn to the message we preach. Only love will make the gospel attractive.

Is America About to Explode?

People are screaming at each other a lot these days. The most recent example is a viral video, seen by millions of people since last week, of a woman who went ballistic because a service dog was sitting near her in a Delaware restaurant.

The dog in question belonged to a veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder. But that didn't stop the woman from unleashing a three-minute, profanity-laced tirade. I'm sure all the diners at Kathy's Crab House lost their appetite that evening.

“It is disgusting to have an animal in a public restaurant ... I think it's gross!” the woman screams. (This is a family-friendly publication, so I can't print much more of what she said.)

It seems everybody is furious today. We've created a culture of outrage. People are offended, and if you aren't offended by what offends them, they are offended by your lack of offense.

We are addicts. We crave a daily fix of rage. We rant on Facebook and Twitter because we need a regular dose of vitriol to fuel our habit. Then we turn on a newscast to watch agitated political commentators throw more gasoline on the flames.

The rage burns on both sides of our political divide. White supremacists march with tiki torches to spread hate. Black Lives Matter activists loot stores and smash windows. Former NFL fans burn football jerseys on barbecue grills. Campus lectures require police protection because leftists have threatened right-wing speakers. Madonna drops expletives and threatens to blow up the White House because she's so mad President Trump won the election.

Then last week, President Trump used an unprintable and demeaning phrase to describe athletes who are protesting police brutality. That was beneath the dignity of a president. I agree we should respect our flag and our national anthem, but you can't demand that respect by using a misogynistic expletive.

Is there anything we don't get angry about these days? Depending on which side of an issue Americans stand, we are offended by Starbucks coffee, Chick-fil-A sandwiches, Target restrooms, CNN, Fox, Nike shoes, the real cause of hurricanes or whatever the actress Jennifer Lawrence said yesterday.

Our rage has become so absurd that this month, a shopper at a Hobby Lobby craft store was offended by cotton stalks (yes, cotton stalks!) in the fall décor aisle. She took her protest online and demanded that the store stop selling dried cotton bouquets for \$ because slaves were used in the 1800s to harvest the plants.

Honestly, it makes me wonder if the real cause of global warming is the alarming increase in human anger. We're going to burn up this planet with our rage if we aren't careful.

My biggest concern is how Christians will position themselves in the midst of this heightened hostility. Will we bring reconciliation? Or will we fuel the flames until both sides explode?

Here are a few pointers that will help us to become agents of peace:

1. **You don't have to comment about everything.** One reason the anger level is so high today is that we have so many platforms to spew our thoughtless words. Want to rant about your noisy neighbors? Go on Facebook Live! Want to boycott a product because you hate the company owner? One tweet could start a movement.

Actually, the best strategy may be to zip your lips. We should consider the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 5:2: "Do not be quick to speak with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God. For God is in heaven, and you are on the earth; therefore may your words be few."

2. **You don't have to take sides in every argument.** Christians love to be on the "right" side. But I have been thinking recently about the moment when Joshua met the captain of God's angelic hosts on the battlefield. Joshua asked him, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" and the angel replied: "Neither, for I am the commander of the army of the Lord" (see Josh. 5:13-14).

God does not necessarily back either side when people are divided. We want to look at issues through our Republican or Democratic lens, or through our conservative or liberal agendas, but political parties don't control God. His kingdom transcends the kingdoms of this world. If you try to fit God into your human ideology, you have created an idol.

3. **You don't have to be "right" all the time.** Many Christians pride themselves on being right about certain moral issues. We know what the Bible says. Yet it is

possible to be on the right side of an issue and still be very wrong because of your attitude. You can angrily defend your right position, yet you can lose God's blessing because you didn't show love or act with wisdom.

I learned this years ago from Christian author Watchman Nee, who saw God's blessing lift off of Christians in China when they became bitter and divided. Nee wrote: "In God's work He will not bless what is wrong, but He will not bless what is right either. When we stand together in one accord, the blessing comes ... We may be absolutely right in the matter, but the blessing will stop!"

