

# Dallas Mass Deliverance 2 Conference Aims to Set the Captives Free

Dauids declared on a recent Facebook post, “God is on schedule to release another wave of real deliverance in Dallas, Texas. Demons are real! Oppression is real! Ignoring the devil is inviting him to operate. Jesus is ready to break you free from demonic oppression. Thousands will be eternally impacted by the Holy Spirit.”

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Charisma News Staff

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## Larry Tomczak: 7 Suggestions for Delightful Holiday Gatherings

Let’s be honest—your upcoming holiday get-togethers have potential for wonderful memory-making or some weird occurrences that’ll make you wonder how you ever got into such a mess. God may have some surprises ahead with a cantankerous uncle, curmudgeon senior or an unexpected boy/girlfriend with uber-liberal political views gleaned from Michael Moore or Rachel Maddow.

Scripture tells us, “A prudent man foresees the evil and hides

himself, but the simple pass on and are punished" (). Pressure reveals the person so this may be your providential "heads up" so you're prepared.

My earliest memories as a child of our extended family gatherings during the holidays remain indelibly etched on the photographic plates of my heart. The annual celebrations with my grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins were the highlight of the year. It was not just the opportunity to receive gifts and partake of sumptuous delights, but I loved the festive atmosphere and joyful interaction with our extended family.

In more recent decades, I must admit I have some recollections that my wife and I wish we could erase. Unexpected conflict that arose was most unwelcome, but enables me to share some insights learned as we transition to this holiday season.

God's will is that we experience happiness and unity in our times together. Our unseen adversary plots to undermine this goal. Here are some time-tested tips that can help you and yours enjoy this "most wonderful time of the year."

## **Having Holiday Harmony**

The Bible instructs us, "Be sober and watchful, because your adversary the devil walks around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 2:7). Let's not give too much credit to the enemy of our soul but let's face the fact that he has clever schemes ready to undermine God's beautiful plans.

To be forewarned is to be for forearmed!

### **1. Start with prayer**

This may seem obvious but it's often overlooked! Prior to the upcoming family get together, pray for God's favor and discernment so He can "deliver you from the evil one" when you come together.

## **2. Serve**

Be intentional to embrace the heart of a servant rather than a spectator and mere consumer. When Jesus gathered for His Last Supper with His friends, He washed their feet and reminded us, "I have given you an example" and "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 12:15,17). Invest in those present by possibly helping with the dishes, clean up or engaging a fussy, hyperactive child.

## **3. Ask Questions**

Scripture teaches that "the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out" (). Accept people as they are and take a genuine interest in their lives. Imitate Jesus who would be in the temple among teachers "listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46).

## **4. Be Comfortable with Silence**

No need to keep the motor running when there are pauses in conversations. "Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise; and he who shuts his lips is esteemed a man of understanding" ().

When I ministered in South Korea, a senior leader chided me politely during our opening leaders' meal informing me that their custom was to refrain from talking continually during dinner but focus on the food!

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## **5. Avoid Arguments**

"The servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but must be gentle towards all people..." (2 Tim. 2:24). Stimulating conversations can quickly take a wrong turn necessitating someone skillfully redirect the flow. "The beginning of strife is as when one

lets out water; therefore abandon contention before a quarrel starts" ().

"Kaepernick and those NFL players are..." "Hefner was a great guy and a real pioneer..." "Hillary was robbed and Trump is a..." "Ha! That Joel Osteen guy ..." Buckle your seatbelt. An opinionated guy may be headed your way!

## **6. Reach out**

In getting ready for our bountiful feasts, do we do as Jesus instructed? When a man prepared a supper and some invited guests didn't come, Jesus said he should include the less fortunate and "bring in the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind" (Luke14:21).

A while ago we invited a grieving man whose wife had died a year before to watch a ballgame with us. On a somewhat regular basis, we've reached out to invite people who would be alone for holiday events. These can also be wonderful opportunities for evangelism.

## **7. Show Understanding**

For those of us who are used to simply plopping down for lavish gourmet offerings during the holidays, we may not be aware of how much time and effort goes into the culinary spread. Moms can literally invest days in planning and preparation for the special occasion.

It sure doesn't honor mom or help her maintain composure when hungry participants add stress with annoying inquiries or failure to come when called due to a "2 Minute Warning" in football games elongated to 20.

