

10 Ways to Boost Your Immune System

With the winter coming to its end and spring coming up, it is a whole new season ahead—that is, flu and cold season. The good news is that I have compiled a list of 10 immune-boosting tips to help you combat the flu bug away.

Try incorporating these 10 tips in your daily routine and you'll be sure to welcome the cold and flu season with a smile.

1. Enjoy a good laugh. A variety of studies have concluded that laughing activates the body's protective T cells and induces increased antibody production. So give in to the guilty pleasure of watching your favorite sitcom, watching some stand-up comedy or maybe reading a book that leaves you cracking with laughter.

The more you laugh, the more your immune system will thank you for it. Who knew that laughter is the best flu shot around? Bonus is the fact that laughter is contagious, so you are not only making your body stronger but helping others too.

2. Give good bacteria a go. What? Welcome some bacteria? Yes! Contrary to popular belief, not all types of bacteria are harmful. In fact, a group of bacteria that are commonly called probiotics strengthens the GI tract and is directly related to the strength of your immune system. Probiotics are typically found in fermented food like miso, yogurt, sauerkraut, kefir and sourdough bread.

3. Load up on prebiotics. So we have probiotics, but what are prebiotics? Prebiotics are soluble fibers that are found in foods such as artichokes, leeks, onions and bananas. They help probiotics to do their function and thus help in strengthening the GI tract and the immune system too.

4. Munch on greens. Immune cells in your gut are ensured to be in their tip-top level of functioning when you munch on some green vegetables like kale, broccoli and bok choy, so load up on kale chips and have at least one glass of green smoothie a day to keep the doctor away.

5. Time to relax. Stress is the number one thing that weakens your immune system. When you are stressed, your body releases cortisol that then suppresses your immune cells. Any relaxing activities that calm you down and make you feel at peace and happy are a surefire way to a healthier immune system.

6. Engage in human touch. I have mentioned that cortisol weakens your immune system and relaxing strengthens it. What better way to relax than indulging in human touch? Be it getting a massage from your significant other, hugging your children or holding hands with someone special, all of these will effectively decrease your cortisol levels.

Research has shown that 45 minutes of massage increases your body's white blood cells, therefore strengthening your immune response and reducing inflammation-causing cytokines—but how? Touch makes your body release oxytocin, which causes the cortisol levels to go down. Experts even recommend an average of eight hugs per day for maximum benefits from oxytocin. So don't be shy—give out some hugs!

7. Connect with people. The American Psychological Association recently published research that says social isolation compromises the body's infection-fighting ability and weakens its immunity. Having and nourishing your social ties like marriage and friendship serves to strengthen your immune system. This gives a new meaning to the phrase “no man is an island” indeed.

8. Get enough restful sleep. Being deprived of sleep reduces your body's T-cell count that results in your body having a reduced ability to fight off disease-causing microorganisms. A

solid session of eight hours of sleep is what your body needs for it to be able to tap into its self-healing powers, so ensure to invest some time in getting quality sleep.

9. Sing your heart out. Who knew that your shower concertos are an effective immune booster? Research has shown that people who sing are less likely to catch the flu and cold bug, so sing your heart out in the home—and especially in church!

10. Meditate. A healthy body starts with a healthy mind, physically, psychologically and spiritually. Meditating positively influences your immune response. One study has shown that people who have engaged in meditation for eight consecutive weeks have an increased response to a flu shot. Even just three minutes of meditation as a part of your daily morning routine is enough to produce results. It is in moments of being still that we are truly one with God. No wonder it reflects back as the gift of better health!

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For the original article, visit .

Will the Real Church Please Stand Up?

By today's standards in the American church, Jesus wasn't cut out to be a pastor, nor would His ministry be highlighted as a model for church planters. Consider these facts:

Jesus had the greatest preaching, teaching and healing ministry in history. Thousands came to hear Him, followed His every move and lined the streets to get a glimpse of Him or simply touch Him. Yet amid His rock-star popularity, He intentionally offended religious leaders, challenged potential mega-donors and weeded out casual followers with tough teachings. Not exactly the textbook strategy you'd find today to grow your church, much less your Facebook likes and Twitter followers.

After Jesus spent three and a half years ministering to thousands, His church consisted of only 120 disciples gathered in the upper room. And even that was a low turnout, considering He had appeared to more than 500 people after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6).