Our country is in a dangerous position in this hour. Fuses are short, nerves are on edge and fists are clenched. Violence could break out at any moment in this atmosphere of rage. May it never be said that God's people fueled this fire. Ask the Holy Spirit to subdue your anger, and ask Him to use you as a peacemaker in these troubled times.

6 Super-Unhealthy Leaders to Avoid

A good friend of mine almost suffered spiritual shipwreck recently because he began following a ministry that claimed to be on the "cutting edge" of revival. The leader uses all the popular buzzwords: He is "prophetic," he sees "healing miracles" in his meetings and he even claims to have face-to-face meetings with Jesus. But in the end, it turns out this self-appointed leader is an immoral man who has left a trail of spiritual abuse behind him.

It breaks my heart that our movement is still struggling with poor leadership. I believe we have made great progress over the past two decades, and the rate of moral failure and scandal seems to be declining. But we have a long way to go.

That's why one of my passions is to encourage healthy leadership among Christians. When you consider unhealthy leaders, there are mainly six types, which I have listed below. You would be wise not to follow them. You would be even wiser not to become like them:

The arrogant narcissist. The best leaders are those who have been broken by God. Like Jacob, they have wrestled with God and walked away with a limp. Their own ego has been subdued. Leaders will become dangerously self-centered if they skip this process. If a leader views his church or business as a vehicle to advance his own agenda, he will view people as cogs in his machine and they will end up being used and abused. This is why Paul warned Timothy: "Do not lay hands on anyone too hastily" (1 Tim. 5:22, NASB). Leaders who have not gone through the fires of testing always end up hurting others.

The cold professional. Unbroken leaders don't know how to build healthy relationships. They tend to be aloof, and they are always in "business mode." They are all work and no play. The organizations they build may seem successful, but there is no warmth. The churches built by these professionals focus on numbers, buildings, fund-raising and big goals, but they lack true fellowship. The focus is always on the performance, while people's real needs are ignored.

The angry tyrant. There's a reason Paul warned the early church never to put an angry leader in a top position (see 1 Tim. 3:3). Just as anger disqualified Moses from leading Israel into the Promised Land, the same attitude will remove God's blessing from a leader today. Angry leaders use fear and manipulation to dominate people. Pastors with this problem can even use spiritual threats, unreasonable demands or even

public humiliation to convince their followers to be loyal. Tyrants are driven by fear, so they are suspicious of people in their churches or organizations who are successful. Like Saul, they will feel threatened by younger leaders—and they will throw spears at them.

The insecure know-it-all. A healthy leader will seek out mentors and coaches to help him or her grow. But some leaders are too prideful to ask for help. They will instead use titles to create an aura of importance. Their lack of experience may even lead them to plagiarize or to invent fake credentials. Instead of asking a group of wise counselors to correct them, they will surround themselves with yes men who are equally as insecure as they are. They never seek input from their subordinates. And when things go wrong, the leader will always look for a scapegoat to blame instead of admitting his mistakes.

The indecisive weakling. Real leaders have strong spines. They know how to lead even in tough times. This should always be done prayerfully, of course, but a true leader will not drag out the process. Joshua, for example, was decisive; he swallowed his fears, figured out God's strategy and motivated the people to march into Canaan. He didn't let obstacles paralyze him. Some leaders adopt one goal, then six months later they quietly bury that goal and shift the emphasis to something else. They tend to follow public opinions, the latest fads or the success of a competitor rather than their own convictions. After a few years the people feel they have been jerked around by a reckless driver.

The closed-minded risk avoider. Some leaders are scared of change. They love maintenance mode. But the leaders affirmed in Scripture did not play it safe. The apostle Paul, for example, risked his neck to take the gospel into new territory. Even when traditional believers pressured him to "keep it Jewish," Paul knew the Holy Spirit was directing him to reach the Gentiles. True leaders know you can't effect

change without thinking outside the box. True leaders stay flexible. And true leaders are willing to follow God even when people criticize them for challenging the status quo.

