

Megachurch Pastor Says a New Year Needs a New Response—and Tenacious Faith

Here's our new reality: Business is not as usual. Normal is not what our habits once were; normal is what we will make it.

We have enough experience to know that politics won't fix our nation's problems. Solutions may come through that avenue, but I don't believe it will be their origin. Only God Himself can deliver us, and one of the things that will be required of us in this new season is a different expression of our faith, and a different attitude toward it.

In 1 Timothy 4:15 (NASB), Paul is coaching a young man about the momentum of his faith and I couldn't think of a single verse that expresses how we need to approach our faith more directly or succinctly: "Take pains with these things. Be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all."

The time for a casual faith, a peripheral faith, a faith of modest import, is gone. It may have served us in another season, but it will not in the season that's ahead of us. We need to be willing to publicly identify as the people of God, not just in church but in our workplaces and communities. That will require some realignment, but our children's and grandchildren's futures depend on it.

The church in America has embraced a compliant, polite faith; it may even be described as a timid faith. On our watch, we've seen one of the most precipitous declines of Christian influence in the history of the church. Not too many decades ago, we lived in a nation where in our public schools we prayed in Jesus' name, as a matter of course. The Ten Commandments were part of our public postings. Prayers in

Jesus' name were a part of our official gatherings, from ballgames with our students, to convening courtrooms to surgical procedures in the hospitals.

There has been a significant decline, and the patterns the church has embraced in the past are not sufficient to address the challenges ahead of us today. We need a tenacious faith. That doesn't mean being angry or embittered or violent or aggressive—but it will require a more assertive response than what we're accustomed to.

We have been coached to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was a pacifist, or a reluctant Messiah, or a timid soul with an aversion to conflict or self-assertion. It is true that Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek or to go the extra mile. But it's far more reflective of His life and teaching to hear Him challenging leaders who diminish holiness in His people or confronting unclean spirits with the authority of an unseen kingdom. Be certain of this: Jesus did not avoid evil. He gave His life to totally and completely defeat it. He offered Himself as a sacrifice to once-and-for-all gain victory for all people.

Our assignment as Christ followers is to declare this good news to the entire world. He has commissioned us, empowered us with His Spirit and promised never to leave us or forsake us. We have a job to do, and it's not to cower in fear or to wring our hands because we don't like the ideological perspective of whomever. We're not here just on a fact-finding mission or to gather a theological creed. We have a message for the world that is reinforced by the reality of our life experiences—our first-hand knowledge of our own brokenness and the power of Almighty God to bring restoration, healing and renewal to us.

Jesus did not avoid the events of His day, the characters of His day, the leaders of His day, the challenges of His day or the tensions of His day: whether they were the Roman governors or the religious leaders or the moral values and the codes.

Throughout the course of His life, Jesus addressed all of these, showing us what tenacious faith looks like.

Jesus is the head of the church and today, He is calling men and women with the courage to acknowledge Him as the way, the truth and the life. God has called us to this generation for His purposes and His plans, and whatever He's asked us to do, He will provide what we need to complete the assignment.

Instead of yielding to the fear or giving in to the wave after wave of the complicity to try to terrify people, we need to understand who we are, the kingdom we represent, what we believe and why. If we do, God will meet us with expressions of His power and authority that will exceed anything we've ever known.

There is no place in Scripture where God invites people to follow Him without demonstrating His power and authority. He called Moses from a bush that was burning but not being consumed. We see example after example of His power throughout the story of Scripture, and the 21st century is no different. If we will have the courage to acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as Lord, God will meet us with His power and authority.

You might say, "Well that hasn't been my story." It wasn't Moses' story, either, until he found the bush in the desert that day. It wasn't Paul's story until he was struck blind, with his nose in the dirt. It wasn't Daniel's story until the king had a dream he couldn't interpret, and they needed an interpretation by morning or they wouldn't see another sunrise. So, don't be frightened or discouraged because it hasn't been a part of your faith portfolio, up to this point.

God is doing something new, and He looked across the whole span of human history and created us uniquely for this season for His purposes. We need to stop looking to someone else to make our lives better. We must stop complaining about what somebody else isn't doing or how poorly they're doing it.

Rather than allowing our circumstances to be defined by a virus or health care challenges or an election cycle or anything else, let's commit ourselves to letting this year be defined by proclaiming the Good News about Jesus more broadly, more boldly, more persistently, in more places, in more venues, with a demonstration of His authority and power, than any other time in our lives.

It's a new year, and we need a new response. Instead of focusing on the darkness, let's determine to turn up the Light, wherever and however God leads. {eoa}

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