But we know the rest of the story: how the 120 quickly became 3,120 and grew daily to where even unbelievers credited Jesus' followers as those "who have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). The truth is, we know that Jesus' divine church-growth tactics surpass all others—with the proof being a global church that, 2,000 years later, refuses to die while it works to fulfill His Great Commission.

Why, then, do we in the 21st-century American church focus on all the elements that Jesus *didn't*? He focused on training and equipping 12 disciples; we focus on growing our crowds and spheres of influence, regardless of whether those people follow Jesus. He preached an uncompromising message of truth; we sugarcoat the gospel until we're saccharine-high on deception. He walked among His enemies in love; we ostracize our enemies by blasting them for all their sins.

Indeed, most of the U.S. church is enamored with size over substance and microwave growth over true reproduction. Research shows that while 235 million people call themselves Christians, only 40 percent of those meet regularly with fellow believers and only a fourth (at most) read the Bible on

a regular basis. It's time we discovered the marks of the real church, measured by Jesus' standards rather than our own trendy metrics. So what are those elements? Here are just a few.

1) Love. Jesus defined a premier characteristic of His church in John 13:35: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." If we can't even love fellow believers—if we skewer each other over theological differences and cultural preferences—how can we expect the world to want what we have? Transforming the world with God's love starts right where we are, on the home front, as we learn to love each other as Christ loved us.

2) Prayer. Jesus was constantly communicating with the Father, listening for His thoughts and seeing where He was already moving. Luke's Gospel shows that little happened in Christ's life without Him first praying. Why, then, do most church gatherings today focus so little on prayer? In trying to be culturally relevant and seeker-sensitive, we've conveyed that this essentiality of our faith—both individually and corporately—is secondary. That can't be if we want to mimic Jesus.

3) Persecution. We in the West equate religious freedom and the lack of persecution with blessing. Yet when you look for the most powerful churches in the world, where the Spirit moves freely and in fullness, you'll always find persecution. It's time we wake up and realize that persecution galvanizes and unifies the body of Christ like few other pressures. Remember, Jesus promised persecution to those who truly follow Him (Matt. 5:11-12; John 15:20). When was the last time you saw this promise fulfilled in your own life or church?

4) Power. Jesus also promised that His followers would do greater works than He did (John 14:12)—a promise sealed by the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower us. Wherever the early apostles and church went, the miraculous followed. Though

there have been seasons of Holy Spirit revival in our nation, even charismatic churches today are de-emphasizing such things as praying for the sick, demonic deliverance or the prophetic. Making room for the Spirit's supernatural movement isn't an option; it's the mark of those who truly follow Christ.

This month *Charisma* highlights eight of the biggest issues today's American church faces. Some are core to our nation's culture wars; others are more exclusive to believers. Regardless, all require the church to stand up as representations of Christ and be the solution—just as Jesus modeled.

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Man Loses 400 Pounds in 4 Years—What's the Lesson?

Bryan Ganey is celebrating. "I lost 400 pounds in four years without any surgery or diet program!" he says. He also was \$60,000 in debt and paid that off too, exclaiming, "American Express—I finally left home without it!"

Overeating and overspending, this Christian finally came to the place where he realized time was running out and it was time for change.

Are we approaching this same place in the church today?

Today I spoke with a man who is being installed as the the pastor of a historic church in our area. After 164 years

operating one way, he challenged them to change their bylaws to align with Scripture. They followed his courageous lead to “trim the fat” in a time of civilizational crisis.

In the Old Testament, we find the account of a man named Eli who disobeyed God in his leadership role. He lost his sons, his sight and God’s presence. Eventually he died, falling off a wall in his overweight state (1 Sam. 2-3). Painful lessons are here about forfeiting God’s presence, fresh revelation and spiritual sons by allowing ourselves to become “fat, dumb and happy.”

Ganey refused to live in a state of denial any longer. He acknowledged his serious condition and said, “Enough is enough!” He incredibly lost the weight and now weighs under 200. (You can follow his story at .)

Our overweight overseer, Eli, stayed the course and suffered terrible consequences. Whose example should we follow? The answer is obvious.

How Does This Apply to the Church?

Having served as a pastor and church planter in America for more than four decades, I’ve been privileged to travel the nation seeing the “good, the bad and the ugly” in American Christianity. Like our Lord Jesus Christ, I love the true church, which is His bride—diverse, flawed and maturing. I believe, as Ephesians 4:11-13 teaches, there will be a generation that sees the church “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” prior to His return. We are called, as the Scripture says, to “hasten” or “speed its coming” (2 Pet. 3:12).

