

Why You Can Always Count on This Characteristic of God

Knowing that God is eternally good and that He holds the final authority on every event that is allowed to touch our lives, why is evil a component of life on earth? It is hard to wrap finite human minds around the juxtaposition of God's goodness, man's sinful nature and the enemy's evil schemes.

Though theologians from every historical juncture have endeavored to explain the dilemma of good vs. evil, there may be issues that are unanswerable this side of eternity. That is why it is imperative to default to the fact that God is eternally, perpetually and generously good whenever one is confronted with evil.

The fact remains, however, that evil exists and has set many horrific fires for those who live for Christ this side of eternity.

Evil is opposition to God and to His plan and is utterly and completely dissimilar to all that He is. God never shows compliance or tolerance for evil. There is not one drop of evil in God. Not one cell. Not one atom.

"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing" (Hab. 1:13, NIV).

God has no evil in Him and will never change to accommodate evil or sin. His plans are for good and not for evil. His heart abounds with the goodness of heaven, and He sits on His throne in anticipation of sharing all that He is and all that He has with His children.

Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil; neither does He tempt anyone. ... Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and

comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no change or shadow of turning" (James 1:13, 17, MEV).

Your God is a perpetual goodness machine! He never stops being or doing good because He knows of no other way to be than completely, utterly and eternally good. If God's goodness were stunted or even paused by our compromising behavior, He would not be totally good and would at least have some "neutral" in Him. However, because His goodness is never determined by our behavior, it is impossible for God to ever be anything but unconditionally good.

"And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good" (Jer. 32:40a).

The words of God to the prophet Jeremiah confirm that He has no intention of ever being anything but good. God has made a covenant with His children that He is continually following them with His goodness.

I don't know anyone else like this! God's goodness is chasing you down, regardless of your past or your sinful choices. God's goodness will not leave you alone today or tomorrow. It is His unalterable promise to you—and that is amazingly good news!

Carol McLeod is an author and popular speaker at women's conferences and retreats, where she teaches the Word of God with great joy and enthusiasm. Carol encourages and empowers women with passionate and practical biblical messages mixed with her own special brand of hope and humor. She has written five books: *No More Ordinary, Holy Estrogen!*, *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart and Defiant Joy!* Her most recent book, *Refined: Finding Joy in the Midst of the Fire*, will be released on Aug. 1. Her teaching DVD *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart* won the Telly Award, a prestigious industry award for excellence in religious programming.

Man Who Survived Deadly House Fire: 'You Are Not Alone on Your Journey to Recovery'

Dr. Mark McDonough is a survivor. As a child, he overcame Guillain-Barre Syndrome, a debilitating neurological disease. At 16, a house fire traumatized him. Not only did he lose his mother and little brother, but he also suffered burns on over 60% of his body.

He has also recovered from a paralyzing stroke and congestive heart failure that required open-heart cardiac valve surgery.

But McDonough was raised to believe that God had a reason for everything that happened to him. One of the reasons he became a plastic surgeon was to work with burn and trauma patients, and to help them find healing and encouragement for their future.

His strong faith moves him to encourage others that, even through the fire, they don't have to become angry and bitter about life's circumstances. They can survive—and thrive.

"When you don't know or can't understand what is happening to you, you need to remind yourself to check in with God," McDonough told Dr. Steve Greene on a recent episode of "Greenelines" on the Charisma Podcast. "The more clueless we are, the more we depend on Him.

"The goal for my ministry is to help other survivors to learn to live again. Through everything, God has a purpose for you. You can persevere. Surrender to His will and lean on Him, let Him be the person in charge. My faith in God is at the core of

all I do, but all glory is His. Just know that you are not alone on your journey to recovery.”

For the rest of McDonough’s incredible story, listen to this podcast.

A Greater Harvest Awaits Those Who Live by This Biblical Principle

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matt 13:45-46)

During Roman times, pearls were an elusive and highly prized treasure. Symbols of wealth, prestige and power, only the elite of society could hope to acquire them. Their high value is no wonder, since harvesting pearls often meant diving to great depths without breathing equipment to gather oysters in hopes one contained a fully formed pearl.

