

10 Ways to Pray for a Troubled America

The Old Testament clearly shows that the rise and fall of Israel was determined by its spiritual condition. When the people worshipped God, and their leaders honored His laws, Israel prospered. When the people drifted into sin and idolatry, and Israel's kings forgot the God who delivered them from slavery, the nation went into decline. Foreign armies eventually invaded.

The same principle applies to any nation—and certainly to the United States, which was founded by people of faith who embraced the Bible. We have known seasons of spiritual revival, and in the past we have elected leaders who called on Jesus Christ as the true God. We have also gone through periods of spiritual darkness. When you review our 240-year history, it seems we are facing our darkest hour spiritually.

But I am not discouraged as we head into this uncertain season. God intervenes even in the darkest times. Elijah called down fire from heaven when an evil leader sat on the throne. When Israel faced certain defeat, King Hezekiah prayed and witnessed divine deliverance.

God is always willing to rescue His people if they pray.

As we head into the final days before this crucial 2016 election, I challenge you to do more than vote. Please pray big, God-sized prayers. A president or a political party cannot solve our national crisis. We need urgent help from heaven. Here are 10 things we should include in our petitions:

1. That our leaders will turn to God. It was President Theodore Roosevelt who said: "A belief in Jesus Christ is the very fountainhead of everything that is desirable and praiseworthy in our civilization." Yet today political

correctness prevents our leaders from barely mentioning faith. It's as if we are ashamed of what made our nation great. Pray that our next president and his or her cabinet will be drawn to love the Lord in a personal way.

2. That our president will rediscover God's forgotten laws. In the days of King Josiah, when the nation's moral compass went missing, the scrolls of the Old Testament were found in a closet. When the king heard the words of the Scriptures, he tore his clothes, repented and called the nation to serve God again (2 Kings 22-23). Pray that our next president will follow the footsteps of Josiah and bravely call for a reformation.

3. That God's prophets will have access to government leaders. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Elisha called on the kings of Israel to obey the Lord—and Israel was blessed when leaders heeded their message. Even when Israel went into captivity in Babylon, God put his servant Daniel in a strategic position of influence. Pray that our leaders will open their doors to those God is sending to speak for Him.

4. That we will have righteous judges. John Jay, the first chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, did not hide his Christian faith. He wrote: "The Bible is the best of all books, for it is the Word of God and teaches us the way to be happy in this world and in the next." Today, most of our judges have no knowledge of Christian morality; instead they create their own laws in a moral vacuum. Our judges are now responsible for redefining marriage, secularizing the country and taking away the rights of the unborn. Pray that God will raise up judges who honor God's laws.

5. That we will stop shedding innocent blood. About 3,000 unborn babies die every day in this country. But this devaluation of life is not only evident in the slaughter of innocent children. It is also seen in the sex trafficking of children and women; in the mistreatment of immigrants; in

violence against racial minorities; and in exploitation of the poor by greedy corporations. God judged Israel not only for the horrible practice of child sacrifice but also for unjust treatment of the poor (Mal. 3:5). Pray that justice will be restored in our land.

6. That our children will be protected from evil. When the evil Queen Athaliah took the throne of Israel, she slaughtered all the children in the royal family so she could control the country. The enemy hates the next generation and seeks to snuff it out. Pray that America's children will be delivered from the schemes of Satan—such as illegal drugs, promiscuity, sexual confusion, fatherlessness and harmful entertainment. Pray that the church will respond by nurturing a new generation of youth who follow Christ.

7. That God will defend us from our foreign enemies. Whenever Israel strayed from God, invaders appeared on the horizon. When King Hoshea became king of Israel, he “did evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 17:2). The result? The king of Assyria “invaded the whole land” and put Hoshea in prison. The United States has rarely experienced foreign invasion, but if we don't return to God soon it will be unavoidable. Terrorists are already plotting. Pray earnestly for mercy in this area.

8. That our economy will not crumble. In the days of Elisha, the spiritual condition of Israel was so bad that God sent a famine that resulted in economic crisis. It was not unlike a Great Depression—and it was so bad that people resorted to cannibalism to survive. Could that ever happen in America? We face similar judgment if we don't return to the Lord wholeheartedly. America's prosperity could vanish overnight if we forget the source of our true wealth.

9. That a great spiritual awakening will revive the nation. After Josiah heard God's Word and repented, he triggered a national turnaround. He burned idols, stopped child sacrifice, removed occult priests and reinstated the Passover. No king

in Israel turned so dramatically back to God (2 Kings 23:25). Could the same thing happen in America today? I believe it is possible. And in this age of grace, God can pour out His Spirit in a fresh way. Even while sin abounds, grace can much more abound. Pray with expectation for a nationwide revival.

10. That God will show mercy instead of judgment. When Hezekiah became king, “he did right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 18:3) and he removed the idolatrous high places in the land. The result was that God showed mercy to Israel and even extended the king’s life. God is willing to grant more time to America if we will humble ourselves and pray.

Some Christians have given up on this country and pronounced judgment on it. But if we would pray instead of criticize, the Father of mercy will respond. James 2:13 says: “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Let’s be the true salt and light in our culture. Let’s shine in the midst of darkness. {eoa}

What if Hillary Clinton Wins the White House?