Here’s the deal: Although the church in America is successful numerically, let’s acknowledge we are unsuccessful influentially. With each passing day, it seems that we are losing ground on critical moral issues and losing our youth. Statistics reveal that almost 60 percent of 18- to 29-year-

olds with a Christian background no longer are part of a church!

Visualize Jesus wiping away a tear from His eyes as He speaks to the church in America the same words He spoke to Laodicea: "You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you can become rich and white clothes to wear so you can cover your shameful nakedness and salve to put on your eyes so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent" (Rev. 3:17-19).

The urgency of the hour demands that Christians everywhere repent of any disobedience and compromise as we reclaim our call to be salt and light corporately and individually. Many have tried the "nonoffensive, keep it positive, play it safe, steer clear of controversy" approach, and while it has worked for some in drawing crowds, what real impact are we having?

False prophets, celebrities and politicians don't hold back in espousing their unbiblical and destructive views, yet why are so many Christians and pastors silent on the major cultural issues affecting our families and future as the United States of America? Of what are we afraid? Or are we finally reaching the place where we're starting to awaken, that we might actually see a heaven-sent revival in our day?

Michael Brown challenges us: "In the past we were willing to be revolutionary; today we want to be relevant. We used to be principled; today we are pragmatic. Once we were prophetic; today we are professional. We used to follow a kingdom model; now we follow a business model."

Ouch! We need this kind of provocation to finally "get on the scales" and get rid of the excess weight!

There comes a time in each of our lives where it's good to

ask, "Am I ready to make a difference?" There are tipping points in history where the status quo, the path of least resistance, is no longer acceptable. I am persuaded that such a time is now.

If you are a pastor, I challenge you to take a stand for truth in our generation. If you are in a church where your pastor has been strangely silent on cultural issues, afraid of offending big donors, trying to keep everything upbeat and positive, saying "We just preach the gospel and steer clear of politics," or, "Why invite trouble or controversy?" or, "Why bother? It's all going down anyway," I invite you to pray for him, print a copy of this article, and submit it to him in a respectful way.

The Bible tells us, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Col. 2:8).

All of us in our churches need to be equipped to avoid the above. May your pastor say like Paul, "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you. ... I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God" (Acts 20:20, 27).

How about appealing to your spiritual shepherd along these lines ...

"Pastor, please help me to more effectively share the gospel as I engage people in my circle of influence. Conversations inevitably arise around hot-button topics in our culture, and I'm coming to you, asking that you equip me to understand the biblical worldview on these issues. As Christ's ambassador, I really want to pray intelligently and interact with others confidently. I promise to communicate in a nonconfrontational and winsome way, but I need you to prepare me. Will you?"

10 Areas to Address

1. Religious freedom and the separation of church and state
2. Abortion and the sanctity of human life
3. Same-sex marriage and the sanctity of biblical marriage
4. Living together and the call to chastity
5. Homosexuality and calling oneself a "gay Christian"
6. Legalizing marijuana and smoking pot
7. The reality of hell and eternal judgment
8. World religions and salvation in Jesus Christ alone
9. Atheism and creationism
10. Civic responsibility and Christians involved in politics

In Deuteronomy 20, God directed individuals going out to battle to turn around and go home if they were fainthearted. Why? Because their fear would adversely affect their fellow soldiers. May none of us shrink back in this day of unprecedented opportunity.

Bryan Ganey reached the point where he said, "Enough is enough!" and God enabled him to shed 400 pounds in four years. By faith, a turnaround occurred and the mountain was removed!

Can't our limitless God do a similar miracle today amidst the mountain of sin and the moral freefall in which we find ourselves? Will you join me in declaring, "Enough is enough!" and believing for a mighty awakening that awaits us if we will respond to this call?

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2).

Larry Tomczak is a best-selling author and cultural commentator with more than 41 years of trusted ministry experience. His passion is to bring perspective, analysis and insight from a biblical worldview (see “Is Gay OK? 10 Things Everyone Needs to know” now on YouTube). He loves awakening people to today’s cultural realities and responses needed for a restored, influential church. Please visit .

