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JUNE/JULY 2021

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

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Keep being the Church.
We'll be with you every step of the way.

OKAY,

We don't have to tell you how tough the last year or so has been. But, looking back, we've learned a few things...

SO WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED

We've learned how to wash our hands the right way, and that toilet paper is the first thing to go when people start to panic. We've learned that some of us have pretty bad mask breath, and that children's ministry volunteers are superheroes.

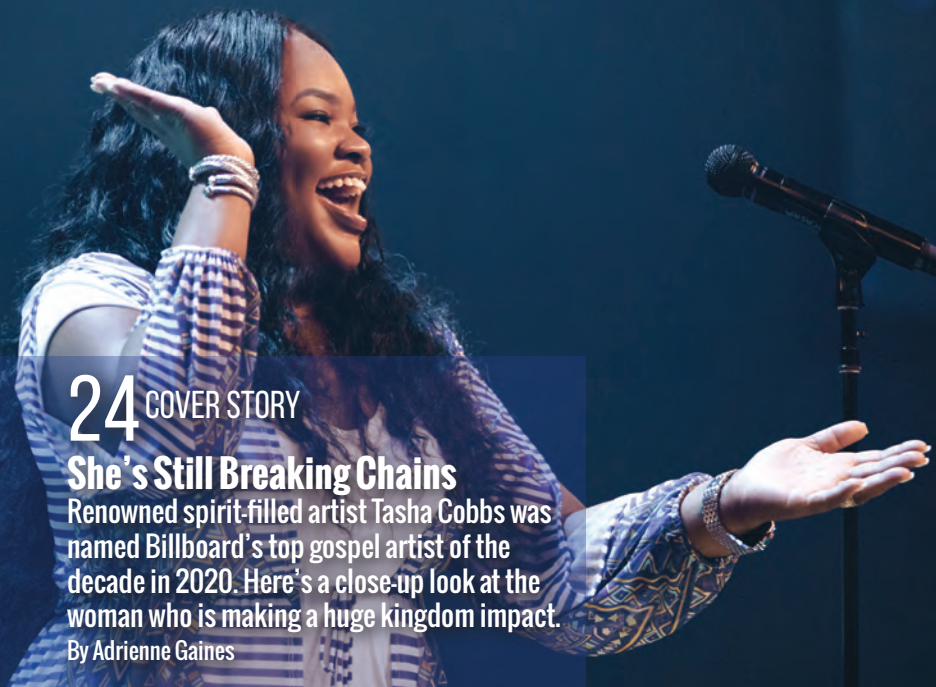
We've learned some important things about the Church, too. We've learned that the Church is resilient. We've learned that the body of Christ can come together in worship, despite division. We've learned that we can still show our neighbors Christlike love and compassion, even from six feet away. At Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company, we've learned a lot, but mostly, the last year or so confirmed something we already knew – the Church is worth fighting for. We've been helping Christian ministries bear their burdens for more than a century. Through that time, we've seen the Church endure countless trials, standing firm in the faith and grounded in love. As we look to the future, we have hope, because we know that no matter what comes, the Church will endure.

So, keep being the Church. We'll be with you every step of the way.



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“Bravo to the cast and crew of The Chosen for bringing us such great viewing.”

—J. Conder

EVERYONE SHOULD WATCH 'THE CHOSEN'
Our family has really enjoyed watching the first two seasons of *The Chosen* series, and we're even more impressed that it has been crowd-funded. As longtime readers of *Charisma*, we were thrilled to see DeWayne Hamby's article (April 2021) about the television series, about how it came to be and how it is produced. Director Dallas Jenkins is very candid about his own relationship with Christ and how it has affected his work. The fact that the series has been viewed in more than 180 countries and translated into 70 languages speaks for itself about the impact of this series. Bravo to cast and crew of *The Chosen* for bringing us great viewing.

J. Conder, *Carterville, Illinois*

GREAT COVER STORY

In a time where there isn't a whole lot of family-oriented, wholesome entertainment in our society, kudos to the people—actors, producers, directors, etc.—involved with *The Chosen* series. And, kudos to the staff at *Charisma* magazine for not only writing about

the series, but for putting it on the cover of its April issue. Entertainment in America continues to get darker and darker in its content and the main networks and television outlets continue to bow down to Satan and worship him with their crude and unwholesome content.

B. Borden, *Ormond Beach, Florida*

JESUS' SUFFERING WAS REAL

If, as a believer, you haven't ever stopped to contemplate the full extent of Jesus' sacrifice for you, then you might do well to read R.T. Kendall's "What Really Happened to Jesus on the Cross" in the April issue of *Charisma* magazine. Many of us don't really think about just how much pain and suffering—both physical and mental—Jesus endured to save us from our sins. Not many stop to think about the loneliness Jesus felt on that cross. Kendall goes into detail about it. I like where Kendall says, "Perhaps no one should attempt to grasp fully how awful His spiritual suffering actually was—God's direct punishment on Jesus."

Anne Coakley, *Alexandria, Virginia*

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Why Is America Justifying or Ignoring Blatant Expressions of Violence and Hatred?

What AMERICA Can Learn From ISRAEL



David Rubin
Author

Is there a radical plan to change the USA from a nation of traditional values - God, family, and hard work - to a neo-Marxist, gender and ethnically confused reality?

Every American should remember that the terrible events in the Capitol, were a brief reaction to years of abuse from a radical Left that has sought to dismantle the magnificent system of values that made America great. Those values, most of which were based on Judeo-Christian civilization, made the USA the country that people from around the world have flocked to and admired. However, we must remember that a country that abandons its roots and its foundations is bound to eventually collapse. The ancient nation of Israel learned that sad lesson from its two painful exiles and from the struggles of its modern rebirth.

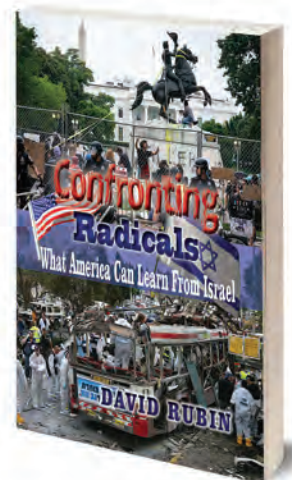
Hopefully, by learning lessons from history, America's process of decline can be reversed.

It's not too late for Americans to fight back before a great nation that has been a beacon of light

for the world deteriorates into a vapid totalitarian country, in which words cannot be spoken, traditional families cannot stay together, and God cannot be worshipped freely without the contrary demands of the thought police.

TESTIMONY: *"Confronting Radicals: What America Can Learn from Israel sheds much needed light on the false allure of the socialist revolution that is rising in America. David Rubin calls to action Americans who are willing to fight for their country's values and to push back against the impending 'Orwellian' future where our thoughts, words, and actions are controlled and cancelled."*

Mike Huckabee – Former Arkansas governor, political commentator on Fox News Channel, TBN, and Newsmax TV.



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Intentionally Intergenerational

Next-gen mentoring relationships can bear lasting fruit

It was only a five-minute encounter. But that brief meeting changed my life. I've written before about Dr. Charles Green and what I now know was our divine appointment. It happened when his son Michael and I, both 17-year-old high school seniors, made a quick stop by the Word of Faith Temple. Our choir would soon sing in the church's huge auditorium, and our music teacher sent us to work out a performance detail.

I'd heard of Green's effective ministry with high school students. But I didn't expect a busy pastor to notice me, much less stop and speak to me.

I don't remember just what he said. I do remember that the words of life he spoke over me blossomed in my salvation two years later. They also grew within me the same desire he had to impact generations.

I spent many years replicating Green's impact in the young souls God sent my way. We shared life, love, laughter and a whole lot of my wife's shrimp etouffee and jambalaya.

But I also had the opportunity to speak words of life and to share Spirit-birthing truths—to go call the next generation up higher by listening to them more than I spoke.

Years later, when Green and I had another divine encounter at the memorial service for Chancellor Oral Roberts at the University he founded under instructions from the Lord, I took time to thank him for the significant spiritual deposit he made on that day in his church. We continue to speak regularly, and he never fails to impart wisdom and stories only he could tell.

When I think back over my years in education, marketing, ministry and now publishing, I see how God has woven the call to reach, teach and impact the younger generation(s) throughout my life. My staff knows the Lord called me to *Charisma* to change lives, particularly of those in succeeding generations. And that's how I see Him using me every day. I'm called to speak life into the next generation.

Not long ago, I had the privilege of spending time with Apostles Craig and Colette Toach and their team of Next Gen Prophets. The Toaches have an international ministry of speaking, writing and hosting the Next Gen Prophets podcast on our network and their own prophetic training school. They pour their lives and hearts into equipping the next generation for kingdom ministry.

"As the Lord led us from country to country, and He opened the door slowly, the vision came into view, because it's progressive," Colette says. "Nobody decides this is what they're



"I'm called to speak life into the next generation."

going to do. Nobody decides they're going to have a next-generation ministry until one day you wake up and you realize that all the steps you've taken in ministry have led to your answer to that question."

"God is bringing back the fullness of the fivefold ministry," she says. "And I see in each one of these new generations, not just a passion to want to belong, but to be part of a team; they get it: 'I can't do this solo anymore.'"

But the desire to impact coming generations doesn't arrive in the natural, she says. "Make no mistake—spiritual parenting is not a career choice—it's a mandate and call," she writes on their website at toach-ministries.org.

Craig adds another essential word about next-generation ministry: Character counts.

Of course, this idea of intergenerational impact has a powerful precedence in Scripture. As the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, "You share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice. And I know that faith continues strong in you" (1 Tim. 1:5b, NLT).

Timothy's mother and grandmother invested in him, and the resulting fruit blessed Paul and impacted the nations. No doubt, that knowledge lay behind Paul's later word to the young pastor to "teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others" (2 Tim. 2:2b).

Do you have five minutes? Consider investing time in a young person. The next life you change could impact generations to come.

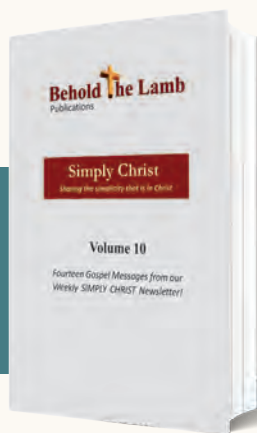
DR. STEVE GREENE is the publisher and executive vice president of the multimedia group at Charisma Media and executive producer of the Charisma Podcast Network. His Charisma House book, *Love Leads*, shows that without love, you cannot be an effective leader. Sign up for his free "5 Things I Learned Last Week" and "Greenelines" newsletters, and download his Greenelines and At Work With God podcasts at greenelines.com.

SIMPLY CHRIST

Sharing the simplicity
that is in Christ

GOD'S SELF-SACRIFICE

Over thirty years ago, an elder Pastor told me that Jesus did not have to die on the cross for our salvation. He said God could have saved us any way he wanted to, but he sent Jesus to the cross to show us how much he loved us. This troubled me for many reasons. Foremost were the words of Jesus in Gethsemane where he prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me..." Matthew 26:39. What did Jesus mean by "if it be possible?" We know it was possible for Jesus to escape the cross, because he said to his disciples, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" Matthew 26:53.



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Volume 10

This being the case, it had to be that our redemption was not possible if Jesus did not suffer the death of the cross.

Years later, someone asked me, "Who required that blood be shed for our redemption? Was it God?" "No," I responded, "God did not require it. Circumstance did!" Let me explain. Because of Adam's transgression, we were lost. Sin became master of our heart and nature, and Satan gained dominion over the souls of men. There was only one possible way to change all this, but it would require the death of the one who made all things because only his death could destroy the power of the fallen creation and deliver humanity from its dominion. God was not the one requiring it. God was the only one who could pay the unspeakable price.

Some present Calvary as a human sacrifice, but it was not. If it were, it would have accomplished nothing. If it had been just a sinless human offered on Calvary's cross, nothing would be changed, and we would all still die in our sins. **It was not because Jesus' blood was the blood of a man that it has the power to wash away sin, but because it is the "blood of Christ," "...the Lord from Heaven"** I Corinthians 15:47. The reason Christ "was made flesh" John 1:14 was so he would have blood to shed and a body that could die. Hebrews 10:5. As the eternal "Word" John 1:1, Christ could not die, but when he took upon himself "the likeness of sinful flesh," Romans 8:3 he became one who could shed his blood for our redemption.

Calvary was not a human sacrifice. It was God's self-sacrifice! God did not choose or require that a man die to save anyone. Christ became as man so that He could suffer death, and thereby destroy Satan and deliver us. The scripture says, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, **he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death; that is, the devil.** And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Hebrews 2:14-15. Only as a man could Christ partake of death. He came forth out of the grave in absolute victory because he is not just a man, he is the eternal Christ, the Son of the living God!

The first promise of redemption is found in God's words to the Serpent shortly after Adam's transgression. God told the Serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Genesis 3:15. The statement, "...it shall bruise thy head," tells how Jesus Christ would destroy Satan and all his works. John says, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." I John 3:8. The statement, "and thou shalt bruise his heel," tells us that in order to destroy Satan, Jesus Christ would also suffer. The phrase "**seed of the woman**" in this prophecy tells us that God already had committed himself to send Christ into the world to be "made of a woman" Galatians 4:4 and become a "partaker of flesh and blood." Hebrews 2:14. From Adam's day forward, every lamb that was slain on the altar, and every sacrifice which was offered before God, was testifying of the great self-sacrifice God would one day make for the salvation of all.

