

10 Tips for Healthy Fasting

Many people think about fasting in January for a variety of reasons. Perhaps you need to renew your body and soul. Did you gain weight during the holiday season? Maybe you're feeling sluggish or toxic and need to cleanse your body in short order. Or maybe you want to fast for spiritual reasons, such as a breakthrough in your personal life or for revival in this land.

Whatever your reasons for fasting, here are 10 tips to ensure you fast smart.

1) Prepare Your Mind

Before you begin, think about why you want to fast. What do you want to achieve? It's important to have the right mindset before you start or you may lose heart early on. Pray for discipline and a strong will to complete the fast.

2) Stock Up

Shop for everything you'll need before the day you begin. Not having everything you need on your first day is a sure way to fail. If you're doing a juice fast, for example, look at the recipes you'll be using, and make sure your shopping list has all the ingredients.

3) Drink Water

Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of purified water while you are fasting so you can flush away toxins and waste. This will also help you stay energized. Dehydration can cause you to feel tired and hungry.

4) Go Easy

Gentle exercise, such as walking, is good, but don't overexert yourself. Your body is working hard to eliminate toxins,

remove damaged cells and restore vitality. This important work is often not completed when we eat regular meals. That's because the body focuses its attention on digestion throughout the day. Fasting frees your body from this daily chore so it can work on cleansing, repairing and healing. It's like taking a week's vacation to thoroughly clean your home.

While all this important work is going on inside, you want to give your body the rest it needs. Take more breaks. Avoid exhausting work. Go for walks. Get fresh air and sun. Go to bed early, as powerful healing hormones are released while you sleep. Relax before bed by taking a bath, reading a good book or listening to beautiful music.

5) Choose a Plan

Many people think fasting means a strict water fast. Some people even try to follow the model of some biblical heroes—no food or water, which can be dangerous. But there is more than one type of fast. Choose the one that is best for you.

Water fast. A strict water fast for more than two or three days is not recommended unless you can completely rest and are medically supervised.

Juice fast. Freshly made juice is rich in antioxidants that bind toxins so they don't damage cells—and those antioxidants are critical, especially during a fast.

Unlike in biblical times, where the air, soil and water were virtually pure, we have thousands of different chemicals pouring into our atmosphere every year. Most of our food is sprayed with pesticides and packaged with preservatives, additives, dyes and fillers. (Therefore, you ought to choose organic produce.) Our water is treated with chemicals, and our air is assaulted with industrial pollution.

Toxins are stored mainly in our fat cells. When we fast, those toxins are released in greater amounts. Without antioxidants

to bind up free radicals, our cells can be damaged.

On the juice fast, you can drink vegetable juices, purified water, coconut water, veggie broth and herbal teas throughout the day. I emphasize vegetable juice because fruit juice has too much sugar, which can cause spikes and dips in blood sugar, leaving you tired. However, you can use a little fruit to flavor and sweeten veggie juice recipes.

All this will keep you healthy, energized and hydrated. To keep from boredom, try new juice and green smoothie recipes, such as those in my book *The Juice Lady's Big Book of Juices and Green Smoothies*.

Daniel fast. As described in Daniel 10:3, the prophet abstained for three weeks from delicacies, meat and wine, which would include all animal products and alcohol. This is a vegan diet, in other words, and includes abstaining from rich foods and desserts.

One meal a day. Everyone can fast for one meal or from certain foods. You can deny yourself coffee, sweets, soda pop, fast food, snack foods and junk food. None of these things are good for your body anyway. And if you can't do a strict fast because of your age or health, choose instead to give up some of your favorite foods. You could also fast one meal a day and drink a veggie juice instead.

6) Be Wise

You may have a physical condition that would make water or juice fasting unwise or dangerous. Seek medical advice first. However, be aware that many doctors have little knowledge of fasting or training in nutrition. People who should not do a strict water or juice fast include women who are pregnant or nursing, people who are anorexic or bulimic, anyone who is emaciated or underweight, and those who are on dialysis.

Be aware of medications and their effects while you fast. For

example, a vegetable juice fast can lower your blood pressure quickly, so you would need to cut back on medication, for which you should seek your physician's advice. People with diabetes or hypoglycemia can modify a vegetable juice fast and include green smoothies made with avocado for extra protein and fat. This would also be my recommendation for anyone who is elderly or weak.

During your fast, if you become so hungry you could eat the plaster off your wall, you may have parasites or yeast overgrowth. It could be that freeloaders in your body are screaming for food. You may need to do a parasite cleanse or a yeast-control diet to get this infection under control before continuing any other kind of fast.

Please note: Children under the age of 15 should not do a strict water or juice fast.

7) Determine the Length

You can fast from one day to an extended period of time, like Jesus did for 40 days. Most people can easily handle a three-day fast. If you work, start on Friday. Then you'll have the weekend to complete the fast at home.

8) Know the Symptoms

As your body releases toxins, you might get some detox reactions, such as headaches, tiredness, foggy brain or bad breath. (Chew parsley for your breath.) This can be part of your body ridding itself of toxins that could cause disease, which is a good thing. Don't quit your fast when this happens. The symptoms should pass rather quickly.

9) Pray

Fasting and prayer are linked throughout the Bible. Whenever we fast, we are admonished to pray, which facilitates our spiritual growth and renewal.

10) Break Smart

How you break a fast is as important as the fast itself. Break your fast the first day with only vegetable juices, green smoothies, raw fruits and vegetables, veggie soups, dehydrated vegan foods or steamed vegetables. Never break a fast with a heavy meal like a burger and fries or steak and potatoes, as you can harm your body and end up with stomach cramps and digestive issues.

Bonus: Know the Benefits

The ancient discipline of fasting offers health benefits no other therapy can provide. On the physical side, it rapidly rids the body of waste and toxins—like changing old water in an aquarium. It can eliminate edema and lower blood pressure. A study published by the *Journal of Alternative Complementary Medicine* in 2002 found that 90 percent of 174 patients with high blood pressure who incorporated fasting achieved normal blood pressure. Each of the participants who had been on antihypertensive medications were able to get off their drugs.