How to Pray ‘On Target’ With Your Spouse

Habakkuk was an Old Testament prophet who complained a lot to God. He thought God needed to show up and handle all the foolishness and sin that was evident among His people. So God shocked Habakkuk by announcing that He was preparing the Babylonians to bring a judgment upon His people.

In Habakkuk 2:3, God explained, “For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay” (NIV).

Did you catch that line: “For the revelation awaits an appointed time”?

Some months before my wife, Vicki, confronted me about my failure to consistently lead us in prayer for one of our children who was struggling, this verse had impressed that concept upon me. It is about God’s sovereignty. God reveals in His timing.

When the light goes on in our lives, usually it is not because we learn new information. Often we already have the

information, and what we need is the revelation. In the mystery of God, it is also about His "appointed time."

This is a mystery to me. Sometimes I think God's timing is pretty bad, don't you? But we are not God. Certainly only God always understands the reason for His timing. Sometimes we have a glimpse of understanding, but frequently we are in the dark. It is an evident call for us to trust Him.

That afternoon with Vicki, I had the revelation! As all of this came tumbling out of my wife's heart—I literally lifted up my hands, as if being arrested, and said, "Guilty ... Guilty as charged!" The conviction of God fell heavy upon me. The alarm was ringing with more force and volume than ever before, and I couldn't hit the snooze button any longer. I was really broken. I felt terrible. I confessed to Vicki, "It hardly seems sufficient to cover the scope of what we are talking about here, but I want to tell you I am sorry. With all my heart, I am so sorry!"

It is a wonderful thing to realize the attendant grace of God. As the revelation of conviction and repentance fell upon me, simultaneously a firm resolve gripped my heart. I said, "You know what Vicki? By the grace of God, this is not going to happen again. I promise. It is not going to happen again!" I sensed my words were at the level of the vows I had given her at the wedding altar.

I continued, "The best we can, within the reasonable limitations and realities of life, we are going to pray together. I know life is very busy, unpredictable, a moving target, but daily prayer together will be the goal. And I am going to take the lead in initiating. I vow to be intentional."

Suddenly, I even knew how we were going to make this work.

I told Vicki, "Here is how we are going to do it. We are going to pray the Bible! We will let the Bible literally be the

guide for our prayers. The Bible will be our template. We are going to intentionally follow God's Word in our prayers—Scripture praying.

“We will read a paragraph of the Bible together—see how the Holy Spirit might speak to our hearts—and then we will let the text of the Bible be the guide for what we will pray back to God.

“We will run on the tracks of the Scriptures to give us the ideas and content for our prayers. Then we will pray about a few of the other things that are immediately at hand in our lives, family and ministry – and that is it. We will keep it short and then we will be on our way.”

Since it is one my favorite books of the Bible, I suggested we start with the book of Hebrews. And you know what? It was just awesome!

Think about it! What could be better than praying the Word of God itself? The will of God, the truths, principles, prayers, praises, values, and doctrines of God.

Perhaps you have heard of “expository preaching.” An expository preacher preaches through the Bible, verse-by-verse, paragraph-by-paragraph. He allows God's Word to bring forth the message for God's people. The Bible becomes the guide to provide the content, ideas, concepts, and exhortations of his preaching and teaching. This approach allows the message to emerge from the Word of God.

So let's call our approach “Expository Praying.” We can follow the Bible with our prayers. God's Word will be the guide to show us the topics, ideas, praises, and requests. In doing so, we allow God to show us what to pray about. We “call out” God's Word in our prayers. The Bible gives us the tracks to follow, and in this way, we can be sure our prayers are on track.

I am either not creative enough or spiritual enough to pray with the same person on a daily or very regular basis and sweep the heavens with all kinds of “thees,” “thous,” spiritual insights, and wonderful intercessions. Praying every time about basically the same things in the same way, I would be boring and/or bored in short order.

But by following the Word of God and by letting the Bible literally be the text of our prayers, then the Bible will take care of keeping our prayers fresh. It will enable us to be as creative and comprehensive as the Bible itself! We will be praying “on target”—the Word and will of God over our lives, family and ministry—in an ever fresh and empowered manner.

*This second in a series of three articles is adapted from “Just Say the Word: A Simple Way to Increase Your Passion for God and Your Wife” by **Sam Ingrassia**. [Click here for part one.](#) For more information about creating spiritual intimacy by praying with your wife, please visit .*

The Joni Eareckson Tada Performance You Won't See at the Oscars

At the Movieguide awards ceremony in Los Angeles Friday night, Joni Eareckson Tada performed the breakout song “**Alone Yet Not Alone**,” which has received widespread attention recently because its Oscar nomination was rescinded.