Let's pray that God will give us leaders who are broken, humble, courageous, loving, faithful and Christlike. And pray that He will give you those same qualities.

Calm Down! The World Isn't Ending on Sept. 23

We are drowning in bad news these days. We've experienced a divisive presidential election, a wave of racial violence, a solar eclipse and two devastating hurricanes. If that's not bad enough, North Korea's dictator is threatening to fry the United States with his nuclear missiles.

So I'm not surprised that another doomsday prophet has predicted the end of the world.

This time it's a "researcher" named David Meade, author of a book called *Planet X—The 2017 Arrival*. He has marked his calendar for Sept. 23, and he says that's the day the world will end.

Meade says a hidden planet called Nibiru will crash into Earth that day. (Never mind that Nibiru hasn't been detected on any telescopes.) Meade also claims he has Bible passages to back up his outrageous theory. So because he can "prove" his prediction from Scripture, many Christians are spreading his loopy ideas.

Meade believes the Aug. 21 solar eclipse indicated the ghost

planet's arrival. He has no scientific evidence of this oncoming collision, but he cites Isaiah 13:9: "See, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate, and He shall destroy its sinners out of it."

Conspiracy theorists like Meade have been spreading rumors about a planet called Nibiru for more than 40 years. They claim it is inhabited by a race of ancient aliens who came to Earth thousands of years ago to mine for gold. Meade says the world will end on Sept. 23, 2017 because the date is somehow encoded in both the Bible and the Egyptian pyramids.

I cringe when I hear that Christians are falling for this hoax. I can't compete with this doomsday madness, but I can offer an appeal for sanity. Here are three reasons why you shouldn't believe or spread Meade's prediction:

1. **It is a false prophecy.** Jesus Himself said all end-times date setting is strictly off-limits. He told His disciples on the day He ascended: "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (Acts 1:8, NASB). Matthew 24:36 says the date of Christ's return is known only by the Father. If it is not for us to know, then how does David Meade know? Only the worst form of spiritual pride would lead a person to claim such knowledge.
2. **Failed date-setting has discredited Christians many times before.** Why can't we learn from history? William Miller, the father of Seventh-day Adventism, was convinced Jesus would return in 1844. When his prediction turned out to be bogus, many disillusioned "Millerites" abandoned their faith.

Jehovah's Witnesses taught that Jesus would begin His millennial reign in 1914. When that didn't happen, they pointed to the outbreak of World War I and began teaching that

this was the “beginning of the end.” A few years later they moved the date to 1925. Nothing happened that year, but more than a generation later they circulated the prediction that the world would end in 1975. (They also taught that only Jehovah’s Witnesses would survive a global holocaust.)

Recent history is littered with more of these embarrassing predictions. It hasn’t been that long since Edgar Whisenant, a Christian layman, wrote *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. Millions of believers bought that paperback book. Other Christians have made similar predictions—such as the Y2K scare in 1999 or Harold Camping’s infamous warning that the world would end on May 21, 2011.

3. **End-times date-setting hinders the cause of Christ.** It’s wrong-headed and irresponsible for any Christian to tell an unbeliever when Jesus is coming back or when the world will end. That’s not the message we were commissioned to preach. Dates and deadlines don’t have the power to save souls—only the gospel can do that.

When we share Christ with others, we don’t need to provide a date for His Second Coming. Instead, we should tell them about the miracle of Calvary and remind them: “*Today is the day of salvation*” (2 Cor. 6:2). Hundreds of thousands of people die every day without Jesus, whether or not He returns in their generation. This alone should motivate us to avoid foolish distractions and false prophecies so we can get busy with the task of evangelism.

Our job is to preach the good news—not the bad news!

All the storms, floods, fires, earthquakes, riots, political tension, terrorism and nuclear attacks have put fear and anxiety in people’s hearts today. But the answer to all this bad news is not a doomsday prediction; the answer is Jesus, who gives us supernatural peace so we can live securely in a chaotic world.