

WATCH: Charismatic Church Declares God's Goodness in Pandemic With Original Song

V1 Church, a charismatic church with multiple campuses in Long Island, New York, declared God's victory and goodness over the COVID-19 global pandemic. In a YouTube video, V1 Worship sings "Good Things," an ode to hope in this moment. The lyrics include:

Though pestilence surrounds me, I don't have to fear

Though this seems like defeat, my God only knows victory

I know that good things are coming

I see hope on the horizon

I see that You're doing a new thing

'Cause You've never left my side and You never will

The music video features a series of shots of businesses closed due to shelter-in-place orders, people observing social distancing protocols, healthcare workers treating and testing patients exposed to COVID-19.

In the video description, V1 Church wrote, "In this season of uncertainty, we believe that this song is a declaration of God's goodness in the midst of hardship." The description also includes [a link](#) to support those affected by COVID-19.

Watch the full music video here.

Chonda Pierce Offers 'Best Medicine' for Quarantine

Chonda Pierce says if this coronavirus lasts any longer, she's going to run out of closets to reorganize. Like many touring speakers and artists, the popular comedian recently announced that she would have to postpone all current shows on her tour in light of the recent COVID-19 outbreaks in the U.S. Now she says she has plenty of free time—and is finding creative ways to spend it.

“I have been to church more times on a Sunday than I can count,” Pierce laughs. “Because I go to my church online, and then I sit at four other services online. It's like an Amazon wish list. I am church shopping from the bed. ... It's gonna be a little hard [to go back]. ... We're going to be so used to being able to just stay in our pajamas, we're going to go to church looking like Walmart shoppers.”

Pierce says that though the impact of the coronavirus is no laughing matter—with more than 1 million infected and 55,000 dead worldwide—it's important to maintain joy and a sense of humor even in dark times.

“Someone asked me the other day, ‘Will the coronavirus be part of your act? When is the appropriate time to start making jokes about it?’” Pierce says. “And I said, ‘You don't make jokes about the death that's going on. But you can make jokes about the way you react to having to be locked in the house for that long—how you get to know yourself better than you've ever known.’ There's going to be a myriad of material that comes out of the quarantine issue, and there's [already] funny memes that you see now online. ... In a dark time, [comedy] can

be a great medicine that the world needs.”

In that spirit, Pierce joked, laughed and shared with *Charisma* about how she’s handling life at home, the need for joy and the power of empathy in this season.

Importance of Joy

Though Pierce can’t tour in the midst of quarantine, she has been staying in touch with fans through social media and video livestreams. She jokes that some people are in psychiatric hospitals for talking to themselves, and here she is doing just that in front of an international audience of thousands.

“I’m so un-tech savvy,” Pierce says. “My hotsy-totsy friends with all the toys will call me just mad as a wet hen because I jump online with my cell phone. I finally learned how to plug in a USB microphone. [Usually] somebody has to come over and set stuff up for me. Well, now I’m by myself, and nobody can come over. So I’ve had to learn so much of this. But I’ll do my little Facebook Lives, and thousands will watch.

She believes people resonate with her videos because, in times of tragedy, people crave comedy and joy.

“You know, it was during the Vietnam War that the sitcom became very popular on television, that people wanted to sit around the television and laugh because of the war that was going on,” Pierce says. “And so comedy is so imperative during dark times on the planet. And God uses it as the medicine it was intended to be used.”

It’s like Solomon writes in Proverbs 17:22: “A merry heart does good like a medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.”

Pierce says sometimes finding that joy inside of yourself can feel impossible, particularly when tragic news surrounds you. That’s why we need to rely on God in difficult seasons.

“I always tell people, when you feel like you don’t have a joyful heart or you’re having a hard time finding that, just relax—because the joy of the Lord is your strength,” she says. “So don’t even rely on your own joy. Just relax and find out more stuff about Jesus. Spend some more time with the Lord. Read the Bible a few more chapters than you normally would do during this quarantine time. If you begin to concentrate on that, all of a sudden you will find joy, because it’s the joy of the Lord that gets you through.”

She says it’s also important not to allow the devil to fill your mind with negativity and fear.

“Sometimes your mind is the battlefield in social distancing and times like this,” Pierce says. “Fear crops up. Fear is absolutely a real thing during times like this, but what you have to fight is worry. My pastor convicted me the other day, because he said worry is a sin—and I thought, *Oh, dear, I’ve messed up on that one this week.* You have to constantly fight it out in your mind. [When it comes to] the whole idea of quarantine, isolation and staying away from people, the battle is not only just keeping this virus out of your body, but keeping the negativity out of your mind.”

That’s where spiritual warfare comes in for the believer.

“You have to push yourself to look on the bright side,” Pierce says. “You have to keep pushing yourself to look for the good out of it. The devil’s job is to keep dragging us down, and you have to fight that. You have to fight back.”

Caring for Others

Pierce says she personally doesn’t mind being alone and getting some “quiet time” during this season. In fact, she jokes that the worst part about it is that she has to eat her own cooking—and that her dating life is proof that she’s been social distancing for years. But she acknowledges the truth of Genesis 2:18b: “It is not good that the man should be alone.”

“I am someone who struggles with clinical depression,” Pierce says. “Now, I’m highly medicated and blessed by a loving God and a great doctor. But I have to be careful about that. If you’re not careful, isolation is not your friend when it comes to depression.”

But she praises God that the internet has enabled people to stay in communication with one another even from a distance.

“I don’t miss a day Facetiming my son to make sure he’s staying home and taking all of this seriously, like all parents fussing at their kids,” Pierce says. “I don’t miss a day checking in on my friends, through texting, Skype and Zoom. We are blessed that this hit us at a time when technology is at its best. ... For everything that the devil is trying to drag us down about, the Lord counters that quickly with His grace, comfort and blessings of all kinds.”

Pierce says sometimes the best way to keep your mind occupied and free from worry is to become focused on something bigger than yourself: “I try to think outside of my concerns and think about others. I am blessed [in this season] to be able to do some things I’ve not ever had the opportunity or thought to do.”

As an example, she says that she became concerned about the plight of mom-and-pop businesses in the small town near Nashville where she lives. She was concerned that they wouldn’t be able to financially survive this extended quarantine and decided to try and help them out.

“I wrote on Facebook, ‘For two hours, I will buy your pizza if you come get a pizza from [this local business] for takeout. They’ll bring it to your car, so you don’t have to be afraid,’” Pierce says. “Too many people like pizza in my county. I had no idea! It ended up being thousands of dollars, and I was able to bless not only just that restaurant but people like me who aren’t able to cook or figure out where

their next groceries are coming from. I just love getting to do that. But that did not just bless those people who got food that night and fed their families; what it did was bless me. It got my mind completely off of the worry and the struggle.”

But it doesn't take money to perform a random act of kindness. Pierce says there are plenty of opportunities in this season to live out Jesus' command to love your neighbor as yourself.

“Call a neighbor,” Pierce says. “This is the first time you've got time to just sit down and call somebody you haven't talked to in a long time. Check on an elderly person and say, ‘Hey, I've got my mask and my gloves on, and I'm going to the grocery store. What can I bring you?’ It helps your difficulties if you step out of your own pain and try to find ways to help other people. That's been the key for me.”

Pierce says it's one of the only times in modern history when everyone in the world has been forced to break their habits, slow down and reflect. That makes it a valuable time to share the Good News of Jesus with people who don't know Him.

“[My pastor] said that never in his lifetime or mine has the entire world stopped,” she says. “It's not just America. This is going on in every country in some form or fashion. The entire world has stopped. And God's gotten everybody's attention. ... Everybody thinks about their own mortality during times like this, and when you think about your own mortality, you think about eternity. The Bible says God will work out things for good. He doesn't bring plagues like He did in the Old Testament anymore—because the grace of Jesus came to cover a lot of things—but He will use good or bad to get your attention. So this can be a vital, incredible time for the world. It could be that last movement of a revival that we've been desperately needing to turn our eyes upon the Lord.”
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Upstream Healing

The Pentecostal and charismatic movement is often defined by its belief that the works of the Spirit are ongoing—anyone can miraculously heal others the same way that Jesus did. But what if there was a way to heal someone before they were even sick? Dr. Mark Sherwood believes it's not only possible but God's will.

Sherwood—a naturopathic doctor who co-leads the Functional Medical Institute (FMI) with his wife, Michele—says the problem is that Americans often focus on healing the symptoms rather than fixing the root causes of illness.

“We've suffered spiritually, financially, emotionally and even intellectually because of it, because now we're paying all these needless bills that we didn't need to pay,” Sherwood says. “It costs an average of \$5,000 to spend one night in the hospital. America spends more on health care per person than any other country in the world—at \$10,000 per person. And we lead the world in—get this—hospitalizations for preventable diseases. Can't that be used elsewhere?”