Fasting also helps rebalance your body's pH level. The typical American diet is mostly acid forming. A slightly acidic body contributes to weight gain, cancer and a host of other diseases. Fasting facilitates weight loss—water weight first, then fat. This ancient practice appears to reset the metabolism, much like a computer reboot.

A fast also gives your digestive tract a rest. This helps your digestive system heal, which can lead to significant health improvements. Allergy symptoms often improve with fasting. Autoimmune disorders may heal. Fasting improves insulin sensitivity by lowering blood sugar, which helps diabetes and metabolic syndrome.

In addition, fasting is part of our spiritual heritage. It was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testament. The

Orthodox Church still has four main fast periods during the calendar year.

However, fasting is one of the most neglected spiritual disciplines of the 21st century. It is rarely discussed in most nonliturgical churches or on Christian TV. Yet Scripture admonishes us to fast and pray.

According to Scripture, when God's people fast with the right motive, seeking Him with a broken, repentant and contrite spirit, God hears from heaven (2 Chron. 7:14). He promised He will heal our lives, our churches, our communities and our nation.

Our land is in desperate need of healing. Repentance, fasting and prayer are the only hope for our nation. Fasting and prayer can bring revival and a change of direction in our country. It can also rekindle our love for Christ. Fasting is a powerful spiritual tool to make a difference in our lives.

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What This Olympian Prizes More than Gold

Even though Kelly Clark is a four-time Olympian and has won every major snowboarding event, including the U.S. Open and Winter Games, Clark still knew she hadn't achieved the real goal.

"I thought that being successful and achieving my goals would go hand-in-hand with being happy," Clark says. "But by the time I was 18 years old, I had achieved everything that was in my heart to do, and at the same time I wasn't finding fulfillment."

Just before Clark decided to give up on her dream job, she was staying at a hotel and approached a woman there whom she overheard say, "God still loves you." She couldn't ignore the tugging on her heart and, through the events that followed, eventually gave her life to Christ.

"There's no place where you can get freedom apart from Him," Clark says. "I've brought that freedom into my snowboarding. It really does set me apart from a lot of the athletes. I get to do what I love with the one that I love. There's no better way to do it than with that kind of freedom."

I Am They Debut Album Set for Early 2015 Release

I Am They (Essential Records)

This six-member band from Carson City, Nevada, will debut

their acoustic-driven album with a goal to highlight what it means to follow Jesus as true disciples.

The name *I Am They* is inspired by John 17 – created with the intent to adopt on a personal and individual level. As Jesus prays in this chapter, He consistently refers to His disciples as “they”. It is important to each band member to be the “they” that Jesus referred to.

In 2011, God began to open multiple doors for the band. Through a unique series of events, including opening for a few CCM acts, as well as winning a band competition at Spirit West Coast, *I Am They* garnered attention within the industry, culminating in a major label/publishing deal with Provident Label Group. Having recently completed their debut album, and working towards an early 2015 album release, *I Am They* is a band that you won't want to miss.

Bethel Releases ‘We Will Not Be Shaken’

Bethel Music

Recorded live from a summer worship gathering in Redding, California, Bethel Church's latest release—a CD and accompanying film—captures a community's spontaneous worship and declarations of hope through songs like “You Are My One Thing,” “No Longer Slaves” and the anthemic title track.

When the “Happiest Time of the Year” Feels Like Anything But

On a foggy, frigid day in the winter of 2011, a doctor in a white lab coat told us that my husband was dying. She spoke with great care and compassion and then gave Steve and I plenty of room to bleed as our lives were torn open like so many who had sat in that office before us. In our 26 years together, my husband had never known a single significant health issue. I sat in stunned silence, mentally recounting the list of things I knew about the monster that is Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). Always fatal. Two to five years. Slow, steady paralysis that ends all ability to speak, swallow, move and eventually breathe. As the facts scrolled through my mind like a movie marquee, I struggled to catch my own breath, to process the prognosis, to stay upright. And I knew that life would never be the same.

Our determination from the very beginning was to find the beauty in every minute we were given. We set our hearts to search out the love of God in the middle of our mess. We reminded our family to focus on the character of God. We prayed for healing. We prayed for His purpose to come alive in us and for His kingdom to be extended amid our suffering.

Sometimes it worked really well and we felt supernaturally sustained in the middle of our grief. Sometimes it felt like we were swimming through quicksand, but somehow we found our way to the warm winds of summer. We spent some time traveling with our kids, pretending we had all the minutes and money in the world. We let them choose dream trips with Steve and used every last, happy dime of a timely tax return making those dreams come true. It was still painful, but the distractions and new discoveries made it bearable.

As the dog days of summer surrendered to the crisp mornings of fall, anxiety moved in as well. I knew change was coming, and I didn't feel ready but could think of no way to stop it. Autumn arrived, slow and steady, like the tide takes over the shore, washing away the last remnants of our dream-making summer and bringing a whole new pressure with it: the holidays.

Forcing, Then Finding, Christmas

I love Thanksgiving and Christmas—I really do. But now as I shouldered the bulky weight of grief, these relentlessly happy days seemed impossible.

I probably would've boycotted the festivities altogether, except I had children who desperately needed something—*anything*—to feel normal, and a husband who was counting his remaining Christmases very carefully. We couldn't afford to let one slip by us. So I decided I would pull myself up by the bootstraps and sink all my mental muscle into making it the hap-happiest season of all.

That decision didn't last very long. I made an elaborate Advent calendar (the first ever in my family's history) filled with fun things to do together each day. I lugged bulging boxes of decorations from the garage but couldn't bring myself to open them, knowing they were filled with endless memories of Christmases past. Better Christmases. I took the kids to get a Christmas tree, something Steve had always done, and we set it up and dressed it with the same old decorations, listening to the same old carols and drinking the same Swiss Miss hot chocolate, hoping maybe we could outwit our sorrow if we used the snowman mugs.

At the end of the evening, I sat in my quiet living room, looking at our beautiful tree as tears dripped onto the pages of my open Bible. It was the same tree but a different me. For the first time, I felt disqualified from Christmas. It was as

if I were standing on the outside of a sparkling house, looking through a foggy window at all the happy people inside. I wanted to go in, but my shoes were caked with the soil of the battlefield we were walking every day. I no longer belonged in that pristine picture.