Think how much tension can be eradicated by following God's wisdom: "Let nothing be done out of strife or conceit, but in humility let each esteem the other better than himself. Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to

the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

Ninety-nine percent of our stress-inducers can vanish by putting this verse into practice. Be proactive and meditate upon this verse before you attend.

Our Lord Jesus, the Centerpiece of our upcoming holiday gatherings, proclaimed, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9). Let’s all embrace this high calling in our upcoming holiday events. {eoa}

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## **Upperroom Shares Gen Z’s Hunger for an Authentic Relationship with Christ as Salvations Abound**

Gen Z is not lost as some may have said. Instead, they’re seeking out an impactful relationship with God.

Upperroom Pastor and founder Michael Miller recently shared with the Christian Post how the ministry is seeing Gen Z reach out for authentic experiences in their prayer lives and relationships with Christ. While many modern churches have watered down the truth of the gospel for seeker-friendly experiences, Miller says this isn’t the reality of what the next generation is looking for.

“I think the church, in the name of being relevant, has placated. We’ve actually built communities that the purpose of

them is to attract people," Miller says.

Instead of physical church expansion, Miller shared that Upperroom's ministry is focusing on knowing and experiencing a deep and meaningful relationship with the Holy Spirit.

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"Gen Z is looking for Jesus. They're hungry for Jesus, and they're tearing down the scaffolding that we put around Jesus," Miller says.

It's through the power of prayer that this next generation is seeking out the presence of God. With Upperroom alone, about 400 volunteers spend 80 hours a week in prayer. These times have helped to drive many to go deeper with Jesus.

"A lot of them are coming in and actually getting saved," Miller said. "They're rediscovering their think hosting God's presence and building communities marked by this reality is really resonating with them."

Just as we saw at Asbury, the next generation has not been forgotten about by God's Spirit. Instead, He is igniting them to know Him in an intimate way. This past winter, Asbury students and many others from across the country saw the glory of God poured out. Charisma Magazine reported on one young man's testimony from TikTok and how he declared that revival is already here. There's a profound truth in this; God's Holy Spirit is here right now, ready to speak to His children.

The upcoming generation isn't shallow or inherently worse than any previous generation; many are simply in need of guidance and desire to cling onto something real. Not only does Gen Z benefit from the truth of the gospel being preached, but all other generations do as well. The spread of the gospel and the fire of the Holy Spirit wasn't just meant to be a one-time

event or experience, but something every single person can encounter.

In Acts 2 during Peter's speech that brought the masses in to know God, he said, "For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call," (v. 39). To commune with God and experience His presence is a promise that we all, Gen Z included, can cling onto for a future filled of hope. {eoa}

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## **Rabbi Schneider's Antisemitism Prophecy Has Come to Pass**

In a July 7 live video on YouTube, Rabbi Kirt Schneider described a revelation he received from the Lord about the coming antisemitism that would forever rock Israel.

"The Lord spoke to me in early July as I was up one morning doing my devotional reading from the book of Esther," Schneider said. "And when I read that it was like a bomb of revelation and prophecy filled me and dropped right into my heart, and instantly with no thought involved I knew that Jewish people were about to face the greatest attack that they had ever faced since the Holocaust."

Schneider said that he knew this wouldn't be like any other

attack the Jewish people had known in recent years. Instead, it would bring about an international antisemitism.

“It was just instant revelation. It was just a divine knowing. I also knew when I read that Israel was about to defend themselves against terror attacks and that the media was going to show them dropping bombs on those that had attacked them and the way that the media was going to portray it is that Israel was this terrible oppressor and tyrant and they were taking out a disproportionate revenge on those that had attacked them, and that the devil was going to use this to turn the whole world against Jews with an antisemitism that we have not witnessed since Nazi Germany,” Schneider said.

The first critical part of the prophecy is that Israel was not only going to be attacked, but that this enemy attack would forever change the core of the Israeli people.

“The first thing that I prophesied there is that Israel was about to be attacked,” Schneider said. “It was the biggest attack from this type of enemy that Israel had ever experienced. They had experienced terrorist attacks before, but this was unprecedented. As they were attacked by terrorists by land, by air, by sea coming into Israel, slaughtering, kidnapping, murdering, raping 1,400 men, women and children. It was such an unfortunate, tragic event that not only has affected people that were in direct line of the terrorist attack, but the whole country right now is mourning, feeling vulnerable and it will forever mark their psyche.”