In three weeks, the baffling 2016 presidential election will be over. The winner will begin assembling a White House cabinet. The loser will most likely disappear for a while. And our polarized nation, weary from all the sound and fury of ugly politics, will recover from the stress of this crazy season.

Many evangelical Christians have supported billionaire Donald Trump, either because he is a Washington outsider or because his policies seem more conservative than Clinton’s. Some charismatic leaders, such as Lance Wallnau, have even

prophesied that Trump is God's man. But that has been a difficult idea to sell, especially to African-American or Hispanic Christian voters who view Trump as racist and anti-immigrant.

The new revelations of Trump's "locker room" comments about women have not helped his case. Many evangelicals have abandoned him over his insulting sexist language. The result is that the latest polls show Clinton leading Trump by 11 points. Barring some new scandal about Mrs. Clinton's honesty, her clandestine ties to Middle Eastern donors or a new batch of leaked emails, it is very likely she will win on Nov. 8.

Some Christians would like to crucify me for saying that. But even Fox News reported this week that Trump is losing—and some Fox pundits are already throwing in their chips and working on plans for a Republican victory in the 2020 race.

Here's my concern: How is the evangelical church going to respond if Mrs. Clinton wins? Hopefully we will allow the Holy Spirit to guide us, rather than our outrage. I would recommend the following:

1. Make a commitment to pray for your president. Many evangelicals who opposed President Obama's election refused to pray for him—ignoring our scriptural mandate to pray for "all who are in authority" (1 Tim. 2:2). I know white Christians who hate Obama, and that has grieved the Holy Spirit and fueled hostility between the White House and the Christian community. Just because you don't agree with a leader's policies doesn't excuse you from supporting him or her in prayer. If Mrs. Clinton wins, I intend to pray for her daily.

2. Don't demonize people who didn't vote your way. Hopefully voters will remain peaceful if Mr. Trump loses. The last thing America needs is more riots. But I know Christians who display a lawless spirit in their comments on social media. Some have even made threats to people who questioned Trump on issues—as

if God expects all Christians to march behind Trump in lockstep with no questions asked. We live in a democracy, and every believer has the freedom to vote according to his or her own conscience. We all need to take a chill pill and calm down. Some people need to take a break from Facebook if they can't control their rage.

3. Stand for religious freedom. Many Christians are legitimately concerned about whether liberal politicians will begin taking our rights away. I'll be the first to say I don't trust the people Mrs. Clinton has around her. Too many of her political cronies are linked to organizations like Planned Parenthood or to groups that want to weaken or abolish the influence of churches. An antichrist spirit is working overtime in Washington. That's why we must elect local and state leaders who will oppose this agenda.

4. Don't be a Chicken Little pessimist. The world will not end if Mrs. Clinton occupies the White House. She may become the president of the most powerful nation on Earth, but God is still on His throne. He is the One who said: "Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales" (Is. 40:15). Our God is sovereign, and He only *allows* people to be in power. He can remove any leader at any time if He wants to. You do not need to head for the hills or build a bunker full of survivalist supplies. View the world from God's big-picture perspective. And remember that the New Testament church thrived at a time when dictators ruled the Roman empire.

5. Work and pray for a spiritual awakening in this country. Ultimately, there is no president or political party that can solve America's problems. Neither Trump nor Clinton can do it. The only thing that will turn our nation around is a heaven-sent revival, and we are long overdue for another one. Intercessors have been filling up heaven's bowls of prayer for many years, and the next Great Awakening could happen during the next four years. I expect to see it soon.

If Mrs. Clinton wins the White House, I pray that her Methodist upbringing will cause her to call on Jesus Christ in the hour of our visitation. She, like all of us, needs His mercy. May God bless America. {eoa}

An Important Word Many Modern Christians Rarely Hear in a Sermon

God has had so much more for you. The apostle Paul told the Ephesians that God desired them to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The fact that we need to stay filled means it is possible for a Christian to run on empty only to scratch the surface of what God offers us. He does not want us to simply splash in the water or wade in the shallow end of His River. He wants to take us to the deepest depths. Ephesians 5:18 says: “Be *filled* with the Spirit” (emphasis added).

Some Christians are content to attend church one day a week for an hour and have a quick, 15-minute devotion a few days a week. Their concept of God is one-dimensional, and they really are not interested in spending too much time seeking more of Him. If that is where you are today, then you might as well put this down now because it will not appeal to you! But if you have said in your heart, “I know God has more for me. I want more of Him!” then you are well on your way to experiencing the Spirit-filled life.

This is intended to help you stoke the fires of personal revival so you not only will know God in a deeper way, but

also will make Him known to others. God is eager to give you more of His presence and power if you will ask Him for more. But as you ask, you must surrender every part of your life to Him.

People often ask me what the secret is to living a Spirit-filled life. I always respond with the same answer: *God cannot fill you with His Spirit if you are full of yourself.* If you want more of God, you must let go of some things, quit some things, repent of some things, and change many things. But I can promise you that if you adopt a posture of surrender, then you will be amazed by the way the Holy Spirit changes you! This is the real secret of the Christian life—it is not about changing yourself or working harder to please God. It is about yielding your life to God and allowing His Spirit to live inside you.