Can't we truly use this God-given bountiful harvest of finances in this country in a better way?”

Sherwood believes it's possible. He was first inspired to start FMI after receiving a supernatural word from the Lord. Now, through his work at FMI, Sherwood's mission is to lead people down the pathway to healing.

“We have two mantras behind our mission statement,” he says. “One is the elimination of all self-imposed, choice-driven diseases. The second is the elimination of all unnecessary usage of medication. ... That is where we all need to be: in that place of freedom.”

Sherwood says it’s not just the healthiest way to live, but also the most God-honoring way. If Christians truly believe their bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost, then they need to behave responsibly with those bodies. That means not only avoiding sin, but avoiding unhealthy lifestyle decisions like sweets and laziness. He believes if Christians can do this, they have an opportunity to become powerful witnesses—especially in a world where fear of disease is currently running rampant.

“At this particular time in our world, with this pandemic going on, wouldn’t it be cool if all believers were walking well and whole and confident and without fear?” Sherwood asks. “Wouldn’t it be great to see that as an example for the world to see God’s hand in their lives and God living through them, as shining stars in a world full of darkness?”

A Difficult Directive

Sherwood says he first became a Christian when he was 8 years old and realized his own sinful nature and need for a Savior. As an adult, he became passionate about evangelism. But his walk with the Lord has also taken him through a variety of jobs and fields.

“I’ve been fortunate enough to have a couple of college degrees,” Sherwood says. “I have been very successful in athletics with physique and bodybuilding—I was with the Power Team for a number of years. It was quite an experience. I actually was even a bodyguard for Benny Hinn at one time. ... I was a police officer for 24 years, 10 years on the SWAT team, before reengaging academics and going back to school.”

During his time as a police officer, he says, he was in charge of a wellness program and noticed a disturbing trend.

“My colleagues were dying as soon as they retired—as soon as they had lost their identity, so to speak,” Sherwood says. “That was heartbreaking. I wanted to find out why. I knew there was more to it than just diet and exercise. There’s also stress management, sleep and other issues. So that put me on a quest to figure it out.”

That quest segued with his own personal walk with God, where he was striving to hear God’s voice but only receiving silence. He remembers setting a notepad and pen by his bed, so if God ever spoke to him through a vision or a dream, he could quickly write it down. For years, nothing happened, and dust accumulated on the notepad and pen. He says he came to view them as a symbol of God’s distance.

Then, one night, he received a vivid message from God in a dream—and he wrote it down.

Sherwood says God gave him and his wife a directive to carry this message around the world: “My people have lost their power. They’ve lost their power because they’ve lost their peace. They’ve lost their peace because they’ve neglected the physical piece: our bodies.”

Then, Sherwood says, God gave him a Scripture, Matthew 22:37-39, in which Jesus says the greatest commandment is to “‘love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“The ‘as yourself’ part jumped off the pages,” Sherwood says. “And that’s where we’ve missed it. We’ve forgotten how to do that.”

Sherwood says he was excited that God had given him this

directive for “about an hour” before it dawned on him how unpopular that directive might make him.

“I realized, if I’m going to carry this message, that’s going to be a little uncomfortable for people,” Sherwood says. “Because now we’re going to start talking about food and habits and the standard American diet and not sleeping and just putting garbage in our body—not caring for the temple. I sat on that message for well over a year and a half, not wishing to do that, because I was an evangelist. I was speaking in churches 20 to 30 weeks a year, having a great time. And when I decided to step out and do what I was called to do and start preaching this message, the message became challenging for people to accept.

“But since then, the message—though challenging—has been amazing. We’ve seen unexpected healings in our clinic. Wherever we go speak, people get well. And the last I read, that’s exactly what Jesus did, and that’s what He expects. He expects believers to be whole and healed. That’s what our mission is, and that’s what we’re called to do.”

Upstream Health

Sherwood says it begins with discussing what it means to be living in wellness. It’s not a purely physical definition. Wellness is a holistic term that affects every area of life—including the physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and even financial. He says the key is to think about how to be “debt-free” in each of these five areas.

“Debt creates stress,” Sherwood says. “So when we’re experiencing debt in any area, we will experience a sort of a counterbalancing effect. If we have debt in one area, we’re going to be paying more than we should to try to pay that off. So we need to be debt-free in all those areas. Our mission statement here is to lead people down a pathway of true healing—in other words, to be debt-free in all those areas.

And to that end, we educate people on how to determine what are the upstream causes of these processes and when it goes wrong.”

Sherwood uses the phrase “upstream health” to illustrate the importance of prevention and treating the root causes, rather than the obvious symptoms. He gives the metaphor of a flooding dam. You could pile up sandbags to try and stop the floodwaters from breaking through—or you could find out what is causing the flooding in the first place.

“Sandbags would be synonymous with acute care medicine, which is not bad—it’s great,” Sherwood says. “But we go way back upstream and say, ‘What caused the flood?’ And we correct those underlying root causes upstream. So our system here is based not upon looking at diagnoses, but instead examining the symptoms and asking the question, ‘What caused those symptoms? What in the body has gone awry? And how can we fix that?’”

Sherwood says FMI also conducts a spiritual and emotional analysis of patients to detect whether those factors may be contributing to disharmony in the body. He calls it FRAUDS analysis, an acronym that stands for Fear, Resentment, Anger, Unforgiveness, Disappointment and Shame. He believes the enemy can exploit those six factors by the enemy to disrupt God’s plans for health and wellness.

“We look at all those areas,” Sherwood says. “Is somebody—from a spiritual angle—are they broken? Are they holding bitterness or unforgiveness, or have they been abused or molested and not let go of that? From an intellectual angle, perhaps they need to learn some information about the physical body or some Scriptures. From an emotional angle, maybe they’re just wounded and hurt, and we’ve got to get behind that and give them a safe place so they can release those wounds. ... So the people who come to us, they really get a good education and inspiration in all five areas, so there can be healing, wholeness and peace in all areas.”

Sherwood says too many Christians sadly devalue and neglect their physical bodies in ways they would never neglect their spiritual practices. But it should matter, because our bodies are not our own.

“If we believe our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we believe He lives in that, it makes sense that He would give us directions on how to protect that,” Sherwood says. “The temple being sick would not be His will. That doesn’t line up. So it’s important that we ... in the church don’t continue to destroy our temple because it’s convenient or we’re not thinking about it. I find that very grievous.”

He says there’s a biblical precedent for this: “When Jesus walked into the temple in his last week alive, He saw the money-changers, and that upset Him, of course, because the temple keepers and Pharisees had allowed something to come inside the temple that created an environment that was improper,” Sherwood says. “It created an environment where God couldn’t do what He wanted to do. ... In those days, the temple was a building. But today, it’s not a building. It’s not made of brick and mortar anymore. The temple is us. Our job is to keep out or drive out anything that disturbs God’s presence and His ability to do what He does, which is absolute, unequivocal, 100% health.”

This lack of focus on the body puts many believers in a position where they are reliant upon supernatural healing—when they don’t need to be. Sherwood compares the situation for many believers to the relationship between a parent and a child. If children get injured or sick, their parents will not hesitate to help heal them. But if the injuries or sicknesses were self-inflicted because of their own bad choices, a good parent will also teach their children how to avoid further pain. That means if those children do not listen to their parents, they will keep suffering the consequences of sickness and illness—even if the parents continue to help them through it.

“When we make ourselves sick, it renders it impossible for us to walk well, because we’re creating it,” Sherwood says. “It doesn’t mean God doesn’t love us or that He doesn’t want to heal us. It means all the more He wants us to walk healed, but when we create it, it’s nothing more than a consequence. ... If I drive down the street, and I continue to speed, and I continue to get tickets, whose fault is that?”

He says the problem is particularly pronounced in America, where personal responsibility is low and bad food choices are plentiful.

“I’ve heard people joke during the coronavirus, ‘I’m cooped up at home, me and my ice cream,’” Sherwood says. “I mean, that’s not OK. ‘Me and my cereal, my best buddy’—that is not OK. We need to get that stuff out of our lives. This may seem a little bit terse, but it’s not intended to be: There doesn’t ever need to be a doughnut ministry. That’s not a ministry. God never directs us to put anything in our mouth that destroys the temple.”

Sherwood believes the irresponsibility many believers have embraced when it comes to food and nutrition grieves the heart of God. And he believes it’s just a continuation of the devil’s original strategy from Genesis 3.

