

How Can the Tired Mom Stay Connected With Hubby?

Courtney asks, “Any advice on marriage in the trenches—when you have multiple little ones, money is tight, date nights are tough, sleep non-existent, etc.?”

Courtney, congrats on the “little ones.” They are a blessing. An exhausting blessing, but a blessing nonetheless.

Grace and I understand your season of life. We had five children in eight years. When the kids were little, we were also planting the church, which meant long hours for both of us. Toss in any combination of cold or flu running through the house, teething or travel, and things can feel overwhelming and exhausting.

Most of the time, money is tight in this season as well, as you are trying to live off of one income and dad is trying to get his career started. Admittedly, these were tough years for us. Looking back, Grace and I did not get this right all the time. But we would offer the following suggestions, as Grace thinks aloud and I type along:

1. Pray

Get prayer time in the morning to start the day. Grace says even if you have to get up a few minutes early and pray while you are lying in bed, it’s worth it. Spend time in prayer with your husband, and during the day use texting to stay connected and in prayer for one another.

2. Worship

Keep your relationship with the Lord going. Listen to podcasts or the YouVersion audio Bible while you do your chores, pick a verse to meditate on, read Scripture to the kids—whatever

works for you, you need to do. Try not to miss church.

Even if you have to get up a few minutes early and pray while you are lying in bed, it's worth it.

3. Sleep

Don't feel guilty about taking a nap. Jesus took a nap in the Bible. Sometimes, you just have to sleep when the kids sleep. If you don't get enough sleep and you try to keep up with every task, things might not fall apart—but you will.

4. Prioritize

Don't try to do it all, but discuss what the priorities are. Kids are unpredictable. They make a mess, get sick, get hurt, break something, need you to hold them and love them, etc. You will never check everything off your list, so give yourself some grace. You and your hubby need to figure out what the priorities are, do the most important things first, and get to the rest if and when you can.

Your car will be filled with action figures, crushed crayons and decaying snacks. Your laundry will at some point be stacked up to what Paul calls the "third heaven." At some point, your kids will likely be wearing a swimsuit and rubber boots with chocolate in their hair. Take a photo, make a joke, and let it go.

5. Date

See if you can organize a date night co-op with people you trust who are family or church family. You cannot trust just anyone with your kids. But if there are godly people you do trust, maybe you could find, say, four couples, and each one can take turns watching the kids on date night. This way, you would at least get three weeks out of four without having to spend a ton on babysitting.

Also, godly college gals sometimes like to do this as a

ministry. When we were dating in college, for example, we knew a godly family who could not afford childcare for date night. So Grace and I volunteered to do that for them a few times a month. We wanted to marry and have kids, and we figured we could learn a lot by being with their kids and serving them at the same time.

6. Get Creative

Ask for date night gift cards for holidays and birthdays. Stacking up a few gift cards to restaurants and using them during a happy hour can stretch out a few nice date nights.

7. Have a Night In

Learn to get time together at night at home. Whether this is soaking in the tub, sitting by the fire or just getting a favorite beverage to enjoy while visiting over a board game, at least it's some adult connecting time. This kind of time multiple nights a week goes a long way in the little years. Some couples just enjoy having the kids out of the house for a few hours so they can come home to have dinner and do whatever without interruptions for a few hours.

8. Be Silly

If you are stressed, your kids will be stressed, so take time to do some silly and fun things with the kids. If you don't have any fun until your husband gets home, you can be pretty frazzled by the end of the day. So try to find some ways to have fun even with the kids.

9. Pursue Hope and Joy

What can happen when you are both busy, exhausted and depleted is that you start to feel overwhelmed and hopeless. Throw in some hormones or post-birth troubles, and your outlook can get dark fast. What you need is some hope.

Putting in place some plans and patterns can go a long way

toward keeping you both hopeful, which helps you be joyful. Not to do yet another shameless book plug, but if you have *Real Marriage*, the appendix on “Reverse Engineering Your Life and Marriage” is a very practical tool that might help with some of these issues as you try to architect your life together.

You will never check everything off your list, so give yourself some grace.

Lastly, these years go way too fast. These are hard years but wonderful years. Once these years are gone, they are gone forever.

Our oldest just got her driver’s license. I can still remember when her main mode of transportation was a piggyback ride from me. Do all you can to not just endure but also enjoy these years.

Thank you for asking this question. You are not alone. A lot of people have this question. We are praying for you, your hubby and your blessings! We’ve been there. We get it. And we appreciate you inviting us to speak in to your marriage and family. Thank you!

Pastor Mark Driscoll *is the founding pastor of Mars Hill Church—based in Seattle, Washington—and one of the most popular preachers in the world today. In 2010, Preaching magazine named him one of the 25 most influential pastors of the past 25 years. His sermon podcast regularly occupies the top spot in iTunes’s Religion & Spirituality category, and his online audience accesses about 15 million of his sermons each year.*

Driscoll is the author of over 15 books, including the #1 New York Times best-selling Real Marriage: The Truth About Sex, Friendship, and Life Together, coauthored with his wife, Grace. He has also written for CNN and The Washington Post and been featured as a columnist for The Seattle Times.

