

Straight Up

What the Bible says about heaven

Is. 11:9-10: Jesus' "resting place" and where no one will be hurt or destroyed

Is. 65:17-19: Where crying will no longer be heard

Is. 66:22-23: Where God's people will worship before Him forever

John 14:1-3: Where Jesus has gone to prepare a place for His people

Acts 7:55-56: It was visible to Stephen as he was being martyred

Rom. 8:18-25: Where earthly suffering will turn to glory

Eph. 2:6-7: Where God's people will see "the exceeding riches of His grace"

1 Thess. 4:14-17: The place from which Jesus Himself will descend to Earth

Rev. 20:11-15: The site of the "great white throne" judgment to come

Rev. 21:1-22:6: Where the dazzling new Jerusalem is being prepared by God

Pentecostal Pastor Meets With President Obama to Discuss Immigration Reform

Pentecostal pastor Samuel Rodriguez said Hispanic leaders who met with President Obama this week to discuss immigration reform left “re-energized” by his commitment to address the controversial topic this year.

“We walked out of the meeting revitalized to a degree, re-energized, understanding that this president will not surrender the issue of immigration reform for the sake of political expediency,” said Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC), a network of 25,000 congregations representing 16 million people.

Rodriguez, a California-based Assemblies of God minister, was the only evangelical at the president’s meeting Monday with leaders of some of the nation’s largest Hispanic activist and labor organizations, including the Service Employees International Union, the National Council of La Raza and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tucson, Arizona.

Rodriguez and several of those leaders are expected to join President Obama Thursday when he addresses immigration reform during a speech in Washington, D.C. Rodriguez said he “wholeheartedly” expects it to be “the most significant speech the president has given on immigration reform” but was short on specifics.

President Obama championed immigration reform during his 2008 presidential campaign and said he would make it a priority if elected. He also spoke out against Arizona’s controversial law that requires law enforcement to question the immigration status of people suspected of being in the U.S. illegally.

But the prospect of passing comprehensive immigration reform looks bleak at a time when many in Congress are reluctant to wade into another politically divisive issue. Rodriguez said he is only mildly hopeful that Congress will take on the issue this year but was impressed by the president's resolve Monday.

"It would be politically advantageous for the president to put immigration to the side, focus on the BP spill, focus on other issues that are so important," Rodriguez said. "But this president insists, driven by principle, that this is a critical issue that needs to be addressed as expeditiously as possible."

He said though immigration legislation may seem dead in the water, other bills have been unexpectedly revived, namely the health care overhaul.

"It had its Lazarus moment," Rodriguez said. "If it can happen with health care, it can happen with immigration reform."

Enlisting lobbying support was part of the president's agenda Monday. But the group also discussed the political realities that have caused reform efforts to stall.

Rodriguez said President Obama's immigration reform agenda is "99.9 percent" in line with the NHCLC's, which includes securing U.S. borders, providing a legal path to citizenship, fining those who have entered the country illegally and deporting undocumented persons committing crimes.

In recent months, Rodriguez's plan has won support from such evangelical groups as the National Association of Evangelicals, Liberty University and the Freedom Federation, a diverse coalition of evangelical and charismatic organizations.

In May, charismatic ministers were among a cross-section of Christians to sign on to a statement with Rodriguez calling for a "just" immigration reform policy that would create a

legal path to citizenship without promoting amnesty.

The statement signed by Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission; Bishop George McKinney, a member of the general board of the Church of God in Christ; and Lou Engle, founder of TheCall prayer movement" drew criticism from some who said the leaders did not reflect the views of grassroots Christians.

"They don't have their constituency with them" and this is not a clear biblical mandate," Alan Wisdom, vice president of research and programs at the Institute on Religion & Democracy, told OneNewsNow in May. "The Bible does not tell us what our immigration policy should be."

Although many conservative Christian leaders have opposed President Obama's political agenda, especially his efforts to pass health care reform, Rodriguez is optimistic he will not alienate evangelicals on immigration.

"He's right on this issue because from a biblical worldview on this issue he is not an extremist," Rodriguez said. "He's really reconciling the rule of law with compassion for the stranger among us."

Son of Hamas Founder Granted Asylum in U.S.

The son of a Hamas founder who converted to Christianity and spied for Israel can stay in the U.S. pending fingerprinting and a routine background check, a U.S. immigration judge said Wednesday.

