

Did I Make the Grade in My Marriage Vows?

Once upon a time, Susan and I said two words that would forever change our lives: "I do." Twenty-five years later, I've decided to look back on the promises I made to her on our wedding day and see how well I've done in keeping those vows.

But I didn't just grade myself; I also asked Susan to independently grade me without any knowledge of how I graded myself. So, did I make straight As, just pass or utterly fail? Here are the results.

My wedding vows began with our pastor asking me a question, to which I gave a response:

"Mark, in Ephesians 5:25, the Lord has given us the responsibilities of a husband. It says, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy.' Mark, do you vow to adhere to God's wish for you as a husband?"

"I do."

- My grade: B-
- Susan's grade: B-

My comments: Christ didn't just love His people when they were sweet, kind and loveable. He loved his people when they were cranky, unkind and unlovable. On one hand, I've found that I've done a pretty good job of loving Susan when she's in a good mood and when she's nice to me. Yet I haven't done a good job of loving her when she doesn't feel well, when she's had a bad day or when she's irritated with me. Looking to the future, I will strive to love her well in the moments when she's unlovable.

Susan's comments: Emotionally, Mark does a really great job of

loving me well. Yet Christ's love for the church was more disciplined than Mark's love for me.

"I will seek for our marriage to be one of understanding, compassion, sacrificial love and humility, both in times of happiness and in times of adversity."

- My grade: C+
- Susan's grade: C+

My comments: While I do a fairly good job in approaching our relationship with sacrificial love and humility, I consistently struggle in being understanding and compassionate. I often don't seek to understand how Susan is feeling about certain situations, and I certainly don't express a lot of compassion when I do know how she is feeling. In the future, I need to work on intentionally carving out time to ask more questions and then have the heart to listen to her answers.

Susan's comments: While Mark is able to wonderfully keep sacrificial love and humility at the center of our relationship, he has a hard time understanding me and being compassionate toward my feelings.

"My love is committed to you for as long as we both shall live."

- My grade: A+
- Susan's grade: A+

My comments: Susan will always be the one I love and the one I adore. My commitment to her is a lifelong one.

Susan's comments: Mark is completely devoted to our marriage and never keeps me guessing. I trust that he'll be by my side for the long run.

"A love, by God's grace, that will be patient and kind, without envy or boasting, pride or arrogance."

- My grade: B-
- Susan's grade: C+

My comments: My love is certainly not a love of envy or boasting, pride or arrogance. On the other hand, it's often not very patient and sometimes not even very kind. Patience is something I struggle with in all of my relationships—and my marriage is no exception. When I want something done, I want it done now. At the root of it, I'm learning that impatience and control go hand in hand. So in order to strengthen my patience in the future, it's important that I start letting go of trying to control my circumstances and control the way Susan reacts to me.

Susan's comments: I'd easily give Mark an A in not envying or boasting. However, his patience is something that constantly runs out too easily. Through the years, I've noticed that he's improved by becoming more patient in our marriage, yet he still sometimes struggles with a lack of kindness towards me.

“A love that will not be selfish or easily angered or keep a record of wrongs.”

- My grade: B
- Susan's grade: B-

My comments: In our earlier years of marriage, I was angered more quickly and kept records in my mind of the ways I thought Susan messed up. But over the years I've learned to become a man who isn't so easily angered and who doesn't hold onto offenses against me. I'm also much less selfish than I was at the start of our marriage and continue to learn how to serve Susan better.

Susan's comments: Mark has become more of a servant in our relationship. And as I mentioned before, Mark has made great strides in being more patient, but sometimes his impatience with me rises up and can cause him to get frustrated and angry.

“A love that will delight in truth, always protecting, trusting, hoping and enduring.”

- My grade: A
- Susan’s grade: A

My comments: I’m a truth warrior. It’s always been important to me to seek the truth, speak the truth and delight in the truth. When it comes to our marriage, truth has played a huge role in allowing us to communicate well. In addition, I always strive to protect Susan in every way.

Susan’s comments: Mark definitely does a wonderful job of putting our family first. I never have to worry that anything will come between us because I trust that he’s all in.

