

6 Ways Not to Take an Offering

I've seen it all when it comes to church offerings. Once when I attended an outdoor service in Nigeria, deacons used wheelbarrows and pickup trucks to collect money because more than 500,000 people were in the audience. Yet I know a pastor in Malawi who collects the equivalent of 80 cents in his offering plate each Sunday because his members are so poor. With that money, he has planted several churches.

Giving is a huge part of the Christian life. Jesus encouraged generosity; the first disciples collected offerings; and the apostle Paul said, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7b). Paul taught us that collecting money to support the church's mission should be done with integrity and that believers should respond with generous hearts.

But even in those days, some Christians resisted the idea of giving to God's work. Others used strong-arm tactics to get their hands in people's pockets. We are still dealing with this problem 2,000 years later. Here are six of the most reckless tactics used today to raise funds in church:

1. **The endless appeal:** Some preachers drone on and on for 45 minutes to collect an offering—and then they take another 15 minutes to pass the buckets. This is rude and insensitive—and it reveals a lack of faith on the part of leaders. You don't have to talk people out of their money or hold them hostage until they give out of frustration. Trust God to supply the need rather than begging.
2. **The salesman's extortion:** Certain slick preachers in our movement are known for their uncanny ability to open people's wallets. But these fundraising "skills" are more akin to those of a used car salesman than a

minister of the gospel. They promise magical benefits to those who give large amounts. They also set deadlines. I once heard a preacher suggest that if people gave “right now,” their unsaved children would find salvation!

Never give in response to manipulation. Paul taught us that when we sow, we will reap. But in the same passage, he also said if we sow to the flesh we will “reap corruption” (Gal. 6:8). If you give in response to a prompting of the Holy Spirit, you will be blessed. But if you give because the preacher twisted your arm or used pressure tactics, your gift will not be blessed. Paul told us to give “not grudgingly or out of necessity” (2 Cor. 9:7).

3. **The give-to-get tradeoff:** There is no question that God blesses generous people. If you keep your hands open to God by giving, He will open a channel of blessing for you. But God is not a slot machine, and His goodness is not for sale. Never believe a preacher who says you can buy the Holy Spirit’s anointing. And never follow a preacher who guarantees you will get a new house or a new car if you put a certain amount in the offering plate.
4. **The Holy Ghost auction:** Numerous times I’ve heard a preacher announce that he needs a certain number of people to give \$1,000—and he will wait for hands to go in the air. Next, he needs \$500 gifts, \$250 and so on. Within a few minutes, the church has become a cattle auction. Sometimes the donors are asked to stand—suggesting that God blesses rich people but not the widow on a fixed income who doesn’t have means to give a big amount.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they liked to blow trumpets in public to announce they were giving to the poor. He told them: “When you do your charitable deeds, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your

charitable deeds may be in secret" (Matt. 6:3-4). Can you imagine Jesus asking rich people to stand and give their large checks while everyone in the audience applauds them? He actually pointed out a poor widow and raved about her tiny gift.

5. **The railing judgment:** I cringe when I hear pastors tell people they will be under a curse if they don't tithe. I don't tithe to appease God's anger; I give more than a tithe because I love to share God's goodness. We should never put a guilt trip on people while collecting money. The church is no place for threats. Zacchaeus was a greedy tax collector, but Jesus did not attack him for his thievery; He extended mercy—and this melted Zacchaeus' heart and made him a lavish giver.
6. **The pathetic apology:** Sometimes we act timid about collecting offerings, maybe because the world thinks all Christians are fakes and that churches are "all about money." But we have nothing to apologize for! We are involved in the greatest mission on planet Earth, and God Himself supplies the funds needed to evangelize the world.

When we collect offerings, we are engaging in a holy process. God is just as much involved in the offering as He is in worship, the preaching of the Word or the demonstration of spiritual gifts. God allows us to be His vessels to give, and then He rewards us abundantly so we can give more. The church has been sustained for 2,000 years by supernatural giving. He is in our midst. While we seek to become more generous, let's learn to be more faithful in the way we steward God's money.

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Don't Swallow the 'Red Pill'

Zach and Amanda (not their real names) were happily married and attending a growing church on the east coast. They started a family and got involved in ministry. Things were going well for this young Christian couple. But then Zach took a major spiritual detour.

He swallowed the Red Pill.

You may not know anything about this infamous pill, but you need to learn fast before it affects marriages in your church. Some Christian men today have come under its influence, mainly through the popular Reddit online discussion site.

At first Amanda noticed her husband was developing odd attitudes about women. He would talk about how "all women" are highly emotional and how they want to manipulate men. Then Zach began to play mind games with his wife: ignoring her, blaming her for everything or cutting off sexual contact for days to teach her a lesson.

Then he started demanding total submission from Amanda. He began quoting 1 Peter 3:6, which says that Sarah called her husband Abraham "lord." Meanwhile he would sometimes call his wife stupid if they argued.

"It was definitely mental and psychological abuse," Amanda says. "His love was conditional. He would say, 'You need to follow me completely, and then I will give you what you need.'"