Simply Christ is sent weekly via email to believers around the world. To request your freebook or subscription, visit cochurch.org or write to: **Behold the Lamb Publications, P.O. Box 750 Porter, TX 77365**

Beware of Spiritual Lone Rangers

In this season of pandemic isolation, don't let prideful renegades spread division

In this pandemic era, many churches are airing their services online and encouraging members to meet in homes. And the house church movement is growing as more and more mature believers step out in faith to start nontraditional congregations. The church is breaking out of its traditional box. That's a good thing.

What is not good, however, is that untested, untrained and unqualified people are also seizing this opportunity to start ministries when they have no business doing so. I call these people "lone rangers" because they have no mentors. They are accountable to no one, yet they claim to be experts all on their own. They take orders from no one, yet they are happy to be in charge.

Suppose a church starts a network of home meetings and provides practical training for the leaders of those groups. Then imagine that one couple in the church decides to start their own group without attending the leadership training sessions because they feel they don't need to comply with the pastor's rules or standards. Their spiritual pride and independence infect others, and soon, there is a split in the church.

Divisions have plagued the church since the first century, when biblical writers such as Jude warned about "wild waves" and "wandering stars" who spread dissension and false doctrines (Jude 1:13, NASB 1995).

Lone rangers are dangerous, even though they often don't realize they are being used by Satan to tear down God's work. Like the rebellious Korah in the Old Testament (Num. 16), they question godly authority and claim spiritual superiority. Here are six indicators of a lone ranger spirit. Heed the warning signals!

Lone rangers are superspiritual. They may pray often (or claim to), and they may even fast often. But their relationships are dysfunctional. Remember: Jesus did not live His life like a guru, floating around while dispensing spooky wisdom. He lived in the real world and interacted in a practical way with the people He loved. So should we.

Lone rangers often claim special revelation. Paul warned the Colossians about prideful people who were always seeing visions from God. He said: "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen" (Col. 2:18a).

God speaks to us through His Holy Spirit, and He can use dreams, visions or prophetic words. Yet His message always flows with love and brings peace. On the contrary, a spirit of weirdness usually follows hyperspiritual people. Beware of a person who always knows what God is saying about everyone and everything.



"Let's guard the church and keep it healthy."

Lone rangers can't submit to authority. Renegade leaders believe they are more gifted than pastors or other spiritual leaders. They find it impossible to receive instruction or correction from anyone. They also are prone to gossiping about a leader or spreading false accusations. Because of their pride, they separate themselves from the body of Christ.

Lone rangers crave attention. Perhaps because they lacked affirmation and love when they were growing up, lone rangers long to be the center of attention. Some people who seek positions of public church leadership actually need inner healing before they can be effective in those roles.

Lone rangers have a victim mentality. Most of the lone rangers I know believe they are constantly being attacked by the devil—as if they are his biggest threat. The slightest problem in life becomes evidence of a demonic conspiracy against them. And if a pastor brings them needed correction, they perceive it as a spiritual attack.

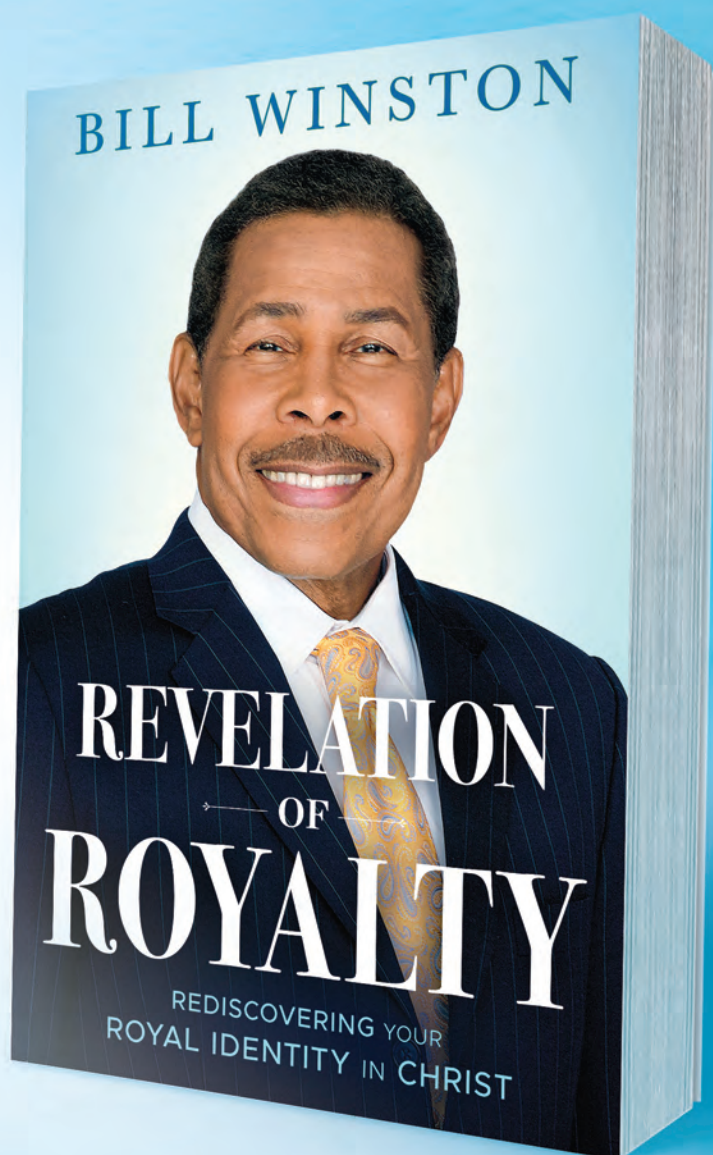
Lone rangers often end up in deception. Renegades who reject correction or spiritual authority are headed toward disaster. Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, started that cult after he declared that all Christian denominations were false churches. People who become focused on their spiritual superiority will end up denying Jesus and justifying their own sinful behavior.

Don't let lone rangers do their damage. We need to train leaders who are humble, teachable, submissive to authority, down-to-earth, servant-hearted and emotionally mature. Let's guard the church and keep it healthy.

J. LEE GRADY was editor of *Charisma* for 11 years and now serves as contributing editor. He directs *The Mordecai Project* (themordecainproject.org), an international ministry that protects women and girls from gender-based violence. His latest book is *Set My Heart on Fire* (Charisma House).

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Bearing Good Fruit When Hard Times Come

God's grace enables us to act and respond in the right way—no matter what happens

The Bible talks about bearing good fruit and how that is God's purpose for our lives. In John 15:5 (NIV), Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." And Psalm 1:3 says that the person who follows God's ways is "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers."

When we understand what it means to bear good fruit, then we can fulfill our destiny as representatives of Christ in this world (2 Cor. 5:20). We do this by working with the Holy Spirit to develop the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23) and by displaying that fruit as we help others.

Many people want the "fruit" of more money, more opportunities in their career, more material possessions or to be more well known. But this kind of fruit is not what they are really hungering for because it won't fulfill them or make them permanently happy and peaceful.

We need to go deeper than that! The good fruit God wants us to have in our lives is peace, joy and mental and emotional stability when the storms of life come. And the Bible teaches that we can grow to the point where we are so deeply planted in the love of Christ that when the storms of life come, we still bear good fruit! (See Ps. 1:1-3 and Eph. 3:16-19.)

The real fruit of Christianity is seen in your life when you can bear good fruit when hard times come—and we all have difficulties in life. It may be an unexpected illness, the stress of financial debt or being betrayed by someone you thought you could trust. God wants us to be peaceful under pressure and have a good attitude in the midst of pain because when others see us behaving differently, they'll want to have what we have, too!

Colossians 3:12-15 gives us a detailed list of genuine, acceptable Christian behavior, and it should be our goal to live this way every day. Verse 12 says that "as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved," we should "clothe [ourselves] with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

Now, I want to say here that we can't just live this way in our own strength, without God. I remember when I would decide in the morning: "I'm going to be nice to everyone today," and I succeeded while I was home alone. But when the



"We can't just live this way in our own strength, without God."

people came home, I had trouble with my attitude. I had to pray for God to help me put on the right attitude and mindset, so I could treat others with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, "[which has the power to endure whatever injustice or unpleasantness comes, with good temper]" (Col. 3:12, AMP). I had to put my faith in God to give me His grace—His strength to do what I could never do in my own effort—believing that He would do it because of who I am in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17, 21).

These verses in Colossians should be our No. 1 goal as believers in Christ. As new creations in Christ, saved by faith, we have a desire to do good things. And as we grow in our relationship with Him, we learn new ways to act and respond to others.

I know this is not always easy. It won't always feel good to obey God, and you may have to sacrifice something to do it. It can seem unfair, but when we choose to trust God and do what He tells us to do no matter how we feel about it, what we think about it or what others think we should do, then we'll have the amazing life Jesus died for us to have!

We don't have to settle for anything less than God's best for us. Make a decision today to trust God to change you and help you do what's right in every situation. Remember John 15:16b (NIV), which says He has chosen you "and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" at all times of your life!

JOYCE MEYER is a *New York Times*' bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries Inc. She has authored 130 books, including *Battlefield of the Mind* and her newest devotional, *Quiet Times With God (FaithWords)*. She hosts the *Enjoying Everyday Life* radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit joycemeyer.org.



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Church: Essential or Nonessential?

Here's how our response to the COVID-19 pandemic is both testing and purifying the church

To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write... I know your works" (Rev. 3:7a-8a).

While these words were penned to a specific local church in Asia Minor, they also echo throughout eternity as a reminder for every church throughout the New Testament era. Christ is King and Lord over the churches. He alone has authority over the church.

However, in recent years, the church has seemed confused about its holy pedigree, its prophetic place and God's great plan. Sadly, many people are questioning the value and the relevancy of what a church is in our day. This has led people to ask, "What purpose does the church serve today?"

More alarming is the reality that many people have now become comfortable not attending church at all. Sure, people will say they now do church online, but let's be honest—viewing an online service is no different than listening to a radio teaching program while driving down the highway. It may be learning, but it is not church. It will not be church until God's people create the opportunity to meet physically.

The truth is that tens of thousands of former church attendees have now found it much more comfortable and convenient to stay home. They have adopted a "wait and see" approach. This is exactly why I believe the Scriptures exhort us to be careful about how we value Christ's church in these days and our meeting together (see Heb. 10:25).

The great news is that Jesus told the pastor in Philadelphia, "I know your works. Look! I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it" (Rev. 3:8a). No pastor, board of elders, governor, president or ruler in this world has the authority to shut the doors of Jesus' church. Only Jesus has that right.

In 2020, it became evident that what was unfolding was the fact that God, though He didn't cause the COVID issue, was using it to test His church and purify His people. Pastors and Christian leaders shared a genuine concern to protect the welfare and health of their churches and communities. However, this later became a standoff between political agendas and obedience to the Word of God.

As we continue through 2021, the next phase of testing will most likely come to the church by way of persecution. The onslaught of societal issues will demand supremacy, trumping a biblical worldview.



"No pastor, board of elders, governor, president or ruler in this world has the authority to shut the doors of Jesus' church."

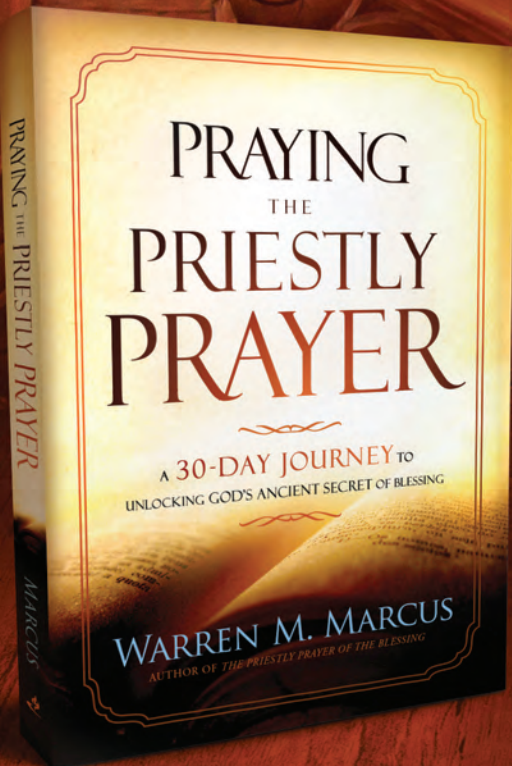
That thought should not surprise the Western church. In every generation for the last 2,000 years, believers in every age and culture have been appointed to forms of persecution. The result was and will be excellent—a cleansing and purging of the church.

We all love the awesome dynamic biblical accounts of great exploits of faith and victories in the face of certain opposition and even death. Those accounts become our encouragement in trying times like these. The church that is taking a stand and has determined to obey Scripture, to be salt and light, to be the hands and feet of Jesus and to be the voice of hope to a perishing culture—that church will be deemed to be at odds with this world. Humanly speaking, the world will make many good and reasonable arguments as to why the church must stay closed and stand down—to comply in the face of "public safety" or "political correctness"—but its argument comes from its value system, while ours comes from Jesus Christ.

I believe we are entering into times of testing. These days of testing must come to prove that the church is neither essential nor nonessential, but rather transcendent. The true church of Jesus Christ will be as a light shining on a hill, a beacon to those who are lost and willing to be hated by the world for the cause of Christ, which is the redemption of the souls of men. Let's take courage by remembering what Jesus went on to say: "For you have a little strength, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (Rev. 3:8b).