Mosab Hassan Yousef, 32, had been denied political asylum in February 2009 because the Department of Homeland Security said he posed a terrorist threat. Yousef, who came to the U.S. in 2007, has said he feared assassination if he returned to the Middle East because he spied for Israel and abandoned Islam. Yousef told reporters he was surprised by the outcome of the deportation hearing held in San Diego this morning. It lasted less than 20 minutes because Homeland Security dropped its opposition to his asylum request without explanation.

Those close to the case speculate that support from members of Congress, former CIA director James Woolsey and Yousef's Israeli intelligence handler, Gonen ben Itzhak played a part in the decision.

Itzhak traveled from Israel to testify on Yousef's behalf, though no witnesses ultimately were called. "Basically, I wanted to say that Mosab was not a terrorist," Itzhak said, according to *Fox News*. "He was not affiliated with Hamas. He's a great guy, and he should get asylum."

Yousef is the oldest son of respected imam Sheikh Hassan Yousef, a founder of the Palestinian terror organization Hamas who is serving a six-year sentence in an Israeli prison. The younger Yousef has been disowned by his father; he became a Christian in 2005 and later spied for Israel's intelligence agency, Shin Bet. He recounts his experience in a memoir, *Son of Hamas*, that released in March.

In a blog posting last month, Yousef admitted that he posed as a terrorist and carried a gun while spying for Shin Bet at meetings with Palestinian leaders.

"Yes, while working for Israeli intelligence, I posed as a terrorist," Yousef wrote. "Yes, I carried a gun. Yes, I was in terrorist meetings with Yasser Arafat, my father and other Hamas leaders. It was part of my job. And I passed on to the Shin Bet all the information I gathered during those meetings

and saved the lives of many people—including many Americans.”

In the blog, Yousef also criticized Homeland Security’s handling of his case, saying the department was looking for terrorists in the wrong places. “If Homeland Security cannot tell the difference between a terrorist and a man who spent his life fighting terrorism, how can they protect their own people?” he asked.

During a conference call today, Yousef said he hoped the government would learn from his experience. In order to fight the relatively new threat of individual terrorists, Yousef said Homeland Security and other intelligence agencies must better understand the religion, culture and motive of those individuals.

“In my case, unfortunately, [there was a] lack of knowledge, lack of experience, lack of distinguishing between who’s terrorist and who’s not terrorist,” he said. “I’m not criticizing; that wasn’t my goal. I wanted, and I still want, American public and Homeland Security, FBI, to consider more. This is not just a small threat, it’s a huge threat, and in order to fight it we need to take different measures.”

Yousef, who lives in San Diego, said he hopes to become a U.S. citizen and pursue a master’s degree in history and geography. He said he will keep fighting the ideology behind terrorists “because I know how they think.”

This year he will celebrate the Fourth of July without the threat of deportation, but he said he has long been an American.

“I think I became American when I start to fight for liberty and freedom,” he said. “At that moment I served the common ground that gathers every free man and woman in this country. I celebrated always the Fourth of July. I think independence is a great thing, but what I think is greater is the liberty that is in the heart of every individual of this country. I

think this is a great country, a great nation, and I will be proud to be called American.”

Read more:

Son of Hamas Founder Shares Faith Journey, Reveals He Spied for Israel in New Book

“Son of Hamas” Threatened With Deportation

Wright is Still Wrong!

✘ This past week Rev. Jeremiah Wright emerged again from the ashes of obscurity to the spotlight. Like the mythical phoenix rising again from the fires of death, Wright is still politically alive after becoming a symbol of racism and division for mainstream America. His actions mirror his friend, Louis Farrakhan, who has recently attempted to malign Jews worldwide. The question I would like to answer here is, “How can such vehement hate mongers like Wright and Farrakhan survive so long in a land that longs so much for racial and religious equality?” Let’s explore the answer as we look at the current status of Rev. Wright. How did he arise again?

Wright recently taught a weeklong course at the Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS). The school is a 150-year old institution affiliated with the United Church of Christ (UCC). As many may not remember, Rev. Wright’s former church (Trinity United Church of Christ) is the largest church in the UCC denomination. This denomination supports Rev. Wright’s assessment of America’s moral condition and motivations. CTS represents institutions that have continued to embrace the famed Chicago minister long after he dropped off the national radar.

