

Why I'm Not Cheering for Floyd Mayweather

It's official: Boxing champion Floyd Mayweather Jr. is the highest-paid sportsman in the world. He took home \$180 million last weekend when he won the so-called Fight of the Century against Filipino boxer Manny Pacquiao in Las Vegas.

But the question remains: Why was Mayweather even allowed in the ring when he is a convicted abuser of women?

The 16,800-seat MGM Grand Garden Arena was sold out for the May 2 fight, and some people reportedly paid \$350,000 for a ringside seat. Hundreds of thousands more fans paid \$100 each to see the contest from their homes on pay-per-view. And no one knows how much money was made on legal and illegal betting on the fight.

It was the most lucrative boxing match in history—and it will also be remembered for being a shameful testimony of just how low America can go.

It was revolting not only because Mayweather is a known abuser of women, but also because leaders in media, entertainment and sports didn't penalize him for his crimes. Instead of kicking him out of the boxing ring, they rewarded his sick behavior with millions in cash and a \$1 million belt covered with 3,017 emeralds.

Mayweather has been arrested numerous times for battering and abusing women, including his former girlfriend, Josie Harris, who is the mother of three of his four children. In one incident, Mayweather threw Harris to the ground, kicked and punched her and pulled her hair—and their son, Koraun, witnessed it all and documented it for the police.

Mayweather has served jail time, once after he tried to break

Harris' arm and threatened to kill her. He also allegedly pointed a gun at his former fiancée, Shantel Jackson. He was last released from jail in 2012.

Yet today the prizefighter is riding high, celebrated by adoring fans who are willing to bankroll his lifestyle of domestic violence. Shame on any American company for supporting last week's fight with advertising dollars. Shame on CBS, which owns the Showtime network, for airing the fight and profiting from Mayweather's abuse. Shame on Hollywood stars who claim they are against domestic violence yet bought front-row seats for this fight.

I don't care how famous Mayweather is, how big his Las Vegas mansion is or how many Rolls Royces he owns. Shame on anyone who paid to watch a boxer who has used his fists to hit women.

It's tragic that our nation is willing to ignore the crime of domestic violence just to rake in lots of money from a boxing match.

In my travels I talk with women all over this country who have suffered painful abuse from their husbands or boyfriends. Many of them overlook the violence, or even cover up their husbands' behavior, so they can appear to be "submissive" wives. (This happens in more Christian homes than we want to admit.) In other cases women fear retribution or financial loss, so they tolerate abuse and even brainwash themselves into thinking violence in the home is something to tolerate.

Mayweather's girlfriend, Josie Harris, put up with abuse for years. But in 2014 she woke up to realize that her life was in danger. She told a reporter that Mayweather monitored her every move, picked out what clothes she could wear, screened her phone calls and held her as a prisoner in her own house.

And sometimes his famous punches were aimed in her direction.

She told *USA Today*: "I was a battered woman. ... But I didn't

understand what a battered woman was at the time. Now I know I was in a very hostile, dysfunctional relationship and a victim of domestic violence.”

I have been involved in confronting the sin of abuse for many years, and I’ve learned that the cycle of pain won’t stop if women aren’t willing to come forward and challenge their husbands or partners. But they cannot do this alone. We also must have the courage to stand up to abusers and call out their bad behavior.

It’s too bad the greedy American sports industry didn’t have the moral courage to tell Mayweather he wasn’t eligible to compete.

When asked about NFL star Ray Rice, who was caught on video knocking his wife unconscious in an elevator in 2014, Mayweather dismissed the incident and said violence is common in many homes. When questioned by a reporter about his own domestic abuse violations, Mayweather downplayed the evidence and said: “Only God can judge me.”

I hope Mayweather is ready for a knockout, because God is a defender of the abused, and He is certainly no fan of bullies.

J. Lee Grady is the former editor of Charisma and the director of *The Mordecai Project*. You can follow him on Twitter @leegrady. His work to protect women from abuse was featured in the March issue of Charisma. Check out his ministry at themordecainproject.org.

Bruce Jenner, the Bible and the Transgender Debate

Olympic track and field star Bruce Jenner was named Male Athlete of the Year in 1976, and soon he appeared on the front of the Wheaties cereal box. He was the poster boy for American masculinity. The 6-foot-2-inch-tall decathlon champion was even considered for the title role in the 1978 *Superman* movie because of his muscles and agility.

But last week Jenner dropped the proverbial bomb when he admitted to a huge TV audience that he is on a transgender journey. In his April 24 interview with ABC's Diane Sawyer, he said he had experimented with cross-dressing as a child—and later when he was married to his three wives. Sometimes referring to himself as “he,” and sometimes “her,” the 65-year-old Jenner says he now realizes he has “the soul of a female.”

“My brain is much more female than it is male,” Jenner said. “It’s hard for people to understand that, but that’s what my soul is.”

Tabloid publications have been speculating about Jenner’s struggle for years, since he began starring in the reality show *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*. Although Jenner says he still has “all the male parts,” he wears his long hair in a ponytail, he’s had breast implants and other plastic surgery, he sports a French manicure and he’s undergoing hormone injections.

