

Reaching Millennials: No Young Man Left Behind

Much has been written about this group of men and women born between 1985 and 2000, often called millennials or Mosaics. They grew up in a fundamentally different world than previous generations, never knowing a world without cellphones or the Internet.

Their disinterest in organized religion is well-documented. In one study, the Pew Center asked people their religious affiliation and found that a large number of people no longer affiliate themselves with any specific religion. This is sometimes called “the rise of the ‘Nones.’”

The Nones

The study revealed a troubling trend. In the oldest generation—those over 65—only 9 percent of the population have no religious affiliation. But as you go into successively younger generations, you see a larger and larger number until you get to the millennials, where 32 percent express no religious affiliation.

Another study by The Barna Group found that 59 percent of 18-29 year-olds with a Christian background have stopped attending church after attending regularly growing up.

The news is not, however, all bad. The number of Nones from The Pew Center study who call themselves atheists is still very low; many express that they pray regularly, believe in heaven and hell and even look to the Bible as a source of truth.

Likewise, a separate study from Barna for InterVarsity and the American Bible Society found that millennials who *are* in church still hold a very high view of the Bible. For instance,

96 percent say it is the Word of God and that it contains everything a person needs to know about living a meaningful life. Millennials outside the church, however, are at best ambivalent, often holding negative views about the Bible. I suspect they see it as a heavy book they have been beaten over the head with.

So, what *are* millennials doing? If we're going to reach them, we need to know how and where to find them.

A Window Into the Generation

There were more than 33 *million* people engaged in fantasy football teams last year. Some of these are middle-aged guys in office pools, but I know from my son's experience that there are thousands of young men spending time, energy and passion on their teams.

I was eating lunch with a 20-year-old college guy in Jacksonville last season, and the Cowboys-Jaguars game was on. I thought it was weird when he gave a little whoop as the Cowboys scored. "Oh, you're a Cowboys fan?" I asked. "No," he replied. "I'm rooting for the Jags to win, but I've got Tony Romo on my fantasy team." Inwardly, I rolled my eyes. Rooting for individual players over your favorite team is hard for me to accept.

Likewise, many of us rant about "kids these days" living in their parents' basement **playing video games** all day. We write condescending blog posts and cluck our tongues like old ladies.

Take the *Call of Duty* game franchise. Since the release of *Call of Duty Finest Hour* in 2004—which sold a "measly" 4.5 million copies—sales have risen dramatically. 2012's *Call of Duty Modern Warfare 3* sold 26.5 million copies. This chart shows a combined sales record of million. That's not dollars; that's units. Several newer versions of the game have come out since.

I recently spent time with a young man who spends enough time playing *Call of Duty* that he is ranked in the top five in the world in *Call of Duty Black Ops 2*. I've known this young man for his whole life. I'll call him Ian.

Ian is not some pasty-faced screen zombie with no life. He juggles being an honor student at school, playing violin in several orchestras, and catcher on his baseball team with this video game hobby—*Black Ops 2* being only one of the games he likes to play.

Ian is my 13-year-old nephew. His mom ensures that his “screen time” is only available after homework and violin practice are done and doesn't delay bedtime. Of course, that doesn't keep him from getting up at 5:30 in the morning sometimes and slipping down to play. He told me that is the best time to play with kids in Korea and Japan.

And that's the key, right there. That's where the eye rolling and clucking fall apart.

I had an “aha moment” when I walked in the room where he was playing—which actually is the basement. He was talking as he played, and I thought maybe the kid had gone a little nuts. That's when I realized he had a headset on. Ian doesn't play video games in a dark basement in his bathrobe by himself. He plays with a headset on and shares his experience with kids from his school in the evenings—and even from around the world at times. They play in teams to beat the computer or other teams.

Guys don't play fantasy football by themselves. They play with a group of other men where they can engage in a community around a common goal. They get to do stuff guys like to do; they meet up for the fantasy draft, talk every week about who did well and who didn't, talk trash and whine about coaching decisions. It goes on and on.

The point is this: These guys are yearning for community.

So how do we do a better job of reaching and engaging younger men in the church? I want to share a few principles with you that I think can shape our thinking by applying the No Man Left Behind Model.

Principle No 1: The Man Code. *Create an environment that is comfortable for millennials.*

What are some key components of that environment?

Authenticity. Younger men need us to be honest about our flaws. This helps guys feel safe about opening up and asking for help when they need it.

Engagement. Are you more interested in knowing or showing? Younger men want to see how to actually live out the gospel, not just know a bunch of theological concepts.

Mission. The next step is to provide opportunities to make a difference. Take those principles for living out the gospel and put them into practice.