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The second part of Schneider’s prophecy focuses on how the rest of the world would perceive Israel. This too has come to pass, that the world would decide not to stand with them, but instead turn their backs on the people of Israel.

“The second thing that I prophesied was that Israel would respond to this attack, and of course Israel is even as I speak,” Schneider said. “And when Israel responds to the attack I prophesied the world was going to turn against them, accusing them of being a tyrant and a bully, accusing them of war crimes having no concern for humanity.”

In an exclusive interview with Charisma News, Rabbi Schneider also said that it is human emotions that has allowed the media to overrule what the word of God has to say about the Jews.

“The Lord says, ‘I will bless those that bless you, I will curse those that curse you,’ and God’s truth about the nation of Israel is an everlasting promise to Jewish people about the land of Israel,” Schneider said.

As devastating as it is to see this prophecy come to pass, Schneider shares how a world growing darker is just as much about the fact that as we draw nearer to the end times, apostasy will continue to grow and believers will experience a growing persecution.

“As things get darker and darker and darker, I believe that God’s going to shine His light and that many will come to faith, but that does not take away from the fact that the world is going to become more and more dangerous and violent and it’s going to be harder and harder to live here until we’re going to be aching in our heart, crying out in desperation for Jesus to return,” Schneider said.

As we get closer and closer to the end times, we can expect to see more people turn their face away from truth and goodness. However, as Christians, we are called to keep our eyes locked on Jesus no matter what as we await His return. {eoa}

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# How Can Local Churches Be Empowered for Evangelism?

Last week, I wrote about the eye-opening conversation I had with two evangelists that I hugely respect and admire on the state of evangelism in modern America. I highly encourage you to read that piece here.

Shawn Carlson is the executive director at Time to Revive (TTR). Founded by Kyle Lance Martin, TTR is equipping the saints for the return of Christ. They started out going city to city throughout the U.S. stirring up the church to come together, to be equipped to share with people, and then leading outreaches for a weekend or weeks at a time in that local region. Though they still have active ministries all over the nation, they have moved to an international focus all over the world through their product reviveSCHOOL, now in 85 countries that is discipling people on the totality of the Scriptures revealing the Messiah from Genesis to Revelation and empowering ordinary people to make disciples.

Wade Aaron is the founder of Christ's Reward. His ministry focuses on evangelism, church workshops, "by faith" mission trips, and provides online equipping materials and resources for believers to walk out their faith in a practical way.

This is the second of two articles with their insights, and I challenge you to read their words and pray about how God might have you respond to Him. (Some of their answers were edited for the sake of time and conciseness).

## **The Responsibility of Evangelism**

**Bunni Pounds:** My question to both individually—what is the responsibility of an individual Christian related to evangelism? We're all so busy, we're in churches, we have businesses, we have families and we have soccer games with our kids. What should we as individual Christians be engaging in as it relates to evangelism?

**Shawn Carlson:** We mistakenly think that evangelism must look a certain way, and I will include myself in this camp sometimes. We think that evangelism must be a 10 a.m. outreach on a Saturday morning, where we're going out with some sort of gospel track or a Time to Revive Bible and band, and we're intentionally engaging people for two hours, and then to come back to the church and have pizza.

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Don't get me wrong, that's our bread and butter here at Time to Revive, but how often are we, as believers, just talking to the person in front of us on a normal day? We need to reframe what we think about evangelism and always try to engage people with a spiritual conversation. It doesn't have to be as exact as—is Jesus the Lord your life, or do you know Jesus? It's also effective to just say, tell me about your life. Tell me what's going on. What is your story? We can be engaging with people all the time and then transition to the gospel.

**Wade Aaron:** Evangelism is for every believer, no matter how busy we are, or what our occupations are. I think people, even in America, are aware that we've got a problem. We've got a problem in our nation. Our nation is sick. But what are we doing to fix that? There are so many great causes, but I'm convinced that the gospel changes lives and it is the greatest cause. When someone gets born again—it changes a person from

night to day.

Whether you're a stay-at-home mom, you're a businessperson or you're in media, or whatever your role is, I believe that God has given you a circle of influence as a believer to reach people with the gospel. Sometimes we limit it to people like me that are missionaries or evangelists. You are the only person who can reach your neighbors or coworkers. I think it's just a mindset in our heads that must change.