“As your leader and head, I will nurture and cherish you as my own self, giving you the care, support and encouragement you need to help you fulfill your potential and be all the woman our Lord intended you to be.”

- My grade: C+
- Susan’s grade: B+

My comments: I’m not naturally a nurturing kind of guy. I also need a lot of improvement in encouraging Susan. I’ve been a lot more intentional in recent years to affirm and encourage her more in everything that she does.

Susan’s comments: You have been very supportive over the years in valuing the different gifts God has given me. I also love the way you always make sure I use those gifts to grow into the woman God intended me to be.

I encourage you to find the vows you once made to your spouse, read through them and maybe even grade yourself. Would you then share how you did with a comment below?

Mark Merrill is the president of Family First. For the original article, visit .

Sizer Reaffirms: Messianic Jews in Israel an Abomination

Several years ago, Dr. Stephen Sizer said, “There are certainly churches in Israel/Palestine that side with the occupation [of the West Bank, Gaza and Golan Heights], that side with Zionism. One of my burdens is to challenge them theologically and show that they’ve repudiated Jesus, they’ve repudiated the Bible, and they are an abomination.”

Sizer made this pronouncement at the same time that he was expressing his desire for friendship and dialogue with Messianic Jews in Israel. Sizer has a habit of trashing Israel in one venue (like when he is speaking to Islamic leaders) and then oozing love toward us in another.

It doesn’t appear that he realized he was being recorded. However, the video was publicized. After much pressure was put upon him, Sizer offered some sort of apology for the benefit of his accusers who “need to see things in black and white.” He comes across in the apology as far more irritated with the fact that he has to apologize than concerned with the shocking nature of his quote.

Sizer seems miffed and stunned that people are offended. Without expressing what he actually meant when he said we are an abomination, he withdrew the comment. And to be honest, when I watched the video, I wasn’t sure whether he was referring to Palestinian Christians who love Israel or Messianic congregations or both—but his apology is directed to Messianic Jews, so it is safe to assume we were his target.

I thought that was the end of the matter, but I was wrong!

Quote Reaffirmed

In a debate Sizer shared with my good friend and apologist Dr. Michael Brown recently, Dr. Brown confronted him with the quote. Sizer first denied that he made the statement, responding with light laughter, "I didn't say that." Maybe that was because Dr. Brown got a word or two wrong.

But then Dr. Brown informed him that he had the quote in front of him. Dr. Sizer asked him to repeat it. Dr. Brown did, adding that it was at a Q&A at Rivercourt Methodist Church, Kingstreet Hammersmith, Oct. 6, 2011.

There was silence. The moderator asked Dr. Sizer to respond, to which he reluctantly says, "I am comfortable with that comment," thus rendering his repentance and apology a sham and showing his true face to Messianic Jews here in Israel, where he will show up any day now for an anti-Israel conference and once again seek fellowship with Messianic Jews.

I recommend listening to the whole debate here—or just the part where Sizer is confronted with his quote at 50:20.

Ron Cantor is the director of *Messiah's Mandate International in Israel*, a Messianic ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Cantor also travels internationally teaching on the Jewish roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of *Tiferet Yeshua*, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book is *Identity Theft*. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.

Being Out of Shape in Middle Age Can Mean Dementia Later

How middle-aged people rate their own physical fitness could provide clues about their risk for future dementia, Finnish researchers report.

Among people aged about 50, those who self-rate their level of fitness as poor are four times more likely to develop dementia within 30 years than those who say they have a good level of fitness, the study suggests.

“Previous research has shown that self-rated health is a strong indicator of adverse health events,” study author Jenni Kulmala, a postdoctoral researcher from the Gerontology Research Center at the University of Jyväskylä, said in an Academy of Finland news release.

The new study, which followed more than 3,500 adults, “is the first large population-based study investigating associations between self-rated physical fitness during the three decades from midlife to later life and dementia risk,” she said.

The link between poor self-assessment of physical fitness and dementia was strongest among people with chronic illnesses and those who did not carry a specific gene known as APOE-4, the researchers found. (This gene version is associated with a strong susceptibility for dementia.)