JACK HIBBS is the founder and senior pastor of Calvary Chapel Chino Hills in Southern California. Jack's teaching ministry, *Real Life with Jack Hibbs*, is broadcast across the country and around the world on both radio and television. He is best known for his passionate, expositional teachings. Pastor Jack and his wife, Lisa, have been married for over 30 years; they and their family live in California.

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The Bonnie Brae House, 115 years after the Azusa Street Revival

Glory Beckons From Azusa Street, Bonnie Brae House 115 Years Later

‘Charisma’ visited the original location of the prayer meeting that birthed the Azusa Street Revival

The glory still fills the room. The sounds of floors and chairs creaking almost drowned out her soft voice in the foyer she refers to as a living room. A small group is huddled around, listening, absorbing and quietly praying that the stories she spoke would become prophecies of things to come in our own lives. All this happened on a visit to 216 North Bonnie Brae Street in Los Angeles, California, on the eve of the 115th anniversary of the day when the glory fell on a small group of hungry believers seeking “the baptism” of the Holy Ghost—the famed Azusa Street Revival.

The voice we were listening to belonged to a saint known only as “Sister Sol.” She told of the salvations, physical healings, deliverance and even repentance of racism that have occurred in the house over the years.

Sister Sol’s gently spoken words fell like hammers upon our small group, inciting a new longing that we would experience our own fresh baptism in our day.

What God did in that simple home and simple prayer meeting 115 years ago stands as a reminder that the same power and same Spirit are available for us today.

'Still the Christians Come': Canada Protesters Flood Church Perimeter With Praise

The gospel will not be shut down

The power of "Jesus Loves Me" was put to the test at the perimeter of GraceLife Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. After the church was shut down for violating COVID-19 restrictions, Alberta's chief medical officer of health ordered fences be erected around its perimeter in an attempt to stop the congregation from meeting.

"Grace Life Church appreciates the public outpouring of support to fully open churches in Alberta," a statement from the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, which represents the church in its legal battle, reads. "Grace Life Church congregants were not at the protest that occurred on Sunday, April 11, 2021 near the Church's facility. Grace Life Church recognizes the place for peaceful protest within the context of a democracy."

"The closing of the Grace Life facility has understandably resulted in significant public outrage and caused even larger crowds to gather in one place," the statement continues, concluding, "It is time to end these unscientific, unjustified and arbitrary lockdown measures."



GraceLife Church

Texas Community Raises \$80K for State Trooper's Family After Shooting

In tragedy, faith, hope and love rise

Texas Department of Public Safety Officer Chad Walker responded to a March 26 call that would ultimately leave him hospitalized and brain-dead after several gunshot wounds. But God—and his Texas community—shines a bright light of hope in the midst of this horrific tragedy.

With the help of the Limestone County Fair and a GoFundMe account, the Texas community raised over \$80,000, with support still flooding in.

"I'm hoping that they felt the love of our community in that moment," said Tiffany Burleson, a family friend and the treasurer for

Christian Culture, Kingdom Values Help Bring Baylor First National Championship

When Scott Drew took over as the Baylor University coach in 2003, he knew the team's attitude at this Baptist university in Waco, Texas, needed to change. As a lifelong Christian, Drew wanted to implement his faith into his players and make sure they put Jesus first in their lives.

After Drew took over for Dave Bliss, who compiled a 14-14 record in his final season at Baylor in 2002-2003, Drew instilled a culture he called "JOY," which stands for "Jesus,

Others, Yourself."

Drew's faith has made a huge impact on the team, which beat top-ranked Gonzaga University 86-70 to win its first national championship.


"One thing a lot of people have said when they watch our team play is that you can tell there's genuine love for one another. You can't fake that," Drew says. "The love and joy they have for each other is definitely a key to our success."



Officer Chad Walker

the Limestone County Fair Association.

The Texas Department of Public Safety reported on Walker's condition, saying the family made the decision to honor his "final sacrifice" by giving the gift of life with the donation of his organs.

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'Don't Let It Steal Your Hosanna': Charismatic Church Holds Livestream Service Amid Nashville Flood's Devastation

Torrential rains and thunderstorms tore through Tennessee this spring. The storms left homes and businesses flooded and created havoc for many around the Nashville area. But for New Tribe Church in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, not even a natural disaster could stop the gospel from going forth.

New Tribe, described on its website as a "Spirit-empowered church," posted on Facebook, "our church building is a

complete loss due to local flooding, It is a literal disaster area."

Lead Pastor Jarod Smith addressed those watching the livestream as he spoke from the church's worship center, "We are smiling, but our hearts are devastated." Pastor Smith shared details of the flooding and expressed

gratitude for the outpouring of support that came from the surrounding community. He reminded his hearers that the church had previously dealt with a tornado and the COVID-19 pandemic but that "This gospel will go forth."

"This week's going to look different for us, but we're not going to let it steal our hosanna. This week might look different for you—don't let it steal your hosanna!"



Pastor Smith



Video of Canadian Pastor Standing Up to Police, Health Officers Goes Viral

"Please get out. Get out of this property. Immediately get out."

Pastor Artur Pawlowski of Calgary's Street Church in Alberta, Canada, gave an emphatic response to police, city and health department officers who interrupted a worship service he was holding. The video he posted of this encounter immediately went viral.

A spokesperson for Alberta Health Services told Calgary CTV the officers were "there to observe whether the organization was following" the province's health guidelines regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Gestapo is not allowed here. ... out! Get out of this property. Go and don't come back without a warrant!"

Pawlowski urged viewers to "wake up, stand up," warning them against a potential future with government control and pressing his fellow Canadians to join the fight.



Luis Palau

Luis Palau, 'Billy Graham of Latin America,' Dead at 86

Spiritual giant leaves lasting legacy

Internationally known evangelist Luis Palau died March 11 at his home in Portland, Oregon, after a three-year battle with lung cancer. He was 86.

His son, Kevin, posted the notice of his father's death on the evangelist's Facebook page, noting that "We are heartbroken, but full of faith. We serve a good God who loves us

tremendously. And Dad gave his life to share that Good News with the world."

Palau, an immigrant from Argentina, was often called the "Billy Graham of Latin America," sharing the gospel in more than 80 nations across the globe. For more than 60 years, his Palau Association has shared the Good News of Jesus Christ with more than 1 billion people throughout the world.

**BIBLE
READING
GUIDE**



Follow our daily reading plan in each issue of *Charisma* to read through the Modern English Version Bible in one year. The plan is also available online at brg.charismamag.com.

"BUT FOR YOU WHO FEAR MY NAME, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. You will go out and grow up like calves from the stall." —Malachi 4:2

JUNE

June 1	Prov. 19-21; Rom. 13
June 2	Prov. 22-24; Rom. 14
June 3	Prov. 25-27; Rom. 15
June 4	Prov. 28-29; Ps. 60; Rom. 16
June 5	Prov. 30-31; Ps. 33; Eph. 1
June 6	Eccl. 1-3; Ps. 45; Eph. 2
June 7	Eccl. 4-6; Ps. 18; Eph. 3
June 8	Eccl. 7-9; Eph. 4
June 9	Eccl. 10-12; Ps. 94; Eph. 5
June 10	Song 1-4; Eph. 6
June 11	Song 5-8; Phil. 1
June 12	1 Kin. 12; 2 Chr. 10-11; Phil. 2
June 13	1 Kin. 13-14; 2 Chr. 12; Phil. 3
June 14	1 Kin. 15; 2 Chr. 13-14; Phil. 4
June 15	1 Kin. 16; 2 Chr. 15-16; Col. 1
June 16	1 Kin. 17-19; Col. 2
June 17	1 Kin. 20-21; 2 Chr. 17; Col. 3
June 18	1 Kin. 22; 2 Chr. 18-19; Col. 4
June 19	2 Kin. 1-3; Ps. 82; 1 Tim. 1
June 20	2 Kin. 4-5; Ps. 83; 1 Tim. 2
June 21	2 Kin. 6-7; 2 Chr. 20; 1 Tim. 3
June 22	2 Kin. 8-9; 2 Chr. 21; 1 Tim. 4
June 23	2 Kin. 10; 2 Chr. 22-23; 1 Tim. 5
June 24	2 Kin. 11-12; 2 Chr. 24; 1 Tim. 6
June 25	Joel 1-3; 2 Tim. 1
June 26	Jon. 1-4; 2 Tim. 2
June 27	2 Kin. 13-14; 2 Chr. 25; 2 Tim. 3
June 28	Amos 1-3; Ps. 80; 2 Tim. 4
June 29	Amos 4-6; Ps. 86; Titus 1
June 30	Amos 7-9; Ps. 104; Titus 2

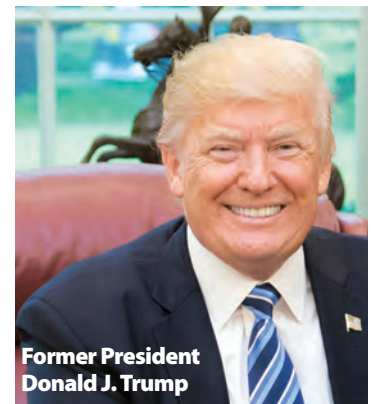
JULY

July 1	Is. 13; Titus 3
July 2	Is. 4-5; Ps. 115-116; Jude
July 3	Is. 6-7; 2 Chr. 26-27; Philemon
July 4	2 Kin. 15-16; Hos. 1; Heb. 1
July 5	Hos. 2-5; Heb. 2
July 6	Hos. 6-9; Heb. 3
July 7	Hos. 10-12; Ps. 73; Heb. 4
July 8	Hos. 13-14; Ps. 100, 102; Heb. 5
July 9	Mic. 1-4; Heb. 6
July 10	Mic. 5-7; Heb. 7
July 11	Is. 8-10; Heb. 8
July 12	Is. 11-14; Heb. 9
July 13	Is. 15-18; Heb. 10
July 14	Is. 19-21; Heb. 11
July 15	Is. 22-24; Heb. 12
July 16	Is. 25-28; Heb. 13
July 17	Is. 29-31; James 1
July 18	Is. 32-35; James 2
July 19	2 Kin. 17; 2 Chr. 28; Ps. 46; Jms 3
July 20	2 Chr. 29-31; James 4
July 21	2 Kin. 18-19; 2 Chr. 32; James 5
July 22	Is. 36-37; Ps. 76; 1 Pet. 1
July 23	2 Kin. 20; Is. 38-39; Ps. 75; 1 Pet. 2
July 24	Is. 40-42; 1 Pet. 3
July 25	Is. 43-45; 1 Pet. 4
July 26	Is. 46-49; 1 Pet. 5
July 27	Is. 50-52; Ps. 92; 2 Pet. 1
July 28	Is. 53-56; 2 Pet. 2
July 29	Is. 57-59; Ps. 103; 2 Pet. 3
July 30	Is. 60-62; John 1
July 31	Is. 63-64; Ps. 107; John 2

Trump Launches New Online Platform to Remain 'Tireless Champion' for Americans

Former President Donald Trump is following in the footsteps of embattled Mike Lindell in taking the first steps to allegedly create his own social media platform by launching an online site called *45office.com*.

The site is a place to “fulfill our promise to put America first,” the website’s homepage reads. “Through this office, President Trump will remain a tireless champion for the hardworking men



Former President Donald J. Trump

and women of our great country—and for their right to live in safety, dignity, prosperity and peace.”

This news follows the reports of Trump’s desire to create his own social media platform, which would be “the hottest ticket in social media,” according to Trump’s adviser Jason Miller. “It’s going to completely redefine the game, and everybody is going to be waiting and watching to see what exactly President Trump does.”

WHY CHRIST DIED

Many articles have written about the crucifixion of Christ and the agony He suffered for us. It would be difficult to exaggerate on this subject. The prophet Isaiah, when foreseeing the sufferings of Christ, said *"His visage (face) was so marred more than any man, and his form (body) more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle (cleanse from sin) many nations..."* Isaiah 52:14-15. We have heard perhaps for generations that He was beaten with 39 stripes, which was the limit set by the Jewish law. Jesus, however, was beaten under the Roman law, which had no such limitations. It was this beating at the hands of Roman soldiers that marred His face and body beyond recognition. The crown of thorns which they beat into His brow blackened both His eyes, and further marred His visage. Jesus knew by the scriptures what torture awaited Him. It was for fear of these things He *"offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death..."* Hebrews 5:7.

"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Matthew 26:39

"And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

Luke 22:14

"O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." Matthew 26:42

We can read the entire record of Jesus in Gethsemane in about sixty seconds, yet these same appeals were made to His Father for a full three hours. The agony of Gethsemane may have killed most of us, but Jesus's sufferings for our salvation only truly began after He cried *"Thy will be done"* a final time. Jesus assured us that no one was taking his life. He said, *"I lay it down of myself"* John 10:18. Jesus told Peter, *"Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"* Matthew 26:53-54. When Pilate said, *"knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?"* John 19:10, Jesus answered, *"Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above"* verse 11.

If we believe these sayings of Jesus, we understand there was absolutely no power on earth that could put Jesus on the cross. No one is to be blamed; not the Romans, not the Jews, and not Pilate. Nothing less than the will of His Father in Heaven could put Jesus on the cross. That being the case, why would our almighty God not only allow, but *"will"* the horrible sufferings and death of His only begotten Son on the cross. Perhaps the prophet Isaiah pointed the way for those who can see. When describing His face and body as *"marred more than any man"* Isaiah 52:14, he said, *"So shall He sprinkle many nations"* verse 15. With these six words he revealed the purpose for which Jesus died.