Approachability. Provide an environment that is approachable and welcoming. You don't have to have a coffee shop in your church lobby. But remember that not everyone is familiar with how church works, so explain things; don't make people feel like they don't fit in.

Ultimately, we need to point to Jesus as the leader, not to a personality or hip speaker.

Principle No. 2: Create value. *Give young men what they need in the context of what they want.*

Young men need the gospel. They need to be discipled. They need to know Jesus.

But men are at all different stages on their spiritual journey. When a man is early in his walk with little or no understanding of the Bible or Christianity, you have to cast

the net wide. You draw men like this by meeting their “felt needs.”

Two of the biggest felt needs I have seen in men’s lives are the need to belong and to be good at something—*community* and *competency*. You see this idea in both the video games and fantasy football. Guys like to be part of something bigger than just themselves, and they like to make a contribution to the effort.

So if you want to reach a man, figure out what he wants to get good at, and then give him an opportunity to do that in a community. Create value for him by meeting his felt needs for fun, recreation, solving relationship struggles and so on.

Principle No. 3: Capture momentum.

Show them the right next step. Once we get a young man to step forward and come to our BBQ, car rally or meet us for coffee, we need to be sure to always show them the right next step. Too often we do all this work to get a guy engaged with us in some activity, and then we don’t show them what’s next.

If you meet a young guy for coffee to talk, don’t leave until you confirm the date, time and place for the next conversation. When he comes to your paintball day or joins your service project, show him exactly what the next step is and, if possible, get him to commit to it before he leaves. Then text him to remind him.

Principle No. 4: Sustain the commitment. *Get them connected.*

We need to connect guys into the longer-term discipleship opportunities in our churches, but with a very important qualification: They need to be the ones who are actually working. Don’t send a new guy to that Sunday school class that “just needs a few more people.” It’s shrinking for a reason.

This might make you uncomfortable, but as men’s leaders in

the church, we need to triage our discipleship activities. The ones that aren't working are using valuable resources that could be used more effectively elsewhere. Sometimes you can give a leader a new vision and encourage him to change. Sometimes you just have to let an ineffective ministry fade away.

But whatever you do, don't do all the work to engage in a young man's life, get him into relationship with some other guys and then send him off to some black hole of an activity that will discourage him and drive him away.

It's All About Relationships

The key to all this is relationships, and so let me leave you with this point: To effectively reach younger men—in fact, all men—we need to help churches create an environment where the Holy Spirit can inspire men to engage in life-on-life discipleship.

It takes a man to reach a man. All around us are unfathered young men who are yearning, desperate to engage in relationships that will help them become the kind of men they know in their hearts they were made to be.

We, the men of the church, must actively seek these men out, engage in life with them and show them the power of the gospel, for the glory of God.

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How Relentless Are You in Your Walk With God?

I was an English major in college, and at heart I am a communicator. I now live every day of my life to communicate the truth, hope and joy found only in the Word of God.

As a communicator, I consider myself somewhat of a “wordsmith.” I love the power of the written word and of the spoken word. I am incredulous that one or two words can change someone’s life, can bring immeasurable pain or extravagant joy, or have the capacity to deliver peace to a raging storm.

The power of a word well-spoken, the Bible tells us, is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

What a beautiful picture, indeed!

One of my favorite words has always been the word “relentless.” I love the sheer strength of the word “relentless” and the sweat-breaking challenge that it brings.

Oh to be a relentless Christian, a relentless woman of faith, a relentless carrier of the Holy Spirit!

The apostle Paul understood completely the meaning of the word, “relentless.”

” ... testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what shall befall me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But none of these things deter me. Nor do I count my life of value to myself, so that I may joyfully finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:21-24).

Paul got it. He understood what it took to walk relentlessly in his God-given destiny.

Paul declared that even though the Holy Spirit had warned him that bonds and afflictions awaited him, he would not be moved from his course of declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul refused to whine, to tell his side of the story, to complain or to give in to circumstances and events. Paul boldly announced that what he saw by sight would not sway his resolve to cross his finish line with joy!

As 21st century Western Christians, often we are often more influenced by discouragement and by halfhearted enthusiasm than we are by choosing to relentlessly share the truth of Jesus Christ. When circumstances fall apart and events are less than positive, our resolve is shaken and our determination erodes quickly.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is looking for men and women in every generation who refuse to be moved! The Holy Spirit is on an all-out search to find men and women, just like Paul, who are determined to finish their course with joy.

The Holy Spirit is on a desperate quest to discover men and women who are relentless in their persistence of making a difference of God-sized proportions.

The apostle Paul was a relentless man; his single-minded, sold-out ambition was to finish his race well and with unquenchable joy.