“Chronic conditions independently increase the dementia risk,” Kulmala said. “Furthermore, if a person additionally feels that his or her physical fitness is poor, the risk is even higher. In terms of dementia prevention, maintaining good physical fitness seems to be especially important for people with chronic diseases.”

Although the study found a connection between poor self-rated

fitness in middle age and a higher risk of dementia, it didn't prove cause and effect.

Having a low level of physical fitness may be associated with a sedentary lifestyle, poor mental health, isolation, a lack of education, being overweight and smoking, the researchers noted. Similar factors have also previously been linked to dementia risk.

"The perception of poor physical fitness is most likely affected by different factors for different people. Therefore, I would encourage those who rate their fitness as poor to think about the factors behind this perception," Kulmala advised.

"Increasing physical and social activity, making better dietary choices or quitting smoking, for example, could change the rating into more positive," she said. "Individual choices that make you feel physically better may substantially decrease your future risk of developing dementia."

For the original article, visit .

Real Convictions Create Real Inconveniences

When Natalie Grant, an acclaimed Christian recording artist, walked out during the 2014 Grammy Awards last month, she was making a loud statement without saying a word.

Rather than revel in the moment of her two nominations, she stood up and left the ceremony, which featured a soft-core-porn performance by a very married young mother named Beyonce

Knowles. It was so sexually aggressive that Jamie Foxx (the presenter who followed her performance) felt compelled to apologize to her husband who was sitting in the front row. He confessed to Jay-Z and the worldwide audience of those watching that he was taken mentally and sexually to places he knew he ought not to have gone as a result of the visual display put forward by the man's wife.

A mass same-sex wedding followed, officiated by Queen Latifah, Madonna and Macklemore, which functionally erased 5,000 years of how marriage has been defined and cast aside the red letters (Jesus' own words) of the New Testament on the subject.

It's America. It was also the Grammys, not a Bible study. But this was also the immediate context of Natalie's departure. With every step away from this environment she took, the blogosphere and Twitter universe speculated on her departure. Later, Natalie answered with honor and grace—an excellent example of courageous convictions on display.

"We left the Grammys early. I've had many thoughts most of which are probably better left inside my head," Natalie tweeted, showing wisdom for withholding her tongue. She then gave glory and honor where it is truly deserved: "I've never been more honored to sing about Jesus and for Jesus. And I've never been more sure of the path I've chosen."

She later posted a statement on Facebook, saying that she never judged one performance or the other; she just left early. While Natalie demonstrated her convictions in the spotlight, the fact is, we all have opportunities daily to put our faith on display with or without an audience.

Being a Christian is counter-cultural. Blending into culture is not the mark of a follower of Christ. Unfortunately, too many of God's men want acceptance, will tolerate everything in the name of grace, and stand for nothing. But this makes our

faith irrelevant to society.

The root question this raises is this: Are you swayed by men or by God? Do you seek people's favor or God's? Do you blend in or battle?

When you're not secure in yourself, it's easy to blend in and be swayed by popular opinion. However, when you fully realize your identity in God's eyes, you can find security to be yourself. The Bible says He calls you His son, an heir to the throne. He calls you a friend. With that family heritage and friend on your side, you can be free to be aggressively different without shaming others.

It's a good thing Jesus didn't blend in. Even His critics acknowledged His integrity. In Mark 12:14, when the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus with His own words, they began by saying, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth" (NIV).

One-Day Challenge

What would happen if every Christian man (and woman) took one day to courageously demonstrate their convictions based on a secure identity with Christ in every situation? I believe people around the world would stop and think introspectively and wonder why. This one-day challenge may become the topic of conversation at your home, office, at play or on the road. It may become the topic of conversation, or it could go unnoticed by everyone but God—who is watching.

Here are a few examples:

At a "skin flick." If you go to a movie with your wife, friends or family and there's more skin than substance, do a Natalie Grant and walk out.

At the office. If a female colleague, supervisor or co-worker wants to meet in your office alone, invite a male co-worker to join you, or at the least, leave the door open.

On the road. If the guys on the business trip decide to go out for drinks and maybe visit a strip club, graciously decline to work out, instead of hang out, and call your wife.