Today it has become more acceptable for Christians to raise their hands during worship services. We do this because the Bible instructs us to lift our hands to God when we sing or pray.

But have you ever wondered why we are instructed to raise our hands in worship? The church I grew up in as a child did not practice this. We kept our hands rigidly at our sides when we sang hymns. I never saw one person getting even slightly emotional or exuberant when he sang. So you can imagine my shock when I attended a Christian conference at age 18 and saw more than a thousand people in a hotel ballroom singing with their hands lifted. It was a strange sight to me—it looked as if a bank robbery was under way!

But I soon learned that raising hands was biblical. The Psalmist wrote: “Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You for help, when I lift up my hands toward your holy sanctuary” (Ps. 28:2), and “Lift up your hands to the sanctuary and bless the Lord” (Ps. 134:2). The apostle Paul instructed early Christians to take this same posture in

prayer when he told Timothy: “Therefore I want men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension” (1 Tim. 2:8).

Eventually I learned to lift my hands while worshipping God in church, and I also began to practice this in my personal prayer times. I started to realize that our posture in worship is supposed to be an outward sign of an inward attitude. God asks us to lift our hands to Him because it prods us toward full surrender.

When I raise my hands to Him, I am saying, essentially: “Lord, I belong to You. My life is Yours. I don’t want to run my life on my own—I want You to direct me. I don’t want to control my relationships, my money, my career path, or my future—I want to follow Your will and purpose. I am Yours, Lord.”

Can you say those words today? Does your life fully belong to God? This concept of personal surrender is what we call *consecration*. And that is a word most modern Christians rarely hear sermons about.

I want to ask you to do something very unusual right now. I want you to create your own moment of consecration—even before you finish reading this. Have you given your life fully to Jesus Christ? If not, you can pray right now and settle this.

Have you been living a halfhearted Christian life with one foot on God’s side and one foot in the world? Have you been in the driver’s seat of your life while Jesus sits on the passenger’s side? It is time for you to let Jesus take the wheel and have full ownership of your life. You can lift your hands to God right now and pray this prayer of consecration:

Jesus, I thank You that You died on the cross for me so that I could have a relationship with my heavenly Father. Thank You for paying for all my sins. I want to enjoy intimate fellowship with You, and I don’t want anything to separate me from Your love. As I lift my hands to You now, I declare that

You are my Lord and Savior. I want You to lead me, direct my choices, and give me the supernatural grace to please You in every way. I surrender my thoughts, my words, my attitudes, and my actions. Take my life and let it be a pleasing sacrifice to You! Amen. {eoa}

✘ *Adapted from Set My Heart on Fire by J. Lee Grady, copyright 2016, published by Charisma House. WARNING: Asking the Holy Spirit to ignite a fire in your heart can have serious consequences for you and the people around you. Learn how to fully surrender to the Holy Spirit's power so you can intimately know God and share His love with others. This book will help you reignite your passion for God and fulfill the plans He has for you. To order your copy [click here](#).*

Prayer Power for the Week of Oct. 16, 2016

This week as you totally surrender to the Lord, continue to pray that He have His way with you. Thank Him for the plan He has for your life and that He will direct each step you take. Thank Him that the safest place for you is in the center of His will. Remember those who were victimized by Hurricane Matthew and other natural disasters. Pray for first responders and their families as they serve those affected. Continue to ask God to help you make wise choices in the upcoming elections. Pray for revival to sweep across our nation and extend around the world (Ps. 28:2; Ps. 134:2; 1 Tim. 2:8).

How a Humble African Pastor Rocked My World

In Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world, Christians suffer from a severe lack of resources. But that

doesn't stop them from sharing their faith or planting churches. In fact, their wholehearted sacrifice sometimes puts America's well-funded evangelistic efforts to shame.

I witnessed this last week when I met Donald Kuyokwa, a 60-year-old Pentecostal Holiness pastor who has done more on his shoestring budget than some American denominations do in a year.

A retired teacher, Kuyokwa and his wife live on a \$200 monthly pension. THEY raised their eight children in a three-bedroom house with a corrugated iron roof and concrete floors. Their toilet is outside.

Kuyokwa's small congregation in the village of Misuku collects an average of 600 kwacha every week. That comes to about 83 cents. Yet the pastor has planted four branch churches in the past 16 years, relying mostly on the strength of his legs to walk long distances.

A few years ago the lanky pastor decided to target the village of Chikando, which is located in northern Malawi near the border of Tanzania. There are no roads to Chikando, only a rocky path through a dense forest. It takes Kuyokwa six hours to make the hike.

No one in Chikando had heard of Jesus when he visited the first time. The people worship spirits and rely on the superstitious magic of witchdoctors to help them grow rice. Young girls suffer horrible abuse and are forced to marry when they are barely teenagers. Polygamy is common.

But slowly people began to convert to Jesus as a result of the pastor's visits. Today the congregation has built a church with a grass roof. They use kerosene lamps during worship services because Chikando, like most of Malawi, doesn't have electricity.