Finally, Amanda couldn't take it anymore. She began to fear that Zach might abuse her physically. "I was constantly crying. I was miserable and depressed," she told me this week in an interview. Although Amanda is not ready to give up her marriage, and she hopes for restoration, her trust in Zach is shattered, and she has started seeing a counselor.

The Christian community needs to be on the alert for the influence of the Red Pill movement because it's developing a cult-like following. It is described as a "men's rights movement"—which sounds benevolent enough—but the fruit of this movement is anything but right.

Many authors over the years have advocated a men's movement, including Robert Bly, Rollo Tomassi or the Christian blogger known as Dalrock. But Red Pill has taken the philosophy to the level of a religion. The Red Pill discussion site was launched in 2012 by Robert Fisher, a congressman from New Hampshire who describes himself as both preacher's kid and atheist. He hid his true identity on the site for a few years, but he resigned from his government post last month after his connection to Red Pill was revealed.

The movement is much bigger than Robert Fisher now. The site has 200,000 active subscribers. It promotes the idea that there is a "war on men" in modern culture and that the only way to fight back is to demand total submission. It even preaches that all women secretly want to be dominated because they are inferior. Some of the most outlandish tenets of this patriarchal online cult include these:

- Despite what feminists say, women don't want equality or respect—they want to be dominated by a strong man.
- Women today should spend more time on their personal appearance and less on work or education because men are not attracted to intelligent women.
- The stereotypical American woman is a "self-entitled brat" who has been influenced by "feminist hogwash."
- All women are alike. Red Pill advocates invented a buzzword, "AWALT," to explain this concept. It means "All Women Are Like That."
- Men should consider male-dominated trades because mechanics, electricians and plumbers are able to avoid negative female influences in the workplace. Men in a corporate culture or in academia risk being emasculated

by women.

The actual name of the movement is a reference to the 1999 movie *The Matrix*, in which the character Neo takes a red pill to tap into the dark secrets of the universe. Followers of Red Pill are urged to open their eyes so they can see that women have collectively joined together in a global conspiracy to dominate men.

Fisher, who started Red Pill to help men navigate “the woes of dating in the American culture,” certainly does not espouse Christian ideas of holiness or decency. Part of Red Pill’s philosophy is to help men conquer women sexually. Fisher wrote in 2013: “I treat women like they’re subordinate creatures, and suddenly they respect me.”

Another tenet of Red Pill involves “negging,” a flirting technique used by pick-up artists. Men are encouraged to use low-grade insults or offensive teasing to undermine a woman’s self-confidence—so that she will ultimately be more vulnerable to a man’s sexual advances.

Believe it or not, Christian men today are embracing these crazy, unbiblical ideas. They think God wants them to be crude, abusive and dominant—even though the Bible calls husbands to be humble, kind and compassionate models of sacrificial love (see Eph. 5:25-30).

If anyone around you is taking this Red Pill, warn them now. If anyone in your church is promoting these toxic ideas, don’t let them spread, or you will face a crisis. Now is the time to teach men that godly masculinity isn’t about bossing women around or acting superior.

Real men aren’t macho, abusive or controlling. Real men don’t put women down or feel threatened by them. Real men don’t compete with women; they are happy to be equal partners with them. Real men don’t swallow the Red Pill. {eoa}

Break Free From the Patriarchal Spirit

Mexico is a violent place for women. When I visited the city of Monterrey a few years ago, a pastor's wife named Estér told me she visited a hospital every month to pray for one or more women who had been seriously injured by their husbands. In some cases, the victim was a minister's wife.

"It is so common here," Estér told me. "The pastor's wife just goes home from the hospital, puts makeup on her bruises and never tells anyone what happened."

Last week, I traveled to the city of Querétaro in central Mexico to speak at a Christian men's conference. During my visit, I learned that a new wave of domestic violence has hit the country. It is estimated that at least seven women are killed every day in Mexico by their husbands or partners.

And the violence is becoming more deadly due to increased rivalry between drug cartels. Women are often used as pawns by gang leaders to inflict revenge on each other.

Two years ago, more than 7,000 women had been reported missing in Mexico, half of them under the age of 18. Domestic violence is often the reason Mexican women try to sneak over the U.S. border.

How can we respond to this tragedy? Of course, we should provide shelters and counseling for female victims. But the most effective strategy is to go to the root of the problem—by confronting the men who abuse. And this must start in the church, because Christian men often abuse their wives and then justify their behavior with Bible verses.

For too long, the evangelical church has ignored the problem of abuse, and this has enabled abusers. We insist on teaching that men have some kind of God-ordained power to be “priests of the home”—when Scripture actually teaches that all Christians—male and female—are priests. (The Bible actually never calls husbands “priests of the home.”)