Desperate for hope, I turned to the only refuge I've found never fails: the Word of God. I decided that instead of abdicating the holiday season to ALS, I would lean into the Christmas story. I read it every day, in every gospel, in every version I could get my hands on. I read Isaiah's prophecies about the Messiah. I studied all the characters and their backstories, imagining the questions I would have asked Joseph or Anna or one of those swing-shift shepherds if I had the chance. In this new world with no maps, the Christmas story became the compass I clung to, using it to steer myself toward hope. Because, it turns out, Jesus came for the sad people too.

Isaiah says it best when he tells us that a beautiful baby King would come to those "sitting in darkness" (Is. 9:2). Matthew repeats Isaiah's words (Matt. 4:16), reminding us that Jesus didn't come because the world needed a little more light, He came as its *only* light, its *only* hope. As I read this verse over and over and over, I felt this truth begin to seep into my spirit like water seeps into sand; my heart, broken and bleeding, belonged in the story. When I couldn't find my way to Christmas, it found me. Jesus found me.

Tips for Finding Hope

Now, three years into Steve's diagnosis, I can say that we have experienced some of our most meaningful, magical holidays right here on this battlefield. It's a miracle to me, but I am absolutely convinced that the comfort of Jesus can reach into the most difficult days and create something worth celebrating. I've talked with so many hurting people and heard so many heartbreaking stories. I never want to trivialize the

pain they are going through in this fallen, frustrating world, but I do want to nudge them toward the hidden hope that can be found in the hardest places.

Finding that hope is not an exact science, but here's what's worked for me:

- **Embrace the dance of sorrow and joy.** We're so conditioned to feel either sorrow or joy that the presence of sadness on a happy holiday can seem jarring. It's tempting to back away from the blending of such powerful emotions by either checking out of the holiday or by stuffing our sorrow away where no one can see it. In fact, I fear we've put such a premium on joy in the church today that we've lost our ability to lament in healthy ways and have learned instead to put on a happy face and hope no one knows we're dying inside.

Sorrow is not sinful. In fact, sorrow is a gift to us because it invites the comfort of Jesus near. And in His presence there is fullness of ... joy (Matt. 5:4; Ps. 16:11). It really is a lovely dance when we give ourselves permission to acknowledge the emotions that go with all our wins and wounds.

- **Get a good flashlight.** John 1 is my favorite version of the Christmas story. It goes like this: "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (v. 14). Jesus, the living Word, took on our pain and sorrow and moved right into the heartache we call home. His word, *the Word*, comes as a light into our darkness, to illuminate, to direct, to protect and to comfort.

I have several go-to verses stored in my memory bank for that moment when the darkness falls. You know the moment. Maybe it's driving to a party you wish you didn't have to attend. Maybe you're facing a pile of bills or shopping for gifts you can't afford or remembering when life felt easier. Those are the moments when darkness can crash in like a sneaker wave,

and that's when I turn to my arsenal of truth. I speak those verses over my life and into my darkness over and over again until I feel safe and steady. (A few of my favorite flashlight verses: Deuteronomy 20:1, Psalm 5:11, Jeremiah 17:7-8 and James 1:2-4.)

- **Refuse to resent.** The thing is, happy people still exist. Some of them are faking it, but many of them are legitimately living in an abundant season of life, and they want to enjoy the holidays. Sometimes they'll understand what you're going through and sometimes they won't. Sometimes they'll say really insensitive things, and sometimes they'll be flawlessly encouraging. Determine to bless them and their happy selves no matter what.

Resentment is a trick that leads to bitterness, and bitterness is a ditch. People will help you justify your right to be in that ditch, but no one really wants to move in there with you. One of the best ways to stay free of bitterness is to stop resentment before it has a chance to start by being willing to smile with those who rejoice.

- **Find someone who needs you.** Because someone does. Someone, somewhere needs your hope, your heart and your God. Throughout the course of our fight with ALS, we've run into countless people who just needed someone to listen to their story, to hear about their heartache without judgment—maybe even without offering answers apart from “I love you” and “I'm praying.”

There's something about moving out beyond the shoreline of our own suffering that helps us see life from a new perspective. During this season in our lives, we adopted a child to sponsor through a humanitarian organization. My husband meets regularly with men who are struggling in their marriages. Our kids are active in raising awareness and funding for ALS research. We find meaningful but doable ways to meet even

small needs in the world outside our war, and it helps to remind us that we are not defined by this struggle. God is still using us to bless others, as we ourselves are being blessed.

- **Recognize and respect your own limits.** The holidays are busy enough without adding the weight of crisis or heartache to the mix. Initially, I wanted to do everything the way I had always done it, hoping to prove to my family and myself that life could go on as normal. But I was wrong. Life could not go on as normal because I wasn't working with the same emotional reserves I had in years past. I had to be willing to make some changes, and those changes involved adjusting my expectations about what a perfect Christmas would look like and humbly accepting help from those who offered.

Friends stepped in to lend a hand with cooking, shopping, wrapping and all the things I used to be able to do on my own. And I gradually let go of the notion that we could create a holiday so beautiful that my family somehow would forget we were fighting a fierce battle. In fact, we stopped trying to keep our pain buried beneath the tinsel and holly and instead let it push us toward the comfort of Jesus.

Somewhere in that swirling, stormy season, I realized that we did not have to recreate the Christmases of years past. We could let the Holy Spirit breathe into our grief and create something new, deep and uniquely lovely. I believe that as I learned to respect the fact that I was powerless to fix our situation, it opened the door for our Great Emmanuel to come to us, and He was perfect in our weakness. There, on our individual patches of broken ground, He met with us and reminded us why He had come in the first place.

In acknowledging what we cannot do, we make way for the amazing things that only He can do. For those sitting in darkness, the light dawns. To our shadows, suffering and

overloaded shopping lists, Jesus comes. And He brings salvation with Him.

Wherever you find yourself today, know that He is with you. Lean into the truth of the Christmas story: The God of the universe wrapped Himself in swaddling clothes and came for a broken world and a broken you. Keeping your eyes fixed on His story will change the way you see yours, and that will change the way you see this holiday season and all the seasons to come.