The public reaction to Jenner’s announcement was largely supportive—especially from American celebrities. Oprah Winfrey tweeted: “All of us deserve to be loved for who we are.” Talk show host Ellen DeGeneres said Jenner’s public admission was “saving lives and opening minds tonight.” Pop singer Lady Gaga

simply tweeted: “Bravery.”

Then, just hours after the ABC interview aired, an Australian radio station started the #PaintYourNailsForBruce hashtag—urging both men and women to get colorful manicures to show their support for Jenner. The message was clear: Don’t judge Bruce Jenner. Accept his choices. Be tolerant.

I would never bash Jenner or any other person who wrestles with their gender identity. Every human being deserves love and respect, and Christians—of all people—should be ready to offer support for anybody who struggles with emotional problems. But because I am a Christian, I can’t just accept someone’s behavior if it is destructive or unhealthy for them. To affirm a person’s wrong choices just to make them feel accepted is *not* love.

If a person with gender confusion came to me for help, I would have to point out these important truths:

1. Gender is part of God’s sacred creation. Gender is God’s idea. Genesis 1:27 says: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” My gender is part of my created identity; it is God’s plan for my life. It is not fluid or changeable. It is fixed. Just as a dog cannot be changed into a cat or a fish into a bird, a man cannot be changed into a woman, or vice versa, because gender is a fundamental aspect of creation.

2. Satan is the cause of gender confusion. Because of the entrance of sin into the world, human beings struggle with all kinds of mental, emotional, physical and sexual brokenness. The world is full of abuse, violence, fear, ignorance, sickness, poverty and addiction—and all of this is fueled by the devil, whom Jesus called “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Sin began when the devil went to Eve and questioned God’s truth (see Gen. 3:1). Satan even questioned Jesus’ identity as God’s Son (Matt. 4:1-11).

As long as we are under the influence of sin, our minds are “darkened” (Eph. 4:18). Paul went so far as to say that the devil “has blinded the minds of the unbelieving” (2 Cor. 4:4). A person who is apart from Christ can be tormented by all kinds of evil, degrading thoughts. The devil does this because he hates people—because we are made in God’s image.

3. Sex change surgery does not fix a person’s gender confusion. Author Walt Heyer had a sex change operation in the 1980s and lived as a woman for eight years, but he later realized that he had made a mistake. He now has a website, *sexchangeregret.com*, where he writes: “Eventually, I gathered the courage to admit that the surgery had fixed nothing—it only masked and exacerbated deeper psychological problems.” Heyer points out that studies performed on 500 transsexuals proved that surgeries and hormone therapy did not cure these people of their confusion.

4. Christ offers healing from gender confusion. When the apostle Paul went to the Greek city of Corinth he preached to people from all kinds of sinful backgrounds, and many of them embraced faith in Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul mentions fornicators (unmarried people having sex with each other), adulterers, idolaters, homosexuals and “effeminate” men—that is, men who dressed as women to engage in prostitution. Yet Paul says these people were set free from these sinful lifestyles after they believed in Christ.

Paul did not promote tolerance or acceptance of gender confusion; instead he offered the hope of healing. Isn’t that a better expression of love? While today’s culture pretends to care about people like Bruce Jenner by putting a sympathetic Band-Aid on this problem, Jesus can go to the root and totally heal it.

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A Practical Checklist for Your Next Mission Trip

Sixteen years ago I prayed a dangerous prayer. I said to God: “Here am I, send me”—and I knew He would take me seriously.

Since that holy moment, I have traveled to preach in 29 countries, and I will leave tomorrow for Iceland. Last year I slept in 58 different beds, some of them extremely uncomfortable, because I surrendered to the call to share Jesus in other cultures.

Missionary travel is biblical. Ever since the Lord called Abraham to leave Ur, God’s followers have been hitting the road to carry His message to foreign places. (And many, like the prophet Jonah, have resisted the call!) The early disciples carried the gospel from Israel to the entire known world in the first century without the benefit of airplanes, smartphones and credit cards. So today we have no excuse when it comes to fulfilling this amazing global assignment.

Perhaps you are preparing to go on a short-term missionary journey this summer. A mission trip can change your life, but it can also turn into a disaster if you fail to plan. Here are a few reminders to help you prepare.

1. Don’t go alone. Jesus sent His disciples two by two. It is best to go on mission trips in teams. There have been times when I flew alone and met other people in the country I was visiting. But my preference is to always have companions with me. And a mission trip is a perfect opportunity to take

disciples with you so you can mentor them along the way.

2. Be sure you are covered in prayer. It's vital that you have intercessory support while you are on a missionary trip. I always send a prayer letter to my supporters before I leave, and I give them specific information so they can pray effectively. It's also a great idea to have your pastor and other church leaders lay hands on you and pray before you depart. You will feel the support!

3. Get the right documents. You can't travel outside the United States without a valid passport. You may also need a visa in your passport depending on what country you are visiting. To find out if you need a visa, check out the country's embassy website. In some cases you will have to mail your passport to the embassy with a fee. In other cases you simply need to pay a fee at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

4. Get your shots! Some countries require travelers to have certain immunizations. Go to the U.S. State Department website to find out if you need these. It's cheaper to get these at your local health department than from a doctor. You will receive a yellow health card with official documentation of your shots. Keep this card with your passport on all trips. Do not be foolish and presume that God will automatically heal you if you didn't protect yourself from disease.