With your kids. If your kid's conversation is about Miley, interrupt and explain what a godly example Natalie Grant is, as compared to the spoiled teen that is headed for trouble.

Hopefully, you will get asked why. And this is your opportunity to say something like Natalie Grant did: "That's not OK with me. I'd rather love God and my wife than look at what's on the screen or on stage. Rather than expose myself to temptation, I'd rather work on my physical and relational health. That doesn't work for me. I'm not sure about Miley's intentions, but I'm sure about mine."

I tip my hat to Natalie for protecting her mind and spirit, deciding not to observe the performances celebrating the Grammy gospel. She didn't know what was going to be on stage that evening. But at some point, she recognized her faith was more important than her fame.

Why did Natalie walk out? Was it a clever publicity stunt? No. She lives for an audience of one. Do you?

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

5 Necessary Listening Skills

for Family Leaders

One of my favorite shows of all time is the *Andy Griffith Show*. When Andy passed away, I wrote “7 Things I Learned From Andy Griffith.”

One of the best things I learned from Andy is how to listen. Andy listened really well. He wasn't one to lecture his son, Opie, or his friends. Instead, he helped them get to the right answer by asking questions, telling a brief story and then just listening to them. And when he listened, he really listened. He didn't have the TV on, he wasn't texting, and he wasn't checking emails. He looked those boys straight in the eye and gave them his complete, undivided attention with a warm smile and a welcoming look on his face.

Oh, how I'd like to be more like Andy. He had a great gift—the gift of listening. It's a gift that I struggle with a lot. To be a good leader at home and at work, I know I need to be a much better listener.

I'm very grateful that my long-time friend and mentor, Barry Banther, has come to my rescue. In his new book, *A Leader's Gift*, Barry shares that when we're speaking with someone, we often “wonder whether the other person is really listening or just waiting to respond. Few people are actually listening to understand.”

I'm definitely guilty. I often find myself not really listening to the other person; I'm just thinking about what I want to say. Banther goes on to share, “There are few moments that make us feel more valued as a person than when we believe someone is genuinely listening to us.” And when we feel valued, we're more likely to trust the person. Trust is key when leading at work and at home.

Barry then goes on to share five listening skills that each of us must learn to lead our family in our homes and our team at

work.

Skill No. 1: Stop, Drop and Listen

When someone is speaking to you, Barry says, “be there and nowhere else. Stop what you are doing, drop whatever you were working on, and just listen.” This is an especially tough skill for me, but it’s the first skill in sending an important message to the other person: “I value you and I want to hear what you are thinking.”

Skill No. 2: Suspend Judgment

My impulse is often to listen to someone briefly, cut them off midsentence, and share with them what I think they should do. Instead, even if I do know the answer, I should suspend judgment on what they are saying, hear them out and then kindly respond. We should listen to understand.

Skill No. 3: Search Deeper

In *A Leader’s Gift*, Barry shares, “Rarely will an employee, and certainly a child or a spouse for that matter, reveal everything to you about something right off the bat. As a leader, it is your job to bring out what the other person is thinking.”

A good way to search deeper into what a person is thinking is through something I learned during my years as an attorney—the Socratic method of questioning. It’s basically asking a series of questions to get to the truth. For example, instead of just sharing your opinion, ask your spouse, your child or your teammate follow-up questions like: “How do you mean that? Can you give me an example? Why is this important? How will this affect us? What do you think we should do?” Then listen. You’ll probably learn much more than if you lectured.

Skill No. 4: Seek Misunderstanding

In almost every instance of talking with another person, there

will be misunderstanding. To become a lasting leader, you have to assume this misunderstanding and seek it out. So there won't be any miscommunication, after you've listened, repeat back what the other person says, and then say, "I heard you say ... Is that correct?"

Skill No. 5: Show Appreciation

It sometimes takes a lot of courage for your teen to open up to you and have an honest, heartfelt conversation about a very personal matter. The same holds true for an employee. If you want more honest communication, then celebrate it. People usually repeat the action they are applauded for.