The "sprinkling" of animal blood was symbolic cleansing

under the Law of Moses, as confirmed by Paul to the Hebrews; *"Moreover he (Moses) sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission"* Hebrews 9:22. Paul gave a comparison between animal blood and the blood of Christ in the same chapter; *"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"* Hebrews 9:13-14. The blood of Christ did much more than just ceremonially wash the outer body. It was shed to wash sin from our hearts.

Many people search Moses' Law, seeking to discover in the Law what Christ came into the world to do. To do this is a tragic error, leading many to believe the blood of Jesus to be nothing more than a "once forever covering for sins." The Apostle Paul clearly denies this thinking. *"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"* Romans 8:3. If you truly want to understand the incarnation and why Christ became a man, search the scriptures to discover *"what the law could not do."*

"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God." Hebrews 10:4-7

The Apostle John began his gospel, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made"* John 1:1-3. This same relationship continued between God and *"the Word"* from the beginning of creation until about four thousand years after the earth was cursed by sin through Adam's disobedience. After so long a time, *"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us"* John 1:14, and John added, *"we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father."*

"Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me..."

Jesus said *"you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* John 8:32. A clear understanding of Hebrews 10:1-10 will free the sincere seeker from centuries of erroneous teaching and fables which have held multitudes of people in bondage to sin. As Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees in His day, many teachers

continue to “make the word of God of none effect” Mark 7:13 through the traditions of men which they teach as Biblical doctrine. Notice it was Christ in the moment of His incarnation (“when He cometh into the world”) who said, “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not.” If the children of Israel had not refused to hear the voice God at Mount Sinai Exodus 20:19, they would have never offered animal sacrifices. God said through Jeremiah, **“I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice...”** Jeremiah 7:22-23. God said **“I hate your feast days...”** Amos 5:21. David, in godly sorrow for sin, said, **“Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it”** Psalms 51:16. God said in the first chapter of Isaiah’s prophecy, **“I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats”** Isaiah 1:11, and He said in the last, **“He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck”** Isaiah 66:3. Why did God so despise the offerings of animal blood? **“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”** The Apostle Paul reminds us that the Law of Moses served only as a “yoke of bondage” to all who trusted in it Galatians 5:1.

“I come to do thy will O God...”

The “will of God” was that the holy body and blood of Christ which God prepared in the womb of Mary would one day be offered as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” John 1:29. The same day sin entered the through the serpent’s deception and Adam’s disobedience, God promised a “seed of the Woman” who would “bruise the head of the serpent” Genesis 3:15. Daniel said “the Messiah the Prince” would come to “make an end of sins” Daniel 9:24-25. The Apostle Paul said it was “through death” that Christ “destroyed the devil” Hebrews 2:14. If the blood of animals could not “take away sin,” the precious holy blood of the Son of God would. The infant Jesus, lying in the manger, had but one purpose to fulfill, and it would require His death on the cross. He was “the seed of the woman” who came “to bruise the head of the serpent” Genesis 3:15. He was “The Messiah, the Prince,” who was come “to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness” Daniel 9:24-25.

“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Hebrews 10:10

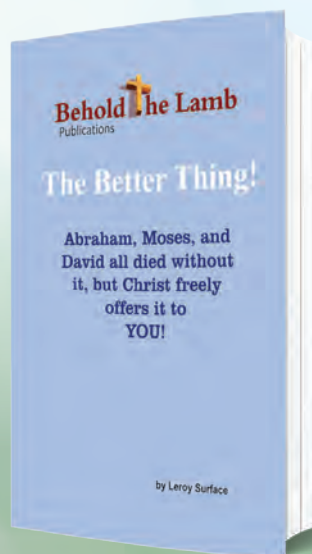
The will of God in the death of His Son on the cross was the “sanctification” of the people, that is, to “take away their sin,” and “make them holy.” This could not be through a lifetime process of sanctification, but only “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” When Jesus

said on the cross, “It is finished,” it was finished for all who would believe upon Jesus Christ.

“Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.” Hebrews 13:12

The Apostle John said, “And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not...” I John 3:5-6. When John wrote to believers in His generation, saying “And ye know...,” it is obvious that what he said was common knowledge among the children of God. In our generation, it seems many believers have traded the testimony of the scripture for religious promises which God’s word never gave. They want to believe their sins are covered from God’s sight and they can never be judged because their penalty or debt has been paid. Yet for anyone who will simply believe the word of God, the record is clear. Jesus Christ came into the world and gave his life to take away your sin so that you might truly be free!

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2



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She Is Still Breaking Chains

Renowned spirit-filled artist **Tasha Cobbs Leonard** was named *Billboard's* top gospel artist of the decade in 2020. We take a close-up look at the woman whose hit “Break Every Chain” became an instant classic.

BY ADRIENNE GAINES

Tasha Cobbs Leonard was born into a musical family, but she didn't sing in public until she was 15—and that only out of necessity. She was directing a community choir filled with other teenagers when the person scheduled to lead a key song couldn't make it to the concert in time.

“Everybody was looking at me like, ‘Tasha, you're going to have to do this song,’” Cobbs Leonard says. “I'm thinking, *I don't sing in front of people. I'm here to direct the choir.*” She ended up singing the solo, her eyes closed in nervousness.

“When I opened my eyes, people were in tears,” she says. “They were at the altar in worship, crying out to God with hands lifted. ... everybody was just lost in the presence of God.”

Cobbs Leonard is no doubt a powerhouse vocalist, but her vocal prowess alone has not caused songs such as

“Break Every Chain,” “You Know My Name,” and “This Is a Move” to resonate with audiences around the world and win Grammy, Dove and Stellar awards. So much more than her voice led to her being named *Billboard's* Top Gospel Artist of the Decade at the end of 2020.

Cobbs Leonard's acclaim comes instead because her songs carry an anointing and authority that has broken true chains in people's lives and caused them to believe the words she sings. It comes because she's a prophet and preacher as much as a singer, and regardless of the venue—Lakewood Church, Liberty University or the Essence Music Festival—she's the same Cobbs Leonard who flows in and out of all those gifts.

“I have an assurance that when I lift my voice or my instrument, that God is going to show up, or that healing is going to show up or freedom will show up, because this is the gift God has given me,” Cobbs Leonard says. “That's

Tasha Cobbs Leonard

the confidence that I stand in when I'm ministering."

Cobbs Leonard grew up in the church her parents pastored, Jesup New Life Ministries in Jesup, Georgia. Her father, the late Bishop Fritz Cobbs, cultivated the preaching and prophetic gifts he saw in her as she moved toward leading worship at the church. In 2005, while attending a ministry conference, she heard the Lord say she had four months to move to Atlanta. At the same conference, the Lord spoke to well-known gospel artist Bishop William Murphy, worship leader for the event, and told him to start a church.

Four months to the day God spoke to her, Cobbs Leonard moved to Atlanta! Upon arrival, she attended the inaugural service of the church where her cousin was leading worship. It happened to be Murphy's brand-new dReam Center Church.

That day, in a jam-packed room, only one person joined the church, which Murphy says was "completely deflating." But in what the two now see as a divine synchronicity, that one person was Cobbs Leonard.

Given the blessing of Cobbs Leonard's father, Murphy became a spiritual mentor, training her in prophetic worship. She eventually became the church's worship pastor and traveled with him in ministry.

"William Murphy gave me the grace to grow," Cobbs Leonard says. "He would go on social media and say, 'This is my daughter, Tasha Cobbs, and she's a bridge to the nations.'"

But it wasn't until she released "Break Every Chain" that she understood what those words meant. "It became real to me," she says. "I just loved that he saw it 15 years ago, before I did."

Murphy says he quickly realized that though Cobbs Leonard wasn't his biological daughter, her calling connected with his. "I knew Tasha had taken on a part of the mantle that's upon my life, and that was to be a bridge to pull different cultures and colors and denominations together," Murphy says. "That's always been a signature of my ministry, that my

songs have always been cross-cultural, that you can go into any denomination and hear a William Murphy song. Well, that's been magnified times 10 with Tasha Cobbs."

"For years, the church has been so fractured and so divided, and of course music is the language that creates synergy and unity," he adds. "Just name any one of her songs; those are bridges that people of charismatic backgrounds or Pentecostal backgrounds or white or Black or Latino—they all sing them. And they're all blessed by them, and it creates bridges, because now I can walk into a room and sing a William Murphy song or a Tasha Cobbs song, and everybody in the room—regardless of race, creed or color—is singing. That's what it means to be a bridge."


Breaking Chains

Although people would weep and run to the altar when Cobbs Leonard ministered, off the platform, she was going through a battle. "I was dealing with depression, suffering from rejection," she says. "There would be seasons in my life where I would minister to people, kiss babies, hug people and watch people be delivered and set free, and I would go home for days and be in a dark room crying and under the covers, really warring with depression."

After she and some friends ministered at another church one night, she was making the three-hour drive back to Atlanta, listening to songs on rotation on her phone as everyone else slept. That's when "Break Every Chain" started to play. At the first three words, "There is power," tears ran down her face.

"That song spoke to me spiritually," Cobbs Leonard says. "At that moment, I felt those chains of depression and rejection and darkness and fear and anxiety breaking off of my life. For the entire three hours, I put that song on repeat, and I allowed the Holy Spirit to minister to my heart. For probably about two weeks, it was the only thing that you would hear in my house."

She began to minister "Break Every Chain" at her church and saw people experience God's power to break chains



"Each time we minister 'Break Every Chain,' God's Spirit meets us in a different way."

—Tasha Cobbs Leonard

in their own lives. When it was time to record her album, *Grace*, which released in 2013, she knew she had to include it.

"I knew that song ministered to me, and I knew it would bless people," Cobbs Leonard says. She had no idea it would minister across racial and denominational lines and resonate with people around the world.

Through the years, she has received multiple testimonies about how the song changed lives. One woman wrote about her husband, who lay in the hospital, paralyzed and comatose, while she played "Break Every Chain" in his room 24/7. Cobbs Leonard says, "She said, 'I'm writing you to let you know that my husband is completely



minister ‘Break Every Chain,’ God’s Spirit meets us in a different way,” she says. “It is absolutely always refreshing. That song, it changed my life.”

As for her battle with depression, Cobbs Leonard has been candid about seeking help from a counselor as well as seeking God. “Prayer works, and we know that,” she says. “But God has also given us the responsibility to do what we can do as it pertains to moving forward in our purpose. I don’t think it’s an either-or thing; it’s both [prayer and counseling].”

Cobbs Leonard also began confessing daily, “I curse the spirit of rejection, and I receive the spirit of adoption.” It’s a practice she continues to this day. “Though my testimony is that I’ve never been back in that dark place, I’ve experienced it trying to come back. But I just will not allow it in my life because I know who I am.”

Crossing Boundaries

As “Break Every Chain” stretched across cultures, Cobbs Leonard gained a new understanding of her purpose in ministry. “I’m always Tasha no matter where I am; you’re always going to get the Pentecostal squall, the shouts,” she says. “It’s just who I am. ... I am always positioning myself where, no matter who you are, there’s something about my ministry that you can relate to.”

As a case in point, her most recent project, *Royalty Live*, was recorded at Nashville’s Ryman Auditorium and has some country influences. She has recorded songs with a cross-section of artists, from gospel singer Kierra Sheard-Kelly to the country-tinged We The Kingdom. U.K. worship leader Matt Redman wrote her song “Gracefully Broken,” and Cobbs Leonard performed her chart-topping “You Know My Name” with worship leader Jimi Cravity.

But her most controversial pairing thus far was with hip-hop artist Nicki Minaj, featured on “I’m Getting Ready” from her album *Heart. Passion. Pursuit*. Many observers found it ironic that Minaj, known for her explicit lyrics, had a song at the top of the Billboard gospel charts. But Cobbs Leonard says she doesn’t

free, completely healed, completely whole as I write this letter to you, and I just want to say thank you for your yes to God.”

On another occasion, she was ministering before thousands of students at Liberty University’s convocation. During the service, an announcement was made: A traumatic car accident had injured three students. One of them, Ruthie Rogers, had been placed on a ventilator with bleeding on her brain, completely paralyzed on her left side. As Rogers’ mother streamed the service into her hospital room, Cobbs Leonard began ministering “Break Every Chain.”

“We started to declare that the power that’s in the name of Jesus

is breaking those chains off ... and that she’s responding to her doctors and that she will walk again,” Cobbs Leonard says.

While they were still singing, campus pastor David Nasser shared with the assembled group a text message update: “The ventilator is off. Both of her legs are now moving.”

“I believe it was a modern-day miracle, which most people don’t get to witness,” Rogers says about what happened that day. Although she still faced a long healing process, she says, “Before convocation, a full recovery wasn’t on anyone’s mind.”

Stories like these explain why Cobbs Leonard never gets tired of singing that song. “Each time we



“It is my assignment to bring the awareness of God’s presence no matter where I am.”

-Tasha Cobbs Leonard

regret the collaboration. She’s heard from people who told her that song got their attention because of Minaj but ultimately led them back into relationship with Christ.

“It is my assignment to bring the awareness of God’s presence no matter where I am,” Cobbs Leonard says. “And I believe that song gave me an opportunity to reach millions of people I may have never been able to reach had it not been for the door God used through Nicki Minaj.”

Cobbs Leonard acknowledges there are additional challenges that come with being a bridge connecting diverse people and cultures. “You run into racism; you run into hatred; you run into injustice,” she says.

“It’s a very, very thin line that you have to walk, and it’s not always easy.”