5. Pack wisely. Find out from your hosts how they want you to dress. In some countries preachers are expected to wear suits even though it is extremely hot! Don't assume you can dress however you want. Be sensitive. You should dress in a way that honors your hosts. (In some countries it is considered inappropriate for men to wear shorts, for example, or for women to wear pants.) Also, be sure you research what type of electrical plugs are used in the country you are visiting. If you don't take the right plug adapter, you will not be able to recharge your phone or other devices.

6. Take the right amount of cash. I avoid using my credit card in developing countries because some vendors will steal your number. Determine before you leave how much cash you need, and store the cash in a concealed pocket. Go to a bank to exchange currency. It is unwise to use currency vendors on the street unless your host is with you and he feels the rate is good.

7. Take interest in the people you are ministering to. Mission work is incarnational. To be effective you must identify with the people. Eat with them, laugh with them, be affectionate with them and serve them. Set your cultural differences aside and be relevant. I do this by learning some phrases in the local language, learning facts about the country and eating the local food. I also try to build lifelong relationships and I stay in touch with the people after I get home. Never engage in “hit and run” missions. Stay connected!

8. Learn to use a translator. If the people you are visiting do not speak English, you must depend on a good translator when you teach or preach. Usually your hosts will provide the translator—but you should make sure this has been arranged before you leave. You may have the best translator in the country, but if you don't know how to speak properly using a translator the people will not benefit from your message. Speak in short, clear phrases or complete sentences, and then let the translator translate. Don't use slang or American expressions. And don't scream or be theatrical. Remember: The people need to hear your translator, not you.

9. Prepare your heart to be a servant. The last thing the world needs is a spoiled American traveling to a developing country. We are called to deny ourselves as we follow Christ. Don't make demands when you are with your hosts. It is wonderful if you have hot water in your shower, Internet access or a nice bed. But don't go expecting to be comfortable, and don't complain about anything when you are there. You might suffer a little from heat, mosquitoes, broken toilets, thin walls, noisy roosters, leaky roofs or gross

food, but I promise those inconveniences won't kill you.

10. Be flexible! In most foreign countries, especially in the developing world, people think differently about time. Church meetings start late. Schedules change. Transportation is unreliable. Electricity goes out often. It is easy to get frustrated if you are used to American efficiency. You must learn to relax and rest in God. Your hosts may tell you the meeting starts at 9 a.m., but don't get upset if everything is two hours late. This is the reality of the mission field. Remember the old adage: "Blessed are the flexible, for they will not be broken."

And finally, when you return from your trip, it's important to debrief. Don't just jump back to your office job. Take some time to process. I minister to many abused people when I travel, and I hear a lot of horror stories. I also see a lot of poverty—and this can weigh heavy on my heart. It's important to talk to some friends about what you experienced after you return.

Don't just bottle up your feelings. What did you learn? Share what troubled you. Cry if you need to. Be open and let God speak to you about what you saw during your trip. He will expand your compassion so He can love a broken world through you.

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Don't Get Caught Up in Last Days Hysteria

Everywhere I go today I meet Christians who are wringing their hands and fretting about how dark the world has become. Some are conspiracy theorists who say the world's economy is controlled by dark forces. Others are convinced that recent astronomical phenomena signal the end of the world, and they are stocking their garages with food to prepare for Armageddon. If I suggest that Jesus might want to pour out the Holy Spirit in a fresh way on this generation, some people get angry. They want God to hurry up and judge America!

Why so much pessimism? It's partly because many people have exchanged their passion for God for a misguided fascination with doomsday eschatology. They latch onto Bible prophecy "experts" who make a living speculating about things nobody knows for sure. And this sky-is-falling mindset never produces good fruit. Here are four reasons we should avoid an unhealthy overemphasis on the end times:

1. It's distracting. Nowhere does the Bible give us permission to speculate about when Jesus will return or when the world will end. He gave us one major focus: To reach everybody with the gospel. Evangelism should be our obsession. The healthiest churches I know are those that are winning the lost, discipling new converts and investing their people and money in reaching nations.

Churches that become consumed with eschatology drift into weirdness, and they eventually lose sight of the Great Commission. Jesus' last words to His followers were clear: "You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Yet when He ascended into heaven, the angels rebuked the disciples because they were staring into the clouds. They

said: “Why do you stand looking into the sky?” (Acts 1:11). In essence they were saying: “Don’t sit around and wait for Jesus to return. Get busy doing what He told you to do.”

2. It’s depressing. I don’t go to church to hear one person’s opinions about Islamic terrorists, why weather patterns are changing, or how European bankers plan to manipulate the world economy. Why focus on the negative? Do we believe in the lordship of Christ, or not? I have read the book of Revelation, and it ends with Jesus on the throne! He is the victor—no matter what men conspire to do or how hard they fight against His authority.

Churches that only talk about blood moons, wars in the Middle East, the Antichrist or the date for America’s demise leave no room for the joy of the Lord or the hope of His ultimate triumph. My Bible says we have a future and a hope. We have the promise that, as the gospel is preached, “all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord” (Num. 14:21). Why should we be pessimistic about the future when we know Christ will overcome all His enemies? People who focus on doomsday theology are killjoys who derive morbid pleasure from spreading fear and anxiety. A gospel without hope is not the gospel!