Pliny, the world’s first gemologist, estimated that one set of pearl earrings during Roman times had value equaling over \$9,300,000 today. We cannot quite grasp the worth Jesus placed on a “pearl of great price”; but in that culture and that day, people might have imagined selling all to obtain such a prize.

In today’s throwaway culture, it is hard to imagine valuing anything that highly. But Jesus was making the point that the kingdom of heaven, relationship with Him, had greater worth than *anything* we could ever desire. Jesus is the pearl of

great price.

Now consider that God, the Father, gave this pearl of great price to buy us out of the clutches of sin and death. John 3:16 reminds us that "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

God places an extremely high value on the souls of humanity. He sacrificed His Son for each and every one. It is hard to conceive the magnitude of love He has for us that would drive that kind of sacrifice. He sent Jesus to seek and save the lost so each one can be a pearl of great price in His kingdom.

How can we, His people, do less?

In 1999, Matt and Katy Stevens followed the call of God to Baltimore. While originally serving as youth pastors, God gave them a love for the people caught in the forgotten parts of the city—and that love moved them to action.

They started Somebody Cares Baltimore and pursued relationships with pastors and community leaders who want to serve and change their city. They laid a foundation by saturating communities with prayer and compassionate acts of kindness, and began meeting the felt needs in some of the most violent and impoverished area.

After years of serving in obscurity, through riots, strained finances and other challenges—they have seen communities turn around, lowering violent crime, renewed housing and increased opportunities in education as people have come to Christ. They are still laying it all down for the pearls of the God's kingdom.

Demos Shakarian was a successful rancher in California in the 1940s and 1950s. He was active in supporting evangelistic crusades and other Christian work but realized that the type of evangelism of that day was missing businessmen. He founded

the Full Gospel Businessmen International organization specifically to reach that unevangelized segment of the population.

The strategy was to hold monthly business luncheons at which business people in each community would share about their faith in and walk with Christ. Countless men and women around the world have come to Christ through those outreaches because Demos was determined to seek and save the lost!

My family came to Christ when then-Air Force Captain Kris Mineau (now a retired colonel), a brash fighter pilot in my dad's squadron, got saved while in a hospital room recovering from a near-fatal airplane accident. He and his wife shared the Good News with my parents, my siblings and me—regardless of how he might have sounded to another combat pilot. Salvation came to our house because of their willingness to look foolish, and we are forever grateful. They have shared the Good News with many others since then as well.

I could recount numerous other stories of people who have devoted themselves to sharing the gospel; hopefully you can think of some too. These stories and the lives of many others should serve as inspiration for each of us to be about the Father's business—sharing His Good News of salvation through Christ alone—with a hurting world.

If you don't know where to begin, start with prayer. Ask the Lord to give you His love for the lost and a renewed joy in your salvation. Remember your life before you surrendered to His love and consider how you have changed since that glorious day.

Then be ready to share your experience with people God puts in your path. God has uniquely designed you for the good works He has called you to do—so don't be intimidated by what someone else does or the style they may use to share the gospel. Remember that you have Good News to share, and multitudes are

waiting to hear it!

A greater harvest is still ahead for those willing to dive into the kingdom to rescue more “pearls of great price!” We are all invited to join Him in the greatest treasure hunt of all time so we have a bounty of pearls to present to the King of kings.

***Jodie Chiricosta** serves as the vice president of Somebody Cares America/ International. Through her 25-plus years of experience in disaster response, humanitarian relief and development with Operation Blessing and Somebody Cares America/Intl. as well as her continual involvement in a variety of community service and international outreach activities, she has long been an agent of positive change. Listen to Jodie’s guest podcast episodes on “A Word In Season With Doug Stringer” on the Charisma Podcast Network.*

Andrew Wommack: Let This Kingdom Truth Set You Free

Does your conscience bother you?

Andrew Wommack doesn’t believe Satan told Adam and Eve they were naked. Instead, their consciences did. And he says Christ-followers must learn to purge their own conscience to walk in greater intimacy with Christ.

“God did not tell Adam and Eve they were naked. And, there is

no indication that the devil told them they were naked,” Wommack told Dr. Steve Greene on a recent episode of “Greenelines” on the Charisma Podcast Network. “I believe it was their own conscience that condemned them.