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Bo Stern shares her family's story of fighting against Lou Gehrig's Disease at bostern.charismamag.com

The Essential Guide to the Power of the Holy Spirit

Randy Clark (Destiny Image)

Revivalist Randy Clark helps believers discover the gifts of the Holy Spirit, recognize when God moves around them and understand how miracles, signs and wonders play a key role in sharing the gospel.

Identifying—and Exercising—Your Spiritual Gifts

The Holy Spirit is not only the gift to every believer, He's also the bestower of many spiritual gifts. Here's why it's important to identify those gifts and exercise them within the body of believers.

A young man in my last church cut off three of his fingers while cutting a piece of paneling in a van customizing shop. As he was being rushed to the hospital, he was asked, "Where are the fingers?" A man rushed back to the shop with a bowl of ice, grabbed the three digits and then rushed them to Birmingham in the ambulance along with the young man.

Nineteen hours of microsurgery reattached those fingers to the young man's hand. Had they been left in the sawdust of that shop, the fingers would have been useless. They were only good to him if they were attached to his body.

It's the same way when it comes to our attachment to the body of Christ, both globally and locally. We are members of the body—whether a finger, an ear, an eye or a spleen—and we need the rest of the body in order to live. We cannot make it on our own.

What's more, being a member of the body of Christ means we have a unique gifting the rest of the body needs too. We need one another and the giftings of the Spirit we each bring to the thriving of the body. Let's explore why.

The Singular Gift

First, it's important to understand the difference between the "gift" of the Spirit and the "gifts" of the Spirit. Much confusion abounds in many churches because of a failure to understand the difference.

The gift of the Spirit to the church was given after the ascension and glorification of our Savior. (See John 7:39.) The Holy Spirit had been in the world before then, but now He had come to live in the hearts of His people in a new and special way. He came to dwell permanently within us (John 14:16-17, 26).

In Acts 2:38, the sinner is commanded to repent, after which we are told the gift of the Holy Spirit is given. The word is singular here: **gift**. In Acts 10:45, this gift is discovered to be given to non-Jews also.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is given to every believer at the moment of conversion. In that moment, you are **baptized by the Holy Spirit** (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13). This means that you are immersed in the Spirit and He in you.

Once we are saved and have the indwelling Spirit, then we may be *filled* with the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Spirit is God's controlling presence in our lives. He will fill only what we yield to Him. This means we may *have* the Spirit and yet not be *filled* with Him.

The Multiple Gifts

Now, all of this so far has to do with the gift—singular—of the Spirit. He comes into our lives to save us, sustain us and strengthen us. But the Holy Spirit is also the bestower of gifts—plural—to the believer (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12). These spiritual **gifts** are endowments of power from God given so that we might fulfill the calling of God on our lives.

To understand the importance of these spiritual gifts, we must first understand the church as the body of Christ. Paul

describes and compares the unity and diversity of the human body to the church body in explaining the purpose of spiritual gifts. Through this metaphor, we learn three important truths:

1. They are divine gifts. The gifts of the Spirit come from the same source. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, we see the source as the triune God. Verse 11 sets forth the fact that these gifts are sovereignly bestowed. God not only gives the gifts, but He also decides who gets which gifts. Verse 18 supports this by declaring that God sets the members into the church as it pleases Him.

Spiritual gifts are not natural talents or abilities that you are born with—those are your natural gifts. Rather, spiritual gifts are the supernatural gifts of God.

2. They are different gifts. The New International Version's translation of 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 uses the word *different* three times. In the verses that follow, three categories of gifts are listed: motivational gifts, ministry gifts and manifestation gifts. The important thing to note is that different gifts are given to different people.

The symbolism of the body holds true here. Every member of the body is different. Paul uses the foot, the hand, the ear, the eye and the nose as examples. How ridiculous it would be if we were all one foot, eye, ear, hand or nose! A body is made up of different members, and God has so designed the human body that each member is necessary for it to function properly.

Each church, then, has different members with different gifts. When will we learn that we are not all alike and that it is in that diversity—both in our spiritual and social abilities and strengths—that we are best able to function as the body of Christ?

Most church problems come because we are intolerant of others who have a different motivation than we do. Many quit

the church because they can't respond to the differences of others. But we must learn that all should not be alike. God made us and gifted us differently on purpose.

3. They are dependent gifts. Christ's body is unified but not uniform, and the value of a member is in its attachment to the body. First Corinthians 12:25-26 describes this dependence we ought to have on each other.

Suppose my stomach sends a signal to my brain of hunger. My feet carry me to the place where my eyes and nose tell me there is food. My hand grasps a fork and a knife when I see that steak. My hand carries a piece of that steak not to my ear or foot or eye, but to that convenient opening in the middle of my face called the mouth. There, enamel grinders called teeth chew the food and keep me from choking to death. Glands provide liquid so the food can be conveyed safely to my stomach, where the bloodstream will carry the food's nutrients to the rest of my body.

Just as the body cares for itself, so church members are to care for one another, hurt with one another and rejoice with one another. We are the body of Christ, and He is our head. We must move as He directs us. We are not to be divided but unified.

Dangers Associated With the Gifts

When it comes to the church and its exercise of the Holy Spirit's gifts, I see some interesting but dangerous trends in our day. Let me list them for you and explain. They are:

1. The neglect of spiritual gifts. God has provided gifts so His church will grow, yet very few churches operate on the basis of God's gifting. This neglect is one cause of the anemic growth of the Western church.

2. The fear of spiritual gifts. Some are afraid of the gifts, especially the manifested gifts such as tongues,

healing and miracles. This fear is rooted in control issues. Certainly excesses can be dealt with in love, but the church must not fear the graces of the Holy Spirit.

3. The clustering of like gifts. Many churches have incomplete ministries because they have attracted those with like gifts. For instance, a pastor with a strong teaching gift attracts others with the teaching gift. You can end up with a group of well-fed, well-studied teachers while other ministries go neglected.

While we're on the subject of like gifts gravitating toward like gifts, you may need to hear the following: It may be time for you to share your gifts with the greater body of Christ. If you are constantly complaining of not being "fed," you may actually be a teacher who needs to be teaching. Babies need to be fed, but mature Christians should be feeding themselves and others.

4. The lack of balance in the body of Christ. Suppose my hands suddenly grabbed a pencil and wrote my eye a note and said, "I am cutting myself off. I am tired of you sitting up there in the head." Why, it would mean a crippling of the body and the death of the hand, just like in the example of what could have happened to the young man from my church.

