

Are You Being Prophetic or Just Professional?

Six years ago, I turned over my Atlanta church to my son.

Six weeks ago, I transitioned from my staff position in our Nashville church to go full-time in serving the wider body of Christ.

At the 41-year-mark in ministry, God called me to say farewell to salary, pension and security guarantees. It's scary, but in light of our nation's rapidly decaying cultural landscape and what many perceive as the church succumbing to a "spiral of silence"—especially on issues of homosexuality, abortion and religious liberty—I don't believe I have the luxury of sitting on the sidelines anymore.

These words from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speak to me daily: "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

Years ago, I published a book with Charisma House called *Reckless Abandon*. On the back of the book, these words appear: "If you would do the best with your life, find out what God is doing in your generation and fling yourself into it!"

There comes a time in each of our lives where it's good to ask, "Am I making a living, or am I making a difference?" Not that they're mutually exclusive, but there are tipping points in history where the status quo, the path of least resistance in religion, is not acceptable. We "pray the Lord of the harvest to send [Greek: to cast, drive out, with notion of violence, to depart in haste] workers into the harvest" (Matt. 9:38), and sometimes we discover the mantle falls on us!

These are heaven's marching orders for me, and I'm not suggesting all follow in my footsteps. What I do sense is the Holy Spirit challenging leaders and Christians across America to embrace whatever reasonable or radical step God stirs us to take as America's moral decline accelerates at warp speed.

The landmark Supreme Court ruling on gay "rights" did not *redefine* marriage, but it did give the *rationale* to deconstruct marriage.

Those of us standing up for traditional marriage now find ourselves portrayed as bigots for simply upholding marriage as it has stood for over 5,000 years of Western civilization! It's unbelievable, but true.

Less than 10 years ago, no state in America recognized gay marriage. Eighteen months ago, President Barack Obama opposed gay marriage. President Clinton and numbers of Democrats all voted to support the Defense of Marriage Act. Until late 2012, not one state had legalized gay marriage through the ballot box.

The handwriting is on the wall. Justice Scalia predicts this is "only the first shoe to drop" in the marriage battle. Christians cannot sit this one out.

If they do, here's what's next.

Boris Dittrich, the Dutch politician who masterminded registered partnerships and then gay marriage, now admits group marriage is on the docket in Holland, the "tolerance" capital of the world.

Canada legalized gay marriage, then entered a major legal battle on polygamy. Now the Polyamory Advocacy Association is demanding legal status for consenting multiple partners in that country.

The Gay and Lesbian Task Force stated the following demands at

their March on Washington not long ago. It's chilling how fast they are checking off their objectives:

- Legalization of gay marriage.
- Implementation of gay, bisexual and transgendered curriculum at all levels of education.
- Custody, adoption and foster care rights for gay, lesbian and transgendered persons.
- Access to all programs of the Boy Scouts of America.
- Inclusion of sex-change operations under universal health care.
- Lowered age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual sex.
- Redefinition of "family" to include full diversity.

All Christians are called to be salt and light, but if leaders choose calm over courage instead of addressing these issues for any number of reasons—"Just keep things positive," "Don't scare people off," "We're in a building program and can't risk offending big donor," Just preach the gospel; steer clear of politics," "It's all going down anyway," "Why invite trouble or controversy?" "I'm warning all of you on staff that this would be a deal-breaker if you start talking about these kind of issues"—marriage as the central pillar of our civilization will be forever lost. We just cannot sit on the bench, mute in the midst of the defining moral issue of our generation, as the people will follow suit.

That's what happened in Nazi Germany as pastors (with the exception of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and a remnant) were intimidated into silence and their flocks emulated their example. Adolf Hitler chortled derisively behind closed doors, knowing he'd discovered the key to railroading his plans through: "They [German pastors] will submit. ... They are insignificant little people, submissive as dogs, and they sweat with embarrassment when you talk to them."

Granted, we are not facing the Fuhrer, but redefining marriage

means redefining religious liberty, and that would imperil us all—our children, our grandchildren and our future as a nation.