3. It’s deceptive. A group known as the Adventists predicted that Jesus would return to earth in 1874. When this didn’t happen, the group’s leaders covered their error by suggesting that Jesus appeared “invisibly” on that date. A theology developed around these ideas that is still accepted by Seventh-day Adventists. In the 1970s, when Americans were so worried about gas shortages and war in Israel, author Hal Lindsey sold millions of copies of his book *The Late, Great Planet Earth*—and he predicted the world would end in a few years. Many other Christians have made similar predictions—such as the Y2K scare in 1999 or Harold Camping’s infamous warning that the world would end on May 21, 2011.

We have no business setting dates for the end of the world. God alone sets His timetable.

Jesus said of His return: "Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 24:36). If anyone claims to know when the world will end, you can be sure he is a false prophet. What we should be telling people is that Jesus died for them, and that they have been given a chance to receive His forgiveness while they are on this side of eternity.

4. It's divisive. Christians have different views of the end times. Some are post-millennialists while others emphasize the Rapture. This is not something we should be arguing about because no one has the full revelation of the future. I tell people I am a "pan-millennialist." I believe it will all "pan out" in the end! I am not as concerned about how the last days will unfold as I am about how many people I can take to heaven with me. We should all be united in our desire to share Christ with others.

I know Jesus will return one day, and it gives me great comfort to know that all heaven will say of Him: "The kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Let's live our lives as if He were coming back today, but let's work as if He weren't coming for 100 years. Let's stop hoping for judgment and instead pray for mercy for our wayward country. Let's stop being so negative and instead show people the supernatural joy that only Jesus gives.

*Please consider donating to **The Mordecai Project**, India and help put a stop to the horrific atrocities these women face daily. To donate, visit christianlifemissions.org.*

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the March issue of Charisma. Check out his ministry at themordecaiproject.org.

Pepperoni, Cheese and the Gay Marriage Debate

I don't own a pizza restaurant, and pizza is not currently allowed in my low-carb diet. But the burning question I'm asking myself in light of recent events in the United States is: "If a gay couple came into my shop and asked me to deliver 12 pepperoni-and-mushroom pizzas to their wedding, would I fill their order?"

I don't have to think too hard to answer that. Of course I would serve the pizza.

You probably asked yourself this same question last week when our nation was in an uproar over Indiana's proposed Religious Freedom Restoration Act. (You might have also wondered, like I did, *Who would order pizza for a wedding?* But that's not my point.)

The furor boiled over in late March when an employee of Memories Pizza in Walkerton, Indiana, told a reporter she would not feel comfortable delivering pizzas to a gay wedding because it would violate her Christian faith. Crystal O'Connor, the daughter of the restaurant's owner, told a local TV station: "If a gay couple came in and wanted us to provide pizzas for their wedding, we would have to say no."

Her comments triggered such a firestorm that the restaurant had to shut down temporarily because of angry calls and threats. (One person suggested that protesters burn down the

place.) Later, when sympathizers learned of the backlash, they raised more than \$800,000 for the restaurant in a few days to show their support for the O'Connors. And a gay woman from Indiana apologized for the angry behavior of the gay community—and contributed \$20.

After businesses started announcing boycotts and travel bans to punish Indiana, the fiasco got even uglier when pop star Miley Cyrus challenged her fans to “stir some [expletive] up” in Indiana to force lawmakers to revise the law—which, ironically, was meant to guarantee equality to gay people while also recognizing that religious people should not be forced to violate their consciences.

Only in America can you find this much drama over a hypothetical wedding that didn't even happen.

Let's be realistic. This month the Supreme Court will review the issue of gay marriage, and it's possible that justices will make it legal in all 50 states. If that happens, the million dollar question will be whether our lawmakers will still defend the rights of religious people—specifically Christians—who believe in traditional marriage. If not, Christians could become a persecuted minority in a country that still prints “IN GOD WE TRUST” on our money.

America has always protected minority religious beliefs. Our laws don't force the owner of a Jewish deli to serve pork, a Catholic couple to use birth control, or a Muslim woman to take off her veil. But today we need assurances from lawmakers that Christians will not be forced to violate their faith when gay couples are granted marriage rights. The Indiana law might have been a flawed attempt to secure religious freedom in our pluralistic society, but we need to address this issue now before someone suggests that having a Bible in my home is a criminal act because it is “anti-gay.”

I am a Pentecostal, Bible-believing Christian, and many people

consider my religious views to be narrow. I still believe young people should wait until marriage for sex. I believe adultery is a sin. I have a strong personal conviction against abortion. But I also believe it is my duty to show kindness and compassion to those who don't agree with me.

The same goes for my personal views on gay marriage. I believe homosexuality is part of the sinful human condition. I am sorry if that offends some people, but that's what I believe God's Word says. I don't believe homosexuality is the "worst" sin, nor do I believe my faith requires me to be hateful toward a gay person. But to call a Christian a "bigot" because he views homosexuality as a sin is a form of bigotry in reverse.

Jesus was certainly no bigot. He was a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19), and He offered His love and salvation to prostitutes, corrupt politicians, social outcasts, drunkards and even religious hypocrites. But Jesus didn't wink at sin, redefine it or sidestep it. He showed us that if we really want to show love to a person, we should confront their sin, warn them about it and tell them the truth (see Matt. 18:15-17).