God never intended marriage to be about hierarchy, domination, control or abuse. If we are ever going to stop abuse in the church, we must teach men to break free from a patriarchal spirit. We must take these three scriptural steps:

1. **Treat your wife as an equal.** It’s true that God asks women to submit to their husbands; yet in the same passage in Ephesians, husbands and wives are instructed to submit to each other (see Eph. 5:21). Paul taught that married people have authority over each other’s bodies (see 1 Cor. 7:3-4), again stressing the concept of mutual submission. And Peter warned husbands that their prayers would be “hindered” if they do not treat their wives as “fellow heir[s] of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7, NASB). If wives are fellow-heirs, they are equals!

The gospel not only restores human beings to a relationship with God, but it reaffirms the dignity of women and their equal value. When a husband understands this and treats his wife with honor and respect, his marriage will reflect heaven.

2. **Serve your wife selflessly.** Many Christian husbands ignorantly think Scripture gives them the right to boss their wives around, bark orders, demand sex or manipulate them with threats. They interpret the verse “the husband is the head of the wife” (Eph. 5:23, MEV) to mean that they can sit in their recliners like kings while their wives do all the housework and take care of the children.

That is not a marriage, it's slavery. In God's kingdom, "headship" is not dictatorship—it is servanthood.

Paul introduced a radical concept: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). This is the opposite of a cocky, macho attitude. A husband who loves Jesus will get out of his recliner and help with the dishes, play with the children and share the burden of family responsibilities. A husband's love should be sacrificial.

3. **Encourage your wife's spiritual gifts.** I've known many Christian men over the years who kept their wives under tight surveillance. An insecure husband doesn't want his wife to further her education, start a career or assume any leadership role because he views her as inferior (or maybe because his wife's success exposes his weakness). Yet God's desire is for a husband to be his wife's biggest cheerleader. The man who was married to the Proverbs 31 woman, for example, praised his wife—not only for her virtue but also because of her success in the marketplace (see Prov. 31:28-29).

The Holy Spirit has the power to subdue the male ego. But we will never overcome the crisis of domestic abuse until we begin teaching the gospel of gender equality and challenging Christian men to swallow their patriarchal pride. Let's quit promoting erroneous religious notions about male domination and get back to what the Bible really says about equality, mutual submission and honor. {eoa}

What We Should Learn from the Kathy Griffin Fiasco

Kathy Griffin is one of only three women who've won a Grammy for best comedy album. Her profanity-laced stand-up comedy routines made her a hit on HBO, and she was voted one of the funniest women alive by the Oxygen network a few years ago. Her popularity soared in recent years because of the way she irreverently pokes fun at politicians and celebrities.

But few people were laughing last week when Griffin posted images of herself holding a model of President Trump's head dripping with fake blood.

And it wasn't just conservatives who were offended. CNN swiftly canceled her appearance on its New Year's Eve special, and CNN commentator Anderson Cooper tweeted that Griffin's photo shoot was "disgusting and completely inappropriate." Even though Griffin apologized for her botched attempt at political humor, saying, "I beg your forgiveness," venues around the nation quickly canceled her scheduled appearances.

Within a few days, she declared that she was the victim and blamed the Trump family for trying to destroy her career.

It has never been exactly clear why Griffin crossed the line from humor to insanity by making fun of decapitation. Was she trying to encourage someone to kill President Trump? (She denies that.) Was she sending a not-so-subtle message to radical Islamic terrorists? (We already have plenty of images of Egyptian Christians being beheaded.) Was she simply giving people who hate Trump a way to process their anger? (If so, that was a flawed strategy that backfired.)

Or maybe she was just trying to get attention? If that was her reason, Griffin got more than she bargained for. This was no joke. It appears that her career in comedy is over.

The same day Griffin posted her images on Instagram and Twitter, I was reading 1 Corinthians 6. I noticed that when the apostle Paul listed the sins of ancient Greece, he included a sin I had never noticed before.

Paul wrote: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor *revilers*, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10, emphasis mine).

I've read that passage many times, but the word "revilers" jumped off the page. The Greek word, *loidoros*, means "one who reviles; one who speaks profanely or rails at abusively." It refers to irreverent speech that is hurtful and crudely disrespectful. The verb "rail" can also mean "to complain loudly and bitterly," and it implies that the criticism contains nasty rumors or untruths.

And even though Paul was describing the sins of a culture that existed 2,000 years ago, his words have particular relevance to us today—in this age of public outrage. We are a generation of revilers. In our country today, we can't argue respectfully. No, we insist on verbal nuclear war. Today, our political discourse has no rules.

Whether you listen to news broadcasts, talk radio or political commentary or read online forums or Facebook comments, you will find that our national tone has changed. Revilers can't just disagree politely. They have to shout, and they have to lace their comments with vicious attacks and malicious jabs. Revilers also feel a need to drop F-bombs and use vulgar language in every sentence to make sure their words are as vile and hateful as possible.

Revilers have no respect for people in positions of leadership, either. Whether they are talking about a

president, the CEO of a company, a college president, an athlete or a stay-at-home mother, revilers pounce on their prey and skewer their victims with abusive words that have been dipped in the acid of hate.