Instead, we must learn some practical facts about the body of Christ. In summary, these facts are:

- One part cannot function as the whole (1 Cor. 12:14).
- The task of one cannot be given to another (vv. 15-17).
- There are no self-made members (vv. 18-20).
- All members are to be directed by the head, which is Christ (Col. 1:18).

That is why you, as a Christian, need to be in a local body of the church. You need to be exercising your gift to the glory

of God and the benefit of believers. I encourage you to get and stay connected to your local body today.

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Ron Phillips explains the difference between the 'gift' and the 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit at gifts.charismamag.com

Israel: From Apathy to Admiration

Sad to say, but a little more than two years ago my interest in the State of Israel could be described as apathetic at best.

Because I believe the Bible is the uncompromised Word of God—and I have ever since I got saved more than 25 years ago—I have recognized the Jews as God's chosen people as in 2 Samuel 7:24: "You established Your people Israel as your own people forever, and You, Lord, became their God" (MEV). There are many other Scriptures to confirm this, including Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 7:6-8, 1 Kings 10:9 and Psalms 105:8-15.

It was only when I came to work for Charisma Media, however, that my eyes—and my heart—were truly opened to how special

Israel really is. I began to oversee the production of our Standing With Israel section on *Charismamag.com*. It has expanded my horizons beyond my comprehension.

Prior to coming here, I had never, in my 46 years, been acquainted with an Orthodox Jew much less befriended one. That has changed, and I now count Jonathan Feldstein, who lives in Effrat, as one of my closest friends despite the physical distance between us and the vast differences in our backgrounds and beliefs.

Jonathan and I pray for and encourage each other constantly. Lord knows he and his family have needed it this past summer during the Gazan conflict with Hamas.

This summer, I attended a service at the Jewish Center in Maitland, Florida, to pray for the Israeli teens who were kidnapped by Hamas. Tragically, the youth were killed shortly thereafter, but, gratefully, it allowed me to connect with the local Jewish community. They are wonderful people.

Charisma also has afforded me the opportunity to learn about and appreciate the many wonderful Messianic Jewish ministries that make an impact on Israel every day and to forge relationships with the pertinent people involved. That includes many of the 12 ministries that we honored in our special November/December issue of *Ministry Today*.

Earlier this year on their trip to Orlando, I had the privilege of meeting Wayne Hilsden and his wife, Ann, of King of Kings Community Jerusalem. The Hilsdens have been spreading the gospel of Christ in Israel for over 31 years. It began as a Bible study/fellowship in a living room and is now a thriving ministry committed to proclaiming the Good News of Yeshua, expressing the heart of the Messiah toward hurting people through deeds of compassion and apostolic ministry.

Many other Jewish and Messianic ministry leaders have graced us with their presence in our offices, including Barry and

Batya Segal of Vision for Israel; Mel Hoelzle, Gary Cristofaro and Craig Shrum of Ezra International; and Rabbi Shmuel Bowman of Operation Lifeshield. Each of these ministries is unique in its impact on Israel, and you can read about them in full in the Nov.-Dec. issue of *Ministry Today*.

Also in that issue are stories from Hilsden about passing down the vision of Israel to the next generation; a piece from Dr. Michael Brown on why we as believers should care about Israel today; and a piece from Jonathan Bernis of Jewish Voice Ministries International as to how we can reach out to the Jews in love and friendship.

We at Charisma Media believe it is crucial for believers to stand with Israel, especially in the perilous times in which we live. As you know, the early church was composed almost entirely of Jews, and for three years, the gospel went through Jerusalem and Judea before it went out to the Gentiles.

For those who aren't already, I would encourage you, as ministerial leaders, to educate your congregations on Israel's crucial role in the End Times. Preach a sermon—or a series of sermons—on it. Create a small-group Bible study on the subject. “Surely the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ... I will put My laws into their minds and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Heb. 8:8-10, MEV).

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Kirk Cameron Targets the Spirit of Scrooge in His Latest Film

CHARISMA: When did you come up with the idea to do a Christmas movie and tackle this subject?

KIRK CAMERON: About a year ago. I love Christmas and everything about it. But every year, more and more, I find there are people inside and outside the church who want to put a big wet blanket on all of it. You have people outside the church, atheists and others, who say, "Look, that's not really what Christmas is all about. It's a winter solstice holiday. You guys just stole a pagan tradition. And by the way, if you want to celebrate your Nativity and your manger, you can do that inside your own house, but keep your voices down. Don't celebrate it loudly, and don't let it spill out into the public square. You just keep it private."

Then you have this other group inside the church telling us, "Hey, wait a minute—as Christians, we shouldn't have Christmas trees because pagans have Christmas trees. And we really shouldn't be spending money on presents, because that's just materialism, isn't it? Think of all the kids we could be feeding in Africa and the wells we could be digging, and this is all really just wasteful. Also, Wikipedia says Jesus probably wasn't born on Dec. 25, so that's not even His birthday. So the whole Christmas thing ought to be celebrated during the Feast of Tabernacles according to the Jewish calendar."

Everybody seems to have a problem with Christmas except the retail stores, but even they don't want to call it Christmas because of all the political correctness. You have to say "Season's Greetings" or "Happy Holidays." Nobody wants to say

“Merry Christmas.” Wait a minute—this is the most important event in the history of the world. God became a man and landed on planet Earth. This ought to be the greatest time of celebration for Christians and non-Christians because it’s changed everything. It changed church, family, education, science, government, entertainment—everything. There’s no better and bigger celebration than Christmas. So I wanted to make a movie about putting Christ back into Christmas.

CHARISMA: The website for your movie was hacked, right? What happened?

CAMERON: It was hacked, absolutely, but they have it back up and running now. It was a fairly sophisticated group of hackers. It really just proves the point of the movie —that there really is a war on Christmas. Some people want to say that Christians are just whining and complaining and making up the whole thing. I think this handily proves the point that there is an attack on Christmas. Why else would you go after a website like this about the most joyful, wonderful day of the year? It’s interesting and exciting times that we live in these days, and now is the time for the church to wake up and remember who we are and Whose we are and to get this message of the gospel out to the ends of the Earth, because the world desperately needs to know the love of Jesus.