“What was Satan’s first, best strategy?” Sherwood says. “He said, ‘Hey, I want you to have one bite of this. Maybe God doesn’t want you to eat just salads. Just have one bite; it won’t hurt you.’ Well, we know how that story turned out. And we’re still doing that today: ‘Have one bite; it won’t hurt you.’ There are a couple of lessons there. No. 1, don’t talk to demons. And No. 2, don’t take one bite. Stay focused and locked into what God called you to do. It’s living in abundance, not in restriction. He tells you what to eat and what to do. He’s not going to lead you astray, and He’s not going to lead you to do something destructive. ... Pastors and leaders must draw the lines and say, ‘Not in this house.’”

Healthy Witness

Sherwood believes a healthy body of Christ could be an incredible witness to the world—at any time, but especially during a global pandemic. He has a few tips for how believers can strengthen their immune systems and experience wellness in every area of their lives.

“First, you can’t be afraid,” he says. “[That includes] what you’re listening to and hearing. What is filling your mind every day? If it’s fear and panic, that will weaken your system and produce massive amounts of cortisol.”

He says the second step is to maintain adequate sleep—about seven to eight hours per night—no matter how old, young, active or sedentary you are. He also says basic hygienic measures—like avoiding handshakes, coughing into your elbow and being cautious around shared surfaces—can be helpful. After all, he says, during a pandemic, “We don’t have to touch people to love them.”

He also recommends staying hydrated, getting out in the sun and maintaining healthy doses of vitamins and minerals. Each day, he recommends getting 5,000-10,000 international units of vitamins A and D, 3-5 grams of zinc and 20-40 milligrams of vitamin C. Most importantly—and challengingly—Sherwood also recommends modifying your diet to eat real food—like fruits, vegetables, and organic proteins and fats—rather than boxed, processed or genetically-modified foods. As a guideline, Sherwood says, “If something has more than five ingredients, you need to put it back.”

“We need to rethink what we do,” Sherwood says. “I’d rather have someone eat one apple than a hot dog or a hamburger. That is not blessing somebody. We have the ability to give them real food, but we give them less. We’ve got to do better than that.”

Sherwood says it’s not always easy or convenient to live

healthy, but for those who do, they'll be rewarded with abundant living and a stronger witness.

"It's just like eating one spiritual meal per week is not good enough [for a healthy spiritual life]," he says. "We need to become a devourer of the Word of God. And when we devour the Word of God, we become a devourer of what He teaches us to do—to take care of His temple and to carry His Word in a stronger manner."

READ MORE: For more information, visit fmidr.com.

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Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Sid Roth Gather for Historic Anniversary

Christian leaders will gather in San Diego from March 31 to April 5 to celebrate the opening of the Morris Cerullo International Legacy Center and the 75th anniversary of Cerullo's ministry. Evangelist Cerullo and his wife will be joined at the event by Kenneth Copeland, Marcus Lamb, Tommy Barnett, Benny Hinn, Perry Stone, Sid Roth and many more, according to a recent promotional video.

The video features a behind-the-scenes look at the Legacy

Center, including a conversation between Jim Penner, the center's executive director, and the executive chef. For more information, watch the video or visit mcwe.com.

Morris Cerullo Opens Spa Resort in California

The Legacy Resort Hotel and Spa at Morris Cerullo's Legacy International Center in San Diego, California, is now open. The announcement was made in a video update by Greg Hodson, vice president of television at Morris Cerullo World Evangelism (MCWE). The video features footage of the old Mission Valley Resort Hotel being torn down to make room for the new center.

"When you walk into the hotel, you really feel that it's part of Morris and Teresa's heart," Hodson says. "It really is part of them. Everything you're looking at, they picked out."

Watch the full video here.

Peace in the Grove

There's a saying in Israel," says Curt Landry. "'In the olive grove is where we work in unity.' That's why the saying is 'extending an olive branch,' because we all work there. We all need olive oil—for our food, for our anointing oil. Olive oil is considered L'chaim—in Hebrew, the oil of life. It's where

peace comes from.”

Landry, a businessman whose radical story of salvation led him into full-time ministry and humanitarian aid, is dedicated to bringing peace to Israel. Through his organization My Olive Tree (MOT), Landry creates Israeli jobs, honors the Jewish people and gives Christians around the world the opportunity to stand with Israel. MOT leaders point to their mission statement in Isaiah 1:17 (NIV): “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

“That’s always been the vision of My Olive Tree: to bring jobs, bring peace and bring a collective gift to be able to honor the Holy Land of God and honor what God honors,” Landry says.

MOT uses its resources to plant olive trees across Israel—rather than directly donating money—in order to help boost the Israeli economy and provide resources. The goal is to eventually plant 1 million olive trees in Israel. For Landry, MOT’s mission is a way of demonstrating honor.

“Honor is the currency of heaven,” he says. “You can’t have what you don’t honor. You must honor what God honors in order to walk in kingdom finances and kingdom blessings, because honor is the key of David that opens that door. When you plant an olive tree, you’re honoring not only the people but God’s boundaries, covenant and land. You’re saying, ‘I agree with what the Bible says.’”

Landry specifically points to Amos 9:15, in which God says, “I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them.”

“We decree this over all our trees: that Israel will never be removed from their land ever again,” Landry says. “So when you plant an olive tree, it’s almost like a covenant act. It is [coming] in agreement that ... the Jewish people belong in this

land.”

Landry’s passion for the mission of MOT comes out of his own radical testimony and life experiences, which planted the initial seeds. Landry spoke to Charisma Digital about his supernatural encounter with God, his relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the significance of U.S. President Donald Trump’s foreign policy with Israel.

Radically Saved

Conceived out of wedlock to a Jewish mother and a Catholic father, Landry was born May 11, 1955, delivered to a Catholic orphanage and adopted by the Landry family six months later. However, Landry says his home was not overly religious, and his first real encounter with life-changing faith didn’t happen until his early 30s, when his wife received salvation through Jesus Christ. He says at the time, he was frustrated: “I felt like Jesus stole my wife.” Landry, a successful broker and businessman, continued to live a successful, country club lifestyle while his wife quietly prayed for him.

About three years after his wife’s salvation, while she was away on a trip to see family, Landry says he supernaturally encountered God for himself. He was celebrating a work accomplishment with champagne in the bathtub when he felt another presence enter the room—even though the bathroom door remained shut.

“Now I realize it was actually Jesus who came into the room, but He came in through the wall behind me,” Landry says. “He was standing right behind me, and I felt this presence of anxiety, but at the same time, this overwhelming presence of God’s love, for which I had no reference point at this time in my life.”

He says he saw a vision of a monitor that played back shameful moments and sins he had committed throughout his life, and he felt the pain he had caused God in those moments. Landry

estimates he watched the monitor for “two and a half or three hours.” But what struck him the most was not shame, but God’s enduring and faithful love despite his own unfaithfulness.

“Coming from my background of being in an orphanage it was a great relief to me, that in the midst of all my bad, sinful behavior, that the Lord never left me nor forsook me,” Landry says. “That was a surprise to me.”

Landry wept and repented for his past sins and received salvation in Christ. That encounter changed his life forever.

“I became so radical in the Holy Spirit that just a week or so later, the company I worked for fired me, because I started leading so many people to the Lord—all I would talk about is Jesus, and I wouldn’t talk about my experience or do my job,” Landry says. “I don’t blame them!”

Planting Trees

After his salvation, Landry says he and his wife began attending a small church in Redmond, Washington, where they got involved in missions’ ministry. The church had a particularly active branch of Operation Exodus USA, which helps Jewish people scattered around the world immigrate to Israel. In 1991, Landry went on his first trip to Israel and immediately felt burdened for the poverty he saw in Israel’s immigrant community.

“We helped these immigrants make the return,” Landry says. “But then so many of them—particularly those from the Soviet Union—didn’t speak Hebrew. Their professional licenses were not recognized in Israel. So, if they were a doctor or a nurse or a lawyer, they had to start all over again. So, there was a lot of poverty, alcoholism and drug abuse taking place, because you have these people who were successful in their land, who come to the promised land, and all of a sudden now they’re washing dishes or waiting tables. It was creating really a cultural poverty that a lot of people didn’t want to

talk about. And somehow I got involved in this.”

Landry decided to switch his focus from helping Jewish people make pilgrimage home to providing humanitarian aid and supporting the community already living in Israel. In 2004, he was involved in a large Christian outreach involving multiple ministries sending large sums of money—in the form of aid—to Israel. Using his skills as a former broker, Landry went to Israel on behalf of one of the ministries involved to handle paperwork. While there, he became friends with then-Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (who now serves, at time of publication, as Israel’s prime minister).