And revilers come in all varieties—both conservative and liberal. When President Obama was in office, some conservatives used hateful racial slurs to denounce him—and some even lynched him in effigy. That is shameful. We should show respect to any elected official regardless of our own party affiliation or political views.

Now that President Trump is in office, his image is being defaced and mocked publicly. And liberal activists have launched hateful campaigns against Vice President Mike Pence as well because of his Christian convictions.

I hope we learn from the Kathy Griffin fiasco that reviling is not the righteous way to effect change. Those of us who represent Christ have no business reviling anyone. We may disagree with a person's political positions, but if we have the Spirit of Jesus we cannot use crude or hateful words to push our position. James 3:8 reminds us that the tongue is "full of deadly poison," and we are commanded never to curse men "who are made in the likeness of God" (v. 9).

Revilers, in essence, believe they are God. They think they can say whatever they want, in whatever way they want to tear down another person. Reviling is rooted in pride—and God hates pride.

Don't let the spirit of the reviler influence your attitude or infect your speech. Don't let pride control your tongue. Pray that the spirit of the reviler will no longer affect you. And pray that it will no longer control our media and our public conversation. {eo}

How Katy Perry's Mother Praises God Through the Pain

Mary Hudson is a minister's wife, a gifted preacher, an author and a mentor to many Christian women. But she's also the mother of one of the most famous entertainers in the world, pop singer Katy Perry. For that reason, many Christians turn a cold shoulder to Mary and her husband, Keith.

"I get a lot of negative vibes," Mary told me this week during an interview in Hawaii, where she was hosting a women's conference. "People ask us, 'How could you have a daughter like that?'"

Mary certainly never expected things would turn out this way. When she was pregnant with Katy, an evangelist prayed over her and declared, "This child will do something great for God." When Katy was 9 years old, a charismatic minister prophesied that she would stand before kings and presidents. Katy wrote worship songs as a young girl and began performing solos in church.

When Katy sang to Christian audiences as a girl, "the anointing for worship was incredible," Mary recalls. "People would just weep."

The Hudsons raised their children to serve God. Katy, along with her older sister and younger brother, attended Christian schools. Katy also tried to become a gospel singer, but the Christian album she released in 2001 didn't sell.

Then she moved to Hollywood at age 17 and eventually signed a deal with a secular record company. She became an overnight sensation in 2008 with the release of her racy hit single, "I

Kissed a Girl.”

Mary was devastated when she listened to that song and realized her daughter was headed in the wrong direction. “I felt like I was flattened to the wall,” Mary says.

Katy’s powerful voice, creative songwriting ability and quirky artistic flair propelled her career. She became one of the best-selling musical artists of all time and is now worth \$125 million—at age 32. She is a household name around the world. She even did a private concert at the White House for President Obama, and her popularity soared into the ozone when she performed at halftime for the Super Bowl in 2015.

Her adoring fans love her versatility, her outrageous stage persona, her spunky femininity and her unbridled sensuality. They’ve watched Katy change her hair color from brunette to electric blue to pink to blond and back to brunette. They’ve laughed at her crazy costumes. And because Katy has more Twitter followers than anyone on the planet, most of her fan base knows she was raised in a Christian home by conservative parents.

Katy has sometimes taken swipes at her parents in media interviews. She has disavowed her Christian upbringing at times—even though the name “Jesus” is tattooed on the inside of her wrist. And in her newest album, *Witness*, which releases June 9, she displays a new level of over-the-top sexuality that would make most people blush. (The video for her newest hit single “Bon Appetit” could best be described as soft porn created especially for the Food Network.)

How does a Christian mother handle it when she sees her daughter drifting so far from the values she taught her? It hasn’t been easy.

“The devil definitely tries to steal my joy,” Mary told me. “I sometimes have to fight depression.” A few years ago, Mary anchored her soul to Psalm 113:9, which says, “He gives the

barren woman a dwelling, making her the joyful mother of children. Praise the Lord!"

That verse inspired her to write her 2015 book, *Joyful Parent, Happy Home*. Mary believes if you want your children to live for God, "You have to get happy and stay in the 'God zone.' It's just like when a plane takes off in a storm. The thunder and lightning may be raging, but once you reach 30,000 feet, the sun is always shining."

Mary's close friends also support her unconditionally. And she asks new friends to agree with her in prayer for a miracle turnaround for her daughter. Meanwhile Keith released a book on prayer in 2009 that examines how God hears our heart's cries. It is called *The Cry: The Desperate Prayer That Opens the Heart of God*.

Mary believes parents of prodigals must focus on others rather than wallowing in their own pain. For the past 11 years she has poured her life into women who attend her Arise conferences.

"You have to take your mind off your own situation and focus on others if you are ever going to see the light of day," Mary says. "Pouring myself into the Arise conferences has been a lifeline. Not only have thousands of women been helped, but with every meeting my faith gets cranked up a notch."

The Hudsons also have chosen to love Katy no matter what. They stay in close contact with her, and Mary sometimes takes calls in the middle of the night from Katy because of her non-stop concert schedule. (Katy asked her mother for prayer last week after a terrorist attack killed 22 people at pop star Ariana Grande's concert in Manchester, England.)