CHARISMA: How should Christians who encounter secular greetings during the holiday season respond?

CAMERON: As you see in the movie, the best way to put Christ back into Christmas is not to whine and complain about those who hate it but to throw a bigger Christmas party at your house. Lean into the celebration, and don’t keep it private. Let it spill out to your front yard and down your street. Invite the whole neighborhood, and tell them about this story of this King and His kingdom—and tell them they have an important part in it. That’s how you put Christ back into Christmas. And stop listening to the pagans. You can safely

dismiss all those arguments, because pagans don't own anything. God owns all the trees in the world. God owns all the solar eclipses, the lunar eclipses; He owns the summer, the winter, the spring and the fall. He owns the winter solstice. He owns everything. Just because some pagans came along and started to think the evergreen tree was pretty cool, does that mean we shouldn't put trees in our houses when God put trees inside of His tabernacle and temple and loaded them with fruit and lights? No.

12 Ministries Making a Difference in Israel

When Canadian native Wayne Hilsden moved to Israel in 1983 to help establish a fledgling congregation in Jerusalem, little did he know that he would wind up staying for three decades, or that King of Kings Community Jerusalem would turn into a multi-faceted ministry that has helped give birth to six churches, a Bible college, a thriving prayer initiative and various outreaches.

However, most precious to the former professor at Eastern Pentecostal Bible College are the carefully built relationships that enable him to share the message that Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) is the Messiah awaited by Israelis.

“There's a greater measure of openness about one's faith,” says the senior pastor of King of Kings. “When we came to Israel, the average Jew didn't believe it was possible to become a believer. Even those who came to Christ believed they were the only Jews in existence who had done that.”

From a smattering of 15 messianic congregations around Israel

when he arrived, Hilsden estimates there are 150 today. These churches have more than 15,000 Jews who consider themselves followers of Yeshua.

Those numbers may seem minuscule in a nation of more than 8 million. But leaders who focus on providing humanitarian aid, social assistance and spreading the good news in a nation largely resistant to Christ say what God is doing in Israel rivals the exodus from Egypt.

The miracles are occurring "right before our eyes," says Gary Cristofaro, director of development for Ezra International. Since 1995 the U.S.-based ministry has aided the return of more than 43,000 low-income Jews to their ancestral homeland. A similar number are waiting for help securing documents, passports and assorted immigration papers.

"God is gathering His people from the four corners of the earth," says Cristofaro, a former Assemblies of God pastor. "The miracles are greater than when He brought them out of Egypt. Understanding this can make a difference in people's faith. The things we worry about are pretty tame compared to this. It's a very exciting time. A lot of people's hearts will fail, but if more understand where they are in His economy, it will make a difference."

Ezra International's founder, Mel Hoelzle, points to God's promise in Jeremiah 16:16 to develop a network of fishermen and hunters to help with the return of Jews to Israel.

The former business leader discovered such networks in Eastern European churches and others after the fall of communism. In a vision, God told Hoelzle He brought down the Iron Curtain, but another wall (poverty) was holding His people from returning home.

"That's why we work with poor people," Hoelzle says. "It was unbelievable how in Russia, Siberia and Ukraine, we had people coming up to tell us about dreams and visions that He would

call them to help Jewish people. And now they had the opportunity to work with an organization like ours.”

Among other present-day miracles is improving Christian-Jewish relations, fractured by anti-Semitism in the church for 2,000 years.

The thaw has been aided by such long-standing efforts as the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, established in 1980 after 13 nations closed embassies to protest the Knesset’s declaration of Jerusalem as Israel’s undivided capital.

More recently, an 8-year-old ministry that provides portable shelters to Jews, Palestinians and other residents during rocket attacks is also opening doors of understanding.

Rabbi Shmuel Bowman says Operation Lifeshield has attracted support from diverse quarters. When Jews and Christians come together for a unified purpose, the program saves lives while bringing down long-standing walls, Bowman says.

“The Jewish Federation in Birmingham, Alabama, now has a Christian on staff whose job is to connect to Christian communities and talk to them about Israel and why bridge building is important,” says the Torah scribe, who lives just south of Jerusalem. “If people can get together and talk about things we care passionately about, that opens doors to conversations and relationships.”

Wide-Ranging Outreach

“Ministry to Israel” is a broad term, encompassing everything from church planting and humanitarian aid to helping soldiers without extended family and protecting people vulnerable to attacks—especially those in southern Israel shelled by a hail of rockets this year from Hamas forces in Gaza.

In a nation prospering amid intense opposition from surrounding Middle Eastern neighbors, it may be hard to see

Israel as a land of need. Indeed, during his multiple visits each year, Hoelzle finds a place vastly different from the snippets that appear via network news reports.

“Israel does a good job of protecting their people,” he says. “I feel safer there than I do on the streets of Los Angeles or Chicago.”

Yet, many are left behind in the country’s economic development, particularly Palestinians, Russians and Ethiopian immigrants. The latter two groups are part of the ongoing “*aliyah*” return aided by groups such as Ezra International.

The Messianic Jewish Alliance estimates 1.7 million, or approximately 20 percent, of Israel’s residents live below the poverty line. Jonathan Bernis, president and CEO of Jewish Voice Ministries International, says those numbers reflect groups still struggling to adapt to an advanced, high-tech-style economy.

In addition to lacking job skills, people such as elderly Russians and Ethiopians also run into language barriers. While many Israelis speak English, a failure to master the Hebrew language places immigrants outside the mainstream, Bernis says.

Yet, such needs are also creating an opportunity for messianic churches and Christian ministries that have gained credibility in many sectors of society.

“There’s still a disdain for Jewish believers among the ultra-Orthodox and a majority in political leadership,” says Bernis, who started Hear O Israel Ministries in 1984 before later merging it with Jewish Voice.

“But I think the messianic Jewish movement has gained a constituency. It has done a good job of providing clothing on behalf of the Christian community.”

Some of the numbers are impressive. During the past 20 years, Vision for Israel & The Joseph Storehouse has assisted more than 750,000 people and 193,500 students, the latter through its Pack to School project providing school supplies to needy children.