Marriage: The Real Fight Has Just Begun

Marriage is very important to me. Personally, it is a covenant that I made with my wife of over 35 years. It is a sacred **trust** between the two of us, but it is more than that. Marriage plays a significant part in the health of our society and the future of our children. This is why I have fought so hard to preserve the traditional definition of **marriage**.

In November, Illinois became the sixteenth state (including the District of Columbia) to change its definition of marriage to include homosexual relationships. You probably didn't hear too much about the fight in Illinois, which dragged on for several months longer than homosexual "marriage" activists had intended. Why did it take so long for an overwhelmingly Democratic state legislature to approve what homosexual activists promise us is an inevitable part of our future?

The answer is that, for quite a while, the efforts of key **black** clergy members preserved the traditional definition of marriage in Illinois. Their courageous stand—which included placing relentless pressure on black Democratic legislators—had the opposition gnashing its teeth in frustration. The Chicago Sun-Times reported on their activity in May, noting, "stubborn resistance within the House Black Caucus, a 20-member bloc of African-American lawmakers who have faced a withering lobbying blitz against the plan [to redefine marriage] from black ministers, has helped keep Harris' legislation [to redefine marriage] in check, with several House members still undecided."

In the end, however, the well-funded and aggressive campaign

to redefine marriage succeeded. It is worth noting that the margin in the House was razor thin. The measure would not have passed without the three Republicans who supported it: Representatives Cross, Sullivan, and Sandack.

As the Associated Press explained, after the bill failed in May, "Proponents then launched another aggressive campaign with help from labor, the former head of the Illinois Republican Party and the ACLU... (Illinois Governor) Quinn and House Speaker Michael Madigan also persuade[d] lawmakers in the final days." Shortly after Illinois' decision, New Mexico's State Supreme Court ruled homosexual "marriage" a constitutional right.

Homosexual activists have been hailing these victories as an unstoppable tide of change sweeping the nation. They rarely mention the fact that 31 states have already passed amendments to their state constitutions clarifying that marriage is the union of one man and one woman. Even with the Supreme Court striking down key parts of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in June, the tide may in fact be turning.

From now on, advocates for homosexual "marriage" face a very different landscape. Only one of the remaining states (which have not redefined marriage) has a Democrat-controlled state legislature. That state is West Virginia, where recent polls suggest that less than 20 percent of the population supports redefining marriage to include homosexual couples.

Thus far, homosexual activists have relied on bullying and on two major deceptions. The first is that all they want out of the redefinition of marriage is rights for loving, committed couples. The second is that homosexual marriage is so incredibly popular that its universal acceptance is inevitable. To be on the "right side of history," we are told we must get on board now.

The first lie is being exposed before our eyes. Illinois had

already legalized civil unions. But as a brief "Civil Unions are Not Enough: Six Key Reasons Why" from Lambda Legal explains, "Regardless of whether civil unions and marriage offer the same benefits and obligations on paper, when the government relegates same-sex couples to civil unions rather than marriage ... those **couples** lose the respect and dignity that they deserve for their commitment. ..." What homosexual activists want, and have always wanted, is mandatory public approval of their lifestyle.

The widespread support for traditional marriage in the black community has been very difficult for radical homosexual activists to understand. After all, if we are to believe their narrative, blacks should be nothing but grateful for all our gains in civil liberties since slavery. They believe that our own experience with oppression should impel us to go along with whatever homosexual activists tell us to believe.

But those who feel this way completely misunderstand what the Civil Rights Movement was all about. It was not about radically restructuring society. We appealed to the rights given to us by our Creator, who created not only mankind, but placed us in families. The family was the one institution that held the black community together through slavery and segregation. And it is the black community that has suffered most acutely as marriage has been devalued and the family has begun to fall apart.

Homosexual activists would have us believe that the fight is nearly over and that their victory is inevitable. Yet barring action from United States Supreme Court, it seems most likely that the real fight is only beginning. The battle will be waged state by state, and it will test the patience and perseverance of all. Several of the black Democrats in Illinois who voted to redefine marriage are facing primary challengers, as are all three Republicans. Will they face consequences for their decisions? Only time will tell.

Harry R. Jackson Jr. is senior pastor of 3,000-member Hope Christian Church in the nation's capital. Jackson, who earned an MBA from Harvard, is a best-selling author and popular conference speaker. He leads the High-Impact Leadership Coalition.

The Universal Language of Love

It is estimated that more than \$18 billion was spent on **Valentine's Day** cards, roses, candy and gifts in 2013. This year the highly commercialized Valentine's season is in full swing. Seductive roses and heart-shaped boxes line shopping aisles while jewelry commercials and promises of romance and love blanket television sets.