"At first we were threatened by witches," Kuyokwa told me of

his missionary adventure. But today a growing group of first-generation believers worship Christ. They have renounced their animistic and polygamous traditions.

Pastor Kuyokwa walks to Chikando twice a month. In the past he rode a motorcycle, but it fell into disrepair. He can't ride a bicycle because the footpath has too many steep hills. So he buys cheap tennis shoes until they wear out, then he buys another pair.

He really doesn't mind the walk, but he's a bit nervous about the huge pythons that lurk in the forest. "I have heard that pythons have eaten people on that path," the pastor told me. "But God has always protected us."

This man's courage and commitment challenged me to the core after I heard his story. How could someone his age walk so far twice a month to reach a village that few people—even Malawians—know about? Why would a man care about a place that is so remote it has no telephone signal?

Kuyokwa says he gets his inspiration from the apostle Paul in the Bible. "Paul went to places where no one had taken the gospel," he says. "Evangelists don't visit my area. They only go to the big cities."

I was also struck by this man's bright smile. Supernatural joy obviously sustains him. He's one of the poorest people I've ever met, and he has never known suburban comforts such as air conditioning, indoor plumbing, hot showers or television. He doesn't even own a car.

But when I asked him what makes him happy, Kuyokwa didn't even pause to answer. He smiled again and said: "I'm looking beyond this life. I want to meet Jesus. That's what keeps me encouraged."

And what keeps him motivated to keep reaching these forgotten people? "No one had heard of Jesus in these areas before we

came, so it is always exciting when the people decide to follow Him," he says, noting that no white person has ever visited Chikando.

I had to do some serious soul-searching after my conversation with this humble hero. Could I smile like Pastor Kuyokwa if I didn't have access to hot water or a wi-fi signal? Would I spend my own money to evangelize a village if I only made \$200 a month?

Most of us have no idea how much the poorest Christians in the world sacrifice to obey the Great Commission. There are many anonymous champions like Pastor Kuyokwa walking miles through jungles and across mountains and deserts to take God's Word to the ends of the Earth. They throw their entire widow's mite into the offering basket for missions while we dig out a few dollars from our bank accounts.

Jesus said: "For to whom much is given, of him much shall be required" (Luke 12:48). Our blessings come with responsibility. We shouldn't feel guilty that we are blessed, but we can't forget that we have been blessed to be a blessing to others. Let's use our abundance not to enrich ourselves but to finish the task Jesus gave us. {eoa}

Have You Pinched Yourself Lately?

Last week I spent six days in Durban, South Africa, with a dynamic congregation called His Church. The members come from all kinds of backgrounds: White Afrikaan believers, black Zulus, Indians, and immigrants from Congo, Malawi and Mozambique. When we gathered last Sunday, it was obvious that

the intensity of these people's love for each other was only surpassed by their passion for praising God.

My eyes welled up with tears as I entered into worship that morning. I was witnessing a miracle. I had read enough about South Africa's painful history to know that blacks, whites and Indians have not always loved each other like this. In the days of apartheid, which was not dismantled until the 1990s, society was rigidly segregated—and so were South Africa's churches.

Now, the Holy Spirit has broken down those walls. I had to pinch myself to make sure this was not a dream.

I was in awe.

I thought to myself, *I actually get to see this! I am witnessing something that Christians in previous ages never even imagined.*

But as profound as that moment in Durban was for me, I should be pinching myself every day. If you are a Christian, you should be continually astounded by what God has done for you and how He is working around you. Consider just a few of his mind-boggling blessings:

1. You have been forgiven. If you're a Christian, you carry absolutely no guilt for your past sins. There are no marks on your record. Like a criminal who was released from death row, you have been declared not guilty, and you no longer face punishment. When you wake up every morning, you should pinch yourself as you realize how merciful God was to pardon you!

2. The Father has adopted you. Adoption is a foreign concept in many cultures. There is not even a word for adoption in some languages. Yet God loved you so much that He brought you into His family, called you His child and shared His eternal inheritance with you. Have you taken time to ponder what that means?

3. You can read and treasure God's Word. There are still many people today who do not have the Bible in their language. There are others who live in countries where Bibles are restricted. Do you realize how high a price was paid by previous generations so you could have the Bible now? Do you read it with a sense of grateful humility?

4. You have continual access to God's presence. In the days of the Old Covenant, people who worshipped the true God could only do it from a distance. They stood outside the door of the temple while priests made sacrifices for them. You should pinch yourself now! Because we live in the New Covenant era, every born-again Christian can approach the throne of God with confidence.

5. The Holy Spirit lives inside you. Before Jesus came, the Holy Spirit only "came upon" certain people—prophets, kings or special messengers. And even those people ran the risk of losing the Spirit's presence. But today, because of Jesus' atonement, He has caused His Spirit to abide in us forever. The Spirit lives in you 24/7, praying for you, refining you, refreshing you, empowering you and leading you deeper and deeper into God's truth. Shouldn't you be in awe of a God who does that?