I asked Mary what counsel she has for parents who have children who have left their Christian faith behind. She believes unconditional love and support is essential—not judgment, anger or estrangement. "It's only the love of God

that will bring them back,” she says. “Don’t cut them off. You have to rise above your feelings. You must stay in communication.”

The Christian community should also show unconditional love to ministers like Keith and Mary Hudson. Rather than judging them for raising a prodigal, we should show compassion.

I hope you will love Katy Perry instead of criticizing her choices and pray for her as if she were your own daughter.
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How I Found Freedom From the Shame of Abuse

When I was a boy, something shameful happened to me that I never, ever planned to talk about publicly. During a summer visit to a youth camp in Alabama, an older boy whom I considered a friend took me into the woods and abused me sexually. He then brought me inside a boathouse near the camp’s lake for more experimentation.

The abuse wasn’t penetrative or physically painful, but it inflicted a deep emotional scar. It was as if my 7-year-old soul were branded with a hot iron. I never talked about the incident with anyone after it happened. I buried the trauma so no one would know.

I was glad when my family moved from Alabama so I would never have to see that camp or the boathouse again. Yet the memory followed me like a shadow. It produced self-loathing, fear of exposure, sexual confusion and deep inferiority. As a teenager, I spent lots of energy trying to convince my friends

I was OK—yet deep down, I still feared I was hopelessly broken.

Thankfully my healing began at age 18, just before college, when I asked Jesus to fill me with the Holy Spirit. God stripped layers of shame off me as I heard the Father's voice and experienced His unconditional love. By the time I got married and started a family, the shadow of abuse had grown faint.

I found more healing when I told a few mentors and friends about the abuse. I was afraid they would recoil in disgust and reject me (most abuse victims expect that response), but they expressed only love and affirmation. Transparency brought freedom. Yet a thin layer of shame lingered. Even though I was involved in full-time ministry by that time, I battled thoughts of disqualification. I seemed confident and successful to others, but I didn't like myself.

Then a few months ago, after I relocated to Georgia, I realized the camp where the abuse happened was only 90 miles from my house. When I told this to my friend James, he suggested we go there to pray and find more closure.

As we drove onto the camp property, I felt uneasy. It had been 50 years since the incident, yet the place looked exactly like I remembered it—except for two things: The ranger's house, where the older boy lived, was gone, and so was the wooden boathouse. Only a faint outline of the foundation of that building was visible next to the lake's edge.

James and I stood on the grass and prayed in the Holy Spirit. No one else was on the property. James asked me to remember again what happened on that spot. Then he added: "The Lord was there when this horrible thing happened. Ask the Lord what He is saying to you."

My arms were folded in a defensive posture. Maybe after all these years I was still protecting my heart from the pain. But

in that peaceful moment, I could see the inside of the dark boathouse, with life jackets, ropes and canoes hanging on the walls. I saw Jesus standing near a frightened little boy. He said: "I will not let this stop you."

Those words lifted a few hundred pounds off my mind. Jesus wasn't scolding me, scowling at me with disapproval or writing me off. He had come to my rescue. He was defending me. He was promising me that the enemy's plan to destroy my life would not prevail.

I knew from that moment that my experience with abuse had absolutely no control over me. The sting had been removed.

I basked in His presence for a few moments, looking out over the lake and remembering that I had learned to swim there during my summer visits. Then I asked James if we could visit one other location. We got in my car and drove to a church in Montgomery, where I gave my heart to Jesus at age six.

When we pulled into the parking lot of Dalraida Baptist Church, my heart leapt. Unlike the old camp boathouse, the church was still there. In fact, a huge new sanctuary stood in front of the old building where I was baptized. The old sanctuary was now the youth ministry center.

"This is amazing," I told James. "The place where I was abused is gone. But the place where I began my relationship with Jesus is thriving."

God spoke to me powerfully that day in Montgomery. He showed me that what defines my life—and what controls my future—is not the ugly blemish on my past but the precious faith I embraced when I chose to follow Him. And he reminded me of the truth of Isaiah 54:4a, which says: "Do not fear, for you shall not be ashamed nor be humiliated; for you shall not be put to shame, for you shall forget the shame of your youth."

What about you? If you've experienced sexual abuse, you don't

have to hide your secret or drag the shame around. Jesus knows your pain and your embarrassment. He does not reject you or keep you at arm's length. Bring your shame into His presence and let His strong embrace heal your wounded soul. {eoa}

5 Ways We Quench the Holy Spirit

How would we respond today if God wanted to repeat the miracle of Pentecost in one of our carefully scripted Sunday meetings? I wonder if we would embrace the unexpected wildness of that Acts 2 moment. Or would we tell the Spirit to behave?

Pentecost was an abrupt heavenly invasion. It wasn't planned in a staff meeting; it came "suddenly," according to Acts 2:2. The noise of wind was not on the program; neither were flames of holy fire.