I dare you to put on the mantle of Paul and then to refuse to allow anything or anyone to move you from running your race and finishing your course with joy.

I dare you to renounce the call of mediocrity and then to relentlessly follow what God has determined that you should accomplish during your tenure on earth.

I dare you to refuse to allow anything to move you from your God-given assignment and call. I dare you.

I will declare with Paul ... none of these things move me. {eoa}

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*, was 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.

Let Nothing, Not Even Cancer, Remove You From Your Course

"Warriors were scarce, they were scarce in Israel, until you arose, Deborah, until you arose as a motherly protector in Israel" (Judges 5:7, NET).

It is time for the mothers in the body of Christ to arise and to teach the next generation how to fight as ferocious warriors and how to win battles. Every generation needs the voice of the father *and* the voice of the mother in order to become the overwhelming conquerors that God intends for them to be.

One year ago I was diagnosed with breast cancer. The oncologist said that my right breast looked as if a gunshot of

cancer had sprayed throughout the entire right breast tissue.

I am honored to know several intercessors and prophets who often speak conformational direction and vision over my life. It is no surprise that at this unexpected attack in my life, I was desperate to hear from God.

Dr. Y. Sammy Choi is one of the respected prophetic voices in my life. When he heard that I had been diagnosed with cancer, he immediately began to pray and then called me while he was en route to speak at a medical conference in Korea. He had a word from God for me and I was anxious to hear what the Holy Spirit had revealed to him.

“Carol, when I heard that you had breast cancer I immediately began to think about the purpose of a woman’s breasts. A woman’s breasts were designed to feed and to nurture the next generation, which is exactly what you have been called to do in the kingdom of God. You have been called to raise up a generation of women who will fight powers and principalities. You are called to nurture the next generation with the principles only found in the Word of God. This is an attack on your voice and on your calling. Don’t be discouraged but be encouraged that the enemy is threatened by your calling and by your passion. God will bring you through this and your voice will be heard.”

Oh! How I stood on that word through the ensuing months of uncomfortable tests, four body-altering surgeries, difficult pathology reports and the ingestion of horrific drugs.

However, regardless of what I experience or see in the natural, I am a spiritual mother to the next generation and I intend to fulfill my calling and to walk in my destiny.

I will not be moved away from my purpose and I will not be silent.

I will not.

"Everything I am or hope to be, I owe to my mother." – Abraham Lincoln

Spiritual mothers have the power to literally shape the course of history. Spiritual mothers are able to stand in faith when all others have given up and to remain constant in unconditional love regardless of behavior.

I believe that God is raising up a mighty army of women who are brave enough and courageous enough to be a voice of wisdom and power to the next generation. Our voices will not be silenced as we fight battles, take down strongholds and walk by faith and not by sight.

Sarah was such a mother. Sarah was 90 years old when she gave birth to Isaac because she simply believed that the God who promised was faithful to keep His word.

"By faith Sarah herself also received the ability to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11).

Sarah had heard the voice of God and knew that her destiny was to give birth to kings and to priests. When everything was against her in the natural, she bravely stayed in a place of faith.

We live in a day and a season when the voice of spiritual mothers is desperately needed. God is calling women to speak, to teach, to prophesy, to pray and to go to battle. It is the plan and purpose of God for women to impact the next generation by the power of their faith and with the strength of their voice.

Will you do it? Will you be a Deborah regardless of the cost and in spite of the intensity of the battle?

Will you believe like Sarah did when in the natural there was absolutely no reason to believe?

Will you, like me, determine that nothing will move you from your course?

Will you? {eoa}

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*, was 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.

7 Contrasts Between Unity and Oneness

I have been involved in numerous local, city and national initiatives related to the body of Christ. Often, our mantra circles around the term "we need unity in the body of Christ."

While that is a good start, it should not be the end game for the church. In John 17:20-23, Jesus's prayer for the church is that we would be one.

The kind of oneness He was speaking about was akin to the ontological oneness Jesus and the Father had with one another. The Old Testament counterpart to this passage is found in Deuteronomy 6:4, where it says, "the Lord is our God. The Lord is one!" This was not mere unity but a oneness in purpose,

essence, mind, heart and passion, which exceeds mere organizational and institutional unity. A lack of oneness in the body of Christ is the reason why we can have hundreds of national prayer rallies without experiencing the results we seek.

In the context of this article, unity merely refers to coming together for an event. In it, believers assemble in the same geographic location around a common cause. This can be a weekly occurrence, as on a Sunday morning, or it can be a regular pastor's or marketplace gathering or citywide event. The challenge with this is people are coming together because of a similar interest in a preacher, worship team or cause, but they have never taken the time to gel together (in addition to the event) so that they are of one mind and one heart.