Love is the universal language understood by all. All humanity longs to find true acceptance for who they are as a person even when their bent is not mainstream, popular, politically correct or as varied as the candies made by Russell Stover. The one language that is never foreign or misunderstood is love, and it often is best spoken without any words.

Love is communicated and shown with actions of respect, acceptance, kindness and tolerance. Yet, this true example of love is lacking in our world today. **Tolerance** is both the most "in fashion" word of the day and the most hated. It is loved and despised by us all – even if we don't choose to admit it. We stand for it when it benefits us and shoot at it when it is not.

We want to put a silencer on any barrel that is firing a different bullet than our preferred caliber. Yet isolating

others with differing perspectives than our own only shrinks our ability for education and growth.

Few of us would admit to being intolerant and there is no other moniker we would more hate to be given. However, the guilt is obvious and on display in every facet of our culture. Politics, sports, television and religion have a window shop of such concrete-minded poster boys.

By definition the meaning of **intolerance** is defined as the inability to accept others views, convictions or opinions because they oppose your own. However, many who are the most outspoken about tolerance of others are the ones speaking with a forked tongue. They want others opinion's heard as long as they are rowing in the same boat. When there is a different stance the fault line is often exposed and verbal volcanoes erupt.

Just recently we saw how the Olympic games become a battlefield of intolerance as the Russian government seeks to muzzle the LGTB community from having a voice. Gag policies never cultivate **understanding** or peace in any relationships whether personal or corporate. Silencing others or trying to get a louder bullhorn is never a bridge to peace. Sadly, protests may be looming at the singular worldwide sporting event designed as a congregation of world unity. And while like everyone, the LGTB community deserves a platform, so do those on the other side of the coin.

Phil Robertson of Duck Dynasty is a classic case. He became embroiled in a firestorm after comments in a recent media interview. Regardless of his opinions he should have the right to state them and drive a stake in the ground without being marginalized as an intolerant redneck.

Cannot **understanding** and **compassion** be learned from both camps without putting a stereotypical label on either as a sinner, saint or psycho? If the last 10 years of traveling the world

have taught me anything it's the need to release my pious attitude and embrace those with whom I don't share much real estate. I have often learned the most from those I understand the least.

I have a family member who I love dearly who has a different sexual orientation from me. Our **relationship** has enabled me to grow in understanding and taught me how to relate to her community of friends. This person's influence has taught me more about compassion and patience than probably any other relationship I've ever had.

This week I spent time with a person whose beliefs about **God** were the antithesis of my own. One hour later we shook hands and planned our next meeting. We are scheduled for lunch tomorrow. In our meeting, there was no jockeying for position of higher ground but an approach to understand beliefs neither of us had ever possessed. By conversation's end, we were both forced to examine what we believed and why we believed it.

One of the strongest evidences of **character** and personal impact is the relationship one has with his fellow man. Maybe the recognition that I am not always right is the best process of growth and can equip me to listen to others whose opinions or convictions I may not like. Agreement and surrender are not mandatory but compassion, respect and openness must be.

Jay Lowder is the founder of Jay Lowder Harvest Ministries and the Crossroads school assembly as well as author of Midnight in Aisle 7. To purchase the book, [click here](#).

The Faith of Ronald Reagan

My friend Dr. Paul Kengor teaches at Grove City College in Pennsylvania. He may be the last serious scholar in America who is still researching and publishing books on the communist menace that held half the world in its grip for 70 years. This, in itself, is astonishing. We have had no end of books and study centers dedicated to the study of that 12-year nightmare known as the Third Reich. As evil and virulent as Nazism was, its political grip was broken when Adolf Hitler shot himself in the Fuhrerbunker in Berlin on April 30, 1945.

We should give comparable attention to communism. It held sway for 70 years and gripped billions of people. Paul Kengor understands the link between communism and atheism. He knows that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's description of communism as "atheism with a knife at your child's throat" is the most concise definition of the Marxist philosophy that underlay an evil empire. That was an empire "built on bones."

Prof. Kengor's books on Ronald Reagan have all paid fulsome tribute to Reagan's religious faith. In this *American Spectator* column, he shows us that Reagan's personal faith was a constant in his life—even as his political allegiance changed from being a liberal Democrat in the New Deal era to a conservative Democrat to a conservative Republican.

Reagan famously said, "I didn't leave the Democrats; they left me." Millions of conservative Democrats felt the same way. Most of these were Democrats with strong religious convictions. If you were a Roman Catholic or evangelical in the 1980s, there was a high likelihood that you or your parents would be among the millions of "Reagan Democrats." It's worth noting here that we have not seen a comparable movement among Democrats for Bush, McCain or Romney.