Yet with the rise of young worship artists such as Chandler Moore, Naomi Raine and Brandon Lake as well as Maverick City Music, which features a cross section of artists from diverse racial backgrounds and musical genres uniting in worship, she sees the walls that divide Christians breaking down even further.

“This is something we’ve been working toward now for a decade, and now to watch these doors open where there’s so much kingdom that’s embedded in what they’re doing, it makes me so proud,” she says. “I know that our world has experienced a lot of friction and a lot of pain as it pertains

to injustice, but I’m always looking at where Christ is and how Christ is always in the midst of it. And to watch how ministries like Maverick City are being birthed, I know that God’s hand is still at work and He gets the glory out of every situation.”

Obeying God

On April 11, 2020, one month after the COVID-19 pandemic put most of the country in lockdown, Cobbs Leonard and her husband, music producer Kenny Leonard, whom she married in 2017, started The Purpose Place in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Church services have been virtual thus far, but Cobbs Leonard says she’s been amazed at the hunger she has seen in the congregation, even online.

“It’s been so refreshing to be able to watch this community of people grow spiritually from their homes,” she says. “To watch them log on with their hands lifted, prepared for worship, crying in their homes, some of them with their pajamas on—it has been such a refreshing experience for me.”

Cobbs Leonard believes when churches are meeting unhindered in buildings again, the challenges the pandemic brought won’t have been in vain. “I believe it was a reboot, like a revival for us to explore personal relationships with Jesus Christ again outside of having a worship leader tell you, ‘Lift your hand,’” she says. “We do it on our own now. Instead of having an intercessor to tell you, ‘Now is our time to pray,’ we pray on our own now. We study the Word of God on our own.”

In many ways, she says, the pandemic has done the church a favor. “I believe more people have now had an opportunity to see and hear the Word of God than ever would have if we had not had to leave our churches,” she says.

While some worry that physical church attendance will never return to pre-COVID levels, Cobbs Leonard remains optimistic. “I do agree that the church will never be the same,” she says. “I don’t believe we’ll ever go back to how it was, and I don’t want to. I believe we’re going to grow from

this encounter. I know churches may be thinking people aren't coming, but I would beg to differ. I believe they're going to crowd our churches because they're going to be looking for a Savior to help them manage the trauma that they've gone through. And the church will be prepared to serve them."

In addition to her church ministry at The Purpose Place, Cobbs Leonard oversees an imprint, TeeLee Records, through her label, Motown Gospel. She plans to release music from those who are also called to impact the nations. Her first artist, Anna Golden, sang on Radio Disney as a teenager before becoming a worship leader at her church. Cobbs Leonard describes her as "relevant and necessary voice to this generation" whose "influence has already crossed barriers and built bridges culturally." Golden's single "Peace" released in April 2020, and her album *Peace Live* debuted in May 2021.

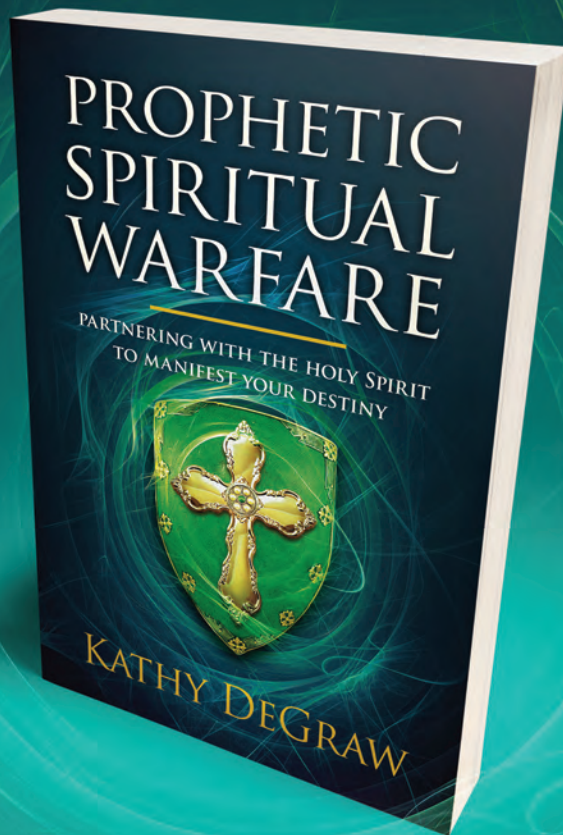
Murphy says Cobbs Leonard's influence comes as a result of her faithfulness to obey God's calling. "Everybody wants to be famous, and everybody wants to be great, but fame is the result of faithfulness," he says. "She was faithful to her dad's ministry, faithful to our ministry, and now God has given her her own ministry. People call it the secret of success, but it's really not a secret. It's a formula. You do what your Father's asked you to do."

Despite seeing God do so many incredible things through her music ministry, Cobbs Leonard says she never ceases to be amazed by God's goodness. "All my life I've been prophesied to that God is going to do something great through me," she says. "But no matter how He makes it happen, my mind is always blown by His goodness, by how amazing He is. I know that God is good. I know that He's great, and I don't discount that. But every single time He does something, it is amazing, and it's always mind-blowing."◀

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ADRIENNE S. GAINES is a writer and editor based in Central Florida.

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truth.

**Love isn't a strategy. Love is a person,
and He is calling us to share Him.**



BY CHOCO DE JESÚS

In the church and business worlds, people go to conferences and read books to discover strategies for growth. That's why I say that love isn't a strategy; it's a lifestyle. You can't uncover "five surefire steps to love people" just like that. Jesus didn't give us a checklist to follow. He gave us Himself. We fail to love when we see people as "the other," but Jesus became "the other," identifying with those who are infinitely below Him and loving us still. Moving forward, keep these points in mind:

» **We may not approve of the lifestyle of gay or lesbian individuals, but they are not "the other."** They're created in the image of God, and God loves them as much as He loves you and me.

» **We may not agree with a person's political views, but we don't have to assume it's a character flaw to advocate for his or her positions.**

» **We don't know everything, and in fact we've been wrong far too often, which should bring us at least a hint of humility.**

» **We may be upset with the attitudes and behaviors of family members, but they need the grace and love of Jesus as much as we do.**

Love breaks down the walls separating us from "the other." These people are more valuable to God than the stars in the sky. If we begin to see them the way God sees them, we'll start to love them the way He loves them. Many of us will need to admit that we have gone years professing Christ but have failed to love people. Let me tell you a few stories of people learning to love.

Learning a Life of Love

A lady who joined our church came to my office one day, weeping. She told me, "Pastor Choco, I've wasted so much of my life! I didn't love, and I didn't know how to love. I'm finally realizing how much God loves me and how I can love others."

She had been a member of another church for 37 years, but during all that time, the church hadn't done much to care for people outside their walls. When she came to our church, she immediately got involved in feeding the poor and providing for the homeless. Her active service ignited her spiritual life. She experienced more love than she'd ever known before, and it poured out of her to people in need.

Matthew is a young man who was raised in a safe, white, affluent suburb of Chicago. His neighborhood was the polar opposite of Humboldt Park [the impoverished, inner-city neighborhood where I grew up]. When he enrolled in our church's Master's Commission, he instantly became a minority since he was the only white person in the program.

"Before I came, I never considered myself to be prejudiced," he told me, "but I was seldom around people who were very different from me. When I got here, I soon realized I had an unseen but very real sense of racial and cultural superiority. I had to face the fact that I really thought I was better than people with Black or brown skin. I used sarcasm to distance myself from the people around me and subtly put them down. I always did it with a smile, but they knew—and I knew—that I thought I was better than them."

After a second or two, he continued, "The sarcasm was a cover for my insecurity. I didn't feel comfortable out of my culture, and this



was the only way I knew to cope.”

Matthew ruffled a lot of feathers in his first several months at the Master’s Commission, but he didn’t realize how he had offended people until another student confronted him. “At that moment,” he explains, “I stood face to face with the ugliest part of me. I had belittled people so I could feel superior.” He made a conscious choice to repent: to change his agenda, change his perspective, change his words and change his relationships. He apologized to the people he had offended—which was just about everybody—and he made a concerted effort to speak words of affirmation instead of sarcastic condemnation.

“I still caught myself being sarcastic, but I was able to stop and apologize right away. People were very kind to encourage me as I trusted God to change me,” Matthew said. He took a deep breath and added this final thought: “The transformation has been slower than I’d like, but it’s happening. I’m grateful for that.”

A Personal Experience of Learning to Love

Years ago, Promise Keepers held a conference at Soldier Field in Chicago for almost 70,000 men. A man in the audience listened carefully as one of the speakers talked passionately about racial reconciliation. He didn’t think the message related to him because he was sure

he wasn’t prejudiced toward anyone. He was a Puerto Rican, but he had friends who were all colors and from different national origins. The speaker asked the audience to get up and make a physical demonstration of their unity by hugging people who looked different from them.

All over the stadium, men from different ethnic and racial backgrounds hugged each other. During this time, the Holy Spirit whispered to the man in the audience, “Sure, you get along with people who aren’t like you, but you don’t really love them.” Instantly, he knew what the Spirit was saying was true.

His mind went back to instances in his past of running away from white kids who wanted to beat him up and being scared of gangs of Blacks. He had avoided them for years, and he had learned to tolerate them. But the Spirit was asking a different question. It wasn’t “Do you despise them?” He could say no to that. But this was “Do you love them?” and he realized he didn’t. He went to the altar to pray and confess his sin of not loving his neighbor, and then he got up and hugged every man within reach.

That man was me. God was moving in my heart to prepare me to be a minister of reconciliation in Humboldt Park and beyond, but first, He had to work a miracle of repentance in my heart. A lifestyle of loving people across racial barriers began that day.

Walking in God’s Unending Love

Not long after Jesus rose from the tomb and ascended back to the Father, the disciples were busy telling everyone who would listen about Him and helping the new believers grow in their faith. One day as Peter and John were on their way to the temple to pray, they passed by a lame man who was being carried to the temple gate to beg. When he saw the two men, the lame man asked them for money. Peter told him, “Look at us!” The beggar expected Peter to hand him a coin, but the apostle had a different offer: “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6, NIV).

Peter took the man by the hand. Immediately, his feet and hands were strengthened, and he jumped to his feet. Luke, the author of Acts, tells us:

“Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him” (Acts 3:8b-10).

Love propelled Peter to notice a man who had a chronic need and had given up on ever getting well. At that moment, Peter may have remembered that Jesus had reached out His hand to him when he stepped out of the

MORE INFORMATION

Love demands more of us than we often want to give. It's easy to love a lovely person, but what about the rest?



boat to walk toward Him and began to sink (Matt. 14:31).

At the temple gate, the lame man received something he never expected. It was a shock to him and to everyone else there. We don't know how much money Peter and John had on them. They may have had a contribution to give at the temple that day, or their pockets may have been empty. But they gave something we can always give—love.

Too often today, the images of the church are of angry faces. Anger is rising up when love needs to rise up. Loving the people who threaten us or disagree with us is hard, but never

overcome it” (Matthew 16:13b–18).

Jesus was saying that even where we're most threatened, He's the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. The place He took the disciples was named for Caesar, the Roman emperor, the most powerful ruler on earth, but Jesus was and is far more powerful.

He spoke, and the stars were flung into space. Nothing matches His supreme authority and power. The pagans believed Caesarea Philippi contained an entrance to the underworld, a dangerous place, but Jesus rescues us from the greatest threat the world has ever known: sin, death and hell. The pagan beliefs ran against everything the Jews believed, from promiscuity to idol worship, but in this very place, Jesus was proclaimed as Lord of all.

When we look around at the degradation of our culture and the poisonous language in our online

one person, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to turn the world upside down (in a good way).

A *family* who loves this way has a mission, a cause and a purpose to be salt to season and preserve their neighborhood. And this family will leave a legacy of love from generation to generation.

A *small group* can work together to make a difference in the community, to be present as Jesus' hands, feet and voice in the lives of people who have lost hope. Each person in the group brings unique talents and gifts.

A *church community* can marshal its resources and work with other churches to provide ongoing services in their neighborhoods. They may start small, but if they catch God's heart, they'll find creative, bold ways to touch far more people than they could have imagined.

It takes only one church with this loving spirit to launch a tidal wave of compassion as other churches join in to care for people throughout the city. The church will be a beacon of hope in the community and a resource to equip other churches to get involved in loving people others ignore.

Don't set your gaze on what's wrong with the world. That leads only to pride that we aren't like "them" and discouragement that we're losing ground. Instead, rivet your heart on Jesus. Embrace your assignment, which is the commission God has given you to love people who are hard to love. You're already thinking about them. Don't wait. Love them today, and see how God uses you to change minds, hearts and lives. ◀

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“At the temple gate, the lame man received something he never expected. It was a shock to him and to everyone else there.

forget that Jesus found a way. In the middle of His ministry, Jesus took His disciples to Caesarea Philippi, a pagan region in the northern part of the country, far from the temple in Jerusalem. They were in enemy territory. Jesus asked them, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not

communication, in families and in politics, we can be deeply discouraged and furious, or we can remember that Jesus still rules and that Jesus still loves.

With this assurance, we can be agents of a love who surprise the people around us. Yes, we may disagree, but we love them anyway. Yes, we don't want to live like them, but we love them anyway. Yes, they've made tragic mistakes, but we love them anyway. This kind of love shouldn't be rare. It should be the norm for the family of God, among ourselves and as we relate to people outside the family.

What Difference Will It Make To Love Them Anyway?

A *single individual* becomes an agent of change and a source of light. After all, it took the love of only



When healing doesn't happen, it can be disheartening.