In contrast, the early church had great power because they took the time to pray together, dialogue and come to a oneness of heart and soul. This all started after the resurrection, when they came together in unity for 10 days of prayer, comparing Scripture and choosing another apostolic leader (Acts 1:12-26).

This process of unity brought them to a place where God deemed them ready for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The result of this was that the church not only came together (unity), but they had all things in common according to Acts 2:44 (oneness), which resulted in the Lord daily adding believers to the church.

Unity was important because it was the catalyst that was the bridge for the church to go into oneness. Unity is the means to the end, but all events should have sufficient follow-through that give opportunity for oneness to develop. Acts 4:32 says that all the believers were of one heart and soul; consequently, great power and grace was manifest upon them all.

Mere unity is only a temporary connection based on a common interest; oneness transcends one event because the common interest is "one another" for the glory of God. This is exactly what Paul the apostle meant when he implored the Corinthian church to be united in the same heart and judgment (1 Cor. 1:10). Based on my observation, very few people in any church, ministry or organization are really "one."

This is why many entities are in survival mode. Believers need a place where they can be honest, transparent, committed to one another's success and have ownership of both the process and the product. When this happens, the synergistic power of God will be manifest.

The following are seven contrasts between unity and oneness:

1. Unity is the process. Oneness is the product.
2. Unity depends upon an event. Oneness transcends an event and knits people together.
3. In unity, people assemble for a common interest. In oneness, people are integrated for kingdom purpose.
4. Unity is the means. Oneness is the end.
5. Unity is how we should start. Oneness is how we should finish.
6. Unity is built upon encouragement. Oneness is built upon purpose.
7. Unity releases temporary momentum. Oneness creates synergy that maximizes purpose.

In closing, if the body of Christ continues to put all their money and effort into events without giving opportunity for oneness to develop among the primary leaders of these events, we will continue to experience the same dismal results. {eoa}

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Is Your Marriage Physically Fit?

"He trains my hands for war, so that my arms bend a bow of bronze" (Ps. 18:34).

"She clothes herself with strength, and strengthens her arms" (Prov. 31:17).

As you may be able to see in the verses above, the first speaks to any men reading, and the second to you ladies. Each one shows that physical strength isn't just for *American Ninja Warrior* contestants or action stars. It's for every one of us.

Gentlemen, you are to be strong in order to protect and fight for your families and communities. Sure, you're no warrior-king like David was, but you're the head of your home, and as such, the defender of it. Ladies, you are to be strong because heaven knows you have a plethora of responsibilities that require your attention every day. Strong arms for those tasks are an incredible blessing, enabling you to accomplish everything safely, efficiently, and independently! ("Independent Women" by Destiny's Child just popped into my head.)

Being physically fit, I'm sad to say, generally isn't prioritized in Christian circles. Spiritual fitness is, yes. Mental and emotional wellness, you bet. But lifting weights, running sprints, or swimming laps seems too worldly, vain, or materialistic to warrant any spiritual merit.

After all, Jesus never gave a parable about the importance of deadlifting (although the power of God did lift Him from the dead!), and Paul never wrote a letter to a church chastising them for not obtaining gym memberships. So, why write or read a blog post that emphasizes a Christian's need for physical fitness?

You've probably heard of the Mediterranean Diet. It's a way of eating that focuses primarily on plant-based foods, like fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and nuts. It also limits red meat and prefers fish and poultry as its protein sources. It's also the way ancient cultures ate, such as the one Jesus and the apostles lived in. There was no "junk food." There was no such thing as processed foods or toxic artificial sweeteners.

Along with a naturally healthy way of eating, the people of the Bible were by no means suffering from a sedentary lifestyle. Ladies, read Proverbs 31 and see what this "wife of noble character" was up to. You will see that she was no slouch, and probably had a pretty impressive pair of biceps!

And guys, it might surprise you to learn that Jesus wasn't a carpenter in our modern comprehension of the word. The Greek word used in the New Testament is "tekton," which can mean "craftsman," "a worker in wood," or "a ship's carpenter or builder. Men with this occupation would have been the ones to build such grand and spectacular structures as the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem.

Needless to say, they were undoubtedly in excellent shape and worked out hard every day of the week, save for the Sabbath!

Another bit of Bible trivia for you, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is said to have walked 12,187 miles by the time she was fifty. That's half the distance around the world at the equator!

I gave the examples above to illustrate the fact that health and fitness came naturally to those living 2,000 years ago. Only in the last century have we seen the troubling rise in diet-and-exercise related diseases and premature deaths. As Christians, we should lead the way not only in spiritual health, but physical health as well.