6. You can enjoy God's house and His people. Jesus said when we gather together, His presence is there. He dwells in His congregation. Yet many Christians have given up on the church because they got hurt, or because pastors weren't perfect. But do you realize that the church is a miracle? It is the living body of Christ, and until He returns it will be the place where God accomplishes His purposes. Don't miss that profound blessing!

7. You get to experience the Holy Spirit moving all around you. When I preached in one Zulu congregation in South Africa last week, more than 30 people were baptized in the Holy Spirit. I had to pinch myself again when I witnessed this! The

Holy Spirit is moving in profound ways today. Churches are growing rapidly in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America, and many new churches are being planted in the United States. Instead of focusing on the negative trends you see in the media, you should stand in awe that we live in a day that ancient prophets longed to see.

8. You are going to heaven. No matter what pain, sickness, disappointment or trial you face during your short time on Earth, you are going to step into an eternity where there is no darkness, no death and no tears. When this life is over, you are going to live forever. It will take an eternity to comprehend a God who would treat us so mercifully.

Please take time to ponder God's marvelous, mind-blowing love. Pinch yourself and be reminded that the truths we read in the Bible are not just words on a page or dry doctrinal concepts. They are living realities that should shake you to the core and produce the purest form of wide-eyed, awestruck worship.

{eoa}

6 Lies the Devil Uses to Condemn You

I have a friend who is a gifted worship leader, a loving husband and an affectionate father. He's funny, smart, passionate about his faith and wholeheartedly committed to his church. People who know him say he's a model Christian.

But underneath this joyful exterior is a lot of pain. He struggles with depression, and then he condemns himself because Christians are supposed be happy. When emotional heaviness drags him to a low point, he knows how to put on his

convincing “church face.” Nobody knows the dark thoughts that torment him.

My friend is not unique in this struggle. Countless Christians I know engage in a daily battle with the enemy of their souls. And Satan is relentless in his attacks. He is described in Scripture as “the father of lies” (John 8:44), and the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10). He wags his bony finger of condemnation and tries to deny us access to the Lord’s love and mercy.

You will never find victory in the Christian life if you don’t expose, confront and renounce Satan’s groundless accusations. If the devil has been replaying his lies in your head, you must hit the “EJECT” button now! The spirit of condemnation always makes these outrageous statements listed below:

1. Jesus can’t use you if you have a weakness. The devil is always ready to remind you that you are fat, unattractive, prone to depression or addiction, sexually broken, traumatized or fearful. But guess what? The people God used in the Bible were far from perfect. Every Christian has flaws. God made us weak so we would find our strength in Him. If you were perfect, you wouldn’t need a Savior.

2. You should give up if you constantly struggle with sin. Many Christian men I know feel spiritually disqualified because they haven’t totally overcome their addiction to porn. They feel bad for being tempted, and then if they stumble, they feel defeated for weeks. This can lead to discouragement and despair—and then they lose all hope of overcoming the habit. The secret to victory is not sweating and straining to resist; instead we must meditate on the love of God and allow His Spirit to rise up inside of us to override sin’s power. If you are struggling, do not give up! The Spirit will help you!

3. God’s promises are for other people, not you. Do you feel God’s goodness always bypasses you? You may have an orphan

spirit. Many Christians don't believe the heavenly Father loves and accepts them. They may have been rejected by their parents, or lacked parental affirmation. Life's pain can block our ability to see God as He is. But if you have given your life to Christ, the Father has adopted you, He delights in you, and He has given you full inheritance rights. His promises are yours to claim!

4. God is always mad at you. Many believers base their relationship with God on performance. If they read their Bibles and pray every day, they feel they are on God's "good side"; if they miss their morning devotions they assume He is upset. The devil loves this legalistic mindset because it prevents us from experiencing God's grace. You must come to understand that the Father does not love you for what you do; He loves you because you are His child. He is slow to anger and full of lovingkindness. When you allow this truth to soak your soul, you will enjoy true intimacy with Jesus.

5. Your past mistakes disqualified you. I met a Christian man recently who loves God with all His heart, yet he sits in the back of his church every week feeling inferior because he committed adultery 35 years ago. His wife forgave him, and he repented for his sin, but he assumes he wears a scarlet letter around his neck and that he has been banished to a spiritual wasteland. That's a lie! If you have repented for your sin, God has forgiven and forgotten it! Nothing can separate you from God's love—not abortion, divorce, sexual sin or any other unspeakable mistake you regret.

6. You have committed the unpardonable sin. I've counseled several troubled Christians who read Matthew 12:31-32 and decided that they had blasphemed the Holy Spirit and therefore could not be saved. This is a ridiculous notion, because a person who committed the unpardonable sin mentioned in this passage wouldn't care if they had blasphemed. If you are worried that you did this, then you haven't! Your heart is turned toward God and you want to please Him. That alone is

evidence of His grace working in you.

Romans 8:1 is one of the most liberating verses in the Bible. It declares: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” This promise is for you! Jesus took your punishment and removed all guilt from your record. And His blood is more powerful than any lie Satan can throw at you.