I am called to follow Christ. I will offer love, counsel, comfort, friendship, healing—and even pizza!—to anyone who needs my help, regardless of their race, creed, income level, religion or sexual preference. I believe any Christian-owned business should seek to model acceptance and a welcoming attitude toward others.

Yet as a Christian minister I cannot, in good conscience, perform a gay wedding because this would violate the vows I made to God when I surrendered to my calling. No Christian should have to forfeit their beliefs just because one minority group demands priority treatment. Religious freedom still matters. I hope you agree that a free society should defend everyone's right to practice their faith.

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Please Help Me Protect the World's Abused Women and Girls

During the years I served as editor of *Charisma*, I often cringed when I saw how Christian leaders manipulated the Bible and their audiences to raise money. Some evangelists promised that if we gave in their hyped-up “miracle offerings,” all debts would be erased overnight. Others said that a gift of \$500 would release healing or salvation to a loved one. And last month one prominent pastor asked each of his followers to give \$300 so he could raise \$65 million to buy a Gulfstream jet.

All this exploitation and greed in our movement turned me off so much that I sometimes found it difficult to take an offering for a legitimate cause. So when the Lord called me into full-time ministry, and asked me to establish a network of mission projects around the world, I had to face a huge personal obstacle. I struggled to raise funds for the cause of Christ because I was afraid of being viewed as a charlatan.

But today I am doing something I've never done in the 18 years that I've written this column. I'm asking for money.

If you've followed my career you know that after serving at *Charisma*, I left my day job and devoted myself to The Mordecai Project, a ministry that is confronting gender-based violence in many parts of the world. I began partnering with indigenous leaders in Asia, Africa and Latin America to provide healing, protection and hope for women and girls who are abused, abandoned or oppressed.

So far, on our shoestring budget, we've been able to establish a home for abandoned girls in India and a domestic violence shelter in Colombia. We've also acquired land in Peru and Guatemala to begin shelters in communities where women are at serious risk. And as God provides funds, we are ready to begin more homes for girls and shelters for women in Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Nigeria, Ecuador and El Salvador.

Because I'm the father of four girls, and because I've seen global oppression of women up close—in the form of domestic violence, forced marriage, mutilation, sex trafficking and other injustices—I've dedicated my life to this cause. But the problem is way too big for me to confront alone. I need thousands of partners to tackle the most critical human rights crisis of the 21st century.

In many developing countries today, women are abused sexually, denied education and health care, and treated like slaves simply because they are female. Yet we know that Jesus cares about women, and He came to elevate them, heal their pain and protect them from injustice. This is the message I have preached in 29 countries since the year 2000.

I have currently set a goal to raise \$100,000 to purchase a home for our girls in India. But I would not be honest if I told you this is all we need. It will take at least \$1 million to launch all 17 projects we have on the drawing board. And

once we begin these shelters we will move on to even needier mission fields—including the Middle East, where women suffer under unimaginable oppression.

I don't claim that a gift to The Mordecai Project will wipe out all your debts or guarantee you a bigger house or new job. I'm offering no gimmicks. But based on the promises of Scripture I can assure you:

- That when you give to the poor, God will repay you (Prov. 19:17).
- That when you are generous, you will also be blessed (Prov. 11:25).
- Proverbs 28:27 says: "He who gives to the poor will never want."

There are hundreds of reputable ministries and missions organizations that need our money, and I am not asking anyone to stop giving to causes that they already support. But I can assure you that The Mordecai Project is good soil for your seed. I have submitted this ministry to the oversight of godly pastors. We don't waste money. And if you designate your funds to a specific project, we take no administrative fees out of your gift.

No amount is too small. It would bless God's heart, I believe, if we built our next girls' home in India with widows' mites from 10,000 people. And even if you cannot give, I sincerely ask that you join me in prayer that God will move upon the hearts of wealthy donors who have the gift of giving, that they would help us raise the \$1 million we need to establish our first 17 shelters and girls' homes.

When I first began The Mordecai Project, the Lord showed me that the women we rescue from abuse, violence and poverty will one day become mighty Esthers who will change nations. I surrendered to the call to be a Mordecai to help these women arise. Please join me in this vital work.

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***J. Lee Grady** is the former editor of Charisma. You can follow him on Twitter @leeegrady. His work to protect women from abuse was featured in the March issue of Charisma.*

5 Reasons Creflo Dollar Shouldn't Buy a New Jet

Last week Atlanta-based prosperity preacher Creflo Dollar announced to the world that he needed \$65 million to buy a new Gulfstream jet. He asked 200,000 of his followers to donate \$300 each so he could ride in style. He told his audience that the plane was needed so he could “continue reaching a lost and dying world for the Lord Jesus Christ.”

A few people dug into their wallets to send Dollar the needed cash. The rest of us started feeling sick to our stomachs.

By this week, after the blogosphere blew up with angry reactions to Dollar's outlandish proposal, his public relations firm announced that “Project G650” had been placed on hold. Dollar reluctantly caved to public pressure and decided that, for now at least, he will have to be content to either charter a private jet or—heaven forbid—fly first-class on a commercial plane.