“A lot of times people just think that if they feel convicted or condemned, like they’re unworthy, that’s it’s God. And yet that’s not the case. The truth is we aren’t worthy ourselves, but through Jesus we are. It’s all about who you are in Christ.

“When I began to realize that there was a part of me that I couldn’t see in the mirror, I could feel in my emotions, I had to look at the Bible and just take what it says about me, that I’m a new person, old things have passed away and all things have become new.

“When I began to deal with myself and change my identity, that set me free from condemnation. And so, you must purge your conscience, and you need to understand that you are delivered from the curse of the law because Christ was made a curse for us.”

For the rest of Wommack’s teaching, listen to the podcast.

6 More Ways to Restore the Shallow Church to Its Fullness

Note: This is part two in a two-part series.

Last week, I listed the top four things the local church must do to restore its fullness, to read "10 Ways to Restore the Shallow Church to its Fullness, Part 1. The following are the rest of the things the local church must do to restore its fullness:

5. **Recapture the practice of catechesis.** With the advent of the Protestant Reformation came about a tendency for non-Catholics to do away with all traditions of the church not directly practiced in the New Testament. (To be consistent, these same people should do away with the practice of Sunday school because that is also not practiced in the New Testament church). One of the most important practices the early (2nd century and beyond) church developed was to catechize new believers (sometimes for as long two to three years) before they were accepted as baptism candidates.

In the context of this article, the word "catechism" has to do with either written or oral instruction related to the first principles of the faith. (See Heb. 5:11-6:4.) Historically it has been a series of written questions with fixed answers and or precepts used for instruction that grounded new believers in the faith. This practice was initially launched by the early church fathers in its nascent form in a first century document called the *Didache*, which was comprised of teachings regarding Christian ethics, rituals such as baptism and communion, church organization along with instructions on how to treat traveling apostles and prophets, as well as the need to recite the Lord's prayer and so forth.

Nowadays, many contemporary non-denominational evangelical churches have virtually no process or rites of passage for new believers and are essentially often baptizing "pagans."

Consequently, the contemporary church is often "a mile long and an inch wide" in regard to sound biblical teaching and discipleship. Recapturing the practice of catechesis, for both

young children (done by parents along with the church) as well instituting a process as the criteria whereby people can qualify for baptism is an important step towards restoring the church back to its calling and fullness.

6. Recapture missions. The early church never separated its existence from its primary calling and mission. The last words Jesus spoke over His disciples before His ascension reiterated the fact that the church existed as a community of people to be His witnesses in every city and nation (see Acts 1:8,9).

Hence, the church was never separated organically from its intrinsic mission from its founding.

The present-day church is so far from this ontological understanding of its essence that it depends upon parachurch organizations and mission agencies in order to train and launch its congregations into short-term or long-term mission expeditions. If the church is ever going to recapture its fullness, it has to become missional again!

7. Recapture the purpose of the church of Acts. Acts 1:1,2 clearly states that the Gospels record the narrative of what Jesus “began” to do and teach—which framed the rest of the Acts narrative by depicting what Jesus continues to do through His church by the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is not primarily called to be a social club or have nice Sunday attendance, preaching and worship experiences. The church is called to continue the works of Jesus, which is also why Jesus expects us to not only continue His works but to do greater works than He did, because He went to the Father and continues to work through us corporately through the Holy Spirit (See John 14:12-13).

Unless we use the Gospels as our primary reference point for how to think, act and serve like Jesus, and unless we use the epistles as our primary reference to practically apply the

life of Jesus in the context of our family and church, we will continue to fall short and never recapture the fullness of God's design for the body of Christ.

8. Recapture the call to be a benefactor community. The apostle Paul admonished the church to do good to all men, especially to the household of Faith (see Gal. 6:10). That being said, Paul also commanded the church to benefit all people—not just people in the church. As we read in Titus 3:8, Paul says that those who have believed would be careful to engage in good deeds. Then he makes it clear that these good deeds are to be profitable for all men—not just those in the church.