So whether you agree or disagree, genuinely thank the other person for talking. Something like, "I really appreciate you openly sharing your thoughts with me. I hope we can do it again soon," will go a long way in building your relationship and demonstrating your leadership.

Can you think of other listening skills we need to have as leaders? Please share them in the comments below.

Mark Merrill is the president of Family First. For the original article, visit .

Jewish Groups Express Concern for Anti-Semitism at California State Schools

Several Jewish organizations have written a letter to top California education officials to express concern regarding anti-Semitism at California state schools.

The AMCHA Initiative, Scholars for Peace in the Middle East, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, StandWithUs and the Zionist Organization of America noted their concerns on the “safety and well-being of Jewish students on California State University campuses,” in light of an event being hosted by the San Francisco State University (SFSU) College of Ethnic Studies on Thursday.

The event, titled “Report and Discussion From Members of the North American-Based Academic and Labor Delegation to Palestine 2014,” features a seven-person delegation consisting of SFSU professors Rabab Abdulhadi and Joanne Barker, along with five other academics and activists who are “leading advocates for the academic boycott of Israel.”

According to the letter, the Jewish groups are particularly concerned about meetings the delegation has had with Palestinians who argue “for the use of armed violence against the Jewish state” and about the fact that “at least two of the meetings were with individuals affiliated with U.S. State Department-designated terrorist organizations responsible for the murder of numerous Jews worldwide.”

The Jewish groups asked the California education officials, including SFSU President Leslie Wong, to “speak out forcefully against this event” and to monitor for “anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli animus.”

For the original article, visit .

Healthy Fruits Can Make You

Fat

With the increasing rates of obesity and issues related to being overweight, people are inclining towards eating fruit instead of dessert when they long for something sweet.

We are all aware of the goodness of the nutrition, fibers, minerals and vitamins that are packed into fruit. No wonder eating fruit grants you immense peace and satisfaction that you are safe from the unwelcomed side effects of white sugar.

Most health experts recommend including fruit in your daily diet to improve your overall health. But did you know that consuming more than the recommended amount of fruit per day is counteracting your efforts when trying to lose that stubborn fat?

Fructose Is the Culprit

Fruits are composed of healthy nutrients, such as fructose, carbohydrates and simple sugar. Most dieticians suggest consuming moderate amounts of fructose when you are on a diet plan. Studies indicate that consumption of excessive amounts of fructose can drastically increase insulin levels, which interfere with the body's ability to burn fat.

The liver helps to process fructose and stores it in your body as fat so that it can be used when you require energy. Diabetic patients and individuals who are trying to lose fat should be careful when eating foods that are composed of sugars, especially fructose.

What Do Studies Have to Say?

Numerous studies have been carried out in order to determine the effect of fructose on weight gain. One major study conducted by the Produce for Better Health Foundation concludes that most people in the United States usually

consume less than a bowl of fruit each day. If you are not trying to lose weight, the increased fructose level may not do you any harm, especially if you are eating a moderate amount. However, if you are already overweight or obese, consuming large portions of fruit can make it difficult to lose those extra pounds.

What Other Foods Contain Fructose?

Fructose is found not only in fruits, but also in many other food products that you consume every day. Fructose is found naturally in agave, honey and fruit juices.

Moreover, lots of processed foods on the market are sweetened with fructose. You will find that condiments, breakfast cereals, corn syrup, juices, yogurt and even bread contain fructose as one of the ingredients. If you are trying to shed weight, remember to read the labels on foods you are buying to check the ingredients.

Make Sensible Choices

If you eat lots of fruit, limit your daily servings to stimulate your body to lose weight faster. You can also look for fruits that are low in fructose. Choose your fruit sensibly so that you can remain healthy while trying to get in shape. The best bet is to choose dark fruits as they are thin skinned and full of antioxidants, as compared to thick-skinned and light-colored fruits.

Some other fruits that you can include in your diet are green apples, raspberries, cranberries and blueberries. These can help to reduce glucose response and slow digestion. Berries contain polyphenols, and when consumed along with the high-glycemic foods, they can stimulate your body to produce a lower insulin response. If you feel like having sweeter fruits like cherries, dry fruits or mangoes, save them for special occasions.