I am not sure which is crazier—that Dollar insisted on being treated like the king of a small country, or that his church-owned PR firm didn't realize this inane fund-raising plan would backfire. Hello? Welcome to the year 2015, a time when

Christian people are smart enough to smell a religious scam before they get bamboozled.

I hate to even give this scheme any attention, but there are naïve Christians who don't realize when they are being taken to the cleaners by a man who claims to speak for God. Rev. Dollar and those who follow him should be ashamed that he has dragged the name of Jesus through the mud and made all Christians look greedy and egotistical.

Here are the five top reasons why I would never give Creflo Dollar money for a private jet:

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

2. Ministers shouldn't use donors to boost their egos. So why would any preacher need his own plane? They can give you a litany of reasons: Time saved, hassle-free travel, no worries about lost luggage. But the real reason is obvious: It makes them look good. It's all about image. It reveals a pride problem. And the Bible says: "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6b). If someone needs to fly to the most remote village of Borneo, and there are no commercial planes, then I can understand the need for a private plane. But Rev. Dollar is not going to Borneo. Usually he is flying to his satellite church in Brooklyn, New York. (Delta has a round-trip ticket for \$337 from Atlanta.)

3. Ministers who demand luxury deny the core of the gospel. Rev. Dollar has been known to twist the gospel in the past,

proposing that Jesus was independently wealthy. Dollar invented this gospel to make it easier to build a case for his own wealth. But the prosperity gospel has become a hollow message in our generation. We are confronted every day by the reality of poverty and suffering in our world, and we know that true followers of Christ are called to give and share, not take and hoard. We also know that a preacher who gets rich off of the offerings of poor people is involved in exploitation.

4. The world doesn't need a message of greed. The prosperity gospel was popular during the 1980s, when many Christians in the United States were riding the wave of American capitalism. But most of the get-rich preachers of that era either landed in jail or fell morally, and we reaped a whirlwind of bad fruit. We were supposed to learn a lesson from that failed experiment. God blesses us not so we can become selfish consumers but so we can become selfless channels of His blessings to others.

5. Jesus rode a donkey. When the Son of God was about to be presented to the city of Jerusalem as the promised Messiah, He didn't raise money to buy a gold chariot drawn by Caesar's best horses. He rode on the back of a rented donkey, the transportation of a poor man. He didn't require a first-class seat or a luxury vehicle.

Jesus humbled himself. He lowered the bar and invited all of us—especially those who call themselves ministers of the gospel—to model servanthood.

J. Lee Grady is the former editor of Charisma. You can follow him on Twitter @leegrady. You can learn more about his ministry, The Mordecai Project, at themordecaiproject.org. His work to protect women from abuse [was featured](#) in the March issue of Charisma.

Please consider donating to The Mordecai Project, India and

help put a stop to the horrific atrocities many women face daily. To donate, visit christianlifemissions.org.

How Prayer Is Breaking the Machismo Stronghold

Last weekend was an unusually violent one for Barranquilla, Colombia. On Saturday, a woman was found dead in a hotel, and police said she had been strangled with a chain. Another woman was found murdered in a different part of the city. The next day, a 26-year-old woman was hospitalized after her ex-husband beat her relentlessly with a broken glass bottle and almost gouged her eye out.

The local newspaper said the man who blinded his ex-wife was initially in custody but he was later set free. Police could not explain why he wasn't charged.

Why is there so much violence against women in Latin America? Why don't the police and the courts protect women from this abuse? And is there anything the Christian community can do about this crisis?

Last Sunday, Christians from dozens of different denominations took a huge step toward ending the violence in Barranquilla. They didn't do it through political protest but through prayer, worship and repentance.

At 4 PM a large group of believers from Barranquilla marched through the downtown area. Then the men knelt on hot pavement across from the city's main cathedral and repented publicly for the way women are being brutalized and abused. Some of the men wept as various pastors from the city lamented the

mistreatment of women and asked God to forgive Colombian men for causing so much pain to their wives, daughters and girlfriends.

As I looked out over the crowd that had gathered at the Plaza de la Paz, I could see that many of the women were astounded. They had never witnessed anything like this. Men in Colombia have never publicly apologized for violence against women. Men had never publicly shed tears for the pain their women endure.

After the prayers of repentance, women leaders from the city prayed and released forgiveness to the men, and asked God to heal the women who have been silenced, traumatized and emotionally crippled by the *machismo* culture.

And I felt the Lord saying: "I am sending a wave of healing to Latin America. As My people cry out in repentance, I am changing the hearts of men and breaking the forces of darkness that have held women in captivity. Prepare for a massive cultural shift."

Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for women. A Colombian woman dies at the hands of her husband every four days. In 2011, more than 150 women were the victims of acid attacks in the country. So far in the Barranquilla region, 15 women have already been murdered by their husbands or partners this year.

The murder rate is so high in Colombia that it is ranked second in the world for femicide—with Guatemala at the top of the list. After Colombia, the list includes El Salvador, Bolivia and the Dominican Republic.

At the root of the problem is *machismo*, the belief that men are superior and that they have the right to dominate, control and abuse females. Male pride is certainly not unique to Latin countries, but because of certain unique cultural circumstances in this part of the world, *machismo* has triggered horrific levels of domestic violence, rape, sexual

molestation and murder.