He also stated in the previous chapter that Jesus redeemed and purified us for Himself so that we would be zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14). Since he does not seem to indicate these good deeds are to be confined within the local church, we have to come to the conclusion that Jesus has called the church to be a blessing to its surrounding community—to serve, pray and bless it, and become a sort of benefactor community to its neighbors. This goes along with what God told Jeremiah regarding the children of Israel in Babylonian captivity. He commanded the Jewish people to build houses, plant gardens, build families, eat their produce and seek the welfare of the city and pray for it (see Jer. 29:4-7). Jesus called His followers to function as the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). If the church is going to restore its fullness, it has to become community-centric—not just merely inwardly focused.

9. Recapture the essence of the church as a missional people (don't depend upon crusade evangelism). When we think about evangelism today, we have pictures of street preachers with bullhorns or huge crusades with well-known, gifted evangelists. This methodology was unheard of in the early New Testament church. When people were sent out to preach, they

never launched out in major ministry without the blessing and planning of their local church (see Rom. 10:15, Acts 13:2).

Furthermore, Paul refused to evangelize beyond the capacity, resources, and faith of the local churches in his region—hence, he never separated evangelism from the context of the local church. He said to the church “that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you” (See 2 Cor. 10:15b-16a, NASB).

We see virtually the same principle modeled by the church of Thessalonica, when Paul commended them because from them (their local church) the word of the Lord sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. (In other words, Paul did not have to preach to those regions because the local church he founded in Thessalonica was doing the evangelizing (see 1 Thess. 1:8).

If the local church is going to be restored back to its fullness, it has to recapture its call to proclaim the gospel and continue to expand the borders of the influence of the kingdom of God without depending upon famous preachers coming to town to hold a crusade.

10. Recapture Word and Spirit focus. Jesus stated that the Father is seeking for people to worship Him in spirit and in truth (see John 4:23-24). He also stated in another place that people were in error because they knew not the Scriptures nor the power of God (see Matt. 22:29). Unfortunately, most contemporary churches are either strong in the Spirit (charismatic churches) and weak in the Word, or strong in the Word but weak in regard to expecting and allowing a strong move of the Holy Spirit (many more theologically inclined churches).

If the church is going to recapture its fullness, we need to

have a robust theological focus in our preaching, discipleship, youth meetings and Scripture application to daily life—as well as a strong focus in fasting, prayer and allowing God to move supernaturally in our midst by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some people are so rationalistic that they either have a (truncated) Bible without present-day miracles (because they are cessationists) or they intellectually believe in the power of God but are afraid to allow God to move because they fear “wildfire”. However, I would rather have wildfire than have no fire at all, in the same way I would not want a biblically illiterate, subjective church with no grounding in the truth.

If the church is going to be restored to its fullness, it needs to embrace both spirit and truth, and know the Scriptures as well as the power of God.

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Why the Enemy Cowers From This Powerful Holy Spirit

Punch

“No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then he will plunder his house” (Mark 3:27).

There is such a thing as prophetic deliverance. I’ve honestly never read or heard of anyone using this term. It’s a revelation I received from the Lord while actively engaged in the ministry of casting out devils. Prophetic deliverance is simply using the gift of prophecy (mainly words of knowledge), in unity with the gift of discernment, to identify specific satanic strongholds, name them and cast them out.

I’m of the mindset that prophetic ministry and deliverance go hand in hand. It’s very common to see both forms of ministry evident within true apostolic houses. To see one without the other is concerning. God will usually speak to you or provide a word of knowledge while or before engaging in the ministry of casting out devils.

The prophetic gift is crucial to deliverance. In my estimation, the best people to cast out demons are those who have a sturdy prophetic dimension. I’ve noticed that, as a prophet, my aptitude to see in the spirit realm has aided me in detecting demons that have become embedded within individuals. Once I’ve perceived their presence in the spirit realm, I’m able to call them out, in the name of Jesus Christ, in the natural realm.

As you probably know by now, I do not recommend engaging in conversation with devils, but identifying them within an individual is imperative to casting them out, as in the case of dealing with the strongman (chief or head demon) that lies within. There is a hierarchy within the kingdom of Satan. It’s very similar to a natural army. There are generals, captains, sergeants, corporals and the like.