You are now qualified. Your past is irrelevant. You don't have to work to win God's love. When the Father looks at you, He doesn't see your past sins or present struggles; He sees a robe of righteousness. Renounce the devil's lies and believe God's promise. He loves you with an indescribable, unfathomable, unconditional love. {eo}

6 Warning Signs of Spiritual Danger

A desperate friend recently contacted me because he was worried that his son might be under the influence of a Christian ministry with questionable doctrines. The leader of the ministry preaches that any church that doesn't experience regular healings isn't following the true Jesus—and he suggests that only his small congregation has an inside track with God. Thankfully, my friend's son discerned something was off track.

Satan loves to pull Christians into unhealthy extremes. And immature Christian leaders sometimes allow youthful pride, greed or insecurity to suck them into toxic spirituality. The result is always a trail of wounded people. In my years of ministry, I've learned there are several clear signs that a

ministry has veered away from the truth and into deception. Here are the most obvious:

1. Lack of spiritual accountability. Healthy leaders know they need to surround themselves with mentors and advisers who can question them if they step out of line. Proverbs 11:14 says: "In the multitude of counselors there is safety." But if you are following a teacher, prophet or apostle who has not submitted himself to any form of accountability, you are asking for trouble. Never align yourself with a Lone Ranger, no matter how fiery his sermons are. He will likely lead you off a cliff.

2. Overemphasis on money. You'd think we would have learned this by now, after so many American charlatans have conned people out of their life savings to build their mansions. But the charismatic church today is still vulnerable to the extremes of financial shenanigans. Godly leaders always call people to fund the work of the church and gospel outreach; unhealthy leaders, on the contrary, manipulate people in order to line their own pockets. Don't be charmed when a preacher makes outlandish promises about what will happen if you give to him.

3. An elitist attitude. All believers in Jesus are part of the body of Christ. Yet Christians who experience certain gifts or manifestations of the Holy Spirit are sometimes tempted to think they are superior. If they aren't careful, this subtle spiritual pride can morph into a dangerous elitism. Suddenly they are God's favorites, with special access to revelation that no one else knows and authority that no one else has.

Some ministries today claim to have inside information about end-times prophecy and the return of Jesus. In some cases they convince people to store up food and even guns to prepare for Armageddon. Back in the 1980s, a preacher named Charles Meade convinced many people to follow him to Florida, where his church taught that only those who aligned themselves with

Meade's group would survive the last days. Don't let anyone suck you into this kind of cultic mindset.

4. A spirit of control among followers. A mature leader knows the members of his church don't belong to him. But there are insecure and untrained pastors who use manipulation and threats to keep their members loyal. True pastors don't have to constantly teach on spiritual authority to win their support of their flocks; but a controlling leader constantly emphasizes that he is in charge, and he demands total submission. This mindset can lead to serious spiritual abuse.

5. Constant talk of miracles with no documentation. There is a great hunger today in the body of Christ for the miraculous—and faith is rising for healing, prophecy and the full manifestation of the Holy Spirit's power. But in the rush to see God's power displayed, some people fall into the trap of hyping, sensationalizing or even faking miracles to get attention. This never bears good fruit.

In 2008, thousands of people traveled to Lakeland, Florida, to witness a "revival" that was supposedly marked by nightly miracles. Yet many of the healings (and even resurrections) that were announced from the pulpit were never verified—and the whole thing abruptly ended when the evangelist leading those meetings admitted to adultery. I hope we learned our lesson from Lakeland. God help us from ever repeating that tragedy.

6. Strange revelations that lack biblical basis. The apostle Paul warned us long ago that waves of deception would affect the church. "For the time will come when people will no longer endure sound doctrine ... they will turn their ears away from the truth ... " (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Never follow a preacher who claims "inside information" from God that no one else knows. Don't be mesmerized by his teachings—even if he claims that an angel gave him this information, or that he received it in a supernatural vision.

The test of truth is not how spooky spiritual something sounds, but whether it is in line with God's Word. Many false prophets can say, "God showed me this," but they are lying if their message contradicts Scripture. If something sounds really off when you hear it, don't ignore your gut feelings.

Don't be deceived. If you are a follower of Christ, you have been equipped with an internal alarm system that will warn you about any unhealthy teaching or ministry. Listen to the Holy Spirit, who is called the Spirit of truth (John 16:13). He can give you the discernment to know the difference between truth and error. {eoa}

8 Ways to Recharge Your Prayer Life

How would you grade your prayer life these days? Are your spiritual batteries drained? Do you need a recharge? It's easy for prayer to become monotonous and predictable, but the Holy Spirit is always willing to offer a jumpstart. Even if you feel like a failure in this area, He can turn a spiritual wimp into a warrior.

After a recent string of answered prayers, I've discovered a fresh excitement about my own prayer journey. I've also realized that if I want to mature spiritually, my prayer life must go to a higher level. Here are eight ways you can turn up the heat:

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

Don't act like a slave who begs for things. You are His heir, and He has given you His royal robe, His signet ring and His estate. He wants to give you the kingdom. God tells us to "draw near *with confidence* to the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16). You can ask Him for anything.