After a few weeks—when Landry was trusted enough to be left alone with Netanyahu (without security oversight)—he remembers Netanyahu asking him, “Why do you do this?”

Landry replied, “Two days ago I was in Tiberias, Israel, where our ministry supports an after-school program for children in need. We went there and delivered soccer balls, a new oven, some toys, food and essentials blankets and sheets. There were two little girls there, ages 5 and 7. One grabbed my leg on one side, and one grabbed my leg on the other. And in their broken English they said to me, ‘Are you going to come back?’ That’s all they wanted to know: ‘Are you coming back?’ I said, ‘Yes, I’m coming back.’ And they thanked me in Hebrew. They can’t come into your office and ask you for help—the structure just is not there. But they can grab onto my leg and ask me, and ... I’m here on their behalf. This is real grassroots.

“I was an orphan raised in downtown Los Angeles for six months, and praise God that the Landrys adopted me,” Landry told Netanyahu. “But my life could have gone a lot of different directions. The Lord has blessed me in business. And Scripture says of those who have been given much, God requires much. It’s my duty to come to you and represent those who have not been as fortunate as I was.”

Moved, Netanyahu replied, "That's good enough for me," and then added: "I appreciate the charity. I appreciate what you're doing. But Israel is not a welfare state. We're not a third world country. And as finance minister, I want to get jobs. So as good as you are at doing this, would you help me to bring jobs and do something that would help the poor and bring jobs?"

"Yes, sir," Landry said. "I'll pray about it and see if the Lord shows me something."

Landry says MOT is what God laid on his heart after that conversation. He says the olive tree, in particular, is symbolic of doing something that will impact not just your generation or the next generation, but generations to come. He says olive trees exist on the Mount of Olives and in the Garden of Gethsemane that are 2,000 years old—that would have been there when Jesus walked the earth.

"In Jewish culture, you plant a vineyard for your son, but you plant an olive tree for your grandson," Landry says. "The reason is because olive trees are so long-lasting. ... Olive trees are very symbolic of long-lasting or territorial authority."

MOT provides the nursery stock for olive trees, water pumping systems and irrigation, according to Landry, while he has worked out deals with the Israeli government to provide water and labor for the site. He says MOT fulfills his promise to Netanyahu to bring jobs, as every phase of the planting and maintenance of these trees requires laborers. Olive oil produced by the olive trees is donated to Israeli soldiers and their families as well as farmers, while annual contributions are given to humanitarian aid projects in Israel including lone soldiers, safe houses, and Holocaust survivors through Curt Landry Ministries.)

"It is a fulfillment of Bible prophecy," Landry says. "It's

what the prophet Isaiah said: 'And the desert shall bloom like a rose.' I have to tell you, it's so moving and so powerful ... to see Jews and Gentiles coming together, causing the desert to bloom."

In the Heights

MOT's newest project involves 500 olive trees planted in a grove near the Golan Heights. The Golan Heights refers to strategically advantageous territory contested by Israel and Syria. The region was captured by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War, and Israel's occupation of the region has been disputed by many countries. However, in March 2019, President Donald Trump made the United States the first and only country to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights territory, as a way of standing with Israel. In recognition of his bold stance, Israeli lawmakers approved a plan to name a new community in the region after Trump, calling it "Trump Heights."

Landry says he was deeply impressed by Trump's declaration of Israeli sovereignty, as well as his movement of the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

"I have listened to politicians for years, and they all make political promises," Landry says. "... [But] when Donald Trump recognized the sovereignty of the Golan Heights, I was actually in Israel, in meetings that involved Prime Minister Netanyahu and some other dignitaries. Everybody was blown away. Everyone said, 'This is incredible to have this recognition.'"

At that time, Landry decided he wanted to do something to honor Trump as well as Israel through MOT, resolving: "We're going to do something in the Golan Heights for the Trump family, to be able to honor them and tell them, 'People appreciate it. Thank you so much.'"

At the bottom of the Golan Heights sits an old French

government building that was recently acquired by a friend of Landry's. When Landry told his friend about plans to honor Trump, his friend offered his own land to help: "Let's partner together and plant 500 olive trees right here, because this is right at the base of where you drive into the Golan Heights." Landry agreed.

Included in the 500-tree grove, are 50 mature olive trees—90 years old each—one to represent each of the U.S. states saying "thank you" to the Trump family. (Landry says each tree can be sponsored for \$2,020, and whoever sponsors it for their state will have their name added to a frameable certificate of authenticity honoring their sponsored state.)

Landry has also partnered with MyPillow's Mike Lindell and Pastor Ramiro Peña from Waco, Texas, on the project.

"We're going to create a beautiful framed picture with the names of all the 500 people who will sponsor the year-old trees and a special notation for the [50] who sponsor the 90-year old trees for each one of the states," Landry says. "We're going to have it very well framed and decorated with the name. Then we're actually going to make a presentation to the Trump family and tell them, on behalf of Israel and on behalf of the Christians, ... 'We honor you by planting olive trees in the Golan Heights.'"

Landry says he cannot wait for that day, and there is still plenty of time for other Christians to partner with him on this project and stand beside Israel and President Trump. He says any interested readers can make their voice heard this election year "by sponsoring one of the year-old trees. ... For \$249, they can sponsor a tree, and they can go to israelmot.com/golan/ to do that."

Believers can also stand with Israel by praying and interceding for God's people. Landry says the proposed peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians should be a primary

focus this March.

“Let’s pray for wisdom and knowledge for the Trump administration, for the team that is negotiating the deal of the century peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians,” Landry says. “Pray for wisdom. Pray for grace for both sides. Pray for favor for the message of hope for Israel, and for the Palestinian people to be able to change the narrative from a very divisive, warlike position to a place of peace and prosperity for all the people.

Landry says Psalm 122:6, which urges prayer for the peace of Jerusalem, is as relevant today as it was millennia ago.

“They need to pray for peace,” he says. “The word peace in Hebrew is ‘shalom.’ Shalom means ‘nothing broken, nothing missing.’ I believe the destiny and purpose of that which you speak peace over may prosper and manifest according to what God has said about it.”

READ MORE: To sponsor an olive tree in Israel, visit israelmot.com/golan/.

Taylor Berglund is the associate editor of Charisma magazine and host of several shows on the Charisma Podcast Network

**Replica of Early Church
Catacombs Coming to**

California

The Morris Cerullo Legacy International Center in San Diego, California, will reportedly feature replica catacombs—like those used by the early church—decorated with art by 3D chalk artist Kurt Wenner.

In a recent video update from the ministry, Greg Hodson—vice president of television at Morris Cerullo World Evangelism (MCWE)—explained why the catacombs were one of the Center’s top attractions.

“We have many attractions in [the Welcome Center], and one of the most amazing to me is the catacombs,” Hodson says in the video. “Why? Because Kurt Wenner, international artist, painted these amazing images that are found within the catacombs. The Last Supper. Resurrection. The Apostles. They’re absolutely gorgeous.”

The [official website](#) describes the catacombs attraction as an opportunity to “walk through history and be transported back in time and journey into an underground maze of stone chamber catacombs.”

Watch the full video update here.

Why Morris Cerullo’s Ministry Spent More Than \$18 Million

on New Center

The Morris Cerullo Legacy International Center is designed to inspire people to go out into the nations and be radically used by God, according to Jim Penner, executive director of the Legacy Center Foundation.

In video clips originally filmed and screened for the ministry's partners, Penner shared the motivation behind the Legacy Center's "Legacy of Nations" exhibit. (Watch the full video, embedded here, to get a preview of the exhibits and hear more of the leadership team's heart behind them.)

"We had to tell that story because it is to inspire somebody as they go through the Legacy Center to say, 'Wow. If one man can inspire somebody else to do this, what can God use me for? How can God use me?'" Penner says.

The ministry spent just over \$18 million on the property that eventually became the Legacy Center, as Penner [told Charisma](#) last fall.

Joel Osteen [will reportedly](#) dedicate the center to God at its opening ceremony and dedication taking place March 31-April 5.

For more information on the Legacy Center, visit mcwe.com.

How Should the Church Respond to a Faith Leader's Sexual

Abuse?

Charisma News reported on Nov. 6 that Christian comedian John Crist had exploited his Christian reputation to harass, manipulate and sexually exploit young women from 2012 to 2019. The allegations included individually sexting multiple women during the same time period, initiating sexual relationships with married women and women in committed relationships, offering show tickets in exchange for sexual favors and repeatedly calling these women late at night while drunk. Our investigation involved multiple firsthand testimonies from victims, secondary corroborating sources and nine months of research.