“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, even as your soul is well” (3 John 1:2, MEV).

What are some steps that you and your spouse can take today to be more like Jesus in the way you eat and exercise? What are some other reasons why it would behoove you to have a strong body as King David and the Proverbs 31 woman did? {eoa}

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When Prophets of Doom Predict Natural Disasters on Specific

Dates That Don't Come to Pass

After Harold Camping repeatedly missed it on his rapture predictions, he finally admitted his statement was sinful. He even wrote a letter to the body of Christ apologizing for his end-of-the-world dramatics.

And that's rare—indeed, too rare.

Most prophets of doom refuse to acknowledge they missed it with clearly dated—and clearly failed—prophecies of asteroids hitting Puerto Rico, earthquakes making the Florida Keys no more, tsunamis putting South Florida completely under water, man-made disasters worse than 9/11 hitting New York, a major government official taking a bullet through the heart, earthquakes splitting the United States down the middle and ... shall I go on?

I am not sure where most of these poor prophecies started so I can't trace them back to their misguided root and call out names. You'll find a number of Internet prophets parroting these words as if God spoke to them personally. Calling out names is not the point anyway. The point is when these dated prophecies fail to come to pass, the many mouths trumpeting the doom and gloom also fail to take responsibility for the words that clearly fell to the ground. They can't even point to intercession staying God's hand of judgment because their prophecies left no room for His mercy.

Makes Me Scratch My Head

Now, I'm not saying that a great earthquake won't strike and do massive damage to the U.S. It's happened before and it's likely to happen again. Matthew 24 paints a pretty clear picture of what's to come. But when "prophets" repeatedly put specific dates on specific natural disasters, widespread riots and other cataclysmic events with no way of escape that don't happen, why are they given the microphone at the next

megaconference?

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I have to wonder, why do some in the prophetic ministry keep rehashing curses that have fallen to the ground with a new twist and a new date? Why do we make excuses for these prophets? Why is there no repentance? No apology? No accountability? Where are the apostolic fathers who will jerk a knot in the tails of erroneous prophetic voices releasing dreadful messages of fear with no redemptive value, messages that clearly did not emanate from the heart of the Father?

I love the prophetic ministry and anyone can miss it. None of us is perfect. Prophetic ministry is vital in this hour; perhaps more vital than in any hour of history. Perhaps that's why Jezebel is working so hard to pervert prophetic voices with platforms large and small. Some thrive on the honor of men and announce peace when there is no peace. Others have bitter spirits and pronounce curses and ruthless judgment with no escape. Many are asking, "What is the truth?"

We Need Balanced Prophets

We need the prophets to announce, decree, impart and activate. But in this hour, we need prophets who pray more than we need prophets who predict. We need prophets who trumpet a message of repentance more than we need prophets who are experts at pronouncing judgment. We need prophets of awakening who will speak to the roots of revival in our nation and command them to rise again more than we need prophets who curse the land.

I feel the Holy Spirit's grief over how some prophetic ministries have turned away from the Word and are tapping into spirits of divination, familiar spirits and the soulish realm. One reason this happens is because the body of Christ is so hungry for personal prophecy that prophets feel pressured to release a word even when it's not a due season. In other

words, prophets who have built a reputation on their gift rise and fall on the operation of the gift. As I've said before, some prophets just need to keep their mouths shut. If God is not speaking, we have nothing to say.

Where's the Fear of the Lord?

So, again, where is the accountability? Where is the repentance in the prophetic ministry? Why is it OK to get up on a megaplatfrom and prophesy things with specific date with no way of escape and move on to the next megaplatfrom (or Internet platform) without ever looking back at the mess you left behind? Why is it OK to charge for personal prophesy at the altar? Why is it OK to scare people half to death in the name of Jesus when we know God does not give us a spirit of fear? I ask you, where is the fear of the Lord?

Have we forgotten that each of us will give an account of himself to God (Rom. 14:12)? What about Jesus' teaching that every idle word men speak they will give an account for on the Day of Judgment (Matt. 12:36-37)? Paul the apostle, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, assured us that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive his recompense in the body according to what he has done, whether it was good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

Prophets, heed these words. Let the words of Christ strike fear in your heart and let's cut the foolishness out of the prophetic ministry: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonderful works in Your name?' But then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice evil'" (Matt 7:21-23).

Cancer: Breaking Through the Church's Wall of Silence

Cancer is a word no one wants to hear. Yet statistics show half of all men and a third of all women will receive the bad news.

Churches should be a sanctuary for support. However, in many cases, people suffer in silence as they cope with their illness.