Many Latin American women have been conditioned to believe that domestic violence is normal. In Bolivia, women in indigenous communities are known to say of their husbands: “Cuanto más me golpea, más me ama” (“The more he beats me, the more he loves me”). They are not shocked to hear that a man in their neighborhood broke his wife’s collarbone or gave her a black eye. That’s just what men do.

But the gospel is slowly breaking the *machismo* mindset—and prayer events like the one in Barranquilla last Sunday give clear evidence that God is ending the sad legacy of abuse. One of the pastors who prayed in the “No Más Violencia” rally was 29-year-old Sergio Castro, who leads Iglesia de Camino, Verdad y Vida. He publicly renounced machismo and repented on behalf of Colombian fathers who have taught their sons to be macho.

Castro prayed: “Lord, we repent on behalf of all the previous generations of men who have treated women as inferior. Heal our land, change our hearts, change the mindset of society. Teach us to love our wives as Jesus loves the church. Teach us to serve them and to love them with a sacrificial love.”

All churches and missionary organizations working in Latin America should prepare for the coming shift. When God answers these prayers, machismo will be uprooted from the church first—and then the rate of femicide and domestic violence will drop as fathers, husbands, sons, policemen, judges and politicians decide to protect and respect women.

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To make a tax-deductible donation, go to christianlifemissions.org and click on The Mordecai Project

icon on the home page. Checks can be mailed to Charisma Cares, 600 Rinehart Rd., Lake Mary, FL 32746. Be sure to put “The Mordecai Project, India” in the notation.

10 Biggest Mistakes People Make on the Mission Field

One of the greatest joys in my life is ministering in foreign countries. Since I surrendered to a call to missions 15 years ago, I’ve visited 29 nations and developed relationships with dozens of pastors and leaders who now consider me their friend and brother. Missions is at the heart of our Christian faith, and I believe every church should be actively engaged in both foreign and local missions so we can advance the gospel of Jesus in our generation.

But just like everything else in life, there’s a right way and a wrong way to engage in mission work. I’ve learned from my own mistakes—and I’ve also seen some sad examples of short-term missions gone awry. If you are considering a short-term or long-term mission trip, avoid these pitfalls:

1. Acting like a spoiled American. If you are traveling to a developing country, here is Rule No. 1: Prepare for delays, cold showers, big bugs and scorpions, power outages, unusual toilets, crazy traffic and strange food. Make a decision before you leave that you won’t let one complaint come out of your mouth. Be flexible and gracious. Focus on the positive, soak in the beauty of the country and come home with a renewed gratitude for your blessings at home.

2. Talking down to people. You are not going overseas to teach poor, ignorant foreigners what you know. If that’s your

attitude, do everyone a favor and stay home! You are going to serve. Most of what I know about ministry I learned from humble people I met in other countries. Whether you are teaching, preaching, building orphanages or feeding the poor, get under the people and wash their feet. And expect to learn powerful lessons from the people you are visiting.

3. Building relationships based on money. People in poor countries tend to think all Americans are rich, and they will be tempted to look to us instead of God to provide. Don't wave money around, don't flaunt expensive watches or jewelry, and don't hand out cash to everyone you meet. Let your new friends know you want a real friendship with them that does not hinge on finances.

4. Making demands. I know prosperity preachers who expect royal treatment when they go to foreign countries. One man told his host he needed a hotel that costs \$1,000 a night—in a nation where most people live in cramped, Soviet-style apartments. The apostle Paul modeled a different approach, and he was willing to live among people at their level (see 1 Thess. 2:9-10). If Jesus was willing to enter this world in a filthy manger, we should be willing to set aside our expensive tastes.

5. Breaking promises. When you connect deeply with a local pastor or congregation overseas, you will fall in love with them and you will want to do everything possible to help them. But don't promise things you can't deliver. Always remind them, and yourself, that we must pray for His provision and wait on Him to answer. And if you do enter into a partnership, always honor the promises you made.

6. Taking team members who are not committed to Jesus. I know of a zealous young woman who went on a mission trip to Africa with her church and ended up sleeping with a guy from that country. How does that happen? Anyone who goes with you on a trip needs a background check and a pastor's recommendation.

Mission trips should never be viewed as opportunities for “religious tourism” by immature people who crave a globetrotting adventure. The behavior of your team members should honor Christ.

7. Working with people overseas without thoroughly investigating them. I get requests almost weekly from foreign pastors who want me to visit their church, support their programs or do evangelistic crusades in their villages. In Pakistan, some unscrupulous Christians troll the Internet looking for churches that will send them money. Some people posing as pastors talk naïve Americans into wiring funds for a trip—and then they vanish. If you are going to do mission work, you will need the gift of discernment. Don’t get bamboozled by a con artist posing as “beloved brother Najib.”

8. Using a “hit and run” approach to missions. When I visit a country I almost always end up going back because I build relationships with ministries. This week I’m on my fourth visit to Barranquilla, Colombia, where I am helping to develop a women’s shelter. Mission work should be a long-term partnership. If your church is planning to start a mission program, don’t just scatter your seed here and there. Prayerfully invest in a few places and let the Holy Spirit connect you with those people for a lifetime.

9. Misrepresenting your work. We laugh about the preacher who was “evangelastically speaking” about the crowds he attracted in Uganda. But exaggeration is lying. There is nothing more obnoxious than a Christian who inflates statistics to draw attention or raise funds. If you build your ministry on half-truths you will have cracks in your foundation. Be honest, be accountable and tell the truth.