Identifying the Strongman

In reference to the Scripture at the beginning of this section, how can we know who the strongman is? We can know through the prophetic DNA (ability to hear God's voice) that exists in every believer. Once identified, as touched upon earlier, a deliverance worker can bind him up and cast the strongman out of a demonized person. The weaker or lower ranking demons will exit with him. In medieval times, when the king or most powerful warrior (e.g. Goliath) was defeated, it left the soldiers scattered and fearful, making them easier to kill or capture.

I'm in total agreement with this philosophy. I see casting out the chief devil as a catalyst that ignites a literal and spiritual chain reaction. Each of the lower-level or weaker demons are "chained" to the most powerful or chief one. When he's thrown out of the house (our bodies), the others go because they're linked to him.

It's similar to a heavy ball with a chain attached being thrown off a bridge and into the water. Whatever is attached to that chain that weighs less than the ball will be pulled in.

You have to get rid of what is demonically weightier in the spirit to get to the demons that are lighter, spiritually. If you only go after the minor-league demons, total freedom or eviction of the spirits in the sufferer may take years.

Again, this may be contrary to conventional thinking regarding deliverance, but calling out all the names of lesser demons is counterproductive. It simply wastes valuable time, especially if the person receiving deliverance has hundreds or even thousands of devils that have made his or her body their home.

Why not use the gift of discernment or a word of knowledge (a component of prophecy) to identify the general (head demon) within and cast him out?

If this is done, his foot soldiers will follow. I call this efficient deliverance.

Dr. John S. Veal is the senior pastor/prophet of Enduring Faith Christian Center and the CEO of John Veal Ministries. Dr. Veal is a highly sought-after conference speaker due to his uncanny prophetic accuracy, humor, candor and unconventional preaching style. He has traveled the nations, presenting a myriad of prophetic trainings and ministry. He currently resides in Chicago, Illinois, with his wife, Elisa, and their three children.

Why Marriage Won't Fix Your Porn Problem

"I can stop whenever I want to," "I'm not hurting anyone," and "It's just a harmless video" are common defenses. Many single guys believe that marriage will expunge the need to view pornography.

But that assumption is not correct.

Bobby Angel, a California campus minister and theology teacher, said, "The problem is that there is no superpower in that wedding ring that will magically imbue you with the discipline (and the freedom) to renounce pornography; your ring is not forged in the fires of self-mastery. There's no switch thrown on your wedding day that will make you impervious to temptations. Nor will your spouse magically satisfy all the illicit sexual fantasies that porn trains your brain to expect. Marriage will not cure your porn problem; your porn problem will undermine your marriage."

Not What They Imagined

Brandon D. Smith, the author of *Rooted: Theology for Growing Christians*, recalled, "What I did not anticipate was how my porn addiction would affect my marriage. I assumed marriage would fix my desire for porn and erase the memories. I bought the lie that sex was going to be what I had seen in the movies I'd watched for years. I assumed sex within marriage one day would step right in and replace my desires. It didn't."

Author Luke Gilkerson wrote about John, a man who saw porn for the first time when he was 10 years old. John said, "So when you're 12 and 13 and you're not married, you think when you become married, that this whole habit you've created for yourself will just go away because now you'll have a sex partner. But the problem is, it's not actually a sexual experience, it's a fantasy experience that your body gets trained for. So now, the reality of the marriage isn't the fantasy."

Joel Hesch, founder of Proven Men Ministries, offered an explanation in the Porn Phenomenon research conducted by the Barna Group. "Patterns developed as a single carry over into marriage. I personally know how defeating it is to get married and then realize that the addiction is growing."

Be Aware of Your Triggers

The problem is not the unlimited supply of sex that is available. You need to know what your emotional triggers are that cause you to seek pornography for sexual satisfaction.

Dr. Robert Weiss LCSW, CSAT-S, the founder of the Sexual Recovery Institute, explains that triggers are catalysts that make someone need something to make them feel better. There can be many types of triggers, both internal and external. These include emotional or physical discomfort, depression, anxiety, family issues, loneliness, financial problems, boredom, stress, hunger, anger or any other form of

discomfort.

Dr. Peter Kleponis, a Licensed Clinical Therapist, gives examples of triggers. "A trigger is a person, place, thing, emotion or experience that can easily lead one into viewing pornography. Some triggers can be easy to identify, such as a day at the beach with young girls running around in bikinis. They can also include things such as pop-up ads on the internet, television commercials during sports games, lingerie catalogs, sexual scenes in cable/satellite television shows or PG, PG-13 or R-rated movies, men's lifestyle magazines, etc."