Now, the Cancer Treatment Centers of America is offering a free program to break down the wall of silence.

Breaking the Silence

After years of counseling cancer patients, Rev. Percy McCray knows they bear a burden unlike people fighting other illnesses.

"Psychologically and emotionally, cancer patients, particularly people of faith, are struggling with their faith at that point," he explained. "What did I do wrong? Is there something I did that caused God to punish me?"

Thanks to his training, McCray knows the importance of encouragement. One conversation helped him realize others need to learn these skills too.

"The patient shared with me that they were impacted more by the support they received at the bedside of our hospital than they did at their local church," he recalled.

It wouldn't be the last time he heard that. McCray said typically, churches deal with issues like addiction and

marital problems very effectively. But it can fall short when it comes to meeting the needs of parishioners who are struggling with healthcare issues, particularly cancer.

“And therefore, they really struggle with, ‘What do I say? When do I say it? How do I say it?’” he explained. “And so what happens is one of the number one dynamics that takes place with a cancer patient and their caregiver is that they begin to feel a sense of isolation and that people begin to avoid them altogether.”

Journey of Hope

To bridge this gap, McCray and his associates at the Cancer Treatment Centers of America elected to offer complimentary cancer ministry training to representatives of churches across the country so they can better meet the needs of their brothers and sisters with cancer.

It's called Our Journey of Hope.

Cancer Treatment Centers of America offers free training for two people from a church who use what they learn to raise up cancer ministries in their home congregations.

Participants learn the basics of the disease and treatments in order to focus on what it's like for the patient.

An added incentive for a church is that the training is free of charge. That includes the two-day seminar, food, lodging, and materials.

“We did not want to limit the ability to have the average church receive this training because of lack of resources,” McCray said.

LaWanda Long attended the seminar years ago and now passes on what she learned to volunteers at Atlanta's Enon Baptist Church.

“When we announced we were going to start this ministry, I want to say we started out with 12 to 15, and all of them had a personal relationship with cancer. Either they were a cancer survivor or caregiver of a cancer patient,” she said.

Long teaches the volunteers one night a week for eight weeks. At that time they are ready to take on a cancer patient who has come forward requesting assistance.

She said the extensive training ensured the patients will be cared for responsibly.

“Sometimes people don’t know what to say to those who are battling cancer. Sometimes they say, ‘Oh, I have a loved one who had cancer. They had that same symptom and they died,’” Long said. “Wrong thing to say.”

“I think the main thing we’re trying to train people is to have empathy, to listen, to not try to fix it but just to be there, to realize that God is everywhere and God will have a witness in every situation,” she added.

Practical Support

She said so far the cancer ministry at Enon is a success.

“A lot of times people don’t understand the impact that cancer does to a family and to a person. It’s more than just a physical detriment. It attacks their spirit. It attacks their soul,” Long said.

Lisa McDermott attends Enon. She remembers suffering through nearly five months of chemotherapy for breast cancer.

“With me it was strictly fatigue,” she said. “I just could not get off the couch ... just down.”

She asked the cancer ministry to help her with daily needs.

“It makes a real difference when you’re just too sick to do

anything," she said. "You don't feel well. You don't want to do the dishes; you don't want to get up. You've got groceries to get; you don't want to go drive anywhere. So it's a good, it's a great ministry."

McDermott dealt with one main point person who recruited others to pitch in.

"Everything makes a difference—phone calls, cards, letters—just to know that people are thinking about me, praying for me, caring about me," she said.

Ministry to the Overwhelmed

The cancer ministry made such an impression that McDermott wanted to get the training.

"We put packages together for everyone that we find out about that's referred to us. I got one, too," she laughed. "All kinds of things in a little care package: books and journals and socks to keep warm, hats, all kinds of things, just beautiful things, jewelry."

As Nefertiti Dixon's mother fought ovarian and colon cancer, the ministry stepped in.

"Oh, goodness, words can't explain," she said. "They were awesome. Just when you think you're by yourself, you're not."

Although her mother lost her fight, the cancer ministry made those final days easier.

"Helping just around the house, food, things that my mom would need," she explained. "She would need errands run, medicine. Sometimes she just wanted someone to sit with her and talk, just companionship."

They also helped Dixon with things like meals, which lifted a burden. As a working mom with two children, she became overwhelmed with the pressure of caring for her sick mother.

While cancer will likely continue to strike far too many, churches now can choose to help those within their midst who are dealing with the disease.

For the original article, visit [.](#)

Where Is the Grace for the Devastated Michigan Punter?

I'm a diehard college football fan. And as a fan of the University of Alabama for more than 42 years, I've come to expect nothing less than excellence from the Crimson Tide.