When Minnesota faced this issue last year, one leader said, “Churches should seek to be nonpartisan in their approach to teaching moral truths,” and he backed away. So did another leader, who said, “Don’t press the organization of the church or her pastors into political activism.” Is protecting and proclaiming marriage as the union of one man and one woman now viewed as “partisan” or “political”?

Alan Chambers, Rob Bell and Jim Wallis crisscross the country advocating for an unscriptural, squishy, spineless approach to this hot-button issue of homosexuality. The WNBA No. 1 draft pick from Baylor Baptist University, Brittany Griner, invites girls to follow her lesbian example as a new role model in *USA Today*. Even our president holds nothing back in pronouncing, “God bless you!” at America’s No. 1 abortion provider’s convention, then flies to Africa after the Supreme Court ruling in order to promote gay rights there after last telling them, “Africa’s future is up to Africans!”

Thank God for our courageous African counterparts who aren’t capitulating but are instead standing strong amidst this moral storm. Thirty-seven nations there outlaw homosexuality, and Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, 2011 Nobel Peace Prize winner and Africa’s first female president, boldly stands to say she opposes decriminalizing homosexuality in her country. “We’ve got certain traditional values in our society that we’d like to preserve,” she says.

False prophets, celebrities and politicians aren’t holding back. Why are we? My longtime friend and mentor Dr. Michael Brown asks this penetrating question: “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.”

Specifically, I’m not referring to a general reaffirmation of the importance of traditional marriage in our churches, as important as that is. We’ve got to do more and start equipping people so they can understand and articulate biblical responses to burning questions both Christians and non-Christians hear daily.

Gauge the Readiness of Your Family and Flock

Are you able to answer these questions with clarity and charity? How about your family members? What about your church members? Try the experiment!

1. What does the Bible really say about homosexuality?
2. Did Jesus ever say anything about homosexuality?
3. Can a person be a practicing homosexual and a Christian?
4. Does “Judge not” apply to homosexuality?
5. Are people born homosexuals?
6. Are gay rights and black civil rights the same thing?
7. Are people born gay?
8. What’s wrong with gay marriage?
9. What are the implications of normalizing homosexuality for the church?
10. Can gay people become straight?

“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).

I personally believe the need is so critical today that I'm preparing to do my part by going with a respected young leader for an intergenerational "Is Gay OK?" fall tour bringing together area-wide churches and leaders in a unified response to today's moral and marriage crisis.

It's Time to Stand Up for the Truth

In Deuteronomy 20, God directed individuals going out to battle to turn around and go home if they were fainthearted. Why? Because their timidity would rub off on fellow soldiers. Is this principle the same today?

Doesn't the urgency of the hour demand that all of us as Christians and leaders rise to the task? I believe a mighty awakening awaits us if we will respond to this call!

Let's conclude with this inspiring excerpt from the Rev. Dr. King's autobiography. He was only 27 years of age, and he had a wife and three small children when he wrote these words:

"One night I settled into bed late after a strenuous day. ... As I was about to doze off, the telephone rang. An angry voice said, "Listen in—we've taken all we want from you; before next week you'll be sorry. ... I hung up but I couldn't sleep. It seemed that all of my fears have come down on me at once. I had reached the saturation point. I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. I had heard these things before, but for some reason that night it got to me. I was frustrated, bewildered. ... I was ready to give up. ... I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing coward. I got to the point where I couldn't take it any longer. I was weak.

"With my head in my hands I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud, 'Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right. But Lord, I must confess that I am weak now, I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage. Now, I am afraid. And I can't let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage, they will begin to get weak. The people are

looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength or courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left.'

"I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, 'Martin, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo, I will be with you even until the end of the world.' I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. At that moment, I experienced the presence of the divine as I have never experienced Him before. Almost at once my fear began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything."

Will you ask God to help you speak up as America is going down? We need to pray and foster another great revival before it's too late. As Winston Churchill told his flock in England's "darkest hour" as they faced the extinction of their democratic freedoms, "I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. ... If we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age. ... Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its commonwealth last 4,000 years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour.'"

Larry Tomczak is a best-selling author and cultural commentator with over 40 years of trusted ministry experience.