One of the biggest things I have found that helps me keep sharing the gospel is keeping my motive on loving people. My goal is to help other Christians realize they can love others. You can love them practically, but another way to love is by sharing the gospel with them. We sometimes build up these lies in our head that we don't want to be too forceful, overly aggressive, or too pushy. But at the end of the day, if your coworker, family member or friend, doesn't hear the Good News and they don't choose Jesus as their Lord, they are going to go to hell. Not only will they go to hell, but I would submit to you that they are living in torment already here on earth. We have the news that can change their lives. Will we share it?

### **Overcoming Fear to Share Our Faith**

**Bunni Pounds:** What are some of the things that you all have seen as far as fears—things that you must get people over when it comes to evangelism? What are some of the mindsets that we must overcome to share our faith?

**Shawn Carlson:** I think the biggest hurdle that we must overcome, especially with the younger generations, is simply teaching people how to talk to people face to face. What is the art of a conversation? How do you break into a conversation and connect with somebody with a short intro? It is the very first thing we must get back to, so that people are used to having those one-on-one personal conversations. We

teach them how to break into a conversation with someone at a coffee shop in a gentle way.

Because of technology, we go into meetings many times armed with information, we look up their biographies because we have the internet, and it usually gives us a starting place to begin to talk. In talking with complete strangers, we must regain the art of thoughtful digging. How do we uncover information about people and draw it out of them by asking questions? That part of a conversation builds trust with the other person. For us here at Time to Revive, a 10- or 15-minute training before we take people out gets them a little bit comfortable with the tools and questions to ask, and then we just go out and have conversations with people and Lord willing, it will lead to a gospel conversation.

**Wade Aaron:** Well, first we must overcome ourselves. We have to get outside of ourselves. I think we just live for ourselves a lot. Whether we realize it or not, we go to the grocery store, we think about our groceries and we don't think about everyone in front of us. We go home, and we want to sit down and chill out for the day. If we reach out to one of our neighbors once a week or even once a month, and we live there for five years, we're going to reach a lot of people over five years. Sometimes I think we're living for our comfort.

To step outside of ourselves, I have found a lot of people have fear that they must overcome. Fear of what to say, fear of what they don't know, fear that they will say the wrong thing. They are afraid that people might ask certain questions that they might not know how to answer or try to argue with them. They must overcome these fears. And that's where I would say—just keep your motive love. Keep loving people because love casts out fear.

Lastly, I think people need practical tools. One of my greatest strengths is making things practical. How do we share the gospel in two minutes? How do we make it simple? I was

helping a student at the University of North Texas break it down the other day—repent of your sins, put your faith in Jesus and make him the Lord of your life, and you will be saved. At the end of the day, it's that simple. We must work with people and share that simplicity with people. We overcomplicate it. They just need practical tools—how do you approach someone? How do you talk to someone? I have found that many people know the gospel, but they are not sharing it—so we train them on these simple questions. How do I engage someone with the gospel? How do I engage someone with my testimony? How do I pray for someone without praying too long? We give them practical tools to empower them.

## **Gen Z and the Gospel**

**Bunni Pounds:** There's a lot of talk about Gen Z right now. What are you all finding on the streets? Is Gen Z open to the gospel? Are they hostile?

**Shawn Carlson:** They are open, wide open. If you get somebody from our generation, Generation X, who grew up in church, and then you try to have a gospel conversation with them, they are many times going to be hardened if all they have seen is religion. In our childhoods, we would get in the car and go to church on Sunday, our parents had the best intentions. But if people in Generation X are not walking with the Lord, there's a hardness around them. However, if you go down one more generation with the same experiences, they seem to be wide open. Even those who don't know anything about Jesus are open. If we can capture the hearts of Gen Z, we will get this revival thing nailed down. We just have to figure out how to talk to them. We must figure out how to reach them where they are—on TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram. Then we must get a heart connection with them, having a meaningful conversation. Those conversations can be awkward, but this generation desperately needs it.

**Wade Aaron:** I would say overall that I can tell they're

curious. They are incredibly open minded to the gospel and having a conversation. Part of my ministry is that I am carrying a large cross to all 50 states. I've been to a couple of college campuses already. I've carried it from Princeton, to Harvard, to the University of Iowa, to even here at the University of North Texas in Texas. Every place there's people that are curious. I think they're looking for what's authentic—for what is real. They have open minds. When you share with them the gospel, they listen. I'm convinced that the Word will go forth and that it has greater power than anything else we could think about.