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

3. Ask big. We can limit what God wants to do in the Earth by praying in a puny way. Why would we settle for less when God can do the impossible? Elisha boldly asked his mentor, Elijah, for a double portion of the Holy Spirit—and God gave him that mantle. God may want to double what you are requesting of Him. The Lord said: "Ask of Me, and I will give the nations for Your inheritance..." (Ps. 2:8). His vision for your life is far greater than what you supposed.

4. Become more aggressive. Status quo prayers won't be enough in seasons of spiritual battle. There is a time to go to war in the spirit, and this will require a militant attitude toward the enemy. When Elisha told King Joash to take arrows and strike the ground, in preparation for a battle, the king halfheartedly hit the ground only three times. Elisha said: "You should have struck five or six times, then you would have struck Aram until you would have destroyed it" (2 Kings 13:18-19). Too often we are satisfied with small victories because we didn't pray with enough intensity. Your zeal will often determine your outcome.

5. Groan when necessary. People who have allowed God to use them in intercession know that certain situations require travail. This is not easy prayer—it is the spiritual equivalent of childbirth! When Elijah prayed for rain to end a seven-year drought, the Bible says he “crouched down upon the earth and put his face between his knees” (1 Kings 18:42). If you really want a crime wave to end in your city, or a nation to find Jesus, or your own children to be saved, let the Spirit pray through you in a deeper, messier and noisier way.

6. Combine fasting with prayer. Fasting is not a way to bribe God. You do not need to forfeit food to get His attention. But fasting helps you focus on the Lord—and it can intensify prayer power. There are certain spiritual obstacles that need an extra push. When speaking of a demon that needed to be cast out, Jesus told His disciples: “But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matt. 17:21). If you are hitting a spiritual brick wall, it may be time to fast.

7. Do a night watch. I am not the kind of guy who typically gets up at 3 a.m. to pray. I like my sleep! But there are moments in our lives when the Lord may woo you to spend time with Him in the night hours. In Song of Solomon, the bride hears her Beloved calling her to get out of bed (5:2-6) and she doesn't respond quickly enough. Many of us are too distracted by the busyness of life to hear God call us to a season of prayer. Yet the Lord is looking for people who will carry His burdens. Will you let Him pray through you?

8. Expect God to fill in the gaps. I used to fight discouragement about my prayer life because I didn't feel my prayers were powerful enough. But then I read Ephesians 3:20 in a new light. It says God is able “to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20). That means after I pray, God adds His own miraculous ingredient. My prayers may seem feeble and flawed, but He is able to amplify them. Like the tiny lunch of five loaves and two fish, Jesus can take something insignificant and feed a multitude. When you pray,

expect Him to increase the impact. What you whisper in your closet can shake the world. {eoa}

Don't Get Ripped Off by These Crazy Email Scams

I'm sure you are familiar with the classic email scam from the "Nigerian widow." The message from "Mrs. Obasanjo" informs us that her late husband, a military general, left behind an estate of \$12 million, and she wants to give it to you! But the money is frozen in a Swiss bank account, so she's asking you to wire her \$1,500 to "unlock" the funds.

Few people today would be foolish enough to fall for that tired trick. But the internet has matured, and thieves have grown more sophisticated in their greedy pursuits. Today, a whole new generation of con artists has emerged, and some of them are specifically targeting Christians.

I don't want you to be a victim! So watch out for these schemes:

1. The too-good-to-be-true speaking invitation. Last week a friend of mine who pastors in Canada received an invitation to speak at a church in England. It seemed like a great opportunity to minister overseas, but there was one catch: The church explained that my friend would need to send funds up front to pay "permit fees" that are required by the British government for foreigners.

Such permits are required, and there is indeed a fee. But in this case, the "church" issuing the invitation was involved in an elaborate religious con job. Thankfully my Canadian friend

didn't fall for it, but many innocent pastors have. As soon as they sent the funds by Western Union—the equivalent of about \$775 U.S.—the church pocketed the money, and there was no event and no honorarium for the speaker as promised.

2. The pay-up-front gospel crusade. The scheme goes like this: You get an email from a pastor in a developing country who begs you to help him reach his village for Christ. You begin a long-distance relationship, and he sends photos of his evangelistic meetings. Then he invites you to come to his country, and he promises you will speak to multitudes.

After more correspondence, you agree on dates and he sends you a budget for the six-day event, which includes venue rental fees and the cost for meals for participants. And then he asks for an advance deposit on these fees, which you wire to his bank. Once the money is transferred, the “pastor” vanishes. (Cue the song, “Take the Money and Run.”)

3. The hurry-up-and-send-relief crisis. Within hours of a legitimate international crisis—an earthquake, hurricane or famine—you are contacted by an organization you've never heard of, asking you to send donations immediately. If you don't know the name of the charity, don't click on the “Donate” button—it could actually be a phishing scam designed to steal your cyber identity. First, go to your browser and see if the charity actually exists. Better yet, give your donation to a group you know and trust.

4. The wealth-laid-up-for-the-righteous investment opportunity. A few years ago, a supposed Christian businessman convinced a group of ministers to invest in an elaborate plan to mine salt from the Dead Sea in Israel and turn it into a more valuable mineral. The plan was shrouded in secrecy and super-spiritual lingo.