No one in that prayer meeting in the upper room in Jerusalem expected to speak a supernatural language. Certainly Peter did not expect to give his unrehearsed sermon, and I'm sure he was surprised when 3,000 people were converted. The church was born in a moment of unearthly, unimagined strangeness.

We will celebrate Pentecost this year on June 4. Would we have room for this miracle today if God wanted to do it again? Would we welcome the interruption? I fear we have enacted so many human controls that the Spirit is totally left out of our Sunday experience. If we don't give Him free rein, worship can become a man-made ritual that is stripped of God's power.

The apostle Paul warned us not to "quench" the Spirit in 1 Thessalonians 5:19. "Quench" means to extinguish a fire. I

fear that today our trendy churches have been equipped with state-of-the-art fire extinguishers that do a professional job of eliminating any risk of a holy outbreak. Let's be mindful of the most common ways that we quench the Holy Spirit.

1. **We ignore the Holy Spirit.** Many churches today make no mention of the Spirit. He is, as author Francis Chan says, the "forgotten God." We play it safe by focusing on Jesus and salvation—yet we forget that Jesus talked incessantly about the Spirit. And it was Jesus who told His followers that they must be "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). We are not being faithful to Christ if we don't take people into the deeper waters of the Spirit that He Himself promised.
2. **We limit the gifts of the Holy Spirit.** There are thousands of churches in this country that teach that the gifts of the Spirit no longer function. Even though the apostle Paul said, "Do not forbid speaking in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:39) and "Do not despise prophecies" (1 Thess. 5:20), speaking in tongues and prophecy are off-limits—along with healing and miracles.

It was a lack of faith that created the doctrine known as "cessationism." Respected Bible teachers have convinced whole sectors of the church that God no longer operates supernaturally. Christianity has been reduced to an intellectual argument, devoid of power. And even in churches that wear the Pentecostal label, we have created such tight controls on our meetings that the gifts can't function.

3. **We misuse or abuse the gifts of the Holy Spirit.** We Pentecostals and charismatics have sometimes quenched the Spirit more than evangelicals who deny His power. We have whacked people to the floor or waved our sportcoats in the air to prove our "anointing," manipulated audiences with mood music, used fancy titles to fake apostolic authority and manufactured counterfeit

miracles to con people to give in offerings.

God forgive us. We cannot use the Spirit or His gifts to achieve our selfish agenda. Either we submit to His plan, or He withdraws and lets us play our silly games.

4. **We misrepresent the Holy Spirit.** How often have we heard, "Thus says the Lord," or "God told me this," when the Spirit had nothing to do with the message we cooked up on our own. When we give the Spirit credit for messages that did not originate from Him, we take the Lord's name in vain. There are many popular "prophets" given platforms today, but some of them bring lying words and false visions. Never let a charming false prophet mislead you with flattery, manipulation, exotic visions or promises of wealth.
5. **We divide the Holy Spirit.** When the apostle Paul corrected the Corinthians for quenching the Spirit, he addressed sexual sin and the abuse of spiritual gifts. But first He challenged them on the way they were treating each other. "Has Christ been divided?" he asked in 1 Corinthians 1:13. We grieve the Spirit when we judge each other, build walls, divide ourselves racially, follow personalities or create camps according to doctrine.

The secret of Pentecost is found in Acts 2:1: "They were all with one accord in one place" (KJV). Can that be said of us today? We are divided between black and white, white and Hispanic, Republican and Democrat, Protestant and Catholic, denominational and non-denominational, evangelical and Pentecostal. We are fragmented and weak. We have quenched the Spirit with our disunity.

Please join me in praying for a new Pentecost. Let's throw away our fire extinguishers and invite a fresh heavenly flame to engulf the church.

Why Women Belong on the Front Lines of Ministry

This past weekend my oldest daughter, Margaret, quietly made history. She was ordained as a pastor at United Assembly, the church in Seneca, South Carolina, where her husband, Rick, has served as an associate pastor for several years. Margaret and another woman, Marly, are the first females to be ordained into pastoral ministry at this church.

As Margaret's father, I couldn't be prouder. I have watched her spiritual anointing develop since she was a little girl. But I'm also aware that the road won't be easy for her or for any woman who embraces the call to leadership.

Thankfully, Margaret's church is affiliated with a denomination (the Assemblies of God) that fully embraces the ordination of women. But there are hundreds of thousands of churches in 2017 that limit women's gifts by enforcing a spiritual glass ceiling that was actually shattered long ago on the day of Pentecost.

I've been a vocal advocate for women in ministry since my book *10 Lies the Church Tells Women* was published 17 years ago. I have helped many pastors remove the traditional barriers to women, and I've encouraged countless women to fully embrace God's unique calling—even when this requires scary steps of faith into uncharted territory.

But here I will simply list three simple yet powerful reasons why it's imperative that we empower women as never before to step into their ministry callings.