He added, "In addition, for some men, just the sight of a computer, television, cell phone, tablet, etc. could be a sexual trigger, especially if those devices are used to access sexual media. Even memories of past pornography viewed can be triggers."

Being aware of your own triggers is a big step in your battle to overcome pornography.

Take Ownership of Your Addiction

Marriage is a beautiful gift from God. However, it is not a wife's responsibility to deal with your porn use—you must be accountable for it.

Marriage will not help you stop viewing porn. As Bobby Angel said, "You bring into your marriage who you are, and that includes your daily habits and behaviors. ... We need to have cultivated discipline and mastery of self before we take our marital vows, not after. For love of your family and love of God, root out pornography now to save your marriage before it even starts."

Author Tiffany Dawn wrote, "Getting married doesn't purge away lust. It might mask it for a little while, during the 'honeymoon stage,' but lust is a battle that doesn't just go away. It is something we work through with God over time, and

if you haven't begun the process of surrendering it before marriage, it will rear its ugly head right back up again after vows have been said."

Brandon D. Smith said, "You cannot change your past, but Christ can offer you a new life and a better future. Chase Him. Cling to Him. Let Him be your standard of character, and flee the temptation to fix your eyes on anything other than Him."

Men are Finding Freedom and Healing in Their Marriages

There is a movement of more than one million men who are finding freedom from pornography. They are using a cinematic small group study called the Conquer Series which provides biblical strategies to help renew the mind and find lasting freedom.

Bryan S. shares, "I am now over 19 months 100% clean of porn, sexual addiction and lust in general. God rescued and redeemed me in November 2017, but not until I had utterly destroyed my wife and our life. But God, in His mercy, let everything come to the surface so we could see how He could work a series of miracles."

His wife added, "I have to admit, 19 months ago, it would have been hard for me to see this as the final outcome. But God truly is a miracle worker and has blessed us with the marriage we never thought we would have!"

If you're single, start the process of healing now so you can approach marriage as a man who has already dealt with this. Your future wife will adore you for it. If you're married, start the process of healing so that you can bring restoration and healing to your family.

Learn more about the Conquer Series at .

If you would like more information about this topic, please

contact Luke Gibbons at 561-771-6709 or email at support@.

Why Your Prayers Don't Come With an Expiration Date

One of the most difficult and also most rewarding parts of being a rabbi is officiating over funerals. We always want to be encouraging to the family and friends who are attending while at the same time being biblical and truthful in what we say.

Recently, I was sharing at the service for a dear friend who had been a long-time member of our congregational family. I looked out at her family and wanted to say something meaningful to them while, at the same time, knowing that not all of them were walking in right relationship with G-D.

As I stood there sharing about the amazing faith of the woman who passed from this world to the world to come, I reminded those in attendance of the powerful prayer life his woman had. She was always one of those people who, no matter what problem or crisis arose, responded with Spirit-led prayers that would rattle the heavens.

When I started to remind her family and friends of her great prayer life and how often she prayed for them, I was reminded that every one of those prayers for her family and friends was very much in effect. Each word of those prayers was eternal, and even though she was no longer living in this world, her prayers were very much alive.

Prayers do not have a shelf life. Prayers do not have an

expiration date. So I looked out to the people sitting in the front row and reminded them that one by one, they had been prayed for, and those prayers are still active and working in their lives.

I shared that their loved one had full expectation that each prayer she ever prayed for those she loved would be brought to fullness. I asked them to think about all of the times she had prayed for each of them and with absolute confidence, I told them that I would be watching to see the seeds of prayer that were planted in them become beautiful fruit in each of their lives.

What was amazing to me was that as I spoke those words, the cloud of sadness that I had felt ever since the passing of my dear friend lifted as if a cool breeze swept through the service. My immediate response was to wonder if the words of comfort and encouragement about the prayers spoken by our loved one were an answer to one of her prayers directed at me—if my friend had prayed for me, knowing my heart would be broken by her passing, and that prayer reached me at that very moment. {eoa}

Eric Tokajer *is author of* With Me in Paradise, Transient Singularity, OY! How Did I Get Here?: Thirty-One Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before Entering Ministry, #ManWisdom: With Eric Tokajer, Jesus Is to Christianity as Pasta Is to Italians, *and* Galatians in Context.