When Healing Doesn't Come

We know Jesus can heal. We always want to pray in faith.
But how do we respond when a miracle doesn't happen?

BY SARAH BOWLING

My daughter needs a miracle.” Several years ago I heard these words in a phone call I received late one night from a man in our church. I had known him for many years, and he was like a brother. His daughter was barely 2 years old. I told him we would be praying and asked where they were and if it would be OK for my husband to come to the hospital. I couldn't go since our two kids were infants and sleeping at that time.

This story ended in tragedy. I still feel the memories of that journey: believing in faith for her healing, listening to the discouraging doctor's reports, doing a church-wide prayer vigil, walking with the family through the experience and wrestling with God when this beautiful little girl died.

Perhaps this experience is seared into my soul because my kids were similar in age to the little girl who died. I desperately wanted her to be healed—for a witness to the doctors, for comfort to her parents, for evidence of the power of faith, for God's glory and many more justifiable reasons. Nevertheless, she died, and my family and my church family faced a challenging journey filled with intense grief.

When healing doesn't come, the hurt can run deep. After going through this crisis, I found myself angry, frustrated, confused, disappointed and uncertain about God. I even felt disconnected from Him. Some of my rants went like this: “Since You didn't heal this little girl, why would I continue to put my faith and trust in You? You don't seem very trustworthy right now. How can You say You're loving when You let an innocent little girl suffer so horribly?”

I spoke some harsh words to God, and as I look back on this journey, I'm grateful I was so real and raw.

If you're reading this article, I suspect you may have had some negative experiences with healing, or you may know someone who finds it difficult to trust God because of a healing dilemma. Perhaps you have some of these questions:

» **Is it possible to constructively reconcile what the Bible says about healing with some of our modern experiences?**

» **What do we do when we face dissonance between a healing deficiency in our lives and what we read about in the ministry of Jesus, who healed all kinds of people in all kinds of situations?**

» **What do we do when we ask God to heal, but nothing happens?**

» **Why didn't healing happen?**

» **How can we trust God amidst disappointment or devastation?**

Let's wrestle with this healing predicament using the familiar questions—why, who, where, how and what—since “When Healing Doesn't Happen” is the springboard for our journey.

Why?

When we wrestle with these questions, it's only natural to ask, “Why?” Why didn't I get healed? Why didn't my relative or friend get healed? Why didn't I get the miracle I was believing God for? Why does the Bible tell me to pray and ask for healing if God isn't going to heal?”

“Why?” seems like a reasonable question, one commonly asked when we're disappointed. As we wrestle with this, we must also discover what the Bible says about the absence of healing. Here are some ideas and verses to consider:

» **The struggle to believe:** “And He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matt. 13:58). “Immediately the father of the child cried out with tears, ‘Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!’” (Mark 9:24).

» **The need for obedience:** “But his servants approached and spoke to him, ‘My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more when he said to you, “Wash and be clean?”’” (2 Kings 5:13).

» **Sketchy motives:** “You ask, and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your passions” (James 4:3).

» **A lack of compassion:** “Whoever shuts his ears at the

“We can choose to remain faithful to God no matter what happens with healing or miracles.”

Marilyn Hickey and her daughter, Sarah Bowling



cry of the poor, he also will cry himself, but will not be heard” (Prov. 21:13).

Ultimately, the “why” question is tricky because we can work on all the reasons to get healed and still not receive healing. Let’s also consider that healing and miracles don’t happen from guaranteed formulas—if we do steps No. 1, 2 and 3, God will wave His healing wand, and healing will magically appear. When we have this mentality, we may be setting ourselves up to be disappointed. If you find yourself in this quicksand, I want to encourage you to wrestle with God rather than disappear into your frustration, anger, disappointment, pain, grief and questions. In raw honesty, I don’t know why healing doesn’t always happen.

Who?

The question of “who” comes up in two ways—directly and indirectly. We ask the direct question “Who is God?” when healing doesn’t happen. Perhaps we have been taught and believe that God is all-powerful and loving, so when healing doesn’t happen, we find ourselves questioning His identity. We try to reconcile our earthly living, with its pain, grief,

disappointment and questions, with God, who is supposed to be loving, compassionate, omnipotent, gracious, healing and caring.

Who is God? Is God really who He says He is? Is God loving? Compassionate? Engaged? Concerned? When healing doesn’t happen, let’s watch how that might affect our perceptions and beliefs about God’s identity, keeping in mind that Satan always wants to distort our view.

The “who” question also comes into play indirectly with believers around us who might be less than compassionate or gentle. This common experience has occurred since the onset of human existence. I remind you of Job’s friends, who sit with him in the worst experiences of his life. When they first observe Job’s suffering, they remain quiet for seven days. In my opinion, these are their most helpful days as Job’s friends. Once they start talking (Job 4-37), the situation moves from harsh to horrendous.

Job’s friends want him to own up to his failures and shortfalls as the reason for his immense suffering. I don’t understand how that would be either constructive or compassionate. Yet there is no shortage of

Christians who blame and criticize fellow believers when they suffer, accusing them of wrongdoing and erasing any compassion or empathy from their conversations. I pray that the goodness of God would confront such critical people, leading them to repent and align more authentically with genuine love.

Where?

When we think about the “where” question, our thoughts may automatically travel to the actual location where healing didn’t happen. Perhaps we think about the hospital, church, prayer group, home situation or other place where we petitioned God for His intervention.

Though we can associate a location with the emotions we experience from the lack of healing, I’d like to ask another “where” question you might find helpful: Where does a lack of healing position you (or your relative or friend) on the faith journey?

Sometimes I think we look at healing as the ultimate destination in our path of faith. When and if healing doesn’t happen, perhaps the development of our faith takes a hit or suffers a catastrophic collapse. I’ve met loads of people who park in the disappointment, anger, frustration, pain, discouragement and various emotions that arise.

Mary, Lazarus’ sister, is someone who feels disappointed in Jesus for not healing her brother. She falls at His feet in a puddle of tears (John 11:32-33). As I read this chapter, I don’t see Mary get up and follow Jesus to Lazarus’ tomb. In contrast, her sister, Martha, goes with Jesus to Lazarus’ tomb and sees her brother raised from the dead and bursting from the grave. We must allow ourselves to experience the healthy array of emotions that can accompany disappointment in a lack of healing. But let’s determine to keep walking with Jesus rather than remaining parked in despair.

If you’re walking alongside someone who is wrestling with the absence of healing, I’d encourage

you to be gentle, patient, kind, compassionate, steady and present with this person.

How?

How can we reconcile our belief in God with the absence of healing? There's no shortage of Bible verses that talk about healing, encouraging us to be persistent in our petitions to God and keep strong in faith. While I recognize that the Bible has valuable insights related to healing, endurance and more, I think we would be wise to keep some core principles embedded in our hearts and thoughts.

Here are some truths for reflection:

» **God's character doesn't change regardless of the presence or absence of healing.** "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no change or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

» **Genuine love is our highest priority.** "If I have the gift of prophecy,

and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).

» **We can choose to remain faithful to God no matter what happens with healing or miracles.** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego demonstrate this when they are confronted with the fiery furnace and the option to surrender their faith to keep their lives. "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up" (Dan. 3:17-18).

What?

What should we think about healing when it doesn't happen? Should we quit praying for the sick?

Should we keep our distance from the subject? Should we warn others about impending disappointment? What can we do when healing doesn't happen?

These are all good questions, along with heaps more. For some answers, let's begin with some essential and unchanging truths that can anchor our souls. Scripture tells us God is all-knowing, and His ways are higher than our ways (Isa. 55:8-9). We must come to terms with the reality that God chooses to do things differently than we would often desire.

It's also important to consider that God's character remains stable in our dark valleys. Remember what David says in Psalm 23:4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." Understanding that God's lovingkindness endures forever (Ps. 136) has

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been a steady anchor for my soul. Let's remember that no matter what we go through or how we feel, God is genuine love and nothing less (1 John 4:8).

We must also remember that Satan always wants to deceive us. Part of his plan includes distorting God's character and identity from who we perceive Him to be. Satan's schemes include telling us God doesn't care or that He is unkind, impatient, unforgiving, unloving, callous and detached. Let us determine to keep walking with God and reject Satan's lies, remembering that Satan is the father of lies, and deception is his native language (John 8:44).

Finally, when healing doesn't happen, I believe true intimacy with God demands that we wrestle with Him in gut-wrenching honesty in our disappointment, pain, frustration, anger and grief. I say this because of reading the psalms David wrote and how honest he was

with God. It's possible that God calls David "a man after His heart" (1 Sam. 13:14b) because he is so vulnerable with Him. Being transparent with God postures us for greater connection and intimacy, and this may be God's endgame. Perhaps God has hardwired each of us for doing life with Him in deep connection.

When healing doesn't happen, it can be disheartening. It can also bring us to a crossroads in our walk with God, where we choose to keep walking with Him even through some somber seasons. I've concluded that while I don't like hardship, and I certainly don't understand His reasoning, I can still keep walking with God, showing up day by day with honesty—frazzled, even limping at times. Let's recall Genesis 32, where Jacob walks away from his wrestling match with God with not only a life-long limp but also a new name and transformed identity.

I leave you with this thought

as I reflect back on the journey I referenced at the beginning of this article. My friend's daughter died, and her death left a sadness lingering in my heart for a very long time. During that time, I wrestled with God, spilling out my heart and emotions, sometimes being angry and disconnecting myself from Him. But I also settled into the reality that God wants to help us in our most unraveled existence, even when we struggle with healing that doesn't happen. In these situations, let's bring God all of our struggles and choose intimacy with Him instead of isolation from Him—even in our darkest days. ◀

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| PROPHECY

WHY WE MUST RECOVER HEALTHY **PROPHETIC** MINISTRY





**Some Christians
have no use
for the gift of
prophecy anymore
because a few
ministers made
mistakes. Here's
why we need this
spiritual gift more
than ever.**

BY DAVID CANNISTRACI

What do you think about all those recent prophetic words that turned out to be so far off? Do you still believe God speaks through people?"

It was an uncomfortable question I'd encountered in the past. Let's face it—the prophetic movement has not been without its controversies. But this question came from an unbeliever. Despite his doubts and my discomfort, it was not blasphemous. And we in the church must consider this question so we can recover and champion healthy prophetic ministry.

Years ago a prophetic minister visited our church and held some meetings. One of our eager young leaders was a newlywed, and his wife was a few months pregnant. The visiting prophetic minister called out this couple and gave them a prophetic word that included a prediction that the child she was carrying would be a boy, and he would be named Christopher.

My heart sank because I knew this type of prophecy was risky and unwise. When the child was born, it was a girl. Not only did this shock and confuse the couple (and all who remembered the prophetic word), but it also seriously undermined the young father's affection for his newborn daughter. He was so eager to be in God's will that he struggled with a result that was different than "what God said."

If you look at what's going on in the prophetic movement today, you may see similar problems. There is an overwhelming array of prophetic ministries, books, seminars and YouTube channels pumping out volumes of prophetic content in various forms on a continual basis. And while there are many examples of healthy prophetic ministry out there, much of it is unhealthy and even dangerous.

How can we tell the good from the bad when it comes to prophetic ministry? Here are five ways we can recover and safely enjoy the many blessings of prophetic ministry in the church:



Pastor David Cannistraci inspires his weekly audience from Gateway's main campus in San Jose, California.

1) Understand the purpose of prophecy. Prophecy is one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit described in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10. A prophecy is simply a message inspired by the Holy Spirit and communicated by a believer. Paul makes it clear some in the body of Christ carry a gift of prophecy, but what's interesting is that he also encourages every believer to desire to both receive and exercise prophetic ministry (see 1 Cor. 14:1, 26-30, 39).

The purpose of prophecy is to strengthen us spiritually and make us more like Jesus. Paul explained it this way: "When someone prophesies, he speaks to encourage people, to build them up, and to bring them comfort ... the one who prophesies builds up the church" (1 Cor. 14:3-4, TPT). Ultimately, a healthy prophetic word brings the right message to the right people at the right time in the right way.

God is a communicator—He speaks and reveals His mind to us in many ways. This means prophecy is a huge blessing because we all need the assurance and comfort of God's voice. Healthy prophetic ministry can even convince the lost: "But if all prophesy and there comes in one who does not believe or one unlearned, he is convinced by all and judged by all. Thus the secrets of his heart are revealed. And so falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you" (1 Cor. 14:24-25, MEV).

It must be said that prophecy is never equivalent to Scripture. Prophecy is a partial revelation of a limited aspect of the mind of God. It comes as a human perception of a divine thought clothed with human words. As such, it is fallible. Only the Bible provides a complete revelation of the essential aspects of God's mind for our lives (2 Tim. 3:16). Still, it

is important to remember that Scripture itself validates and directs prophetic ministry.

2) Champion healthy prophetic ministry. It always amazes me when people attack all prophetic ministry. While they drone on about how some prophetic ministers have made mistakes and how "prophecies shall cease" according to 1 Corinthians 13:8, they forget something important: Prophets and prophetic ministry are championed in Scripture.

Consider just a few of the many verses that do so. Ephesians 2:20 says the church rests on a foundation of apostolic and prophetic ministry. Among other ministries, prophets function "for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service, and for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, into a complete man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13). How can we reject what has been created by God to mature us and make us like Christ?

When people point to examples of failed prophetic ministry, I remind them there are also examples of abuse and neglect in preaching, health care, banking, parenting and every other sphere of human life. Shall we throw all of that away as well? Should our immaturity or imperfection be grounds for shutting down prophetic ministry altogether? Remember, when Paul said, "I desire that you all speak in tongues, but even more that you prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:5a), his audience was the church at Corinth—hardly an elite group of mature believers.