The spokesman for the company said only an elite few people were being offered the chance to profit from this amazing

venture. Prospective investors were told that Satan was fighting the operation because it would unleash millions of dollars of the world's money into the hands of Christians. The people who bought into this plan were convinced it would change the world—and make them independently wealthy.

Nothing ever comes of these scams. The people who invest are usually too embarrassed to report criminal behavior once they realize they've been bamboozled. But every year, tons of God's money is flushed down the drain because a scam artist figured out how to use religious lingo to deceive people who should have the discernment to know better.

Jesus warned us long ago: "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15). Things are not always as they seem. The church has been infiltrated by charlatans who pretend to be children of God but are actually agents of the devil.

How can you protect yourself? Read every email from a stranger with a skeptical eye. Do your homework and always scrutinize any financial plan carefully before investing. Be cautious when building relationships overseas, and never trust someone who asks you to send funds to them in order for you to eventually strike it rich.

Finally: If you want to have keen discernment, make sure you crucify your greed. It is usually a lust for money that causes people to fall for get-rich-quick schemes that sound too good to be true. Don't let the love of money pull you into a trap.
{eoa}

Finding Grace in Your Season of Transition

This week my wife and I packed our belongings and made the biggest move of our lives. After living in the Orlando area for 24 years we pulled up our roots and relocated to Georgia. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done because I'm a sentimental guy who gets very attached to people and places. Yet I found extra grace for this transition because I knew I was following the Holy Spirit's leading.

Counselors say relocation is one of the most stressful things in life—ranking right up there with the death of a loved one. It weighs us down because it's a huge combination of stressors—selling a house, buying or renting a new house, hiring movers, leaving friends and stepping into the dark unknown. Not fun stuff, in my opinion.

Yet many people who are reading this are about to step into a transition—or are already in the middle of one. I have taken much comfort from the fact that the Bible is full of people who were called by God to move. Abraham, the father of our faith, began his spiritual odyssey when the Lord said: “Go from your country, your family, and your father's house, to the land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1).

Think about it. When God wanted to do something really important in the Earth, like start a new nation that would serve Him, it began with a relocation. Spiritual blessings often are not realized until someone moves! Moses had to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. David had to move to Jerusalem. And Jesus' last words to His disciples were about moving to foreign countries.

If you are in a season of transition, you will want to consider these guidelines:

1. Have courage. When Joshua was preparing to relocate the people of Israel to Canaan, God said three times: “Be strong and courageous” (Josh. 1:6,7,9). Moving requires a leap of faith, and doubters always get cold feet. Has God given you a big promise about the land you are about to possess? Don’t be surprised if the devil tries to make you fearful. Take a deep breath, resist fear and forge ahead.

2. Take one step at a time. Moving isn’t just one decision, it’s a tangled mess of many decisions that can overwhelm you. You don’t have to handle everything at once. The Bible says you are not on your own; you don’t have to figure out your relocation plan by yourself. You have a Shepherd, and He is good. He leads you “beside quiet waters” and He guides you “in paths of righteousness” (Ps. 23:2-3). Trust your Shepherd’s leading. He will make your transition peaceful; and He promises that “the steps of a good man are made firm by the Lord” (Ps. 37:23).

3. Let go of the old. When God wanted to bless Naomi, He told her to leave the forsaken land of Moab and move to Bethlehem. Her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth pledged to go with her, but her other daughter-in-law, Orpah, stayed behind. Orpah couldn’t tear herself away from her culture and her lifestyle, even though God was visiting His people in Bethlehem (Ruth 1:14-16).

Sometimes when God calls us to a new place in the Spirit, we discover that we are hindered by many soulish distractions. You must love Jesus more than you love your comfort zone. It’s good to have roots in a place, but you must never let those roots become stronger than your willingness to follow God anywhere.

4. Cry if you need to. A few days ago, after we finished loading every piece of furniture on our moving van, I walked through my house in Florida one last time and locked the front door. Then I sobbed in my car as I remembered playing with my

young daughters in the back yard, hanging Christmas decorations on the shrubs and burying our family dog in the back yard. It's totally normal to feel sadness when we move. The best way to process your feelings is to let the tears flow.

5. Be open to God's detours. One important lesson I learned in my transition is that we must never lock ourselves into "our" plan. You may sense the Lord leading you to leave where you are, but when you begin moving to your new destination God may redirect you. The apostle Paul was heading to Rome to preach the gospel, but a shipwreck took him to the island of Malta—and thus he led a successful but unscheduled revival. Don't be so headstrong about your destination that God can't gently nudge you 15 degrees to the right, or take you on an unexpected detour.

6. Expect miracles along the way. When I knew for sure God was calling my wife and I to Georgia, we asked our friends to begin praying with us. I shared with them seven specific prayer requests, and the first item on the list was: "Quick sale of our house." Guess what? Our house sold in less than 24 hours—to the first people who walked in the door! Since then, all but the last request on my list has been answered.

Moving can seem like a chore, but if you invite God into the process it becomes a thrilling adventure. When the Holy Spirit says go, He goes with you. When He calls you to leave the old and step into the new, He pushes you to a new spiritual level.

{eoa}