Crist apologized and confessed to mistreating women in a statement supplied to Charisma prior to the article's publication, canceled his remaining 2019 tour dates and went dark on social media. Netflix indefinitely postponed the release of his standup special, and Waterbrook & Multnomah indefinitely delayed his debut book. More women shared on social media that they and their friends had experienced similar inappropriate behavior from Crist.

But this story isn't really about Crist, any more than it's about Bill Hybels or Andy Savage. In 2018, Hybels stepped down from Willow Creek Community Church in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois, after several women accused him of sexual misconduct. Willow Creek's board of elders initially accused the women of "lying and colluding," only to later apologize when an investigation showed Hybels had, in fact, sinned. In another case, Savage, then a youth pastor, sexually assaulted a teenager in his care, and church leaders did not report the incident to authorities. When reports broke 20 years later—after the statute of limitations had expired—Savage confessed to the crime and received a standing ovation. He ultimately resigned his pastorate but now intends to lead Grace Valley Church in Memphis, Tennessee.

Sadly, no denomination or branch of Christianity is exempt from abuse. A 2018 report found that 300 Catholic priests in Pennsylvania had raped and molested more than 1,000 children; those crimes were often covered up, and the priests faced few to no consequences. In 2019, the Houston Chronicle reported 700 victims were raped, abused or harassed in Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches since 1998. Some of those abusers still work in SBC churches. And in August, news broke that a Madison, Wisconsin-based United Pentecostal church had covered up the sexual abuse of at least four women for more than three decades.

The sad reality is that time and again, the church has failed when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable among us. Some of that is because we live in a fallen world. Sin is inevitable, even among those who follow Jesus. But permitting, covering up or ignoring sin should not be. Charisma spoke to Christian experts and leaders with experience regarding sexual abuse within the church. They shared their stories and explained how to spot the warning signs of abuse in churches and ministries, how to stand by abuse victims and create safe spaces for them, and whether abusive leaders can ever be restored to leadership.

Red Flags and Safeguards

Wade Mullen, professor at Capital Seminary & Graduate School, says abuse can be most broadly defined as “using somebody or something wrongly.” After writing his doctoral dissertation on the ways evangelical organizations try to maintain their reputation and legitimacy following a scandal, Mullen says sexual abuse is often motivated by a desire for power, rather than sexual desire. Abusers usually seek to possess their victims.

“What the abusive person is going to do is try to gain control over that person, as much control as they can, so that they can use that person in whatever way they please,” Mullen says.

Mullen says vulnerability, ingratiation (flattery) and favor rendering (quid pro quos) are common tactics of abusers seeking to gain control. Abusers will intentionally groom victims and even the surrounding church to see these strange behaviors as normal. Once they've ingratiated themselves, abusers will attempt to isolate the person whose trust they've won. This can be digital isolation—such as moving conversations to Snapchat, which deletes messages after they've been viewed, to avoid a paper trail—or physical isolation, like inviting someone to their hotel room.

“The abusive person wants to create moments of isolation because it's in that place of isolation that they can more clearly cross boundaries,” Mullen says. “They can take that risk.”

Viewing sexual abuse as a power issue rather than a lust issue may seem counterintuitive. Numerous studies have highlighted Christians' struggles with pornography, lust and infidelity. It is easy to project our own struggles onto the abuser and imagine how we could have behaved the same way—“There but for the grace of God go I.”

But while it seems logical, experts say it's inaccurate. Author and speaker Mary DeMuth says “all sexual abuse is an abuse of power.” Ruth Everhart, a Presbyterian pastor who recently wrote *The #MeToo Reckoning*, agrees.

“People compare [sexual abuse] to a married person kissing someone outside the bounds of their marriage,” Everhart says. “It's so much different than that. It's so much more than that. Abuse is not just a little bit of lust that got away. Usually the abusive relationship has been developing for a long time before it gets acted out in such a way that it gets exposed.”

For that reason, every church needs safeguards in place. These systems prevent abuse and catch would-be abusers in small

things before they escalate. Mullen says the most basic step is to educate the congregation about how to recognize abuse.

“We can’t name something if we can’t identify it, so [then] we can’t confront it,” Mullen says. “It would be very helpful, then, for the community to have a way for people who suspect wrong behavior or suspect grooming behavior to be able to report that in a safe way. Then [start] a process for following up on that behavior.”

Churches should have protocols and policies that establish what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and this should be clearly communicated to all staff and volunteers. (Many denominations already have policies like this in place, but some member churches fail to enforce or communicate them.) Other steps include posting hotline numbers and information for domestic violence shelters in church restrooms or doing a sermon series about #MeToo and the Bible’s response to sexual abuse. Everhart says these small steps can telegraph to victims that the church’s leadership will listen if they speak up.

Pastor Brady Boyd has added additional safeguards at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He noted that abuse most often happens when volunteers are away from the church building during overnight trips, so New Life stopped holding overnight retreats. He also calls references before accepting new volunteers or staff members, noting it’s “amazing” how few churches check references. Boyd says these measures won’t prevent all abuse, but churches must protect their flock.

“We’re not making those decisions out of fear,” Boyd says. “But I think we are making them out of wisdom and trying to be thoughtful about the risk that we’re taking with people.”

Slow Down and Listen

When Boyd was appointed senior pastor in August 2007, he inherited a wounded church. Ted Haggard, the church’s previous

pastor had fallen from grace and left the church after a series of sins became public. Boyd knew he had two major tasks to accomplish: to regain trust and to create an environment where emotional trauma could be healed. He realized firsthand the wide-reaching impacts pastoral abuse can have on a church community.

“There were three groups of people at New Life when I arrived,” Boyd says. “The first group trusted me because I was their pastor. They welcomed my leadership. They gave me their respect and they were willing to let me be their pastor. There was a second group that was willing to trust me, but I would have to earn it. They needed to watch me for a season of time to make sure I was trustworthy before they would give me their trust. And then there was a third group of people who were irreparably harmed by what had happened. What I mean by ‘irreparably’ is not that they could not be healed by God’s grace; it was that I would not be the agent for that healing. They would probably have to go somewhere else, to another environment, to experience the healing they needed.”

His job of healing New Life grew harder when—on his 100th day as pastor—a gunman opened fire on campus and killed two women. The church had again been traumatized. Boyd brought in 100 counselors to give pro bono therapy to anyone who needed it. He was surprised to learn that what most people wanted to talk about and process was not the shooting, but the impact of Haggard’s departure. The abuse had hit them harder than the shooter.

“They had never really been allowed to process their pain,” Boyd explains.

Boyd says the church often moves too fast for its own good.

“Nobody gets healed on the run,” he says. “Local churches, especially in American culture, are notorious for going really fast. In other words, they move from one Sunday to the next.

They go from one big event to the next. They are obsessed with attendance and growth. ... Healing doesn't happen in those fast-paced, market-driven church environments. Healing happens in a pastoral, nurturing environment. That's why when a lot of people experience pain in the local church, the local church doesn't know how to slow down and help them. So people end up leaving the church."

By slowing down, Boyd says New Life created a "culture of care." Twelve years later, the church has experienced very little staff turnover despite the flurry of traumatic events.

"All we did for three or four years is we had worship, prayer, taught the Scriptures and met in small groups," Boyd says. "That's all we did. Our church didn't grow as a result, because we were trying to get healed. But I'm grateful I took that time. I'm grateful I didn't give in to the pressure of getting back on the church growth treadmill, or I would have caused irreparable harm to some people who needed time to get healed, including my staff."

Mullen says the length of that healing process depends on the depth of the wound. That's another reason why the church must slow down—to take stock of how badly it's been hurt.

"You need to be willing to go through a process that is going to, by its nature, take a long time," Mullen says. "I think [assigning a time frame for healing] is a fault of some of our approaches to recovery and healing in our evangelical circles. I have seen two-year restoration plans for pastors. I don't think there is a blueprint, and I think we make a mistake when we try to create one."

Dr. Doug Weiss, a clinical psychologist and the head of Heart to Heart Counseling Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, says slowing down and listening may be an oversimplified solution to the problem of abuse. He also suggests a unique option he uses in his own clinic: annual polygraph tests.

“If the church wanted to stop abuse in one year, it could have every pastor do a polygraph around porn, self-behavior, inappropriate touch with others or sex outside of marriage every year,” Weiss says.

He says if churches gave polygraphs to new hires, they would discover abusers before they came on staff: “This is simple to stop leaders abusing sheep.

“It’s not the church that doesn’t want to heal,” Weiss says. “It’s the leaders that won’t give themselves and their team the accountability. Until leaders lay down their lives for their friends and get real, just asking the church to be better is questionable and passing the buck instead of leading by a measurable standard of integrity.”