However, what I have also learned is that these football players are young kids. Like the rest of us, they often make mistakes on the field and in life, and they deserve grace as much as you and I do when they mess up.

Yet because of what their sport has become to mean to a mixed-up—if not somewhat deranged—society, these players carry a larger burden on their shoulders than most of us can fathom. They're expected by many rabid fans of their school to be perfect and to lead their team to victory every Saturday—because victory in a college football game is life or death, right?

The question doesn't deserve an answer.

Consider last Saturday's game between Michigan State and Michigan. With 10 seconds remaining in the game and Michigan leading 23-21, all the Wolverines needed to do was punt the ball away. For all intents and purposes, the game would end and Michigan would snap a three-game losing streak to its

arch-rival.

As fate would have it, though, Michigan punter Blake O'Neill bobbled the snap and then fumbled the ball away, and a Michigan State player caught the ball and ran for a touchdown in one of the most incredible finishes ever in college football.

It's not enough that O'Neill will have to live with the fact that his team lost to its in-state rival, and that Michigan is most likely now out of the national championship hunt. It's not enough that his strong two-year career at Michigan will be marred with the legacy of this one mistake, and that it will be replayed over and over again and could haunt him for the rest of his life.

On top of that, the young man received death threats on Twitter because of the outcome of a football game. One, according to Michigan's , told O'Neill to "head for the equipment room and start chugging that bleach my friend." Another told O'Neill to "jump off of a cliff into a pool of spikes and cyanide."

Those tweets were quickly deleted, but took screenshots of the worst offenders. Some were not death threats, but this one doesn't exactly offer a Christlike attitude: "The entire state of Michigan hates you."

Come on folks—are you serious? Over a football game? Things like this are only a microcosm of how sick and demented facets of our society has become. Don't get me started on the whole Planned Parenthood thing.

Where's the grace? Where is the compassion? No matter what type of person he is, Blake O'Neill deserves better. You know he is hurting inside. "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).

Let us pray for the hardness of these people's hearts that have maligned Blake O'Neill and for the love of God to overwhelm them.

This week our publisher, Dr. Steve Greene, began the week here at Charisma Media with a great message, preaching from the book of Galatians. He quoted chapter six, verses 1-3: "Brothers, if a man is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore such as one in the spirit of meekness, watching yourselves, lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if someone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself."

It's all about restoration. Bear one another's burdens. If a pastor commits adultery, confesses the mistake and repents, bear the burden with him or her. If a person steals something, admits the transgression and repents, bear the burden with him or her. If an employee misses a deadline, don't beat him or her up for it.

If a punter fumbles the ball away and his team's arch-rival wins the game in the last seconds, bear the burden with him. Encourage him and help him to know that losing a football game means absolutely nothing in Christ's plans. "So comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, just as you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11).

And as I always like to say, "there is that." {eoa}

10 Ways to Score Big Points

With Your Wife

It was Mother's Day and I wanted to do something special for my wife. I planned to get up early and make her breakfast in bed from recipes from her favorite cookbook.

This was a labor of love for me because cooking and getting up early are two things I don't much enjoy. The night before I went shopping and managed to get all of the groceries into the house without her knowing. Everything was going according to plan. I didn't anticipate how quiet our house was at 6 a.m. or how noise reverberated through the house from the kitchen.

I had barely gotten started when my 4-year-old son woke everyone up by yelling, "Who's making all of that noise in the kitchen?" My wife came stumbling out, smiled and told me to come back to bed. When she saw my disappointed face, she said, "Don't worry, you still get the points."

Most of the time, when it comes to our wives, it is the thoughtfulness more than the execution that wins their hearts. It's the small and subtle nuances that communicate how much they are loved. If you are working at finding favor with your wife, try these 10 ways.

1. Finish "that project." Every household has things that get put off to another day. Over time, this can cause friction in a marriage. Dedicate a day to clean up all those loose ends and you will be her hero.

2. Take the kids for a "daddy's day." Give her some rest. Take the children early on a Saturday morning on an adventure. It'll be great fun for you and a tremendous load off your wife's shoulders (if only for a few hours).

3. Clean the house. In the same vein as making dinner, take it upon yourself to straighten up around the house. Do this without having to be asked. Perhaps even ask her what you

could clean around the house that would help her the most.

4. Plan a family vacation. Come to her with a list of ideas to do on a vacation. Think through how they facilitate good time together and meet the desires of each family member. She'll appreciate the initiative.

5. Make dinner for the family. If your wife is the one who normally prepares dinner, tell her to sit down and relax one or two nights a week while you take over. Let your wife see you in the kitchen preparing a meal—even if it's as simple as boiling some pasta. Remember when it comes to our wives, it's not the execution that matters; it's the effort. But good execution helps.