Statistics pale in significance, however, when co-founder Barry Segal has touching encounters like his meeting with 64 Holocaust survivors in mid-August. Barry and his wife, Batya, sang to them and provided financial vouchers in advance for the Jewish holidays (Rosh Hashanah, Sept. 24-26, and Yom Kippur, Oct. 3-4).

This tender moment came right before the ministry distributed 8,500 backpacks and other assistance to children. Soon after, 500 members in Vision for Israel's Lone Soldiers program received hiking bags stuffed with personal supplies.

In early September, Segal's staff also gave out thousands of dollars worth of medical kits in backpacks to first responders who deal with the fallout of attacks from Hamas and other terrorist groups.

The latter has been even more challenging lately, as more than 2,000 Gazans and Israelis died in two months of fighting with Hamas before a shaky ceasefire went into effect in late summer. In addition to destruction, Segal says the collateral damage has included victims suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Segal shares about projects and topics such as food, culture and the Bible on his weekly *Roots & Reflections* TV program, which airs in Israel and globally on Daystar. The program's positive message about Israel and its people helps counteract the anti-Semitism that has resurfaced this year around the globe.

"We are not stuffing the good news down people's throats," says Segal, who grew up in the United States and discovered

Yeshua as a young musician in the Midwest. “We’re introducing people to the Bible and its great author through a relationship with Yeshua, the Messiah.

“We are not trying to convert Jews to another religion but bring them back to repentance and a love for the faith of their patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all looked forward to this covenant relationship.”

Meeting Needs

The needs Hilsden sees around Kings of Kings’ headquarters in an old theater in the heart of Jerusalem prompted the formation of new outreaches this year. Its Anchor of Hope counseling center is based in what used to be a sex shop, while its compassion center offering various forms of aid launched last July. It plans to open a soup kitchen there in January.

“What we’ve been finding is the recent Gaza-Hamas war caused a quick downturn in the economy, partially due to [lower] tourism,” Hilsden says. “There are a lot of needy people, especially in Jerusalem. I regularly see homeless people on the streets, digging through garbage cans to find food. Our hearts go out to them.”

That statement can be repeated by numerous ministries that not only help those in need, but also continue to shine a spotlight on the land that occupies a central role in the Second Coming of the Messiah. Some examples:

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ)

Among its outreaches is hosting annual observances of Sukkot (this year observed from Oct. 8 to 15), a Jewish festival commemorating God’s faithfulness to the Jewish people during their exodus from Egypt. The ICEJ, which held the first Christian celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in 1980,

helps educate Christians worldwide about Israel's unique calling in God's plans.

The embassy also helps combat anti-Semitism, which has surged this year in places such as Germany, France, Great Britain and Eastern Europe. In September Greece strengthened its laws against anti-Semitism and other hate speech because of the rise of a neo-Nazi Party there.

During a trip to Ukraine last January, Ezra International's Cristofaro encountered flyers containing "Blood Libel" claims. Popular in Nazi Germany, their primary accusation is that Jews murder Christian children to use their blood during holiday rituals, including baking Passover matzahs.

"It's hard to believe this is happening in the 21st century," Cristofaro says. "This happens in the Middle East and then is repeated by the Orthodox Church. Anti-Semitism is not just coming from neo-Nazis and Arabs but what many Jews see as the church."

Maoz Israel Ministries

More than 35 years old, Maoz Israel marked its birth with the 1977 marriage of founders Shira Sorko-Ram and her husband, Ari, a former actor and professional football player for the Arizona Cardinals (formerly St. Louis Cardinals). Now as Israeli citizens, they have founded the Tifaret Yeshua (the Glory of Yeshua) congregation in downtown Tel Aviv.

In addition, they manage a nonprofit publishing company that prints and distributes Bible-based books in Hebrew and a humanitarian-aid organization (istandwithisrael.com) that supports widows, orphans, needy people and terrorist victims.

The organization also provides scholarships to help immigrants with Hebrew studies and career training, as well as college courses for Messianic Jews.

Revive Israel Ministries

Directed by Asher and Betty Intrater, this apostolic ministry is dedicated to bringing revival to Israel by reconciling its people with Yeshua as Messiah. In addition to past involvement with several messianic churches in Israel and the U.S., the couple now helps pastor Ahavat Yeshua (Love of Jesus) in Washington, D.C.

Revive Israel's evangelistic strategy focuses on building personal relationships in the workplace, schools and neighborhoods. It also spreads the gospel through one-on-one street witnessing, broadcasts and literature distribution.

The ministry distributes a third of its donations to helping the poor, widows and orphans, and assisting Israeli business owners whose faith in Yeshua prompts challenges. Based in a residential community just outside Jerusalem, it also is cooperating on projects to develop a messianic industrial park and a residential development.

Operation Lifeshield

Responding originally to disruptions in northern Israel during a 2006 war with Lebanon, this year's attacks from Gaza have shifted its emphasis to the country's southern region. Bowman felt so strongly about the mission to protect residents from disruptions that he left his Orthodox Jewish temple to devote all his time to Operation Lifeshield.

Bowman draws key inspiration from Esther 4:14 and Mordecai's admonishment to Esther that God had placed her in a strategic location to save Israel. He recalls how he and others who helped initiate this effort mused: "Perhaps this is our time."

Since then the organization has distributed nearly 300 portable bomb shelters that can protect anywhere from a dozen to 50 people. The school, medical clinic or governmental entity requesting one agrees to provide ongoing maintenance.

“We’re such a boring organization,” Bowman jokes. “We have one mission and that’s to prevent Israelis from rocket attacks. Pastors tell me to allow congregants to make a donation, be able to see where that donation has gone and connect with Israelis—they won’t give to something abstract or undefined.”

Media Ministry

While their ministries don’t have an identical emphasis, two outreaches to Israel stem from those with roots in writing and commentary.

The co-pastor of Tel Aviv’s Tifaret Yeshua, Ron Cantor is the founder of Messiah’s Mandate, a teaching ministry aimed at raising up leaders for the coming Israeli revival.

The active blogger and author of *Identity Theft* (Destiny Image, 2013), Cantor is a thorn in the side of both anti-Semites and supporters of “replacement theology.” His novel explores how Jesus has been robbed of his Jewishness, while in a weekly podcast and blogs he explores the truth about such topics as Israel’s rebirth in 1948.