After listening and implementing safeguards, the next step is to sincerely listen to victims’ stories and refrain from snap judgments. Dr. Diane Langberg, a psychologist who has worked with trauma survivors and clergy for 45 years, says, “Trauma is the missions field of our time.” Yet Everhart says many victims are not believed. In cases where they are believed, they may still be treated with shunning and contempt because their stories make the listener feel uncomfortable. She says church members can have “a hard time believing that the perpetrator’s a perpetrator. There’s this knee-jerk reaction to defend the person, because usually it’s a person who’s known and loved by the congregation.”

“We need to train our congregations to be listeners rather than jumpers to conclusions,” DeMuth says. “To really come alongside a sexual abuse victim is to listen to them—not to preach, not to send Christian cliches or even verses that have become cliché, but to do the Romans 12 thing to weep alongside those who weep and to identify with those who are hurt.”

DeMuth says the church has made progress with this, but the common narrative is still that well-known leaders get the

benefit of the doubt over their less-powerful victims. Boyd says #MeToo has been a “wake-up call” for the church to listen more carefully to those who bring accusations.

“We sometimes give extra grace and attention to the one who caused the abuse, and we’ve done a poor job of listening to the victims,” Boyd says. “We’re quick to defend the well-known leader and dismiss those who are making the accusation.”

But won't believing victims lead to an influx of false accusations? While these do occasionally happen, they are rare enough that we should not base our behavior on them. A 1996 FBI study found that only 8% of rape allegations were “unfounded” after thorough investigation. A 2010 study in the journal *Violence Against Women* estimated the false-allegation rate as between 2% and 10%. And those false allegations rarely ever lead to criminal consequences. A 2005 study by the British Home Office found that of 216 false allegations, only six led to an arrest, only two alleged perpetrators had criminal charges brought against them, and both falsely charged individuals were found to be not guilty. The study concluded, “There is an overestimation of the scale of false allegations by both police officers and prosecutors.”

Furthermore, a 2012 study by the U.S. Department of Justice found the number of false accusations is dwarfed by the number of rapes and assaults that are never reported; from 2006 to 2010, only 1 in 3 rape or sexual assault victims ever reported the incident to police. In other words, data and experts alike suggest that, generally speaking, we should believe victims unless given specific evidence not to do so.

“There are people who might make false accusations for some kind of monetary gain,” Boyd says. “But oftentimes, that’s the first thing we think of when we hear these accusations, and we have got to get out of the habit of immediately dismissing the victims’ complaints. We have to listen better. It’s the reason why a lot of women, especially, won’t come forward and talk

about how they've been abused—because they know they're going to be immediately dismissed. They're going to be shamed, and they're going to have to prove it beyond reasonable doubt before they're ever taken seriously.

“I've counseled women who have said to me, ‘I would love to come forward and tell my story, but I cannot. It would cost me my job. It would cost me my public reputation. So I'm just going to live with the results of this abuse rather than come forward.’ That's heartbreaking for me as a pastor.”

Expose the Wound

Once abuse has been reported, the next step is to expose the wrong so the perpetrator cannot hurt anyone else.

“In a case where somebody is abusing multiple women, it's not a private matter,” Mullen says. “It's not a personal matter. It's a public matter. It's a community matter.”

He adds: “The priority has to be on protection for the community—to prevent further victims from being harmed—and also to allow past and current victims the freedom they need to be able to move forward in their own lives. Because so often those victims are forced into an agreement with the abuser to maintain his secrets. So if something like this isn't made public, then the victims feel as if they must keep all of this to themselves. Once it's made public, for many victims, it's a moment in which they feel free because they don't have to maintain these secrets anymore. The community is saying basically to the abuser, ‘We're not going to let you have power over your victims anymore.’”

For most grievances, the Matthew 18:15-17a template for conflict resolution is prudent. But abuse requires a different response, Mullen and DeMuth say. Mullen says privately confronting an abuser but allowing them to remain in power is like scolding a wolf but letting it remain in a flock of sheep. When there are victims, abuse is no longer a private

matter, and private confrontation is inadequate and misguided.

Matthew 18:17 itself says some matters must be brought before the entire church. And Scripture speaks to the issue of abuse beyond Matthew 18. DeMuth says because man is made in the image of God, we know every person is worth protecting—and that when the people of Israel incurred God's wrath, it was often because they were exploiting the widow, the poor, the orphan and the alien.

"Handling it in-house is actually harming the victim, because what it says is that we value the reputation of our awesome person in leadership more than we value the cry of the one who's been harmed by them," DeMuth says. "... We hear weird language like, 'Don't touch the Lord's anointed.' Maybe if the Lord's anointed is exploiting their people, they need to be touched—and talked about. No one is above the Lord, and no matter what position they have, that position doesn't insulate them from critique."

Boyd says God's heart is clear throughout Scripture regarding how the church should treat the vulnerable, mistreated and abused.

"James 1:27 tells us, 'Pure religion undefiled before God and the Father is this: take care of widows and orphans in their distress, and keep your heart unspotted from the world,'" Boyd says. "That has really been my life verse since I was a young man in my early 20s. I think James, the brother of Jesus, understood that the primary mission of Jesus was to bring good news to the marginalized. ... The gospel is really, really Good News to those who have been pushed to the outsides of our culture. Oftentimes, it doesn't sound the same for people who have power and influence."

Romans 13 and state laws matter too; Christians cannot just cover up crimes like assault by dismissing them as sins to be handled internally.

“We are very quick to spiritualize bad behavior, and that is a way of letting abusers off the hook,” Everhart says. “Because it’s not just a matter of what’s in one’s heart. ... There’s a sin and there’s a crime, and we can’t ignore one over the other.”

“The grace of God can reach beyond prison walls and you can find the grace of Jesus behind those prison walls,” DeMuth adds. “But there are consequences to those actions. If you have to register as a sex offender for the rest of your life, that is the consequence for your actions. God does not remove those consequences. That’s part of living in a world according to Romans, where we have to submit ourselves to the governing authorities.”

What About Restoration?

Following news that a leader has become abusive, it’s only a matter of time before someone asks when that leader can return to ministry. This story has played out many times; plenty of leaders get removed from one church or ministry only to start anew somewhere else. Many Christians see it as a natural outflow of their faith: I have been forgiven of great sins, and therefore I must quickly forgive others and return them to fellowship and good standing. But experts say both the theology and psychology underlying the question of restoration are more complicated.

“The community can extend forgiveness the moment after they’ve been wronged,” Mullen says. “I think that is often between a person and God, whether or not they choose to forgive the person who has wronged them. But that forgiveness doesn’t cancel out the pursuit of truth.”

In other words, the reality of forgiveness does not negate the need for justice to be administered. Everhart gives the example of David and Bathsheba. After raping Bathsheba, David was eventually forgiven for his sins. But to get there, he

spent days in mourning, and God killed the son conceived from his sin. Our sins will always have consequences.

“Forgiveness and justice are both really powerful concepts, and the way they meet is a problem for churches,” Everhart says. “There’s a tendency to just jump over justice and move straight to forgiveness. But if there’s behavior that needs to be forgiven, that also means there’s justice to be pursued. So this overemphasis on forgiveness is a problem. Can an abuser ever be reconciled? Well, God’s grace is wide and deep. I’m sure that possibility exists. Have I ever seen it? No.”

Boyd says whether an abuser can be reconciled depends on the nature of the abuse, but it’s “pretty rare” that an abusive or violent leader could ever return to leadership: “It doesn’t mean they can’t be restored into salvation. They’re not going to miss heaven over this. But church leadership is a place of sacred trust, and when that sacred trust is broken, especially under those premises, I think it’s hard to bring them back in, if ever.”

More broadly, he says, both abuser and victim alike cannot find healing while still coexisting in the same space, because of the power dynamics at play.

“Hypothetically, if I had been caught sexually abusing my two children, and the police came to my house, the first thing [government workers] would do is remove the person of power who was abusing people from that house,” Boyd says. “Because they realize a person of power and influence has undue access to someone. They can’t be healed, and the children who have been abused can’t be healed if those two parties are living together. So the dad will be separated.”

DeMuth believes a truly repentant person would not return to the church they hurt, knowing their presence would simply retraumatize the victims.

“I don’t know that it could happen, unless by a miracle, that

a person could go back into that situation without traumatizing all the people they've already traumatized," DeMuth says. "Of course, on the other side, in the new heavens and the new earth, we will have that reconciliation perfectly. But we do live on a broken planet. I'm not saying it can never happen. I would just say it's excessively rare."

Beyond the question's practical implications, Mullen says an abuser who is already thinking about returning to leadership will fail to truly learn and grow from the experience. They may just become sneakier.