How You Can Keep the Culture From Hijacking Your Rights

Media expert Billy Hallowell isn't suggesting Christians should turn their televisions off completely. He does, however, urge believers to carefully monitor what they are watching and to support faith-based programming and movies.

Hallowell says we must show the world that we belong to Christ.

"Everything we are putting into our minds and our hearts has an impact on us," Hallowell told Dr. Steve Greene on a recent episode of "Greenelines" on the Charisma Podcast Network. "We can complain all day long that Hollywood isn't creating enough Christian, faith-based or family-friendly content. But if we're not out there, subscribing to services like PureFlix, seeing films and consuming them, then people can't make them.

"On the entertainment side, it would be as simple as to take steps to support the art that's out there. There are a lot of opportunities to do that in a lot of different ways. We also must engage in the content, and look at what media we are watching.

"And, we must take a step back and pray for President Trump and other politicians like Maxine Waters and Nancy Pelosi. I don't think we're doing that enough. I think we're reacting. A lot of times we're putting our faith second. So, we must engage in the content and engage in prayer.

"We also need to train young people and adults to first be kingdom-minded. We need to send them out into the world to become producers, journalists and professors. We need Christians who can fit into all these arenas because that is how you have a presence."

For more about the importance of media interactions for Christians, listen to the podcast above.

Why Ministry Hurts and What You Can Do About It

Sometimes ministry hurts. There's grief and pain for church leaders.

It's like a violent storm that comes from every angle against us. Discouragement. Depression. Quitting. Being fired. Wanting to turn your back on church and ministry.

Why is the downside of being in ministry so huge? And why does it hit all of us?

Prayerfully read on, church leader, to see how God wants to strengthen and encourage you today. There aren't easy answers. Just some perspective and hope.

Why Ministry Hurts

Why does ministry hurt so much?

1. **Imperfect people do imperfect things.** It's the obvious starting place: Ministry hurts because people do and say things that are hurtful.

They may be ornery, oblivious or power-seeking. They may not mean to be hurtful or even realize that they hurt people. They may be sorry.

Or they may never admit their part in the hurt. We're

surprised when people in church hurt other people, but we shouldn't be. We're still a bunch of sinners.

2. **The Evil One is the destroyer.** Let's not forget who is behind the hurt. It's not accidental. It's calculated to bring ruin and comes from the one who is out to kill, steal and destroy (John 10:10).
3. **We're blinded by our own perspective.** We got robbed several years ago, and in the aftermath, we were surprised by how hypersensitive we were.

In an unusual turnaround of expectations, for the next few days, we expected sympathy and sensitivity from everybody. We felt violated. And with all the details of closing stolen credit cards and bank accounts, we were hurt, frustrated and angry. We couldn't think straight. We got easily irritated. We weren't our normal reasonable selves.

It's not easy to step away from the pain, to put it in perspective, or to move past it. Sometimes ministry hurts because all we can see is the offense and the offenders.

4. **Church work is just plain hard.** Peter Drucker has famously ranked the job of pastor as one of the four hardest professions. We're right alongside the president of the United States, university presidents and hospital CEOs ... at least we're in good company.

Why is ministry so hard?

Samuel Chand in Leadership Pain explains that in former days pastors only needed to preach and care for their flock. Now they need to run a much more complex organization involving buildings, finances, human resources and community partnerships. Not the usual seminary curricula.

In addition, our churches sit in the middle of a post-modern culture. Our church members can listen to the best preachers every time they slap on their headphones and go for a run.

They only come to church a couple times a month.

The colloquialism “it’s an uphill battle” comes to mind.

5. Your gifting leaves you weak in other areas. You may be a good preacher, but you don’t like administration.

You may be full of vision and passion, but you disappoint people when you’re not at their bedside.

You may be a great shepherd, but you can’t move the church forward.

We bring our strengths to our ministry, but our weaknesses become the focal point of the criticism. We work harder, try to do better, wear stress like a badge and persevere for the sake of the gospel. But our weaknesses come hand in hand with our gifts.