There have been some Republicans—most notably former Indiana

Gov. Mitch Daniels—who have urged the Republican Party to declare a truce on social issues like abortion, marriage and religious liberty while vigorously spooning out the GOP elixir of smaller government and lower taxes. Stick to the economic issues, they say. But while this appeals to some, it can never command the kinds of majorities that Reagan enjoyed.

Reagan's biggest domestic problem as president was the congressional Republicans who feared his anti-communism and who eschewed his pro-family policies. This failure to embrace all elements of the Reagan coalition got the GOP clobbered in 1982 and 1986 in the midterm elections. This reduced cadre might be termed the Golden Calf Republicans because all they cared about was money.

The problem with Golden Calf Republicans is that they don't know where gold comes from. Ronald Reagan was more successful in selling conservative economics to Americans at the grass roots because the people formed a bond with him.

Reagan understood the need for compassionate conservatism, to be sure, but he realized that that compassion should well up from families, from churches and synagogues, and from voluntary associations. As president, Ronald Reagan reinvigorated what social scientists have called the *mediating structures*.

Reagan had a deep understanding of that amazing quality that the great French political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville first described in *Democracy in America*: our genius for "voluntary association." Reagan understood that too much government interference crowded out and starved these important social institutions.

Tocqueville compared the French and the Americans. Let a flood or hurricane strike in America, he said, and the local people will immediately form committees to address the crisis. In France, he wrote, the peasants in distant provinces will fold

their arms and await direction from Paris to relieve their anguish.

This capacity for voluntary association, Tocqueville wrote, is the key to American democracy itself. Reagan grew up in the self-reliant Midwest. He understood all this.

Reagan's religious faith also gave him a faith in the common sense of common people. He had a healthy skepticism of "experts"—those credentialed bureaucrats and administrators who think they can order our lives better from a distant capital city than we can ourselves.

Douglas Brinkley is a respected scholar with a Ph.D. in history. He was selected by Nancy Reagan to edit Ronald Reagan's diaries. I love the surprised reaction of Brinkley to what those diaries revealed. Prof. Brinkley has said, with an air of astonishment: Ronald Reagan was really *smart*.

Reagan's achievements can be attributed to the fact that Reagan did not seek to persuade us that he was really smart or that he knew better how to run our neighborhood schools, our local communities, our churches and synagogues, and our voluntary associations than we did.

Stumping for votes in the Midwest in 1979, Gov. Reagan paused in front of a TV to watch the return of Pope John Paul II to his Polish homeland. Poland was then still in the grip of communism, under Soviet domination. Communism is atheism. But a million Poles gathered for an open-air Mass. Gov. Reagan halted his campaign for the White House to listen to those Poles chanting, "We want God!" To say you want God is to say you don't want communism. Reagan teared up at that miraculous chant. He said simply, "I want to work with him."

As president, Ronald Reagan *did* work with the pope to free hundreds of millions of people in Eastern Europe and the USSR. The fact that Russia has now slipped back under historic despotism can be attributed in no small measure to the failure

of U.S. diplomacy. Successive U.S. administrations never pressed the post-Soviet leadership for guarantees of religious freedom. Still, Eastern Europe remains largely free because Reagan never lost faith in freedom.

When he went to the Brandenburg Gate in 1987, President Reagan famously said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." We all know what happened to the Berlin Wall.

But the president said something else that was not widely reported at the time. He described the radio tower built by the puppet communist East German regime. That tower overshadowed all the church steeples and synagogue walls in the Soviet sector of Berlin.

President Reagan described the "defect" that the Communists had tried to paint over and sandblast. They even attempted to etch it away with acid. But when the sun strikes the globe on that radio tower, it reflects the sign of the cross!

I had studied the public statements of all the U.S. presidents. I had never encountered such an amazing affirmation of Christian faith before. While he never sought to force anyone to share his beliefs, Ronald Reagan was unapologetic about his Christian faith. Perhaps that's why so many Americans honor his memory.

Robert Morrison is senior fellow for policy studies at Family Research Council. This article appeared on Thursday.

Ben Carson: Obama Officials

'Acting Like Gestapo'

Brain-surgeon-turned-political-analyst **Dr. Ben Carson** says officials in the Obama administration are "acting like Gestapo."

Carson was specifically referring to the indictment of **Dinesh D'Souza** by the Justice Department and the IRS political targeting of those in opposition to the administration.

Carson was also the target of an IRS audit after he criticized Obama's policies at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington last year.

"I believe we are dealing with an extremely corrupt administration," Carson says.

"I've always been someone who has been very careful about my finances and the way I take care of my business," he explains. "I've never undergone this kind of scrutiny before, but then it comes after the prayer breakfast. They're harassing my family. They're harassing my colleagues. And they're not finding anything—so that just makes them dig a little deeper."

In an interview with WND, Carson said he was also disturbed by Obama's comments during his pre-Super Bowl interview with Fox News' Bill O'Reilly last week.