6. Say "thank you." Marriages tend to go on cruise control. Think of the many things your spouse does that gives your family a better life. A sincere "thank you" will fill a heart in need of acknowledgment.

7. The "random" anniversary. Think of something in the past that is special to your marriage. The first time you met, the day of your first kiss, or when you got engaged. It could be anything. Then surprise your spouse by celebrating that day.

8. Make a gift. Using your time and energy to create something special, even if small, is a special way to show your wife how important they are to you. Major talent not required. They will cherish it.

9. Something fun for the whole family. Plan a night for the whole family to have fun together. Have a game or movie night. Go on a photo scavenger hunt, miniature golf, or bowling. Taking the planning off of her shoulders will be a big winner.

10. Remember what your mama taught you. In the name of comfort and relaxation, men can forget to use manners and common courtesy. For example, dishes left behind or clothes thrown on the floor. There are many ways a man can be annoying to those

who live with him. Make an effort to remember your mom's voice still ringing in your head and clean up your act. If the world deserves the best of who you are, certainly your family deserves even more!

For the original article, visit .

Study: Eating This Fruit May Decrease Colon Cancer Risk

Specific research findings were recently provided to guests at the Experimental Biology Conference (Boston, 2015). The study results provide evidence of reduced risk of these cancers by the addition of dried plums within the nutritional regime.

This supplementation increases the promotion of good bacteria within the colon. According to research professor Dr. Nancy Turner, this outcome provides individuals with a positive health benefit which strongly produces evidence of the reduced risk of developing this type of cancer.

Main Cause of Deaths

Colon cancer is currently the third cause of cancer deaths among men and women (classified in studies separately) in the United States, as distinguished by the American Cancer Society. When viewing statistics of both populations together, this form of cancer is noted as the second leading producer of deaths. Within the United States in 2015, deaths are expected to be close to 50,000 related to this one cancer alone.

Background Information

Within the colon, a very high concentration of bacteria are

present; over four hundred different species of bacteria have been previously identified. Good bacteria, as well as bad, are present within the environment at any given time. It is important for the body to have a sufficient amount of good bacteria within the colon to continuously promote good health. Previous studies have shown if the balance of these bacteria is not healthy, inflammation occurs and can further enhance the development of these cancers.

Research Findings

Microbiota, commonly known as “gut bacteria,” is positively affected by the consuming of dried plums, within the diet on a regular basis. Research studies also show the metabolism of the bacteria within the colon can be altered based on dietary consumption. This metabolic change is needed to help with healthy disease prevention and it can aid in dietary treatments, as noted by Dr. Turner’s research findings.

In order to understand how this positive process works, dried plums hold phenolic compounds which provide various affects towards one’s health. First, this specific food contains antioxidant benefits which gives health to the body. Second, the compounds provide the ability to neutralize free radicals present within the body. Free radicals are known to cause potential damage to the body’s DNA.

During Turner’s research, the hypothesis stated the supplementation of preserved plums in the diet would provide the detainment of microbiota, thereby reducing the risk of cancer developing within the colon. Controlled studies were created with matched macronutrients given to two different groups of rats. Following dietary consumption, the internal colons of each groups were examined.

Positive Results and Strong Findings

The study results provide vigorous health findings which are conclusively positive. The group of rats which were provided a

composition of dehydrated plums experienced an increase in Bacteroidetes (rod shaped bacteria) as well as a decrease in Firmicutes. These bacterial levels were contained within the descending colon and sigmoid colon (within pelvic area). On the contrary, the study group of rats which did not consume the dehydrated plums experienced the opposite effects.

Additionally, a secondary observation noted during research studies included the rats who consumed the dried plums had much lower numbers of abnormal tubes within the lining of the colon (known as aberrant crypt foci, ACF). ACF is typically observed as a strong signal which occurs prior to the development of cancers within the colon; they are seen medically as pre-cancerous lesions.

Turner offered this positive assurance: the increase in Bacteroidetes (along with decrease in Firmicutes) gives strong evidence the addition of dehydrated plums within the diet provides substantial health benefits. Healthy gains include the promotion of more good bacteria within the "gut" which helps in the prevention of cancer of the colon. This is in direct correlation with a reduction in the number of ACF seen.

More Research Needed

Although this research study performed at Texas A&M University (along with assistance of the University in North Carolina) shows extremely promising results, further research in the field of science nutrition is encouraged, especially within human trials. It is noted this one dietary change can provide an excellent and beneficial strategy to work against the development of cancers of the colon.

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For the original article, visit .