"So often we approach these things with that assumption in mind: 'We need to get this person to a place where they can continue doing their work again,'" Mullen says. "And I would say the best thing for that person and for the community is to stop assuming that is even possible. Because otherwise that can very easily become the goal, and so the entire process can be framed around a wrong goal. Then the person who's going through that process—who's a deceiver so often—can very easily deceive the people involved just so that they can take possession of what they lost—namely, their platform."

The temptation to prematurely restore an abuser may be particularly great for those in leadership. Mullen says that's because abusers use different tactics when addressing those who hold power or influence they need in order to get ahead.

During his research, Mullen found that abusers will drop the ingratiation or intimidation tactics they used before (on those with less power) and rely on supplication. They may "plead for help or highlight their own hurt or suffering when speaking to those who have power over them." They may even deceptively appeal to common biblical values.

"It's almost like [abusers] have this whole body of material to work with, which falls in the category of their relationship to God," Mullen says. "[They may say,] 'This is

what God wants us to do,' or 'God's at work in me right now. He's healing me.' There's this whole body of material that they can use that makes their deception a little bit more sophisticated and more powerful."

Everhart agrees, saying that asking whether a fallen leader should ever be restored to leadership is "the wrong question."

"The simple answer is no," she says. "... I've been ordained 30 years. I don't hold that lightly. I could do something that would remove my ability to function as a pastor. The world does not owe me an ordination. The church does not owe me its employment."

Mullen concurs. He says he keeps hearing people ask, "Should this fallen leader be restored? Why should we ruin their careers by making this public?" He counters with a question of his own: "Why is that so important to us?"

"I think it reveals something about the way in which we view people in our lives who have occupied positions of power," Mullen says. "They have given us something that we have valued. Perhaps we have valued this pastor's preaching or what that comedian has brought to our life. We may be biased and selfish, and we want to see that person restored so we can once again enjoy what it is they were offering to us. I just think there's something unhealthy about the preoccupation with whether or not the person can get back into that position."

In the end, abuse has no easy answers. Perhaps our desire for neat resolution speaks to why the church continues to struggle with this topic—and with lament more broadly.

"It's something kind of interesting to think about, right?" Everhart says. "Like, why is it hard for a church community to have their pastor stripped of their power? To have a loved person stripped of their power? It's a loss for them. So they don't want to grieve that loss. They don't want to deal with that loss. They just want to restore what once was, as if they

can go back to an earlier, more innocent time. ... Maybe some of this is just about our inability to grieve.”

The church has endured a flood of tragic testimonies of abuse, and each new story cannot help but shake your core. Maybe, like New Life Church, what the church really needs is to slow down and grieve.

Charismatics are fond of calling for revival. But DeMuth says repentance must take place before revival can come—and our corporate complicity in this sin has damaged our witness and prevented a move of God.

“When revival comes, it always comes on the heels of deep repentance,” DeMuth says. “I believe this is one of the most egregious [sins] that’s happened in church. We must corporately repent for it. We will not see that kind of revival we keep praying about and giving lip service to if we’re not willing to corporately repent, like Nehemiah did. He was actually pretty awesome and good, but he repented for the nation of Israel.

“We need to have that same kind of corporate lament and repent over what we have done and what we have allowed. We have protected reputation over the cries of those who have been exploited. ... We have to address the spiritual elephant in the room honestly, with lament and sadness. And then I believe the light that can come through acknowledging our sin will begin to bring in the kind of revival we’re longing for.”

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE: *Read the original report at cristreport.charismamag.com.*

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'Geeking Out' the Bible for the Next Generation

"This is going to be a very long conversation."

The Bible Project's latest podcast series starts with those words by Jon Collins, followed quickly by Dr. Tim Mackie's wry chuckling. For the Bible Project to preemptively call something a long conversation is saying something indeed, seeing as previous series on the podcast have lasted six to 20 hours. Collins flips through the papers in his hands, sounding both amused and preemptively tired.

"When we did the God conversation—which turned into a 20-episode podcast—it was about 40 pages of notes," Collins says. "And here, in my hand, are 41 pages of notes on the Sabbath."

Mackie, the author of the short novel in Collins' hands, chimes in excitedly: "I started reading and writing and collecting notes a couple of months ago. ... I've learned so much as I've been preparing for this conversation."

"Our office whiteboards are just filled with your Beautiful Mind notes all over the place," Collins says.

“Pretty much I’ve just been living and breathing, reading and rereading the Torah over and over again. I’ve just been noticing and collecting all these observations,” Mackie says, and then begins describing the significance of the number seven and its relation to Sabbath. But this theology chat between two friends is not a dry discussion held in the back room of a seminary, but rather the central focus of one of the most popular Christian podcasts and YouTube series on the planet.

The Bible Project, which debuted in May 2014, features Mackie and Collins, two friends passionate about presenting the Bible as a unified story using beautiful art. Along with Mike McDonald—The Bible Project’s director of strategic relationships—they run the Bible Project as basically a small animation studio, entirely funded by patrons’ donations. Those donations give them the ability to share everything they produce free of charge.

They produce quite a lot. To date, the Bible Project has created 140 videos in English, with plans to continue releasing 18-20 new videos every year for the foreseeable future. More than 700 videos have been translated into 21 different languages, with localization teams on the ground worldwide. The Bible Project also has a podcast series, basically a behind-the-scenes peek at the conversations Mackie and Collins have while creating the videos’ content. (Mackie often acts as the scholar, breaking down complex Greek and Hebrew concepts, while Collins asks questions and organizes Mackie’s ideas in structures and metaphors a layman can digest.) The podcast gets more than 1 million downloads per month. This year, the organization will launch new projects, including seminary-level classes you can attend from home (at no cost) and partnerships with Cru, Compassion International, Young Life and Alpha USA. Mackie even has ideas for expanding into the virtual reality space.

No one involved in the Bible Project imagined it would grow so

large. In a retrospective video posted Dec. 2, Mackie and Collins explain that the organization started with a simple idea.

“When we started the Bible Project five years ago, we actually didn’t have a grand vision of what it could become,” Mackie says. “We had an idea that the Bible’s hard to understand—at least for us and a lot of other people—so let’s make it easier to understand using cartoons we’ll put up on the internet.”

“Let’s make these really beautiful [and] explain the Bible really well so they are of a lot of value,” Collins says.

“But we want to give them away for free to everybody,” Mackie says.

“So that meant we thought it would just be a side gig, and we would use freelancers as money came in,” Collins says. “We’d make videos slowly. But we had no idea how supportive and enthusiastic [viewers] would be about this project.”

Meet the Team

The team’s passion to share the Word of God around the world stems from its leaders’ own life-changing encounters with the Bible. McDonald was raised Bahai but became a believer in Jesus Christ at 19 after a missionary to Turkey gave him a Bible.

“I read through Matthew that night,” McDonald says. “I didn’t have language for it at that point, but that was when I decided, ‘This is the guy that I’m going to follow.’ So for me, even my coming to faith was through the Scriptures. It wasn’t through somebody telling stories or going to church on Sunday or even hearing it through an evangelist. It was sitting down with the Gospel of Matthew, reading it cover to cover in four hours, and going, ‘Wow, Jesus is Lord. That is huge. I think this is obviously what’s going to shape and change my life.’”

Mackie grew up in Portland, Oregon, but always resented being taken to church by his parents. He was more interested in the free-spirited skateboarding lifestyle and saw the church as an embodiment of “the man” he was rebelling against. But that changed when he discovered a local ministry, SkateChurch, which sponsored and ran a local skate park. (The organization has been reaching Portland-area skateboarders for Christ for more than 30 years.) Every week, he’d come to skate and hear a short message about Jesus. Eventually the gospel worked its way into his heart, and by age 20, he was following Jesus. He started attending the nearby Multnomah Bible College.

“I had a couple friends [who] had all gone to SkateChurch,” Mackie explained during a 2018 podcast with Preston Sprinkle. “We all became Christians around the same time, started following Jesus, and so we signed up for classes together. A number of us went overseas within a year. We went and spent a summer in the jungle with [Wycliffe] Bible Translators—you know, like super, super intense. I came back and was like, ‘I want to follow Jesus. I want to do whatever.’ So I signed up for Greek, naturally. ... I became a Bible nerd. I got hooked.”

Mackie got his Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible and Jewish studies at the University of Wisconsin, only to realize he had little interest in becoming a university professor. He started teaching classes on biblical theology at Blackhawk Church in Middleton, Wisconsin. When he moved back to Portland, he got a job teaching part-time at Western Seminary and also served as teaching pastor at Door of Hope Church. He soon reconnected with Collins—a friend from his time at Multnomah—who had since started two digital communication companies that specialized in creating animated explainer videos for organizations like Google, P&G and Nike.