### **Breaking Out of Consumer Christianity**

**Bunni Pounds:** If you were advising the Church on how to break out from a consumer Christianity to a more first-century church model, how would you advise people? We're sitting in a pew, we're listening to a message, but how would you advise an ordinary Christian to try to break out of that consumer mentality?

**Shawn Carlson:** God's trying to do something today in our time. I think we need a 21st-century church, not just a first-century church. In the book of Acts—there was a movement because Jesus equipped the disciples on how to reach people of that century. They saw a lot of movement among the Greeks and the Romans who were under heavy oppression from their government. They also saw a huge movement and openness to the gospel among the Jews. I think if we try to implement the things that they did we're missing in our own cultural context. I personally am longing for the 21st-century church rather than the first-century church.

**Wade Aaron:** I think we need to recognize that they need to grow in this area. People are inspired by leaders. As a pastor if you're leading your congregation, and you have testimonies from the week of someone that you lead to the Lord and you're discipling, it overflows to everybody in your church. In the

process, you raise up others in your community that are engaging in disciplemaking. It can't only be the leaders of the church. Every man and woman in the church needs to know that God wants to use me. It's taking small steps to empower people over time, but you will start seeing change.

☒ There is a church in Arizona where this is really taking hold. They are doing what they are calling—gospel nights. Once a week, in this small church, they have 40 people who get together. They talk and keep each other accountable to reach people with the gospel throughout the week. They ask each other—who are you discipling? Who are you reaching in your circle of influence? I would love to see us create more environments like this. Ultimately, we need to get our minds around what Jesus told us to do continually.

### **What is the Christian Walk?**

**Bunni Pounds:** If you were going to break down the Christian walk in one sentence, what would it be?

**Shawn Carlson:** I just have one word—obedience. I desire for God to lead me in every area of my life. I haven't fully submitted every area, I'm sure, but I want to ask God every day, what do You want me to do?

**Wade Aaron:** Following Jesus with all our hearts and being obedient. If we follow Jesus with all our heart, all the other stuff will work itself out.

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**Bunni Pounds** is president and founder of *Christians Engaged*, a ministry activating the Body of Christ to pray, vote and engage regularly. Formerly a congressional candidate and 16-year political consultant, she is a motivational speaker and bible teacher. Her book, *Jesus and Politics: One Woman's Walk with God in a Mudslinging Profession* comes out nationally on

2/6/24.

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# Sean Feucht: Peace Anthem 'God of Israel' Is 'A Prophetic Sign'

During the holidays in December—especially Christmas and Hanukkah—"peace on earth" has been a popular phrase for nearly 160 years. Henry Wordsworth-Longfellow, one of the most prominent American writers of the 19th century, composed the poem of the same name on Christmas Day in 1863.

It's a concept that three songwriters and performers—all of very diverse backgrounds—are trying to keep alive today in a time when bitterness, contempt, prejudice and outright hatred are becoming more prevalent each day as the return of our Lord Jesus Christ draws nearer in these treacherous but hopeful end times.

American Christian Sean Feucht, Lebanese Christian Carine Bassili and Israeli Jew Yair Levi's collaborative song "God of Israel" is sweeping the globe to help bring about peace in a world gone completely mad. Released—and not without controversy—this past week, the song, performed in Hebrew, Arabic and English, has risen to No. 1 on the American Christian chart on iTunes in only a few short days.

It's a song that Feucht, an evangelist and worship leader who travels the world to promote the peace of the gospel of Christ, says is an "absolute miracle."

"Songs go to places where bias and cancel culture can never

go,” Feucht says. “This is still the No. 1 song in Christian music today on Apple Music, and only God can write a story like this.

“The No. 1 Christian song in America today is a prayer of peace and unity for the nation of Israel. I never would even dream this was possible.”

The song’s release was delayed for three days, but finally made its debut Sunday evening on Apple. It was flagged by iTunes and Spotify “with no explanation” as to what content was in question.

Feucht, Levi and Bassili strongly believe it is because the fact that Levi is a Jew, and antisemitism and hatred toward the Jewish people, although a staple of this world for centuries, has exploded since the terrorist group Hamas unexpectedly and brutally attacked Israel on Oct. 7. As Israel tried to defend itself, global media bias and on-campus students relentlessly assaulted the nation of Israel verbally and blamed Israel for the conflict, which was clearly started by Hamas.

Some believe Apple and Spotify blatantly omitted Levi’s name from the download label because of Levi’s Jewish heritage.