"What he said was that his administration was not guilty of any wrongdoing with regard to the IRS, and he blamed Fox News for reporting it," Carson said. "I don't think he would be happy unless Fox News were shut down and there was no more criticism of his actions."

A representative of a possible new brand of non-politician presidential candidates in 2016, Carson is only the latest in

a string of high-profile figures who have expressed serious concerns about the indictment of D'Souza, who is an author, scholar and filmmaker. Like Carson, many see the Obama administration abusing the criminal justice system for political payback.

Clearly D'Souza was one of Obama's staunchest critics when he released the extremely popular and vividly candid documentary *2016: Obama's America*.

A federal grand jury indicted D'Souza on two felony counts for violating campaign laws. He could face up to seven years in prison if found guilty of making false statements to the Federal Election Commission and for illegally contributing \$15,000 to a candidate running for the U.S. Senate.

A high-profile Washington-based attorney specializing in campaign finance issues, Cleta Mitchell, told WND, "The decision to prosecute—or not prosecute—is always a matter of discretion. It was the prosecutor's decision—indeed [the] DOJ's decision—not to prosecute widespread conduit contributions to the John Edwards campaign in 2008. Contrast that with this prosecution, which involved \$15,000 (not \$20,000 as claimed)."

When Mitchell was queried as to whether she believes the indictment was politically motivated, she responded, "Do I think this is politically motivated? I think if a Republican appointee had done this, the press corps would be going ballistic. Just consider how outraged they were when Bush asked for and received resignations of all U.S. attorney appointees at the start of his second term, something that is customary. Imagine if his appointee had gone after a George Soros friend. Imagine the outrage."

President Bill Clinton and Obama both have a history of accepting highly questionable campaign donations, charges

Brent Bozell, founder and president of Media Research Center.

“Let’s assume Dinesh D’Souza is guilty, and I mean 100 percent guilty,” Bozell says. “What is he guilty of? Circumventing FEC dictates by directing [\$15,000] to a Senate candidate of his choice. Big deal,

“First, in a multimillion [dollar] Senate campaign, this is a fraction of a fraction. It buys a can of soda pop, and that’s about it. Second, and more importantly, compare this ‘crime’ with Bill Clinton, who raised millions of dollars from questionable at best, and illegal at worst, sources, including felons and Chinese Communist generals.

“Compare it to Barack Obama, who raised millions upon millions from who-knows-who-or-where to this day. Nothing ever came of their fundraising abuses, abuses 1,000-fold larger than anything attributed to D’Souza. And yet he was arrested and forced to post a \$500,000 bond. It is astonishing. Given all the other abuses of power swirling around this administration, so many of them finding their origins in the ‘Justice’ Department, do I see deliberate persecution against conservatives? I am not conspiratorial by nature, but I will say unequivocally, you better believe it.”

“100 percent” political, says Rep. Michele Bachman, R-Minn.

“Of course it is,” she says. “It is payback from the DOJ. Plus, it sends a signal to anyone else for 2016 who may be thinking of producing a movie. It is up to the candidate to return the money. This should have been found when the FEC filing occurred. I don’t know the details, but this could cost Dinesh literally millions in legal defense fees, plus destroying his name and making him toxic to conservatives and Republicans. These are the goals of the political destruction machine at the DOJ.”

And Rep. Steve Stockman, R-Texas, also says, “Yes, I think it is political. It fits a pattern of abuse of power. As someone else said, President Obama is the president Nixon wanted to be.”

REVIEW: ‘The Lego Movie’ Has Got Religion

Legos got religion? Who knew?

The Lego Movie, well-reviewed and making money by the brickyard, builds its story upon religious and moral themes. They don’t all snap together securely, but that’s in keeping with the rest of the film.

Spoiler alert: I’ll give away nothing that you wouldn’t get from the reviews. There’s a late plot twist, however, that affects everything we thought we understood about the story. Anybody who reveals that twist, at least in the first few weeks, deserves to be extruded in molten plastic. I’ll tip as little as possible.

Right off the bat: It’s as good as the reviews say. The story takes elements from *The Matrix*, *Harry Potter*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *Lord of the Rings*, the good Star Wars movies, *Toy Story 2* and other recent cultural touchstones and blends them into plot slurry. Which is not all that surprising for a modern kids’ movie.

But references to Aristophanes? Ibsen? Orwell? To an architect who died more than 2,000 years ago? I guarantee you did not see that coming.

You've likely read a summary of the story: An utterly unremarkable construction worker figure in a Lego city literally falls into a tale where he discovers the "Piece of Resistance," a plastic doodad that is the only way to stop a dastardly villain (modeled on 1984's *Big Brother*) from destroying the world. Our hero, who has never ever deviated from the "official instructions" for anything, has to discover what it means to be "the Special" and lead the battle.

In his quest, he gains allies: a warrior-woman named Wyldstyle; her boyfriend, Batman (yes, that Batman); a half-unicorn/half kitty mash-up named, duh, UniKitty; and others, including a wizard named Vitruvius.