1. **We need a woman's perspective in the pulpit.** In New

Testament times, the apostle Paul traveled with his colleagues Aquila and Priscilla. They helped lay the foundations of the early church, and in one scene in Acts 18:24-26, we see them instructing Apollos and launching him into ministry. Priscilla co-labored with Paul to build the first churches. She was not sidelined or silent. She was powerful and apostolic.

Paul was surrounded by women leaders who taught the Bible, prophesied, led churches, served as deacons and died as martyrs. Besides Priscilla, he mentions in his letters several female ministry companions including Chloe, Phoebe, Euodia, Syntyche, Junia, Nympha, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis. Beyond that, the evangelist Philip had four daughters who were prophets (Acts 21:9), and John's second epistle is addressed to a woman who led a congregation (2 John 1, 13).

If women had this level of influence in the first century—at a time when women were typically treated like property—how much freer should women be to preach today? If God's image is reflected in both male and female, as Genesis 1:26-28 tells us, why wouldn't we need both male and female to reveal His truth from the pulpit? If a healthy family needs both a father and a mother to provide nurture and instruction, doesn't the church also need spiritual fathers *and* mothers?

2. **Spiritual gifting is not tied to gender.** In many evangelical churches today, women are told that their "role" is to serve as wife, mother and domestic servant—and that men have the "role" of leadership. Women are told that preaching, pastoring, teaching and even leading worship are "masculine" gifts, while "feminine" gifts consist of teaching children, prayer, cooking, cleaning and secretarial work. But this sexist view is rooted in macho pride, not in the Bible.

The Holy Spirit's gifts have nothing to do with gender. The Spirit distributes His gifts "as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11b,

NASB). The nine manifestations of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and the motivational gifts listed in Romans 12 have no reference to gender whatsoever. Women can heal the sick. Women can cast out demons. Women can show mercy. Women can preach and teach. We limit and grieve the Spirit when we tell Him who can and cannot function in His gifts!

3. **Certain battles won't be won without women's influence.**

There are many times in Scripture when a woman determined the outcome of a battle. Jael dealt the final blow against Sisera in Judges 4:21; the "certain woman" of Judges 9:53 crushed Abimelek's skull; and Esther stopped Haman's genocide plot. If women are supposed to sit on the sidelines while men do all the important work, why are these stories in the Bible?

The truth is that God calls both men and women into ministry. We need both Aquila and Priscilla to build a healthy church. We will continue to lose certain battles until women are trained, empowered and commissioned to engage the enemy.

A few weeks ago, I was in a church in Idaho listening to my daughter Margaret preach a sermon about fighting injustice. Her text was Psalm 45. As she shared passionately about why she adopted an African child and how she traveled to India to fight gender-based violence, I wept—not because my daughter was preaching, but because I could hear God's voice thundering out of the heart of a 31-year-old mother who cares about the poor and the mistreated. Sometimes it takes a woman to reflect God's heart. {eoa}

How to Extend Grace When Christian Leaders Fall

A close friend of mine was discouraged last week. A pastor he respected for many years was asked to resign from his church because of serious allegations of inappropriate conduct.

I knew how my friend felt. Over the years, I've known several pastors and leaders who found themselves in spiritual disasters—a sexual scandal, a financial scam or a crisis of integrity. My trust in these people was shattered. My trust in all leaders was tested.

A church scandal is not just traumatic for the leader at the center of the storm; it also destabilizes everyone around them. Whole churches or ministries can be shaken to their foundations when a leader makes poor choices. Fortunately, I never walked away from my faith because a leader failed. But many people do.

If you are close to a leader who has experienced moral failure, I recommend taking these steps:

1. **Make sure you have the facts.** In this age of fake news, anybody can make up a story and post it online. That's why the Bible says we should not receive an accusation against a leader "except before two or three witnesses" (1 Tim. 5:19). The devil keeps a special set of knives sharpened and ready for those who are eager to assassinate the character of a pastor. Make sure the story you heard is accurate.
2. **It's OK to grieve.** Jeremiah wrote an entire book of the Bible—Lamentations—to process his grief over Israel's unfaithfulness. He cried out: "Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers ... Our fathers sinned and are no more" (Lam. 5:2a, 7a). Jeremiah did not minimize the

impact of the sins of Israel's leaders. But he didn't sit in judgment; rather, he cried for them—and for the effect their choices had on others. Sin has huge implications. We should shed tears over it.

3. **Extend mercy to the leader who fell.** The apostle Paul often had to bring correction to first-century leaders who failed God. He wrote: "Brothers, if a man is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore such a one in the spirit of meekness" (Gal. 6:1a). That means we shouldn't be harsh or vindictive, even if we must remove the person from leadership for a season of rehabilitation.

Biblical gentleness is not a greasy form of cheap grace. Biblical gentleness doesn't require you to overlook sin or minimize its consequences. But biblical gentleness does require us to recognize that if it were not for the grace of God, we could have made the same mistakes the offending leader did. Treat the fallen brother or sister like you would want to be treated!