We should never overlook the value of healthy prophetic ministry. Many of us have greatly benefited by welcoming seasoned prophetic voices into our lives. An example of this occurred when a friend and prophetic minister prophesied in our annual leadership conference several years ago. As she spoke into the future of our movement

“A healthy prophetic word brings the right message to the right people at the right time in the right way.”

of churches, she encouraged us all. One key phrase in her prophetic word caught my wife’s attention, and she recalled it months later when our local government began closing churches during the coronavirus pandemic. That small but precise phrase became like a divine green light in our decision to fight in court for the right to reopen our church. We battled for the right to gather all the way to the Supreme Court of the United States—and won! By remembering and responding to a sound prophetic word, we were able to see hundreds of other churches reopen as well.

Healthy prophetic ministry will remain central to God’s plan for the church until we are complete in Christ. Rather than steering us away from prophecy, Scripture is filled with evidence that God loves prophets and prophecy, and He wants plenty of it in our lives. Our focus needs to be on celebrating healthy prophetic ministry, not requiring that it be perfect.

3) Respect boundaries in prophetic ministry. To stay healthy, we need to establish limits and boundaries in every area of life. Too often, we assume that anything goes in prophetic ministry, and that’s a problem. God authorizes prophetic ministry within specific boundaries, and when we ignore them, we’re asking for trouble. Three dimensions of authority that will help to keep us

“in bounds” with prophetic ministry:

»The Gift of Prophecy (Rev. 19:10): When an atmosphere is charged with God’s Spirit, almost anyone can prophesy, regardless of their maturity. The spirit of prophecy refers to an atmosphere

where the voice of God is easily heard by anyone who is listening (see Num. 11:24-30; Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 14:31). For example, the spirit of prophecy was released when Paul laid hands on the new believers at Ephesus who received the Holy Spirit and prophesied (Acts 19:5).

»The Gift of Prophecy (1 Cor 12:10): As mentioned, this is a gift the Holy Spirit gives some believers. Still, every gift needs to be guided by Scripture and developed under the supervision of mature mentors. Even though we may have a gift, proper restraints must be in place so we don’t go too far in directing others or foretelling coming events—a function reserved for those authorized at a higher level (see Acts 2:17; Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:10, 14:1-5).

»The Office of a Prophet (Eph. 4:11): This is an extension of Christ’s earthly ministry as opposed



Pastor David Cannistraci shares a prophetic word about God’s power in difficult times during a weekend gathering at Gateway Church.

5 Guardrails for Those Who Prophecy

Prophecy should encourage people, not hurt them. Here are five ways we can keep prophecy from moving into abuse.

Controversies are swirling around the prophetic movement today. Can we who love and operate in prophetic gifts commit to a few guardrails to keep us from running off the road? Here are five actions prophetic people can take to safeguard people and protect the prophetic movement:

» Be slow to speak. Before we say, “Thus says the Lord,” shouldn’t we take a breath? Jesus warned us we will give an account for every idle word. Restraint of the tongue is a neglected virtue, and while “Thus says the Lord” is a perfectly biblical statement, it might be wise to use it less. “Ready, aim, fire!” is much healthier than “Ready, fire, aim!”

» Discern our motives. We all want every story to have a happy ending—we love healings, victories in elections and timely breakthroughs. But as much as we might desire them, they don’t always come. We must never confuse

our desires for a given outcome with something God is saying. The outcome belongs to the Lord, no matter what. Let’s keep that in mind as we speak what’s in our heart.

» Resist sensationalism. It concerns me that we have incentivized extremes in prophetic ministry. Is our offering or a YouTube view rating more important than the approval of God, our credibility as God’s people or the health of the church? When one says, “An angel appeared to me and said this ...” another is tempted to one-up them and say, “Three angels appeared to me and said this.” Integrity is more valuable than adrenaline.

» Avoid unnecessary specifics. When we prophesy foolish

things such as “This miracle will happen by (a certain date),” or “God showed me who will win the presidency” or “Your unborn child will be a boy named Christopher,” we risk embarrassment, confusion and more. Why not focus on the truly important matters, like the kind of heart God wants us to have or the sacrifices He wants us to make to invite His power?

» Prophecy in team settings. The problem with many prophetic ministries today is that they work alone. Paul taught us that several prophets should be present to judge things together as each one prophesies (1 Cor. 14:29). Why aren’t our prophetic words more carefully screened before they come to the ears of the masses? No matter how mature or gifted we may be, we all have blind spots, and we all need others to stay healthy in prophetic ministry.



to a gift coming from the Holy Spirit. This highest dimension of prophetic ministry carries much more authority than the other two. All prophets have the gift of prophecy, but not all who prophesy are prophets—that’s important. Only established prophets should venture beyond the gift of prophecy into prophetic prediction, correction or direction (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28-29, Eph. 2:20, 4:11; 1 Tim. 4:14).

Keeping these three levels clear is important because it reinforces healthy boundaries. No one should ever assume a level of prophetic

“When it comes to faith in supernatural things, we really only have only three options: We can be cynical, gullible or reasonable.”

authority that has not been given to them by God. Even though I am born again, I don’t drive 18-wheel trucks, practice medicine or create laws. I’m not qualified or authorized to do those things. In the same way, if each of us respects boundaries in prophetic ministry, we’ll be safe and healthy.

4) Test the source of every prophetic message. Hearing God’s voice brings a challenge with it: Inevitably, when we release even well-meaning people to prophesy, we run into mistakes and messes. Prophecy has limitations and must be evaluated to help determine our response to it (1 Cor. 14:29). In fact, the Bible mentions another gift of the Spirit, the discerning of spirits,

right next to the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10). If prophecy were intended to be perfect, why would it need to be evaluated and discerned? I tell our people, "Prophecy is like milk. It can go bad, so smell it carefully before you swallow it."

Some cases of imperfect prophecy require no action in response. Years ago, I heard about a young man who was prophesying about "Shadrach, Meshach and Labingo." He made an innocent mistake, as humans often do. Maybe that's why Scripture says, "Do not despise prophecies. Examine all things. Firmly hold onto what is good" (1 Thess. 5:20-21).

In other cases, prophecies can become unhealthy or even dangerous in their impact, and they need to be corrected. In my mind, what happened with many recent controversial prophecies in the United States could have been born of foolish sensationalism or an immature desire for fame.

Thankfully, several of the prophets involved corrected themselves and apologized. I deeply respect them for that. In any case, discerning the quality and origin of every prophetic word should be standard procedure for every believer.

In retrospect, I was uncomfortable with my unsaved friend's question about failed prophecies because I felt embarrassed and conflicted. I love the church, and I value prophetic ministry, but it's clear that we have drifted into some dangerous waters.

Is it costing us our credibility? I believe we can do better. Healthy prophetic ministry is within our reach if we can honestly face the questions people are rightly asking, dig out the answers in God's Word and recover the purity of this important ministry. It is vital that we do for both those inside the church and outside it.

In the end, I swallowed hard and offered my doubting friend this response: "I understand where

you're coming from, but God does speak through people, and we need to hear what He says. Those prophecies were wrong, but the Bible lays out a framework for sorting out the healthy prophetic words from the unhealthy ones. When it comes to faith in supernatural things, we really only have three options: We can be cynical, gullible or reasonable. To me, listening for what God might be saying and sorting things out is reasonable. When My Creator is speaking, I want to hear what He's saying." ◀

READ MORE: Let prophecy inspire you with the power of the Holy Spirit when you visit prophecy.charismamag.com.

DAVID CANNISTRACI is lead pastor of Gateway City Church, a multisite church based in San Jose, California. Among his most popular books are *Apostles and the Emerging Apostolic Movement* (Regal, 1996) and *Let's Talk About Teams* (Kindle Direct, 2019).



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SET THE CAPTIVES FREE

You may not see it, but women and children in your local area are being bought and sold as sex slaves. God is tasking His church to answer the call and see the captives set free.

BY MAGGIE TURNER

She was only 5 years old when it first happened. I sat beside my friend in the orange jumpsuit as she told me about her involvement in prostitution and drugs. She waited in the cold detention center exam room, facing yet another simple possession charge.

Her voice quivered as she told me how ashamed she felt. “I just made too many bad decisions,” she said. But she also said her mom first engaged in prostitution to keep the two from being homeless after they fled my friend’s abusive father. One night a man soliciting her mother offered to pay extra if she would allow her daughter to participate.

Before my friend had even begun kindergarten, her mother sold her for the first time.

The abuse never stopped. The older she got, the more

frequently it occurred. Now she sat in the detention center, carrying the pain of more than 30 years of abuse, trafficking and exploitation.


Prior to my work with survivors through a South Carolina nonprofit dedicated to fighting sex trafficking and exploitation, I had a sensationalized, Hollywood picture of what sex trafficking looked like. I assumed it always involved kidnapping, being chained to a bed and auctions to the highest bidder—as portrayed in the film *Taken*. And while that does happen today, in the U.S., exploitation and trafficking are much more hidden.

Traffickers skillfully use force, fraud and coercion to control their victims. They often look for individuals with vulnerabilities such as addiction, abandonment, mental illness, financial difficulty or past criminal activity, so they can easily manipulate and control them.

Most people are trafficked by someone they know rather than a stranger. In fact, traffickers are more commonly someone who has built trust with the victim—family members, significant others, peers, family friends and even faith leaders.

A common tactic of recruitment is to approach women by pretending to be a loving boyfriend and waiting six months to a year before ever pressuring them to have sex for money. I learned from local law enforcement that traffickers looking for women to prey on often scroll through online detention inmate lists, looking for women with charges such as unpaid child support.

Traffickers commonly get their victims involved in



“Violence, threats of violence, fraud schemes and coercion are all common tactics used to enslave.”



“We must do the hard work of taking down the stronghold of oppression that exists today and pursuing racial justice if we are to end modern-day slavery.”

activities that make them more isolated and dependent. They often ruin their victims' credit and force them to take illegal drugs and break ties with friends and family.

Busting the Myths

Shockingly, many trafficked women do not even realize that they are being exploited and abused. Like me, they have a Hollywood idea of trafficking.

One girl I worked with told me confidently that she had not been trafficked, saying she was willing to engage in commercial sex because her boyfriend asked her to.

“Are you allowed to take days off?” I asked.

“No. I told my boyfriend once I wasn't going to the work the corner,” she said. “He slapped me across the face and told me if I didn't have his quota when he got home, he would kill me.”

Violence, threats of violence, fraud schemes and coercion are all common tactics used to enslave. This is also true of child victims, the crimes against whom are even more hidden than those against adults. More than 91% of domestic minor victims in the state of Georgia were enrolled in school at the time of their exploitation. Though they suffered horrible violence and abuse, these kids were not locked up in a basement

somewhere. They came in contact each week with peers, teachers and administrators.

In Greenville, South Carolina, the most common type of child trafficking is familial trafficking, meaning the trafficker is a relative. It's the mom who allows the landlord to rape her 16-year daughter in exchange for the rent or the uncle who offers his middle-school nephew to his drug dealer as payment for his next fix. Even teens use peer pressure, sextortion, bullying and blackmail to traffic their peers. These are just some examples of what child trafficking looks like in America.

Boys are trafficked almost as commonly as girls. Because girls are much more likely than boys to disclose abuse, the narrative that only girls are victimized persists. The truth is that boys are also being sexually exploited, but many suffer in silence for years before telling anyone.

During my time working with survivors, I encountered so much pain. I sat with women in the emergency room while they waited to have a sexual assault forensic exam performed using a rape kit. I waited with them in the courtroom when they received the news that they must return to prison rather than receive the opportunity to go to drug rehabilitation. I held their hand when they cried over a miscarriage caused by a beating.

But there were beautiful moments too. I saw God's power at work as moms reunited with their kids after successfully graduating drug rehabilitation. I celebrated with women who had earned their GED certificates and gotten accepted into colleges. I even got to baptize one of the women I

worked with and see her passionately recommit her life to Jesus.

After several years of working with survivors, I couldn't resist the pull of the Holy Spirit. I knew I had to do more to protect children and prevent these injustices from happening. My husband, Rick, and I sold our home in South Carolina and moved just south of Atlanta, where we knew the need for prevention efforts was enormous.

I launched an organization called Illuminate Justice to implement strategic efforts to stop child trafficking with prevention education with children in juvenile detention and foster care. Eager to get churches involved, Rick founded Rejoice City Coffee, a roastery that specializes in church café accounts and gives profits back to ministries that fight trafficking. Both of these ministries were birthed out of a desperate prayer that no more children would suffer the violent, isolating injustices lived by all the survivors I've been honored to work with over the years.

Reaching for Solutions

When faced with a challenge as enormous as sex trafficking, we must believe God will use His people to make an impact and see His kingdom advance in the life of one person at a time. Of course, God does not call everyone to start their own anti-trafficking organization. But there are four major ways you and your church can end modern-day slavery for good.

1) Decide to resist. The first and most essential way to end modern-day slavery is to resist being a part of the problem. Trafficking exists because of the solicitation and consumption of pornography. Our

society cannot end human trafficking while simultaneously creating the conditions that promote it. Trafficking continues because of the high demand for commercial sex. If our culture moves toward rejecting pornography and all forms of paid sexual behavior, then sex trafficking will cease to exist.

A simple supply-and-demand principle drives this industry. Traffickers work tirelessly to recruit victims because the high demand for commercial sex makes their work profitable. They see human beings

as commodities. But if the demand dramatically decreases, traffickers will have no reason to lure victims.