Don Colbert, M.D., is board certified in family practice and in anti-aging medicine. He also has received extensive training in nutritional and preventive medicine, and he has helped millions of people discover the joy of living in divine health.

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

Do Funders Like George Soros Pose a Threat to Evangelical Christian Support for Israel?

For well over a century, Christian Zionists have been steadfast in their support for a Jewish homeland. Emerging from this movement, evangelical Christians have served as the foundation of Christian Zionism due to a number of theological, moral and political reasons.

At the same time, there is a growing movement of mainline Protestants who are critical of Israel.

With the support of anti-Israel Palestinian groups and nongovernmental organizations funded by liberal philanthropists like George Soros, some are seeking to sway evangelicals away from support for Israel. Can Israel and the Jewish community take evangelical support for granted, or will evangelicals follow the path of mainline Protestant groups in their growing criticism of the Jewish state?

“There has always been an undercurrent of anti-Zionism in parts of the evangelical community,” Dexter Van Zile, Christian media analyst for the Committee for Accuracy in

Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA), told . “It was always there, but it was a marginal force.”

For years, Israel has been the target of mainline Protestant churches, such as the Presbyterian Church USA, which recently released an anti-Israel study guide called “Zionism Unsettled” and may vote to support the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel at its biennial General Assembly in Detroit this June. As the number of mainline Protestants has declined over the years, due to increasing secularism and the appeal of the evangelical and Pentecostal movements, remaining followers have shifted their focus away from Scripture to other causes like social justice. One of the byproducts of this trend has been growing mainline Protestant support for anti-Zionism.

“I think that the liberal mainline denominations, such as Presbyterian Church USA, continue to be the leaders of this sort of thing [Christian anti-Zionism] within the Christian world, and the evangelicals are just followers,” Dr. William M. McClay, a professor of history at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) who has written extensively on American evangelicals, told .

Yet younger evangelicals have also been targeted directly by anti-Zionist elements. Scholar Robert Nicholson, in a recent article for *Mosaic Magazine*, described a movement of younger evangelicals called the “New Evangelicals,” a group that is “tired of the message of heaven, hell and salvation preached by their parents” and wants “nothing so much as to bring religion down to earth.”

Among those targeting younger and more liberal-minded groups like New Evangelicals is an organization called the Telos Group, which is funded by Soros, the billionaire liberal philanthropist.

According to a report by the Jerusalem-based watchdog group

NGO Monitor, Soros, who is Jewish, has been a frequent critic of Israel and does not support Zionism.

Through the network of Open Society Foundations, which he founded, Soros has funded a number of anti-Israel organizations that are aimed at delegitimizing Israel on the global stage, shifting U.S. public opinion against Israel and promoting fringe political opposition groups inside Israel, according to NGO Monitor.

Emerging from this pattern of funding by Soros has been an effort to undermine support for Israel among the evangelical Christian community.

“Thanks to funding from individuals such as George Soros, the effort to separate the Christian community from Israel has intensified in recent years,” David Brog, executive director of Christians United for Israel—which calls itself American’s largest pro-Israel group—told .

The Telos Group, some say, has been leading this anti-Zionist effort with Soros’ financial support. According to NGO Monitor, Telos received a \$238,000 grant in 2010 from the Soros-founded Foundation to Promote Open Society to “train Israeli and Palestinian civil society leaders and human rights activists on effective engagement with U.S. policymakers and the public, and to facilitate relationship building between partners and leading U.S. policymakers.”

Brog told that the Telos Group tours of Israel are “carefully calibrated to convince these young people that Israel and Israel alone is to blame for the conflict and its human toll.”

“We who care about sharing the truth in the Middle East need to find the funds to compete with these very deep pockets,” Brog said.

In a statement provided to , Todd Deatherage, executive director and co-founder of the Telos Group, said his

organization is committed to the “security, dignity and freedom” for both the Israelis and Palestinians. That is the message Telos wants to spread to evangelicals and others, Deatherage said.

“The individuals we work with from the evangelical community, as well as every other community, share in our commitment to being pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, pro-American and pro-peace,” he said.