“It’s just another reason why our new song ‘God of Israel’ is so timely right now,” Feucht says. “So many do not have the heart for Israel. Songs can go to places and touch hearts like nothing else can.

“It’s really powerful when you see people that are not supposed to be seen together that are seen together, and the song is an act of God itself. It’s highly controversial because it doesn’t go along with the media’s narrative and it shows people there is a better way. It shows that people that God can bring about a unity that the world says can never happen. The song in of itself is a prophetic sign of unity and breakthrough that God wants to bring right now to the world we

live in.”

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Levi cancelled a concert tour of Israel that was supposed to begin in mid-October. He now serves in the Israel Defense Forces to help defend his country, but through Bassili, Levi says that he is proud of what God of Israel is doing to help promote world peace.

“With this album, we have just proven that we are trying to make peace in our own way, with faith,” Levi says. “We don’t need to delete our identity. You [Bassili] love Lebanon. Sean loves America and I love Israel. We can come together and work together to do everything we can to bring peace.

“It’s a sign from God that we, Jews and Christians, need to work together. It’s so beautiful to see it in Arabic, English and Hebrew during this war. We need to make more and more collaborations on projects like this music. This album is a very good sign from God, especially in this time, when all of these things are happening in the world, like what is happening in Gaza.”

The song has brought strong reaction on social media, although some forms of social media like TikTok and Instagram, Levi says, have blocked his accounts.

“I cannot stop listening to ‘God of Israel.’ Thank you for coming to the Sunshine Coast last Friday and Saturday night. Let us worship. Very powerful movement of God,” Michele Whalan said on Feucht’s Facebook page recently.

“The song is AWESOME!! I heard it for the first time when you were in the CA church event. SOOO touched and teary eyed. Thank you for this beautiful song,” Deborah Collins wrote on Feucht’s Facebook page.

Feucht says despite Satan's dastardly attempts, the efforts to keep others from hearing "God of Israel" are futile.

"The devil is a liar and a fraud," Feucht says. "He can't stop the song of the Lord coming out over Israel. Let's share this, blast this and sing this as an anthem of intercession over the nation of Israel." {eoa}

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## **The Spiritual Force Choking the Life Out of the Church**

Earlier this week I spoke at a leadership conference for a group of pastors in El Salvador. These pastors face a lot of spiritual challenges in their culture: Drug addiction among youth, alcoholism, idolatry and rampant witchcraft. But I had to tell these pastors that the biggest challenge to their churches is not something outside—it is something inside the church.

One of the biggest enemies of revival is the spirit of religion. It could be the reason your spiritual life is stagnant. It could also be the reason your church isn't growing.

Religion opposes biblical preaching, resists the Holy Spirit, persecutes those who truly love God and turns vibrant faith into empty formalism. And most of all, it sterilizes churches until they die from barrenness.

The apostle Paul warned Timothy that the time would come when people who claim to know Christ would “[hold] to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power” (2 Tim. 3:5a, NASB). Religion looks good on the outside. Religious people sing nice songs about God, recite nice prayers, dress in nice clothes to listen to nice sermons and even give money to build nice buildings. But it can all be a show that is devoid of life.

And when the Holy Spirit comes to bring new life to the church, and to revive us from the deadness of the past season, we must break free from the control of a religious spirit. We are in this season now. The Spirit wants to blow His refreshing wind into our barrenness. When He does, the dead roots and brittle branches of lifeless religion will be pruned away—and supernatural fruit will appear.

Have you been infected by dead religion? You can take your own test by examining these eight characteristics of a religious person:

**1. Religious people view God as a cold, harsh taskmaster rather than an approachable, loving Father.** When Jesus wanted to show people who the Father really is, He told the story of the prodigal son. He described a compassionate father who forgave his wayward son, embraced him and welcomed him back home even though he had been living in a pig pen. Our God is merciful. He opens His arms to us when we return to Him. When you cultivate this view of the Father you will break the spirit of religion.

**2. Religious people do outward things to prove that God accepts them.** Some Christians believe their dress codes, music styles or even certain doctrinal positions make them better than others. I knew of one church that taught that people who wear wedding rings aren’t saved. Another denomination taught that women shouldn’t wear makeup. Such religious rules ostracize people and turn Christians into legalists.