Marcus Vitruvius Pollio was an engineer and architect who wrote a 10-volume encyclopedia on architecture in the first century B.C. His work was so influential that Leonardo da Vinci used it 500 years later to help design his famous drawing of a man inside a circle, the Vitruvian Man.

This Vitruvius is one of the film's "master builders," figures able to effortlessly construct anything out of the Lego materials. "Master builder" may be a nod to Ibsen's play *Master Builder*, about an architect who dies when he falls from one of his buildings. (Yeah, that's dark.)

Go deeper? The hero of the tale, the anonymous construction guy, is named Emmet, or "truth" in Hebrew. I asked Lego director Philip Lord if this was coincidence.

No, he replied in a Tweet: "'truth'—was Greg Silverman's idea at WB and we embraced it." (Silverman is president for creative development and worldwide production for Warner Bros. Pictures.)

Our plucky band ends up at one point in Cloud Cuckoo Land, a chaotic place where there are no rules. That's an unambiguous nod to Aristophanes' satirical play *The Birds*, written about 2,400 years ago, which included a chaotic realm called Cloud

Cuckoo Land.

Where are the religious and moral references? There are references to the Man Upstairs, the one really in charge of their world. So there's your Lego God.

There's a prophecy, by Vitruvius, about that doodad called the "Piece of Resistance" (think "Holy Grail" or "Ark of the Covenant") and "the Special" (the Only One who can use the Piece to save the world). Which is something like any religious prophesy about a savior.

Emmet also sacrifices himself for his friends, plunges through a tunnel into the Light, learns an unforeseeable truth about his world and is resurrected to return to the quest. That has echoes of Jesus and Guru Nanak, the father of Sikhism.

The whole film turns on finding a balance between conformity and creativity. Vitruvius tells Emmet: "All you need to be special is to believe." Eventually, Emmet does. He's not initially as creative as other master builders, but, unlike them, he understands how total freedom can fail without some rules. And that's how he is "special."

This is a theme that plays out today in many houses of worship. In fact, the broad popularity of Pope Francis is exactly about the way he is redefining the balance of conformity versus creativity for the Roman Catholic Church.

(And let's deal with the canard you might have heard: There's nothing anti-capitalist about the movie. True, the film is opposed to an externally imposed rigidity of thought. And it's against some of the degrading vulgarities of modern culture. But it's emphatically "pro-entrepreneurship," which is as pro-business as you can get. And at one level, after all, it's a 100-minute ad. The Sunday I saw it at a local mall, there was a line afterward waiting for the Lego store to open.)

But then there's that plot twist at the end that I dare not

reveal. It changes our perspective of most of the film. Some of what had been annoying randomness suddenly makes total sense. It also takes what seemed like a tale about imaginary beings and turns it into a story with a message that is both more specific and more universal.

We realize, with perhaps a shock of recognition, that the tension between creativity and necessary rules is hardly limited to the Lego universe. And we get a lesson about how that strain might be resolved.

There one more possible nod to faith: Like Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*, Emmet's heroic quest would fail except for an act of grace. In this case extended by, ahem, the Man Upstairs.

Are we supposed to understand any of it as real? As Vitruvius tells Emmet: "The prophecy is made up, but it's also true."

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Wars and Rumors of Wars

2014 will mark a grim anniversary: 100 years since the beginning of World War I.

It was to be the "war to end all wars." If only.

World War I is rapidly disappearing from modern memory. At the current pace of events, we often forget what happened last week, much less a century ago. We are twice as far removed

from 1914 as Americans in that year were removed from the Civil War era. Another world war and scores of smaller ones have occurred in the generations since. Revolutions have shaken and reshaped entire chunks of the globe. Technology has transformed almost everything.

But we should never forget the consequences of “the Great War.” Aside from its staggering bloodshed and suffering (more than 30 million killed or wounded), it brought the end of the old order in Europe and laid the groundwork for a new one. It swept away monarchies and empires, set the stage for revolutions and years of global economic struggle—and ultimately led to an even more devastating global conflict.

Some historians believe we are entering a similar era of endings and beginnings. If Christians intend to make an impact on the world, we must strive to understand the times. We also must deal with the world as it is, not as we want it to be. If you’re waiting for general stability and peace before you launch out to the nations or lead your church to go, you’ve got a long wait ahead.

“The coming conflicts and challenges are pretty clear,” writes Gordon Adams, professor of international relations at American University, in *Foreign Policy* magazine. “We will hear a lot about the Syrian civil war, the fate of the Iranian nuclear program, conflict in Iraq, the departure of U.S. forces from Afghanistan—not to speak of what applecart Vladimir Putin plans to upset next, whether the North Korean regime will implode, and whether China and its neighbors intensify their conflict over the rocky outcroppings they all want to own.”