6. You are caught in difficult circumstances. You didn’t know that the senior pastor was going to resign in a cloud of dust two months after you arrived, and that the congregation wouldn’t trust anyone for years.

You didn’t foresee the chronic illness in your spouse, the rebelliousness in your kids or the financial struggles you would face. Our difficult circumstances manifest in symptoms of grief and stress.

The next time you’re with other pastors, go behind the “how big is your church” facade and quietly ask how they are really doing.

You’ll find that everyone has difficult circumstances.

7. You expected it to be easier. It would have been good to know when you went into ministry what it was really going to be like. We didn’t know that most churches don’t grow, and that growth, when it does come, brings new challenges.

I don't know why we expected a world of easy blessing. It wasn't easy for any of the leaders in the Bible:

- David hid in a cave from the murderous Saul.
- Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son.
- Moses had millions of malcontents.
- Paul was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked and so on.
- And Jesus bore our sins on the cross.

As you've noticed, leadership pain is normal. It isn't a mistake. It's God's proving ground.

What to Do About the Ministry Pain You're Facing

1. **Run to Jesus.** You may feel too numb to practice spiritual disciplines or to expect anything resembling hope or joy.

Let me gently suggest that you need to get out of town like Elijah. You need extended time alone with Jesus.

Find a cave and bring your complaints to God. Listen for his voice. He got you into this mess. Let him get you out of it. Let him comfort you, and like Elijah, let him strengthen you (1 Kings 19).

If you can't manage an overnight prayer retreat, here's how Lorne Sanny, former Navigators president, recommends you spend a day in prayer:

2. **Embrace the pain and decide to grow.** Easier said than done, I know.

When you realize that the worst thing to do is to go numb and ignore the pain, and the best thing to do is to decide that you won't give up, then you're ready to see from Jesus how to grow through this.

You can do it.

You may never have expected Hebrews 12:7a (CSB) to speak to

the pastor, but it does: “Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons.”

And “Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11b).

3. **Find someone to talk to.** Maybe you’re one of the lucky ones, and you have someone around who will listen to you.

Most pastors are too isolated to share their heaviest burdens. If that’s your situation, then pay someone to talk with you.

I’m not kidding. Get a counselor to help you work through what you’re feeling and how you can learn from your situation.

You’ll make progress, you’ll feel better and you never have to worry about your counselor betraying you or leaving you.

4. **Get out of town for a short vacation.** Or take a longer time away if you can manage it. Go camping. Use Groupon to find a deal to take the kids to a water park. Or take your spouse on a weekend getaway.

Do something fun and different. Get some fresh air and a new point of view. Let your problems fade in importance.

I’m often surprised at how much lighter my load feels when I’m out of town.

Here’s how to get away if it seems too hard: “Why Pastors Should Get Away Every Summer—and How to Make it Work.”

5. **Manage your own expectations.** Ministry is hard. But hard things don’t need to floor you. Somehow, it’s a little less discouraging when you decide to see challenges as a normal part of life, and when you embrace the principle that God uses pain to grow leaders.

6. **Stand on God’s Word.** Open up your Bible and read Psalm

31.

Here are some highlights:

“Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; my eye wastes away with grief, yes, my soul and my body” (Ps. 31:9, MEV).

“Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have done for those seeking refuge in You before people! You will hide them in the secret of Your presence from conspirators; You will keep them secretly in a shelter from the strife of tongues. Blessed be the Lord, for He has shown me His marvelous lovingkindness in a fortified city” (Ps. 31:19-21).

“Be strong, and He will strengthen your heart, all you who wait for the Lord” (Ps. 31:24).

Here are a few more: Isaiah 40:28-31, Joshua 1:7-9, Lamentations 3 and Ephesians 6:10-18. Or go back and read your old favorites again.

Let God speak to you through His Word, and He will ease your ministry pain.

What's Next?

Read Samuel R. Chand's book, *Leadership Pain*, for a deep dive in learning how to use your pain for growth. Chand advises that you should continually raise your threshold for leadership pain because you will only grow as a leader to the limit of the pain you are willing to face.

I see hope for you. {eoa}

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