If the juxtaposition of the phrases *pro-Israeli* and *pro-peace* rings a bell for those who follow the American Jewish organizational world, and that is because J Street—a liberal advocacy group Soros has funded—uses that lingo, defining itself as the “pro-Israel, pro-peace” lobby. J Street says on its website that Soros “has provided regular annual donations to J Street, that comprise just over seven percent of its funding.”

Deatherage—an evangelical Christian who has worked for years in senior positions in the legislative and executive branches, including the U.S. State Department’s Office of International Religious Freedom—partnered with Gregory Khalil, a Palestinian evangelical Christian, to found the Telos Group. Khalil has participated in several joint events with J Street and in other events aimed to reach out to the American Jewish community.

CAMERA’s Van Zile took issue with the “pro-peace” messaging by Telos, insisting that it is a cover for anti-Israel bias.

“Telos Group purports to promote a ‘pro-Israel, pro-Palestinian and pro-peace’ agenda, but the problem is that this slogan has become a cover for broadcasting a lot of misinformation that invariably cuts against Israel,” Van Zile told . “It’s part of a propaganda or cognitive war against Israel.”

Van Zile added, “The way I look at the Telos Group is that it

is a group that gives Palestinian leaders access to influentials in the evangelical community that they would not otherwise have. These influentials then lend their credibility to the anti-Zionist cause.”

Deatherage, however, rejected this criticism and insisted that his group is looking out for the best interests of Israel.

“We’re proud to be supporting an environment for being authentically pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, pro-American and pro-peace. Like many in the pro-peace community, we believe that the status quo is the greatest threat to Israelis and Palestinians,” he said.

While the Soros-funded Telos Group has been working to influence evangelicals, there has also been a push from Palestinian evangelicals. Though very small in numbers, the Palestinian evangelical movement—whose de facto headquarters are the Bethlehem Bible College in the West Bank—has been experiencing significant growth in a Middle East region that is known for hostility to Christians. Yet Robert Nicholson wrote for *Mosaic* that, despite their commitment to nonviolence, Palestinian evangelicals are “hardly distinguishable from any other run-of-the-mill anti-Israel outfit, faithfully singing the refrains of racism, imperialism and apartheid.”

Bethlehem Bible College is preparing for a four-day conference called “Christ at the Checkpoint” that begins March 10. The conference is set to draw several major leaders from across the evangelical world, such as William Wilson, president of Oral Roberts University; Rev. Geoff Tunnicliffe, secretary-general of the World Evangelical Alliance; and Joseph Cumming of Yale University’s Center for Faith and Culture.

According to the conference manifesto, the gathering is promoting a Christian theme of reconciliation that calls on evangelicals to “reclaim the prophetic role in bringing peace,

justice and reconciliation in Palestine and Israel.”

Nevertheless, the language of the manifesto clearly paints the Palestinians as victims and Israel as the aggressor.

“There are real injustices taking place in the Palestinian territories and the suffering of the Palestinian people can no longer be ignored,” the manifesto states.

Despite the growing prominence of conferences like “Christ at the Checkpoint,” UTC’s McClay downplays the influence of groups seeking to sway evangelical opinion against Israel.

“I think the extent [of Evangelical anti-Zionism] is being exaggerated by the fact that there are a small number of people on the evangelical left who have an outsized media presence. You don’t see it in the pews and in the attitudes of average congregants,” McClay told .

McClay’s sentiment is reflected by a recent Pew Research Center survey whose results revealed that 72 percent of white evangelicals support Israel, while only 4 percent support the Palestinians. Eighty-two percent of white evangelicals surveyed believe that God gave Israel to the Jewish people, while only 47 percent for mainline Protestants agreed with that statement.

“Evangelicals tend to be naïve about politics, and some of the people involved are motivated by commendable Christian sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians—but they don’t see that the timing, at a moment when the BDS movement is as strong and vocal as ever, and the general situation in the Middle East is perilous in ways that have little to do with the Palestinian issue, makes their actions highly problematic,” McClay says.

At the same time, organizations like the Soros-funded Telos Group and Bethlehem Bible College have grown in influence. As younger evangelicals look beyond Scripture for answers and

seek out social causes to champion, there remains at least some chance that they will look at the Palestinians as a worthy cause, much like their counterparts in mainline Protestantism.