“As we reflect on this [World War I] anniversary year, however, there are deeper rumblings afoot, rumblings that will color and shape many of these conflicts,” he continues. “The same was true 100 years ago. ... At the start of that new century, the shape of world politics was about to transform, while class conflict rose and shook the very foundations of

the monarchies of continental Europe.”

“Between these two forces, they would wipe out the Austro-Hungarian Empire, remove royalty from power in Germany, bring revolutionary turmoil to Russia, undermine the colonial systems established by France and Germany, and bring a new power—the United States—to the center of the world stage,” explains Adams.

Now the United States and its allies seem to be receding as global power players, by circumstance or by choice, while economic, political and military conflicts simmer around the globe. If that withdrawal or decline continues, other forces will fill the power vacuum.

In some cases, the vacuum itself will bring chaos. It’s an old historical pattern, repeated many times through the ages.

“Why so much anarchy?” asks Robert Kaplan in a new piece for Stratfor, the global intelligence analysis service. Twenty years ago, Kaplan warned in an influential *Atlantic Monthly* article (“The Coming Anarchy”) of “unprecedented upheaval, brought on by scarce resources, overpopulation, uncontrollable disease, brutal warfare and the widespread collapse of nation-states and indeed, of any semblance of government. ... Welcome to the 21st century.”

Some of those predictions came true; some didn’t. But “what is not in dispute is that significant portions of the earth ... are simply harder and harder to govern,” Kaplan reports. He identifies five major causes for the persistent upheaval of recent decades:

1. The end of imperialism. Empires and spheres of influence built by international powers often oppress and exploit the peoples they absorb. But they provide (or enforce) order. When they crumble, freedom may follow. Or chaos and blood.

2. The end of postcolonial strongmen. National dictators

replaced departing colonial authorities in many places during the postcolonial era in the 20th century and again after the Cold War. Saddam Hussein, Moammar Gadhafi, Hosni Mubarak and many other strongmen are gone. But who—or what—will replace them?

3. No national institutions and feeble national identities. Postcolonial dictators typically ruled by fear and secret police, not strong social and political institutions. “It is institutions that fill the gap between the ruler at the top and the extended family or tribe at the bottom,” Kaplan explains. Without such institutions, “the chances for either [more] dictatorship or anarchy proliferate.” States with such weak national identities become particularly vulnerable to “non-state identities that fill the subsequent void.” Think al-Qaida, organized criminal cartels and other bad actors.

4. Doctrinal battles. Religious struggles have sparked many wars in the past. It’s happening again in the Muslim world “as state identities weaken and sectarian and other differences within Islam come to the fore, often violently,” Kaplan notes. Americans tend to focus on radical Islam versus the West. But the great ideological battle now tearing apart the Middle East—from Syria and Iraq to Iran and Saudi Arabia—is the blood feud between Sunni and Shiite Islam.

5. Information technology. Smartphones “can empower the crowd against a hated regime, as protesters who do not know each other personally can find each other through Facebook, Twitter, and other social media,” Kaplan acknowledges. But they “cannot provide [or] maintain political stability afterwards. This is how technology encourages anarchy. The Industrial Age was about bigness: big tanks, aircraft carriers, railway networks and so forth. ... But the post-industrial age is about smallness, which can empower small and oppressed groups, allowing them to challenge the state—with anarchy sometimes the result.”

What comes next?

“The real question marks are Russia and China. The possible weakening of authoritarian rule in those sprawling states may usher in less democracy than chronic instability and ethnic separatism that would dwarf in scale the current instability in the Middle East,” Kaplan warns. “The future of world politics will be about which societies can develop responsive institutions to govern vast geographical space and which cannot. That is the question toward which the present season of anarchy leads.”

That might be the political question. The spiritual question for Christians: How do we continue to go into the world, declare the gospel and make disciples among all nations as yet another era of upheaval unfolds? There are as many answers as there are nations, cultures and peoples.

But retreat is not one of them.

Erich Bridges *is an IMB global correspondent.*

Death Threats Target Christian Rapper Who Opposed Macklemore’s ‘Same Love’

The criticism of Christian rapper Bizzle has continued following the release of a YouTube video, “Same Love (A Response),” in which he opposes Macklemore and Ryan Lewis’ gay-affirming song “Same Love.”

In fact, Bizzle says he’s even received death threats. He set up a website, , showcasing social media comments in response

to the video.

Let God In

“My beloved spoke and said to me, ‘Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone’” (Song 2:10-11, NIV).

God is calling you out of your past and into your future with Him.

It is of utmost importance that we are known by God. Don't get so busy laboring for God that you forget to labor with Him. When your motives become distorted and mixed, you can lose focus on His character, nature and perspective.

We can't forget why Jesus is our beloved. We don't pursue Him because of all we can get from or bring to Him. Our pursuit of Jesus is about His pursuit of us. It's about Him.

Whatever we choose to withhold from God will eventually be our downfall. He wants to be involved in all aspects of our lives. God is not a user and a taker; He's a loving giver.