Prayer Leader: Supreme Court Decision May Signal Onset of Church Persecution

A 5-4 Supreme Court decision Monday requiring Christian campus groups on public universities to accept gay students as members and leaders may signal the beginning of religious persecution in the U.S., says prayer leader Lou Engle.

“This is the first time in U.S. history where the Supreme Court has actually ruled that gender rights now trump religious rights, which means this is the beginning of the possible coming harassment and persecution of the church because it’s going to be clear that the true church will take a stand only on the Word of God,” Engle, founder of TheCall prayer movement, said today. “So these campuses will find out who the real Christians are, who is willing to take a stand and risk their status with the school as a club.”

In its split decision, the court ruled in favor of the University of California’s Hastings College of the Law, which barred the Christian Legal Society (CLS) from recognition and funding because it would not accept members who were engaged in homosexual relationships. The ruling states that campus groups cannot bar any student who wishes to become a member or move into a leadership position, even if that person does not agree with the group’s beliefs.

“The Hastings policy actually requires CLS to allow atheists to lead its Bible studies and the College Democrats to accept the election of Republican officers in order for the groups to be recognized on campus,” said Gregory S. Baylor, an attorney

with the Alliance Defense Fund who is representing CLS.

Writing for the majority, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote that "Hastings, caught in the crossfire between a group's desire to exclude and students' demand for equal access, may reasonably draw a line in the sand permitting all organizations to express what they wish but no group to discriminate in membership."

CLS says it welcomes all students to join its meetings and Bible studies, but requires voting members and leaders to sign a statement of faith that includes, among other beliefs, a line about "unrepentant participation in or advocacy of a sexually immoral lifestyle."

Justice Samuel Alito, in a minority opinion, called the ruling "a serious setback for freedom of expression" and said he hoped the decision "will turn out to be an aberration."

"The court arms public educational institutions with a handy weapon for suppressing the speech of unpopular groups," Alito wrote. Conservative Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, and Chief Justice John Roberts joined his dissent.

Official recognition gives groups access to small grants, the college's email network and meeting rooms on school property. Now the Christian Legal Society will not have access to any of these things.

"This is an extremely disappointing decision that significantly damages the constitutional rights of religious organizations," said Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice, which filed an amicus brief on behalf of several groups, including the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Campus Crusade for Christ and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. "The majority of the Supreme Court missed the mark in understanding that it is fundamental to religious freedom that religious groups are free to define their own mission, select their own leaders and determine

their own membership criteria.”

Baylor said the case is far from over and that his group is considering further litigation. “This decision doesn’t settle the core constitutional issue of whether nondiscrimination policies in general can force religious student groups to allow non-believers to lead their groups,” he said. “Long term, the decision puts other student groups across the country at risk, and we will continue to fight for their constitutional rights.”

CLS attorneys said they do not expect the ruling to have an immediate effect because it knows of no other college with Hastings’ “all-comers” policy, which bars campus groups from excluding students from membership or leadership for any reason.

David French, director of the Alliance Defense Fund’s Center for Academic Freedom, noted that the court did not rule on whether Hastings’ nondiscrimination policy trumped CLS’ right to free association. Instead, it determined that the all-comers policy was constitutional if it had been applied equally to all groups on campus.

That distinction opens the door for further litigation, he said. “Despite an unfavorable ruling on the all-comers policy, [CLS] can still prevail on remand if it proves that the university did not apply the policy to all student groups but instead specifically targeted CLS,” French wrote in a blog posting Monday. “We have powerful evidence that the university has, in fact, targeted CLS.”

Engle said his group is challenging students to begin campus prayer groups and stand against pressure to change Christian organizations’ statements of faith.

“We’re going to head into this thing and seek to raise up a standard of a radical stand for God, for truth,” Engle said. “We’re going to fuel prayer all the more. It’s going to be a

great time for true Daniels to arise and get an opportunity to proclaim the word of Christ in the midst of this. I think the darkness is always is going to bring out the best in the light.”

Fire Damages Promise Keepers Office

Normal

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Promise Keepers (PK) has sustained “substantial” losses after a fire broke out at its ministry headquarters in Denver Sunday.

No one was hurt in the blaze that firefighters say started in a closet around 10:30 p.m., Denver’s CBS affiliate reported. The fire may have been electrical, firefighters said.