10. Focusing on numbers. There is huge pressure in missionary work to prove our effectiveness by counting heads. But God’s kingdom is not about crowds—it is about making disciples (see Matt. 28:19-20). Some of my most powerful moments on the

mission field were in small meetings where God changed a few lives forever—and then those people changed more lives. I'm not impressed when someone says 5,000 people prayed to receive Jesus. I want to know if those converts were followed-up and plugged into churches for discipleship.

I hope you will become more passionate about taking the message of Christ to the world. But as you pack your bags for your mission trip, leave your unneeded “baggage” at home and go with a humble, teachable heart.

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Take the Test: Are You Fully Abandoned in Worship?

I was raised in a traditional church where people worshipped God reverently while holding identical blue hymnals. The only instruments in our church were a piano and an organ, and nobody got too excited except for the one old man on the front row who sometimes belted out an uncomfortable “amen” during the preacher’s sermon.

Then, at age 18, I had a life-changing experience with the Holy Spirit—and I ended up visiting an African-American church on the other side of town. These people worshipped Jesus with no inhibitions. They flailed their arms, shouted “Hallelujah!” and swayed to the beat of drums. I was so energized by their passionate praise it that I couldn’t wait for the next

meeting.

I soon learned from studying Scripture that my African-American brothers and sisters were worshipping the biblical way, even though it was foreign to me. God never intended His people to hide their enthusiasm. The more exuberant I became in my worship, the more personal freedom I experienced. I began to leave the shallow waters of religious tradition. I ventured into the deep ocean of total abandonment.

I learned what it means to worship God with my whole heart—with no fear of people's opinions.

Many churches today have adopted a free style of worship, and some of the best praise music ever recorded is available to our generation. Yet I find that many Christians have still not learned the secret of uninhibited praise. Many of us are content to listen to a music team on stage when God never intended a worship service to be a concert. He invites all of us to be fully and radically engaged in extravagant worship.

Have you shed your inhibitions in worship? I often challenge people to compare their worship experience with the book of Psalms, which should be the standard for every church regardless of nationality, culture or denomination. Psalms calls us to joyful, energetic, unreserved, high-voltage praise.

Have you found the freedom to express your worship in these ways?

1. Declaring praise. The psalmist says: "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." (Ps. 107:2). Praise is simply honoring God for His character and attributes. But it is not enough to just think nice thoughts about Him—you must verbalize how much you are thankful for His mercy, forgiveness and goodness.

2. Raising hands. King David said: "I will lift up my hands in Your name" (Ps. 63:4). I'll never forget the first time I saw

a room full of Christians praising God with their hands in the air. It looked like a bank robbery! God asks us to raise our hands because our physical posture affects our hearts. Lifting your hands will help you surrender totally to Him.

3. Singing. Can you imagine a world without music? It lifts our hearts, releases joy and breaks the power of anxiety. The psalmist said: "I will sing of lovingkindness and justice, to You O Lord I will sing praises" (Ps. 101:1). Don't just listen to songs in church or mouth the words halfheartedly. Turn up your volume and belt it out—and don't worry if you are in tune. All God wants from you is a joyful noise.

4. Shouting. We don't think anything about screaming at the top of our lungs for our favorite sports team. But are you comfortable cheering for Jesus? The psalmist wrote: "My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You" (Ps. 71:23). The shouts of God's people caused the walls of Jericho to fall. Some types of spiritual resistance will not come down until you raise your voice.

5. Clapping. The psalms have several references to clapping (Ps. 47:1), but it is not just a way to make noise. Clapping in worship has an invisible spiritual impact. Psalm 149:6-8 says that when we engage in the "high praises of God," we bind spiritual principalities with chains. High-decibel praise is a form of spiritual warfare that has profound impact on demonic powers. No wonder the devil has convinced some churches to stay quiet!

6. Dancing. One of the most powerful moments I ever experienced in worship was when I danced in a church for more than an hour with a group of Christians in Nigeria. I was absolutely soaked with sweat by the end of the service, and my calves were sore the next morning, but my spirit was free. Many Christians are too self-conscious to express their worship in dance, even if it's just a simple sway or a side-to-side shuffle. But the Bible is still clear: "Let them

praise His name with dancing” (Ps. 149:3). If you want God to move in your life, you may need to move when you worship!

7. Kneeling. Catholics and liturgical Protestants have practiced kneeling during worship for centuries, but many of us Pentecostals and charismatics have forgotten this vital biblical practice. Muslims bow in prayer five times a day, yet it has become a strange practice in the evangelical church. David wrote: “Come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker” (Ps. 95:6). Kneeling inspires humility, and reminds us that we are not God. You may find the most profound experience with Jesus occurs when you are on your knees.

When King David brought the ark into Jerusalem, he was so overjoyed that true worship was restored that he danced before God with abandon. Yet his wife Michal was so embarrassed by his radical display of devotion that she criticized him—and became barren as a result (see 1 Sam. 6:12-23).

Who would you rather be in that story—the wholehearted worshipper or the stick-in-the-mud religious critic? Don’t let tradition, spiritual pride or personal hang-ups stop you from experiencing all God has for you. Break out of your box and turn up your volume.

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