**3. Religious people develop traditions and formulas to accomplish spiritual goals.** Formalism chokes out the work of the Holy Spirit. If we trust in rote prayers, vain repetition or dry ceremonies, we are quenching the Spirit. If we want the life of the Spirit, we should sing a new song, preach a fresh word and experience fresh fire each time we gather.

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**4. Religious people become joyless, cynical and hypercritical.** These attitudes can turn a church completely sour. When religion takes over a church, love turns cold, smiles turn into frowns and church members gossip about each other. And visitors won't feel welcome in that environment. One of the best ways to overcome dead religion is to ask God to restore your joy.

**5. Religious people develop a judgmental attitude toward sinners, yet those who ingest this poison typically struggle with sinful habits that they cannot admit to anyone else.** Religious people rail against the evils of society but rarely notice their own flaws. And their pharisaical attitude makes it impossible for them to show true mercy. This is why religious churches don't do outreach.

**6. Religious people refuse to embrace change.** Many Christians become so focused on what God did 50 or 100 years ago that they become stuck in a time warp and can't move forward when the Holy Spirit begins to open new understanding. When a church refuses to shift with God's new directives, it can become an "old wineskin" (see Mark 2:22) that is stiff and inflexible.

**7. Religious people persecute those who disagree with their self-righteous views.** An angry religious person will even use slander to assassinate other peoples' character. You would be

shocked by the kind of behavior professing Christians are capable of when they are driven by a religious spirit.

**8. Religious people won't see conversions.** Sinners will rarely find Jesus in a toxic religious environment. When religion takes over a church, fewer and fewer people visit the altar, tears of repentance are rare and the baptismal tank stays dry. The congregation ages; there are no children in the nursery, the youth group dwindles and eventually the church closes. Religion is deadly.

If the poisonous tendrils of religion have contaminated your walk with God, ask Him to pour a fresh understanding of His grace into your heart—and then expect His new life to flow through you. Let's welcome the fresh wind of God that comes to breathe new life into our barren churches. {eoa}

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## **Controversial Pentecostal Bishop Carlton Pearson Dies at 70**

Pentecostal Bishop Carlton Pearson, once the pastor of the one of the largest churches in Tulsa, Oklahoma, died at 70 on Sunday, Nov. 19, after a long battle with prostate cancer. He had been under hospice care since early November.

During the 1990s, Pearson's church in Tulsa, Higher Dimensions Church, reached an average attendance of 6,000. In 1994, however, after watching a television program about the

“wretched conditions” of people suffering and dying from genocide in Rwanda, and considering the teaching of his church that non-Christians were going to hell, Pearson revealed that he had received an epiphany from God and stated publicly that he doubted the existence of hell as a place of eternal torment.

He said that hell was created on earth by human depravity and behavior.

When he announced his stated belief in universal reconciliation, Pearson began to lose his influence in his ministry as a member of the Joint College of African-American Pentecostal Bishops and was eventually declared a heretic by his peers in 2004.

Charisma News columnist J. Lee Grady recently said that, after watching a video Pearson posted from his hospital bed, “Pearson smiled and told his followers he would see them in heaven.”

But Grady wonders if that will be the case.

“I’m glad that I’m not the one to decide that,” Grady says. “But I wouldn’t want to be in this man’s shoes as he steps into eternity.”

Pearson was raised in the Church of God In Christ and attended Oral Roberts University. He was mentored by Oral Roberts himself, and eventually became one of the most recognized preachers in America as he sang with the World Action Singers.

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He began to hold Azusa conferences that attracted thousands to his church every year and his church began to grow. But that’s when the trouble began.

Pearson decided to stand for the Gospel of Inclusion, and eventually declared that Jesus is the Way. He's just not the only way.

In 2006, he was accepted as a United Church of Christ minister and in September 2008, he held his final services at New Dimensions Worship Center.

Pearson was then named the interim minister of the Christ Universal Temple in Chicago, but left that position in January 2011 and returned to Tulsa in 2014.

His time in ministry was the subject of a Chicago Public Radio Program called "Heretics" in December 2005, and his life story was broadcast on NBC's Dateline program called "To Hell and Back" on Aug. 13, 2006.

In 2007, CNN broadcast a story about Pearson that covered the changes in his teachings—including the acceptance of LGBTQ people into his church—and the backlash against it. {eoa}

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*Shawn A. Akers is the online editor at Charisma Media.*

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# **Christian Leaders Call for Support at 'March for Israel' Amid Ongoing War**