“American Jews should not take evangelical support of Israel for granted,” McClay says.

For the original article, visit .

When Prayer Feels Like a Workout

“But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him” (Acts 12:5, NLT).

I want to expound on the word *earnestly* in the verse above. The original Greek word for earnest is *ektēnes*, and it means “resolute,” “tense,” and “stretched out.” The word is also used in 1 Peter 1:22 to describe the way we’re to love one another: “*fervently, with a pure heart*” (NKJV, emphasis mine).

We’re all familiar with the feeling of *ektēnes*. We feel it when we set goals for ourselves, like dropping 10 pounds and running a half-marathon or completing our college education. We feel it when we’re head over heels in love and would happily drive 200 miles in a single night to be with our beloved for a single hour.

And we feel it when someone we love is in the ICU and all we know to do is lie prostrate on the floor and cry out to God like a helpless child. This is the type of earnestness with which we’re to pray for the ailing among us, the community

around us, the enemies who hate us, those who lead us—everyone.

Maybe you're guilty like me. You are guilty of saying, "I'll be praying for you," and then forgetting the promise 10 minutes later. Or if I do remember to pray, I'm guilty of only praying once that evening ... and for 15 seconds ... and while I'm chopping onions or scrubbing dishes, not somewhere still and silent, where I can focus on interceding with fervor. I'm guilty of praying only for friends and family, not for my community, enemies or the leaders of our nation.

James 4:2 says, "You don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it" (NLT). If we continue to disregard the Bible's exhortations to pray earnestly, we will never see the kind of life-saving, miracle-making, angel-summoning prayer that Peter and his friends witnessed in Acts 12, as we are willingly refusing to ask God for His wisdom, strength and divine help.

The late Scottish evangelist and teacher Oswald Chambers said, "Prayer is an effort of will." It doesn't matter whether you're a missionary in Africa or a mom in Alabama; everyone struggles to pray, at least sometimes. Why? Because as I mentioned earlier, Satan doesn't want us to pray, and he'll do all he can to discourage and distract us from doing so. Not even Jesus' 12 disciples could stay awake to pray on the night before His crucifixion. Jesus told them, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

We are three-part beings comprised of the spirit, the soul and the body. We may have the very best of intentions when we tell people we'll pray for them, but because we flesh and blood beings are prone to sleepiness, forgetfulness and, let's face it, selfishness, we often allow hours, even days to pass without talking or listening to our heavenly Father.

Just as it takes effort to will ourselves to work out some

days, to study for an exam, to cook for our families or to even roll out of bed, prayer requires effort and a resolute—*ektēnes*—determination to put aside our schedules, silence our phones, ignore all distractions and pray directly to the Giver of all good gifts.

I want to challenge you to pray for others. No five-step process to follow, no scheduled alerts or alarms to remind you, no pretty prayer journal to fill up. Just you and the Lord with desire to see His will done in your life and the lives of those He's placed on your heart to intercede for.

Remember, you can pray wherever you are and at any time. God's office door, if you will, is never closed. And when you feel unmotivated to pray, think about Jesus, who displayed the greatest example of earnest, "stretched out," *ektēnes* prayer as He hung on the cross, arms outstretched for you and me as He cried out to God:

"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

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What to Do When You Don't

Know What to Do

This pain is dragging you down, robbing your joy, aching your heart. No one seems to understand. Maybe they don't even know.

You've pleaded with God for deliverance. You put your faith in Him. You've been waiting a long time. Nothing. You are out of options. You have no plays left to run. It looks like game over.

But is that what's really going on? Just because you don't know what to do doesn't mean that nothing is happening.

God is sovereignly orchestrating every event in our lives for His glory and our ultimate good. We will be delivered.

Long before His people were even in bondage, Isaiah wrote, "In that day the Lord will end the bondage of his people. He will break the yoke of slavery and lift it from their shoulders" (Is. 10:27).

Our part?

"So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor" (1 Pet. 5:6). When will this happen? Only God knows, but He has made a promise that it will happen at "the right time."

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