4. **Forgive from your heart.** I've met Christians who still nurse the same grudges 30 years after a pastor hurt them. They keep their pain alive by reliving the offense over and over. As a result, they are stuck in a time warp, and no one wants to be around them because their sarcasm is so toxic. You must learn to say what Jesus said on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).
5. **Learn from the offending leader's mistakes.** The Bible provides us with both good and bad examples of leaders. I have mentors who taught me much about God, leadership and ministry. But I also have learned a lot from watching the mistakes leaders make. If someone in ministry hurts you, make a mental note: "That is not the way I want to treat people." You can turn your

disappointments into blessings if you learn from them.

6. **Keep communication open.** I've seen cases in which leaders were asked to step down because of a scandal, and suddenly everyone they knew stopped talking to them. That's understandable, because often we just don't know what to say. And it can be awkward if the fallen leader is justifying his behavior or trying to convince people of his version of the story.

But let's learn to apply more mercy. Fallen leaders need friends too. If you were close to the person who fell, try to maintain the friendship—knowing that your words might not be appreciated at first. If you did not know the leader well, a kind letter sent at just the right time can be like water in a desert to a soul who thirsts for encouragement.

7. **Stay in fellowship.** Many people who experience a church scandal leave church altogether. It's okay to take a short break to recover. But if you go two months, then six months, then a year without being in close fellowship with other Christians, you are making yourself vulnerable. You may be tempted to believe that there are no healthy pastors or churches in your area—but I dare you to disprove that.

God will have a holy church, and we can't compromise His standards. But holiness must be bathed in mercy. As we seek to extend more grace to the fallen, let's also pray that fewer leaders in today's church will fall. {eoa}

Why Every Christian Should See the Movie 'Lion'

I'm not ashamed to admit that I cry in movies. In fact, I'm known to cry more than my wife when a film really tugs at the heartstrings. I've watched *Lion* three times now (once when it came to theaters and twice since it was released for purchase a few weeks ago), and I've cried every time.

You need to see this movie. While it has mainstream actors and a Hollywood budget—and it was nominated for six Oscars—it offers a powerful Christian message without even trying to be Christian.

Based on a true story, *Lion* begins in 1986, when a 5-year-old Indian boy, Saroo, ends up on a train that takes him 1,500 miles to Calcutta. Separated from his older brother, Saroo desperately tries to survive as a street child. He scrounges for food, sleeps on a piece of cardboard in a train station and is almost abducted. He ends up living in a crude orphanage and is then adopted by a caring Australian couple.

The film then fast-forwards 20 years, and Saroo (played as an adult by Dev Patel) begins to remember bits and pieces of his traumatic childhood. With the help of college classmates, his girlfriend Lucy (Rooney Mara) and Google Earth technology, he figures out where he lived when he got lost.

When Saroo returns to India to look for his mother, the drama intensifies. I won't tell you the ending, but you will need some Kleenex—especially when director Garth Davis reminds us in the closing credits that more than 80,000 Indian children go missing every year and that 11 million children live on the streets in that country. You will then realize that Saroo was fortunate; most kids in his situation don't end up in nice homes in Australia.

Lion is a powerful film partly because it shines a harsh light on the cruel reality of poverty and child exploitation. But it is also powerful because it explores the beauty of adoption. Saroo's adoptive mother, Sue Brierly (Nicole Kidman), tells him she knew when she was a young girl that she would adopt a child from another culture.

One of the most moving moments in the film occurs when Saroo tells Sue he's sorry she and her husband, John, couldn't have their own kids. She gently scolds him for thinking that he was some kind of second-class substitute for a biological child. "We chose not to have kids," Sue says, explaining that she and John adopted Saroo and another Indian boy, Mantosh, because there were already so many children in the world who needed parents.

"We wanted the two of you," Sue says. "That's what we wanted. We wanted the two of you in our lives. That's what we chose."

There are Christian movies today that aim to reach secular audiences. (*The Case for Christ*, for example, is in theatres now.) But there are also mainstream films that Christians need to see. *Lion* is in that category. Christians need to see it because we still don't fully embrace the importance of adoption—and in some cases adoption is viewed negatively in the church.

I know many Christian couples who are praying about starting a family—yet when I suggest they look at the possibility of adoption, my idea sometimes gets a cold reception. We often have the mindset that a biological child is the better choice, and that adoption is either a painful alternative or a last resort. Or, because adoption can be expensive, some people automatically rule it out before asking God to provide the funds.

We forgot that God chose to adopt each of us (see Rom. 8:15), and that the decision to adopt a child—especially one from a

culture different from our own—is one of the most loving and generous acts any human could perform.

While *Lion* is a masterful film with beautiful cinematography, first-class acting and a moving score, it is at its heart a film about parental love: The love of a poor Indian mother who lost her little boy, and the love of an Australian mother and father who were willing to bring two Indian boys into their world, all the while knowing that adoption comes with great risks.

My prayer is that *Lion* will convince many Christian couples to open their hearts to adoption so that more children like Saroo can find loving homes.

Lion was released on DVD on March 28. It is rated PG-13 for some mild sensuality, and is too intense for young children.
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