Through both novels and non-fiction, author Joel Rosenberg has written extensively about Middle Eastern and end-times subjects. His latest novel, *The Auschwitz Escape*, explores a Jewish prisoner relying on God’s power to escape the concentration camp and alert the world to Nazi atrocities.

In 2006, Rosenberg and his wife, Lynn, set up The Joshua Fund to mobilize Christians to bless Israel. They have led numerous prayer and vision trips to Israel, organized conferences and seminars on four continents, and provided food and other supplies to the needy.

Chosen People Ministries

Founded 120 years ago in Brooklyn by a Hungarian immigrant and now directed by Dr. Mitch Glaser, this ministry seeks to

evangelize, disciple and serve Jewish people. It operates in 13 nations with programs that equip churches to do Jewish evangelism, support messianic congregations, print messianic materials and participate in benevolent distribution.

Representatives of Chosen People Ministries also conduct "Messiah in Passover" presentations in churches across the U.S. The ministry hosts an annual messianic Jewish retreat in Maryland and leads tours of the Holy Land annually.

The Joseph Project

The Joseph Project is the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America's humanitarian-relief arm. The alliance, which will observe its centennial anniversary next year, has distributed more than \$100 million in aid to the poor of all faiths in Israel.

The ministry collects, ships and distributes more than 75 tons of clothing, furniture, household goods, medical supplies and other aid annually. It supplies this assistance through a network of 35 relief-aid centers, more than 100 Israeli partnering organizations, and messianic congregations.

Donations have increased in recent years, with the Joseph Project tripling the number of 40-foot containers it shipped to Israel between 2010 and 2013, when aid totaled more than \$5 million.

A Divine Mission

Those involved in ministry to Israel cite numerous Scriptures to buttress their support, particularly Matthew 25:31-40, which Segal says in context is a reference to helping Jews. They also cite Genesis 12:1-3, Job 29:11-17, Job 31:16-22, Isaiah 11:11-12, Isaiah 43:5-6, Isaiah 49:22, Isaiah 61:1-3 and the 36th chapter of Ezekiel.

"Ezekiel 36 speaks about how God's name is profaned as the

Jewish people have been scattered,” Cristofaro says. “God is mocked, and people think He can’t fulfill His promises. He reveals himself to the Jewish people and the nations with this (*aliyah*) process. We have a choice: to sanctify or desecrate His Name.”

Hoelzle sees encouraging signs that more Christians are warming to the message of support for Israel, saying Ezra International has more churches helping finance the ministry than it did a decade ago. He thinks that stems from more awareness of ancient prophecies about Israel being fulfilled in modern times.

Indeed, during his ongoing trips to Israel, Bernis senses the same kind of openness to Yeshua that he saw among American Jews during the heyday of the Jesus People in the 1970s.

Bernis, whose work in recent years has broadly expanded to establishing a network of medical clinics for Jewish communities in India and some countries in Africa, says he has talked to Orthodox Jews in Israel who have embraced Yeshua after supernatural experiences.

“There is a growing expectation of Messiah,” Bernis says. “We believe that ultimately the Jewish people—and particularly those in Israel—will cry out: ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matt. 23:39).

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4 More Ministries Impacting Israel

Here are some other ministries that are making a difference for the people of Israel:

Chaya and Avi Mizrachi founded Dugit
in 1993

Dugit: Simply the name of this organization in Tel Aviv is intriguing. The word “dugit” is Hebrew for “fishing boat,” like the ones used by the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. Established in 1993 by Avi and Chaya Mizrachi, Dugit likes to refer to itself as “fishers of men” in the heart of Tel Aviv.

The Dugit Messianic Centre has been reaching Israelis with the gospel of Jesus Christ for more than two decades, discipling them to become stronger believers and grounding them in the Word. With 20 percent of Israelis living in poverty, Dugit’s Agape Distribution Center helps to provide food and clothing to the needy. Families are sent to the center by social services, including Holocaust survivors and those unable to work for health reasons. During the major Jewish holidays, Dugit distributes “baskets of love,” and the organization hands out free Bibles and testimony books in Hebrew, Russian and Arabic to quench spiritual thirst.

The Dugit Messianic Centre has
been reaching Israelis for Jesus
for nearly two decades

Succat Hallel: In the mold of the many sites of the International House of Prayer in the United States, Succat Hallel is a place where anyone can come to worship and pray 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Americans Rick and Patti Ridings were summoned by God to Jerusalem in 1999 and began worship services in their living room. In 2004, the Lord opened the door to Succat Hallel to relocate to a facility overlooking Mount Zion and the Old City of Jerusalem. In fall 2006, a second private prayer room opened in the City of David where the original Tabernacle of David stood. Since 2007, Succat Hallel has hosted a youth/adult conference known as ELAV, which means “Unto Him.”

Jerusalem Institute of Justice: This organization is dedicated

to cultivating and defending the rule of law, human rights, freedom of conscience and democracy for all people in Israel and its adjacent territories. Founded by Calev Myers in 2004, JIJ was established to provide pro-bono legal assistance for those suffering from illegal religious discrimination, including Messianic Jews. Myers immigrated to Israel in 1992, graduated from Hebrew University of Jerusalem and became a licensed member of the Israeli Bar Association. Since 2007, JIJ has strived to free men, women and children trapped in the sex trade and has been working to change legislation in Israel, which currently allows both the sale and purchase of sexual services. Additionally, JIJ focuses on Palestinian human rights.

Bridges for Peace: Bridges is a Jerusalem-based, Bible-believing Christian organization whose desire is to see Christians and Jews working side by side for better understanding and a more secure Israel. Founded in 1976, BFP is a ministry of hope and reconciliation, giving Christians the opportunity to actively express their biblical responsibility before God to be faithful to Israel and the Jewish community. Its many programs include bimonthly publication of pertinent and positive news from Israel; its monthly teaching letter to bring fuller meanings of biblical concepts from the Hebraic roots of the Scriptures; its Chai Night prayer and study groups, which is a monthly intercessory prayer program for those desiring to pray for the peace of Jerusalem; and Operation Ezra, including a food bank and assistance to Jewish immigrants, Israel's elderly and its poor.