“Although our offsite backup ministry files are in tact, we have sustained substantial loss in our communications, equipment, office furnishings and servers,” the ministry said in a statement. “Coach McCartney, Dr. Raleigh Washington and our PK staff are still standing and are more committed then ever before to bring the Word of God to our 2010 conferences.”

Founded by former University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney, the men’s ministry made headlines in 2007 when it drew nearly 1 million men to Washington, D.C., for its landmark Stand in the Gap event.

Though phone lines were expected to be down for two or three

days, the group's leaders expected to be ready for their August conferences in Denver and Orlando, Florida.

Grieve Not the Spirit

A few years ago a British couple, Sandy and Bernice, accepted a call from their denomination to be missionaries in Israel. A house was provided for them near Jerusalem.

After they moved in, they noticed that a dove had come to live in the eaves of the house. They considered this to be a confirmation that they were in the right place.

However, Sandy noticed that every time they raised their voices, the dove would flutter off, sometimes not returning for some time. "Have you noticed that every time there is a lot of noise, the dove flies away?" he asked.

"Yes, and it makes me feel sad. I am afraid the dove will fly away and never come back," Bernice replied.

"Well," Sandy said, "Either the dove will adjust his behavior to us, or if we really want to make sure we never lose him, we will have to adjust our behavior to the dove."

Likewise, our heavenly Dove, the Holy Spirit has feelings, and we can hurt His feelings when we grieve Him by the things we do (see Eph. 4:30). I have learned that the Dove will not adjust to me; I must adjust to Him.

What is needed is a sensitivity to the Spirit's ways and an immediate awareness of His absence should He withdraw. In fact, how quickly we recognize His absence is a good test as to how well acquainted we are with Him.

Break Through Your Weight-Loss Barriers

Studies indicate that only 5 percent of those who lose weight are able to permanently keep it off. According to Ed and Elisa McClure, founders of the ZOE 8 Weight Management Program and authors of *Eat Your Way to a Healthy Life!* (Siloam), awareness of the following eight roadblocks is the first step to finding permanent weight-loss success:

1. Prescription medication—many prescription drugs either cause weight gain or hinder weight-loss.
2. Candida—this overgrowth of yeast in the intestinal tract can cause cravings for carbohydrates and sweets.
3. Stress—don't ignore the spiritual and emotional aspects of the stressful situations in your life.
4. Chronic lack of sleep—inadequate sleep can increase appetite due to interference with appetite-regulating hormones.
5. Hormones—if your hormones are out of balance, you will have problems with weight control.
6. Food sensitivities—many people are unaware of their sensitivities and regularly eat foods that leave them bloated and prevent weight loss. Top offenders: corn, yeast, sugar and sweeteners, dairy products, wheat and peanuts.
7. Sabotage—it takes true love and understanding between family members and friends to give up unhealthy food habits.
8. Compartmentalization—failure to treat the whole person often produces temporary results at best.

If you think you have one or more of these roadblocks, find a doctor who can test you for things such as candida, hormone imbalances and food sensitivities. This will help you evaluate the effect these roadblocks may be having in your life, determine ways to overcome them, and start yourself on the road to permanent weight management!

8 Keys to Losing Weight

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6 Ways to Deal with the Post-Holiday Blues

Feelings of discouragement are common after the holidays. The excitement has faded, the decorations are packed away, and visiting relatives have gone home.

If you find yourself feeling down or restless but you do not have other symptoms of depression, such as difficulty sleeping or sudden change in weight, you may be experiencing what is

known as mild depression. In their book *New Light on Depression* (Zondervan), David B. Biebel, ., and Harold G. Koenig, M.D., offer six self-help strategies to counteract mild depression:

1. Surround yourself with constructive friends.
2. Increase your activity—this will make you feel better and improve your mental outlook.
3. Relax—a new twist on the old adage: “All work and no play makes Jack or Jill depressed.”
4. Helping others gives your life purpose and meaning.
5. Journal—this activity provides insight into where you’ve been, where you are, and where you’re going.
6. Praying connects you with God, dispels loneliness and puts your problems in proper perspective.

Biebel and Koenig point out that these tips do not replace professional help for anyone who is more than mildly depressed. If you feel you need help, don’t hesitate to seek a professional counselor or therapist.