Although the Christian-themed song from the independent film of the same name will no longer be honored as a nominee for **Best Original Song** at the Academy Awards ceremony on March 2,

Tada's performance of the controversial, hymn-like song at the Movieguide awards will air nationally on the Reelz cable channel during Oscar weekend, March 1-3.

"The Academy's rescinding of the nomination for this song sends a sad message to Christian audiences," said Tada while on the red carpet prior to the Movieguide awards ceremony. "But it doesn't change the fact that so many people voted for it."

Her song, which was written by Bruce Broughton and Dustin Spiegel, reportedly edged out the likes of Beyoncé and Taylor Swift for the Best Original Song nomination, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

The dubious, behind-the-scenes efforts of disgruntled individuals that led to the revoking of the Oscar nomination of Tada's song are still mired in controversy and mystery worthy of a Hollywood movie twist.

Tada admits that she doesn't quite understand the "inner workings" of Hollywood, but she perceives that "Hollywood believed this low budget, Christian film, *Alone Yet Not Alone*, did not deserve to be elevated to the global stage through the Oscar nomination."

It will be up to Christian audiences to support the song and film and send a message back to Hollywood.

Tada says she believes an increasing number of people are "tired and weary of entertainment that degrades the human spirit." She believes there is a growing demand for movies and songs that are "uplifting and full of valor and courage and faith."

"No matter the tragedies in life, God has promised to never leave us or forsake us," Tada said on the Movieguide red carpet. "The song is about how God will never forsake us."

She added, "God's power always shows up in weakness."

Tada acknowledges that she is not a professionally trained singer.

"Isn't it just like God to pick an ill-equipped, untrained singer to be part of something great like this [song]?" she said.

Tada is a disability advocate who was paralyzed from the neck down after a diving accident as a teenager. She is well-known for her Joni and Friends ministry. She has also authored more than 40 books.

Along with Tada's performance, another notable musical performance expected to air during the Reelz channel broadcast of the Movieguide awards in early March is Billy Ray Cyrus' performance of his new song, "Hope Is Just Ahead."

For more information about the Movieguide awards, go to [.](#)

We Are Not All God's Children

You've heard it said that we are all God's children. This rings flowery and nice.

It's an insidious lie.

Indeed, God both created and loves—in a way most unfathomable—everyone who ever lived. He wove us together in our mother's womb and numbered our every hair. But God the Father has only one begotten Son. The rest of us, in order to become one of God's children, must be adopted—in, by and through—the One who is the Son: Jesus Christ. Those who are not adopted are not children of God. Christ and Christ alone

is “the way, the truth and the life.”

Indeed, to become a child of God, we must ask God—through Christ—to adopt us. We mustn’t just believe upon Him, for even the demons believe that (James 2:19), but, rather, we must also accept Him. We must follow Jesus, the one true God, as our only God: “But to all who believed him and accepted him [Jesus], he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

Don’t believe? Don’t accept? You have no right to become a child of God.

And that’s unholy hell.

I’m not here to question God. I can neither fully understand nor explain why what He says is so. I can only convey to you that He unmistakably, unequivocally and without stuttering says it is so.

And so it is so.

“‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Is. 55:8-9).

The postmodern concept of religious pluralism is likewise an insidious lie. It’s a relativist tool of deception dreamed up by the greatest of all deceivers. It’s a false religion—jazzed-up paganism—propagated by the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:12).

Merriam Webster defines *pluralism*—in the context to which I refer to it—as “a theory that there are more than one or more than two kinds of ultimate reality.”

The goal of the pluralist philosophy is to muddy the waters and divert mankind from the “narrow gate” that leads to

eternal salvation (Jesus), while, at the same time, herding them along the "broad road" to eternal damnation (anything and everything that denies the singular and exclusive deity of Christ or that rejects the certainty that He alone can save us from hell).

Pluralism is a nonstarter. It's inherently self-defeating, contradictory and, frankly, just plain stupid. Pick your "ism"—be it progressivism, socialism, Hinduism, Buddhism, communism, Marxism, atheism or another—and central to each you will find the leavening lie of pluralism.

Each of the world's major religions fundamentally contradicts the other. They cannot all be true. Either one is true or none is true.

Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (Matt. 7:13). Again, Jesus alone is that "narrow gate."

Here's the thing. You can deny Christ until the day you die. But after that, you will deny Him no more. Hate Him you may still, but deny Him you will not. Philippians 2:10-11 assures us "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

John 3:36 warns, "Whoever believes in the Son [Jesus] has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Christ is both tolerant and intolerant, utterly exclusive and wholly inclusive. He said in no uncertain terms, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Universalists, atheists, pluralists and other followers of false gods and religions, take note: Jesus, rather

conspicuously, did not say, “No one comes to the Father except through Me, the Buddha, Muhammad, Ganesh or L. Ron Hubbard.”

The narrow gate to heaven is utterly exclusive.

Yet Christ also promised us this: “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light” (Matt. 11:28-29).

Romans 10:13 is even more direct: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

The narrow gate to heaven is wholly inclusive.

If religious pluralism is true, which it cannot be, then Jesus is a liar. And if Jesus is a liar, then Carl Sagan was right when he said, “The cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be.”

Worm food.

Thank God Jesus is not a liar.

Still, some apostate, celebrity megachurch pastors like Rob Bell have become wealthy calling Jesus a liar. They teach the heretical doctrine of universal salvation, which suggests that, ultimately, everyone ends up in heaven—even those who rejected Christ while here on earth.

Bell and others like him claim that we’re all God’s children.

This is a pseudo-Christian form of religious pluralism that may well condemn untold millions—to include celebrity megachurch pastors like Rob Bell—to the unimaginable horror of eternal separation from God. (Rob, brother, I pray that you’ll repent posthaste and ask Christ’s forgiveness for both your heresy and for leading your flock to slaughter. He’ll forgive

you, just like He's forgiven me for all the crap I've pulled over the years.)

And the truth will set you free.

Romans 8:1-2 promises, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death."

By logical extension, the converse is true. There *is* condemnation for those who are *not* in Christ Jesus. Until and unless you believe upon, accept and follow Jesus, you remain imprisoned under the law of sin and death.

Unconvinced? You don't have to believe to quietly pray this simple prayer to yourself: "Jesus, if You're out there, please reveal Yourself to me. If You're real, help thou my unbelief."

If I'm right—if Jesus is not a liar and He is who He says He is—then you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by inquiring further.

If you don't inquire further, you have everything to lose.

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The Joni Eareckson Tada

Performance You Won't See at the Oscars

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For more information about the Movieguide awards, go to .

A Fresh Move of the Spirit and a Warning

We are coming into the time of a new outpouring of the Spirit. This will not be a reliving of past **revivals**, nor a continuation of the movements of recent decades. It will be different in ways that would be difficult to explain apart from the actual experience of it.

I can say only that a fresh newness is coming to us who can receive it and that it will be more rooted in the Father's heart and the character of Jesus than any that have come before.

Be aware, however, that historically whenever there has been a **fresh move of the Spirit**, opposition has erupted. It comes in two forms. The first comes from those who don't really want the Spirit to move, who can't handle the mess it makes or who find their theology threatened by it. It would seem that the **spirit of religion** cannot allow for anything to occur that human beings cannot control or understand.

I learned long ago that one person's order and decency are another person's boredom and death and that not everyone will be comfortable with the freedom **revival** brings. Hidden in what might outwardly appear to be chaos may be a well-established order and set of protocols.

On the other hand, beneath an outwardly reserved appearance, someone might be having a deep and powerful experience of God. Let criticism stop, and let us respect one another's natures!

Realize also that it is biblically sound for God to act in ways that are unprecedented and out of the box. There was, for instance, no biblical precedent for the gift of tongues on the **Day of Pentecost**. While Joel and others foresaw the gift of the Spirit, no passage of the Old Testament could be construed

as a clear **prophecy** of that gift. While God will never actually contradict Scripture or act in a way not consistent with His own nature, He nevertheless “does whatever He pleases” (Ps. 115:3), and we would be wise to make room for it.

The second form of opposition comes from those who want **revival** and don't mind the mess it makes but who think themselves immune to **deception**. Specifically in these days to come, the enemy will access weaknesses and unhealed regions of the heart to twist words and perceptions in order to paint the leaders of that move of the Spirit as having less-than-pure motives or as having said abusive or inappropriate things that were neither said nor intended.

As the words actually spoken get twisted and changed, offense will be taken, then held in the heart and fed. If not actually altered, words spoken innocently and in righteousness will often be perceived in ways that distort their meaning and intent.