As Mackie explains it to Sprinkle, Collins was the first one to pitch the Bible Project: “[John] pitched the idea to me of, ‘Hey, I make these videos. You’re a Bible nerd. We’re friends. Let’s make some videos and see what happens.’ So it was really

truly like just kind of a harebrained idea. We spent a year and a half—just [as] a side project—making the first two videos.”

The rest is history. When the Bible Project began expanding and going global, Mackie and Collins reached out to McDonald—who attended church with Collins at Imago Dei Community. McDonald had run a nonprofit called Hear the Cry focused on international justice and compassion work for 10 years and, in his words, “was ready to hand that off ... and do the next season.” He was excited to use his international experience to help the Bible Project go worldwide.

The Bible Project has moved twice—from a basement to the back office of a web development shop to its current base of operations, a shared office with Imago Dei Community. In 2016, Collins left his other businesses to work full-time on the Bible Project. Today McDonald describes the operation as a combination between a pastoral ministry and an animation studio.

“John ran two major, large studios here in Portland doing explainer videos,” McDonald says. “... He was able to bring [those systems] with him. Having a staff of 70-80 people at some of those agencies, he learned in the for-profit model how to run a business, and then was able to bring that over, which was very helpful when it comes to the animators and illustrators and everything else. And then Tim was a pastor and a teacher. So you’ve got this whole pastoral feel to the office as well.”

In the retrospective video, Collins says all of this growth has only been made possible by supporters: “We keep growing because we’re doing more than just making videos. We believe the Bible is brilliant, literary genius, and [using] visuals and animation, you can bring that to life in new ways.”

Theology in Action

The idea of the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus is important to the team at the Bible Project, because they fear so many people today lack basic biblical literacy.

“I think we are quickly reaching ... a post-Bible Christianity,” McDonald says. “We’ve got people who say, ‘I’m a Christian. I go to church on Sunday. But I don’t read my Bible, and I don’t need to read the Bible, because it’s an old, archaic book that doesn’t really meet me where I’m at right now.’ Whether people say that out loud, they’re thinking it. They’re feeling it. And [they demonstrate it] in how much they actually read the Bible.”

Even for Christians, the Bible can be difficult to parse and understand by oneself. In a video interview with Crossroads Church’s Chuck Mingo, Collins says his experience in Bible college was disorienting: “The deeper I would go, the more confused I would get.” One question would become five. Context would be missing. Mackie compares the experience of reading the Bible without proper context to “watching just the third movie of a trilogy—it would make no sense.”

“It’s an entire narrative from Genesis to Revelation,” McDonald says. “Even though it’s done by a ton of different authors, it’s one big story, and we need to understand the context if we want to actually read, learn and dive in. ... To me, we can’t understand Jesus unless we understand Genesis. We can’t understand the New Jerusalem if we don’t understand the original intent from the Garden [of Eden]. That’s really important for daily life and what it means to be a community and to be the church.”

A big part of the creative process for the Bible Project is finding out the best way to succinctly and clearly communicate complicated Hebrew teachings in a way that makes sense to viewers today.

“The Bible is meant to shape how I live and think and

communicate the reality of God's presence and love to me," Mackie tells Mingo. "But the way ancient Jewish literature does those things is really different than how modern [literature] communicates. ... It's literally a cross-cultural experience to open the pages of the Bible. The point isn't to read the Bible to get an answer for my life today. The Bible actually is designed to not work that way most of the time. What it's designed to do is to invite you into a teaching or a story, and then get you to think about it for weeks and go back and reread it a year later."

The Bible Project has spread far beyond the English-speaking Western world, with views in almost every country on the planet. The videos have been localized into over 20 languages—including Spanish, French, Hindi, Mandarin and many more—in a process that McDonald says goes beyond translation. After all, if the point of the original Bible Project videos was to explain ancient Hebrew concepts in a way that resonates with American viewers, then different tactics or metaphors or examples may be needed for other cultural contexts.

"We definitely call it localization, not translation, for a purpose," McDonald says. "We really are localizing these videos—meaning that we're working with language advisers and theology advisers from that area. ... If Tim's talking about skateboarding in Portland, I mean, that might not make sense in some of these places. So we really rely pretty heavily on an incredible local team that we're working very closely with. And then it goes off to a bunch of people to view and [proof]. It's a big process for sure. It's definitely not just kind of jumping on Google Translate and hoping we get it done. There's usually an army of people in each of these countries that are working full-time on getting these videos done."

But the secret ingredient of the Bible Project videos is pairing those deep theological ideas with beautiful art and clear designs that visually demonstrate the truths being taught.

“The first few videos we did were in the explainer video style with art,” McDonald says. “The feedback that we got was, ‘It’s beautiful. I feel like I’ve just learned more in five minutes than I learned in a year in seminary. I can understand it. I can retain it. I can remember it. I was attracted to it. I stayed focused while watching it.’”

Freely Given

McDonald says he is particularly passionate about the Bible Project’s localization work because he knows the need firsthand. He encountered the lack of proper biblical resources frequently during his time working at Hear the Cry.

“We worked with a lot of pastors in those countries, and they were just so under-resourced—not just from a financial standpoint, but actually more from resourcing around the Bible,” McDonald says. “Many of these people would come to faith and just go plant a church the next year. They had what they had, and they used what they had, but to be able to provide free good resources that could actually equip the church globally was very important to me.”

McDonald says the Bible Project’s most popular secondary language is Spanish, though he notes the French videos too have a larger reach than many might expect. He says creating these videos provides resources for other ministries and organizations like Compassion International that work in Central and South American countries. It’s not about expanding the Bible Project’s reach; it’s about equipping staff and pastors and organizations with the tools they need to disciple the next generation.

To that end, the Bible Project makes a point of giving away all of its resources. There’s no special “premium” tier of extra goods or licensing fees on videos. The ministry doesn’t even enable advertisements on its YouTube videos. McDonald, Mackie and Collins all acknowledge in various interviews that

they are blessed to have that ability to simply make resources for the kingdom, without having to worry about profitability, thanks to a generous donor network. The Bible Project is 100% crowdfunded, and McDonald estimates the average donation is about \$20 per month.

“I think most ministries would love to give their stuff away to more people so that more people could experience the gospel in Jesus and the generosity of the church,” McDonald says. “I think that would be the hope for most. It’s just hard to do. ... We are very thankful for the incredible crowd that’s been with us, whether it’s been for the whole five years or people who are joining literally this week, who support and allow us to make more videos. It’s only because of that generosity that has allowed us to give them away for free. And I hope that that continues, because that is our heart.”

Even so, resources are not unlimited. McDonald says the Bible Project’s hardest decisions often involve turning down new projects that would distract from their core mission or compromise the quality of their videos.

“We don’t run too fast,” McDonald says. “We realize we create our own deadlines. You know, if we hired 15 more animators, we could make twice as many videos. But the bottleneck is scriptwriting with John and Tim. Then all of a sudden, quality of life completely changes, and then we just might burn out in the next two or three years.

“So I feel like we’ve set a pretty good pace. ... Honestly, there are some times where [a donor] might say, ‘I’ve got a check that I’d love to write to make more videos.’ We just say, ‘No, we don’t want to do that. We don’t [want to] be driven by that.’ ... It’s about knowing what we’re saying yes to, so we can know what to say no to. Because there are a lot of really good ideas and ministry opportunities and thoughts that I think are really good things, but they would potentially take us off track from our mission.”

In an era where content is king and media companies try to create as much output as possible, McDonald believes audiences have responded to the Bible Project's slower-paced release schedule of a few high-quality videos.

"I think part of the reason we've grown fast is that we started slow, in the sense that we don't rush the videos," McDonald says. "Could we make a video every single week? We could. But it takes us three to six months to make one of these videos. We have five teams that are each working on a different video, so that we can produce them every three weeks, but they take three to six months to make. That level of dedication and quality, I think, is represented on why so many people watch them on YouTube and why the completion rate of the videos is way higher than most videos. People watch the entire video. They don't cut out at minute one or two."

In five years, God has already taken the Bible Project from creation to a massive platform—and the leadership team is hopeful for what God has in store for the next five. (They already have four years of projects mapped out.) If nothing else, they're excited for the chance to continue geeking out about the Bible and inviting others to do the same.

"We hear stories from people who are now encountering Jesus and reading the Bible and how much they're changing," Collins tells Mingo. "You just can kind of see this ripple effect—that's been going on for thousands of years—of this countercultural movement of people deciding they're going to live a different narrative."

DONATE: To support the Bible Project, go to thebibleproject.com/give.

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