Only when we stand vulnerably before Him, without any walls or inhibitions, can we truly develop hearts in love with Him.

“Search me, God, and know my heart” (Ps. 139:23).

What situations have you not let God into? Ask Him into every area of your life, not just the ones in which it is easily comfortable to give up control.

Adapted from Out of Control and Loving it! **Lisa Bevere** is a best-selling author of *Fight Like a Girl*, *Kissed the Girls* and

Made them Cry, Out of Control and Loving It! and Be Angry and Don't Blow It! In addition to speaking at national and international conferences, she is a frequent guest on Christian television and radio shows. She and her husband, best-selling author John Bevere, make their home in Colorado.

After 20 Years, New Edition Published of Siegel's 'Stocks for the Long Run'

There are countless thousands of investing books out there, but precious few that could be considered true classics.

Some of the obvious titles include Benjamin Graham's *The Intelligent Investor*, of course, one of the bibles of value investing and a favorite of gurus like Berkshire Hathaway's Warren Buffett. Maybe books like Burton Malkiel's *A Random Walk Down Wall Street*, or *Beating the Street* by former Fidelity Magellan manager Peter Lynch should also be included on the syllabus.

But no such list would ever be complete without *Stocks for the Long Run*, by Jeremy Siegel, a finance professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Hard to believe, but 20 years have passed since that classic's first publication back in 1994. Now there is a new edition of the book, analyzing the 2008 financial crisis that shook investors to their core, and providing fresh forecasts for the years ahead.

Reuters sat down with Siegel to chat about the wild ride of

the last two decades—and about what twists and turns are still in store.

Q: Twenty years have passed since you published your book, but long-term stock returns have remained the same. Do you see those findings as a validation of your earlier work?

A: Stock returns through 2013 have averaged 6.7 percent per year, which is exactly the same as I reported in the first edition of *Stocks for the Long Run* back in 1994. Of course there has been quite a bit of volatility over the past couple of decades.

And over the short run, equities are indeed a very volatile asset class. But over the long run, perhaps the most stable asset class of all, delivering the highest returns.

Q: You are not quite as hopeful for bondholders, though.

A: They have had some great years, but right now it looks to me like the environment of the early 1960s. I don't think we will end up with inflation rates like we had in the 1970s, which got up into the double digits, but I do think 10-year interest rates on bonds will get to 4 or 5 percent. Not this year, maybe, but in 2015 or 2016. And that obviously does mean a tougher time for bondholders ahead.

Q: Your new edition analyzes the roots of the financial crisis of 2008-9. What is your take?

A: I don't blame (former Federal Reserve chairman) Alan Greenspan for keeping interest rates low. I don't think that is relevant. But I do blame him for not seeing the buildup of risky assets on the balance sheets of critical financial institutions. When Lehman Brothers and Bear Stearns started leveraging themselves up 50-1 or higher, on risky real estate securities that were wrongly stamped triple-A by (Standard & Poor's) and other ratings agencies, he should have sounded the alarm on that.

Q: Looking ahead for our society, one point you make is that retirement ages have to change.

A: When programs like Medicare and Social Security started, the average life expectancy was 67. But the world is changing. Back then, the costs of programs like that were tiny fractions of what we are now expecting today. Now we are much healthier, and 70 is the new 60 or even the new 50. There is no reason why we shouldn't work longer. If the retirement age doesn't change, that is not going to be good for equity returns going forward.

Q: It seems you are quite bullish on emerging markets, which are going through a rough patch at the moment.

A: Emerging markets valuations this year are going so low that I believe it is a very unique opportunity right now. Companies in emerging markets are selling at 10 or 11 times earnings; in some places like China valuations are even lower, at seven times earnings. This is remarkable.

These are opportunities you do not get very often. It is part of a common cycle, swinging between optimism and pessimism. If you recognize that, you go in. Just know that you might take some further short-term losses, before those markets hit absolute bottom.

Q: What does all this mean for allocation for individual investors?

A: If you are an aggressive investor, you might look at an equity allocation of one-third U.S., one-third developed ex-U.S. markets like Japan and Europe, and one-third emerging markets. I don't see much of a future in bonds, cash is yielding virtually zero, and commodities don't seem very attractive. My feeling is that stocks still offer the best long-run prospect for future returns. And if we were looking back at this market's price-earnings ratios two or three years from now, we would probably be very happy to get in on it.

Q: If you had to predict what your next book update is going to discuss in a few years – what would it be?

A: Normally I do an update to *Stocks for the Long Run* every four years or so. So four years from now, in 2018, I honestly don't foresee having had another crisis like the one we just saw. You have to go back to the 1930s to see something like that. That was not just a once-in-a-generation thing: It was a once-in-a-lifetime thing.

The writer is a Reuters contributor. The opinions expressed are his own.

Editing by Beth Pinsker, Lauren Young and Matthew Lewis

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