Those who get caught in this trap will be led to believe that their “**discernment**” is godly and accurate so that correction becomes exceedingly difficult and is often rejected. The enemy intends this to cause division and to wound and weaken leaders so that they cannot lead as effectively as God intends. Lest anyone in my own circles think I'm speaking specifically of you, know that I am in touch with pastors and leaders in many places who tell me stories that reflect the dynamic I'm articulating. It is not uncommon and comes with the territory.

This two-headed **demon of opposition** rises simultaneously with an increase in the move of the Spirit and blinds those caught in it to what is really going on. Not one of us is so holy as to be immune to this! I have been privileged to live through the **charismatic renewal**, the Vineyard movement, shades of Pentecostalism and lately the **Toronto Blessing**, and I have seen this dynamic played out every time God has launched a new

thing.

To think that you are immune to it constitutes the kind of pride that comes before a fall. Don't fall prey to the enemy's strategy! Stand for oneness. Keep your heart clean. Before assuming anything about the heart of another or even what you think you understand from what you've heard or seen, ask questions and then honor the answers you receive.

What's coming is glorious, but the way is narrow that leads to life.

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How to Guard the Treasure of Your Relationship With God

The most precious thing in Jesus' earthly life was His union with His heavenly Father: "I and my father are one [one in essence or nature; also at one, or unified]" (John 10:30). It was everything to Him.

That sacred bond preceded all His other relationships, sustained His rich spiritual life, and empowered His diverse and dynamic teaching, preaching, mentoring, healing, and charity ministries. Every decision Jesus made, every action He undertook, every word He spoke, every new course He chose or declined was motivated by His determination to preserve His union with His Father.

Whatever His Father willed, Jesus agreed with it so He would always be at one with Him: "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). He maintained that oneness, that mystical connection, that marvelous intertwining of His and His Father's Spirits, minds, and actions, at all costs. The public could criticize or praise Him, His disciples could come or go, but Jesus always nurtured and protected the union—His unique closeness, fellowship, harmony, and alliance with heaven—every day in every situation. It began in Nazareth.

Though Jesus preached no sermons and worked no miracles for thirty years, He nevertheless served, faithfully nourishing, growing, and guarding the union by consistently obeying His Father. After Jesus' stunning debut before the nation's religious leaders at age twelve, rather than start His ministry He opted to return to Nazareth to continue submissively serving Joseph and Mary. Why? It was His Father's will. Years later He did the opposite, refusing to leave His growing ministry to return with His mother and family to Nazareth (Mark 3:21, 31-35). Why? It was His Father's will. Seeing Jesus' focus, Satan aimed to break it.

In the temptation, he attempted to separate Father and Son by persuading Jesus to change His focus. He offered Him several alluring alternatives—pleasing Himself physically, empowering Himself politically, or promoting Himself religiously—but they all contradicted His Father's will. He sent Jesus not to serve the flesh but the Spirit, not to rule but to be rejected, not to be crowned but to be crucified to redeem the world. When Jesus said no, the union prevailed and tempter failed. But only "for a season" (Luke 4:13).

Persistent, Satan kept trying to disrupt the union and abort God's plan during Jesus' ministry. He moved Jewish nationalists, after seeing Jesus' miracles, to suggest He establish His kingdom immediately by force of arms (John 6:15), but Jesus again said no. When Jesus announced He was going to the cross, His closest disciple strongly objected.

Finally, when Jesus was on the cross, the religious leaders taunted Him to “come down” to save Himself. But again He refused. Why? The union.

Jesus prayed our union with Him would be like His and His Father’s: “Father...that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:22). He taught our alliance would be like a vine’s bond with its branches—a constant vital dependency yielding life, fruit, and honor for the vinedresser (John 15:1-8). He said loving, trusting obedience keeps our connection strong and growing: “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love [union], even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (v. 10). If wise, we’ll cherish our alliance as He did His.

We’ll nourish our union daily with private prayer, Bible reading, and worship. We’ll maintain it by constantly following His Spirit’s guidance. We’ll grow it by living faithfully for Jesus in our home, church, neighborhood, and workplace. We’ll protect it by training ourselves to think scripturally, not secularly; humbly, not haughtily; kindly, not callously; generously, not selfishly. We’ll preserve it by forgiving offenders and reconciling with those we offend.

We’ll keep it unencumbered by quickly confessing sins to Christ and laying aside burdens of anxiety. We’ll strengthen it by loving those Jesus loves most—Christians—by fellowship, patience, and assistance. We’ll keep it “first” (Matt. 6:33) by favoring it over any relationship that could hinder or ruin it. When the tempter presses, we’ll follow Jesus’ example: refusing allurements, though they strongly stir our desires; rejecting distractions, lest they waste our time, energy, or resources; enduring crosses, accepting these negative situations as positive opportunities to obey God and prove our loyalty to Him. Why? The union.

In these last days God is raising a new body of believers like Jesus—a taught, tested, transformed, purified bride church

(Eph. 5:25-27). Every choice they make, every word they speak, every action they take or decline, will be decided by one question: Will it help or hinder the union? Be among them. Today, commit yourself unswervingly to the union.

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Is the Holy Spirit Too Weird for American Christianity?

If you're a Christian and you have a pulse, then you've heard about the latest dustup between conservative Christianity and the modern charismatic movement. In his most recent book, *Strange Fire*, noted cessationist John MacArthur accuses charismatics of everything from doctrinal heresy to just being plain weird. He often cites the worst cases and passes them off as the normative charismatic experience.

To be fair, I do think some of the excesses and abuses in the book warrant correction today. I must also say that I agree with some of what MacArthur and his surrogates teach about the Holy Spirit.

For instance, it's true that God wants our worship to be doctrinally sound (1 Tim. 1:3), intelligible (1 Cor. 14:19) and orderly (1 Cor. 14:27). We need to be reminded that the Spirit brings conviction of sin (John 16:8) and transforms our character (1 Cor. 13:1-7). MacArthur's emphases on these vital aspects of the Spirit aren't wrong.

But as I read, I wondered, "How is it that such a biblically educated believer can so blatantly and effortlessly screen out

the supernatural content of Scripture?”

At worst, MacArthur just morphs Christianity into a mere doctrinal system—a checklist of sacred beliefs. At best, he portrays the Spirit as that silent member of the Trinity who is busy with the discreet work of inner transformation.

He doesn't speak to us. He doesn't lead us. And He has no interest in setting hearts, hands and lips ablaze with His presence. At least, not today anyway.

The Legacy of Radical Cessationism

Here's the problem with all this. More than a century of mere doctrinal inculcation has left us with a generation of believers who don't even believe in the doctrine of the Spirit anymore. It's counterintuitive, I know. But just consider this:

- The Barna Group found that most American Christians do not believe in the existence of the Holy Spirit.
- Barna also found that younger generations were less likely to believe in and engage with the Spirit.

These statistics are alarming when one considers the mass exodus of 18- to 34-year-olds from the church.

In effect, we have barred would-be **worshippers** from the fullness of the Spirit's experience while insisting that they learn the Apostles' Creed. But the Holy Spirit is not merely a doctrine we learn about. He's not a dove on a stained-glass window. And he's not the "silent member" of the Godhead. He is God himself—the God who has "invaded our lives with transforming presence," as Craig Keener puts it.

A diminished view of the Spirit's work is dangerous for several reasons.

First, minimizing the Spirit compromises biblical truth. The Spirit is instrumental in our personal rebirth and renewal

(John 3:3, 5-8). He fills us as we gather and worship (Eph. 5:19). He also empowers us to meet our obligations through Spirit gifts (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12). The same power of the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is available to the believer (Eph. 1:19-20). The Christian faith is a lot of things, but it is nothing without the Spirit. We may engrave His name in the bedrock of our historic creeds, but without His presence, we are not of Christ at all.

Second, minimizing the Spirit will jettison our mandate. Christianity is not a nice family religion. It is a living, active and missional enterprise. If we make the mistake of treating the Spirit as nothing more than a theological abstraction, an amorphous concept or the “silent partner” of the Trinity, we will utterly fail to disciple the nations and the next generation. This is why Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise—God’s empowering presence (Acts 1:4–8). Take the Holy Spirit away from the church and all we’re left with is a grace-deficient, family-based cult. Christianity doesn’t work when the Spirit is ignored, marginalized or sidelined in favor of our Spirit-less ingenuity.

We’re losing our culture to darkness. And Christianity cannot be seen as a credible option in a culture where it is reduced to a mere historic curiosity, devoid of wind and fire—absent the Spirit of life.

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