Pornography also fuels the industry. As many as 50% of trafficking victims say images of them while being trafficked were used to create pornography. Businesses like Pornhub and MindGeek make millions of dollars annually, monetizing child trafficking, rape and videos that capture unspeakable violence against women.

Resist being complicit in the abuse of others and make a firm personal stand against soliciting or consuming pornography. Offer support groups within your community to help others who may struggle with sex addiction. And don't limit these groups to males only. Both men and women struggle with pornography addictions, so create safe places for healing in your churches.

2) Support solutions. Invest in projects to prevent trafficking and support care for survivors. Steward your resources in a way that radically blesses the most vulnerable. Give a monthly donation to a local anti-trafficking organization. Encourage members of your congregation to spend time with vulnerable youth in your area. Leverage your influence at the company where you work to provide human resources to a nonprofit that serves women and children. Your time, treasure and talent can make a huge impact in the effort to end slavery today.

3) Stay aware. Keep educating yourself on the injustices happening in your community today. Learn more about the problems your neighbors face and then move closer. I frequently say to educators and pastors, "The eye cannot see what the mind does not know," meaning that the more we learn about trafficking and exploitation, the more apt we will be in seeing the signs and being moved to help.

For a great place to start, read *In Pursuit of Love: One Woman's Journey from Trafficked to Triumph* by Rebecca Bender, an amazing woman of faith who boldly empowers leaders to fight human trafficking. Her testimony captures

the harsh realities of trafficking in the U.S. while providing insight into how believers can fight the injustices.

4) Work for reconciliation. Know trafficking is not an isolated social problem. Just as slavery in the 19th century was rooted in hate and racial oppression, so is trafficking today. Although people of every color and ethnicity are exploited, women of color are especially vulnerable. Not only are they disproportionately affected, but they are also much more likely to be treated as criminals instead of victims.

A recent FBI study showed that Black children comprised 59% of all prostitution arrests of those under 18 years of age—more than any other racial group. A Los Angeles County study of juveniles arrested for prostitution showed that Black girls comprised of 92% of the arrestees even though they make up only 3% of the overall county population.

U.S. law prohibits children under the age of 18 from consenting to commercial sex. The church must lament over and demand reform when white child victims of trafficking receive various social services, but Black child victims are taken to jail. God calls the church to the ministry of reconciliation. As Christians in America, we must be a firm voice of justice and equity in every situation. We must do the hard work of taking down the stronghold of oppression that exists today and pursuing racial justice if we are to end modern-day slavery.

Grieving Into Change

While living in South Carolina, I had a long commute to most of the jails I visited in my ministry to serve survivors of trafficking. The time alone in the car let me start the day's ministry with a Christian podcast, favorite sermon or worship jam session. The long ride home gave me the space to grieve, cry all over my steering wheel, intercede and let God know this wasn't OK. Those long commutes gave my heavenly Father time to break my heart over the things that also break His and became the launching place for what would come next. continued »



When Rick and I first began to feel the Holy Spirit's prompting to uproot our family and move to Georgia, I felt scared, but Jesus kept showing us that life with Him is such an extraordinary adventure. It was this revelation that prompted us to lay down our lives for those most in need.

Packing up the moving truck and driving south toward Atlanta was a simultaneously scary and exhilarating experience. We were making a radical move, rooted in the faith that God would see our lives as an offering from which He would receive, bless and receive glory. We were compelled

to say yes to His calling. This calling is not free from pain, suffering or sacrifice, but it is free of regret—and full of joy. You never regret bravery, and you never desire less joy.

Rick and I are in new territory now, looking every day for the lost kids, the ones who have been

Free the Slaves

Six local ministries who rescue victims of the sex trade

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something! While the need is great for more engagement from the church, here are six ministries that are working to see trafficking eradicated, rescuing victims of the sex trade and ministering to those recovering from the pain and abuse they experienced.

Helping Survivors Up and Out

Valiant Hearts (valianthearts.org) is a faith-based nonprofit working in the Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, area to help women find a path out of trafficking, stripping and prostitution. Most survivors lack legitimate job experience, are unable to pass a background check due to previous incarceration, suffer with addiction, blame themselves and struggle to believe a better life is possible. Valiant Hearts ignites hope in the lives of these women by providing a host of services, including emergency housing, support groups, mentorship, counseling, education and survivor advocacy.

Walking by Faith

The Transformation Garden (transformationgarden.net) is a residential restorative care program under construction in north Mississippi for female adult survivors of sexual exploitation.

The seeds for this ministry were planted several years ago when The Anchor Church in Verona, Mississippi, realized the vast majority of women in its drug addiction recovery program had experienced childhood sexual abuse, and many had become vulnerable to sex trafficking. As the Holy Spirit moved in the hearts of His people, churches, businesses and individuals joined in the cause. Two national faith-based nonprofits gave support: Eight Days of Hope and The Samaritan Woman Institute for Shelter Care.

Instilling Dignity Through Work

As a staff member for A Way Out, a Christ-centered residential healing program for sex trafficking survivors in Memphis, Tennessee, Lee Howard was grieved by the difficulty the women faced when looking for meaningful employment. In 2019, God led her to start RE+NEW+ALL (renewallcandle.com), a social enterprise to meet the need.

RNA uses a therapeutic work model to create a safe and nurturing environment where survivors can earn an income

and grow in confidence and professionalism while acquiring valuable skills in artisan candle making. Available for online purchase, each candle arrives with a card signed by the woman who made it, and the customer is encouraged to pray for her.

Reducing Vulnerability Through Foster Care

Southeast Christian Church (southeastchristian.org) is a unified, multisite community with campuses in Kentucky and Indiana, all receiving centralized teaching from the main campus in Louisville, Kentucky, where Kyle Idleman serves as lead pastor.

In keeping with its intent for each campus to meet specific needs of the area in which it is located, Southeast has set out to find families for foster children in each local area. When Christians commit to providing strong, loving families to at-risk children, they are helping to prevent children from becoming victims of sex trafficking.

Disrupting Buying and Selling on Front Lines

Reset180 (reset180.com) is a local Christian nonprofit in Reston, Virginia, working to prevent and disrupt modern-day slavery while restoring survivors. Its "outreach and disruption" teams meet outside illicit massage businesses and start grace-filled conversations with sex buyers, offering prayer and hope in Jesus. Through this approach, the ministry hopes to create lasting change in sex buyers that will greatly reduce the demand of sex trafficking services. The nonprofit has visited more than 110 separate illicit massage business locations since 2017.

Reset180 also reaches out by text to those sold on the internet, where 84% of criminal sex trafficking activity is generated.

Rescuing Through Relationship

Natalie's Sisters (nataliessisters.org) is a Spirit-birthed safe place for sexually exploited women, located in a former drug house in a Lexington, Kentucky, neighborhood. The ministry offers respite to these women from the harsh realities of their lives as well as access to sleep, food, clothing and life-application classes.

ANNE REED is a freelance writer in Tupelo, Mississippi, who works part-time for a ministry that confronts sex trafficking.

“This calling is not free from pain, suffering or sacrifice, but it is free of regret—and full of joy.”

neglected or thrown away. Though our work challenges us deeply, we have the comfort of being guided by the best shepherd—the one who has so beautifully shown us what it looks like to leave the 99 and find the one. Our prayer is always, *“Lord, every day we are blessed with breath, give us Spirit-birthered eyes to see the lost and vulnerable ones, and help us be brave in the rescue.”*

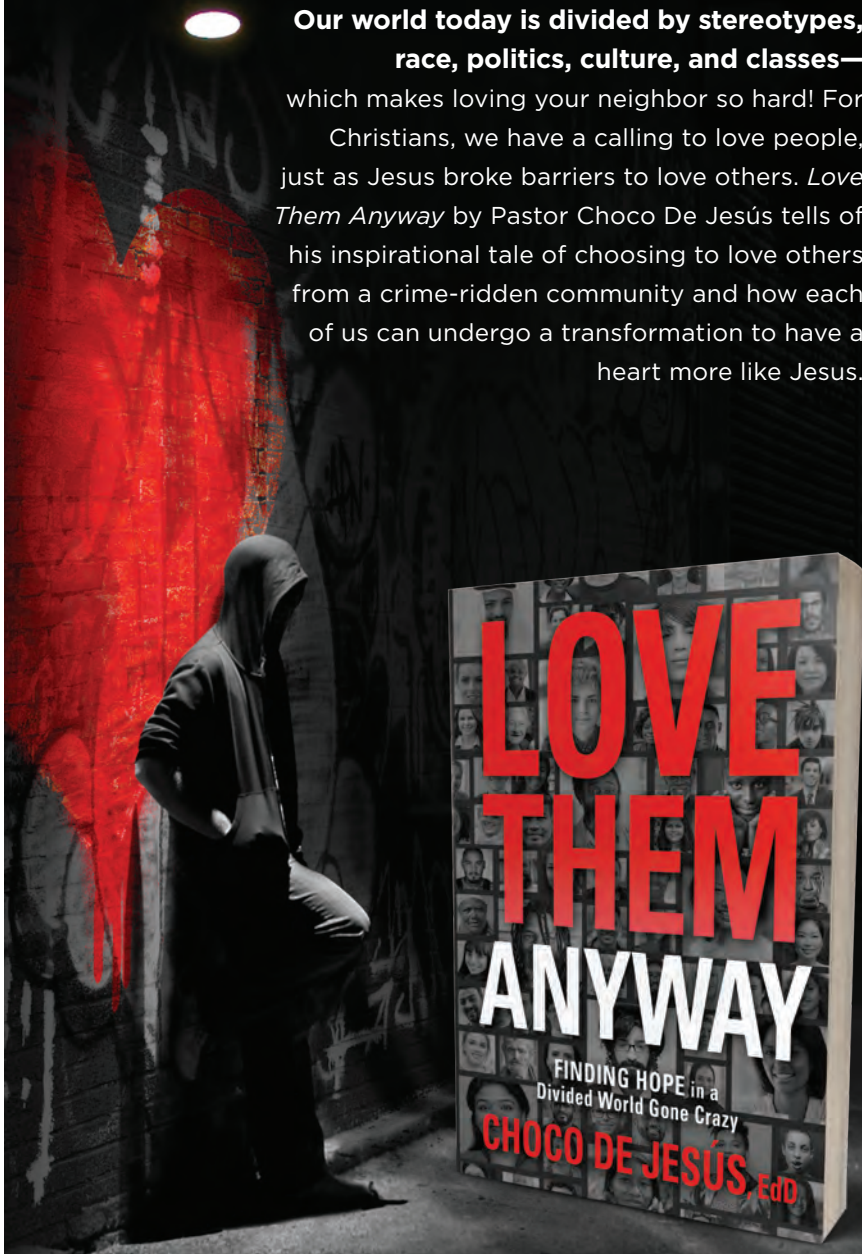
One person, one family or even one church could never meet the vast need that lies before us. However, I believe that as everyday Christians like us rise in faith and arm ourselves with a willingness to do hard things. We will serve those being abused. God will work through us, and we will see a day when this scourge of sex trafficking can be eradicated from our nation. I am working toward a day when we have no more stories to tell of 5-year-old boys and girls who were violated, exploited and abused. My prayer is that you would hear God’s call and say yes to whatever He is calling you. ◀

READ MORE: For additional content that highlights the dangers of human trafficking, visit humantrafficking.charismamag.com.

MAGGIETURNER is the executive director of *Illuminate Justice*, a nonprofit organization committed to ending child trafficking. Her husband, Rick, is the founder and CEO of *Rejoice City Coffee*, which gives 10% of its profits to the fight against sex trafficking. Learn more about their work by connecting on Instagram @illuminatejustice and @rejoicecitycoffee.

LOVE BREAKS THROUGH DEFENSES AND DESTROYS WALLS THAT DIVIDE US.

Our world today is divided by stereotypes, race, politics, culture, and classes—which makes loving your neighbor so hard! For Christians, we have a calling to love people, just as Jesus broke barriers to love others. *Love Them Anyway* by Pastor Choco De Jesús tells of his inspirational tale of choosing to love others from a crime-ridden community and how each of us can undergo a transformation to have a heart more like Jesus.



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Bounce Back From Election Burnout



BY BUNNI POUNDS

Many Christians felt devastated after the 2020 election. Some don't even want to vote again because they feel betrayed by candidates, misled by the media or abused by voter fraud. Here is a heavenly blueprint on how to move forward.

After the November 2020 election, disillusionment set in. The quest for the truth about the presidential elections ended—for me and for many of us around the nation—without resolution.

If you are one of those people who has lost hope in our electoral system in America, I pray the words that follow speak life back into you. We have experienced this national trauma together, and God wants to help us recover. So how do people of faith move on from this dramatic election season?

As a political professional, do I believe there was voter fraud in this last presidential election? Yes, I do. I saw it with my own eyes.

Do I believe there was enough to produce a different presidential election outcome? I do not know that definitively. I do know there were provable injustices, and they were all but swept under the rug.

Less than a week after the November election, I found myself on a plane flying to Las Vegas, Nevada. I did not go there to relax and recover from an intense season of running a congressional race and speaking on behalf of our Texas nonprofit, Christians Engaged, *christiansengaged.org*. Instead, the Holy Spirit moved me to head back into battle—to Clark County, the forefront of some of the fiercest allegations of voter fraud in the presidential race.

Exhausted, I could not stop until I discovered the truth in a state where the president was down by only 33,000 votes. Clark County had report after report of voter fraud because of mail-in ballots. Officials had mailed out ballots to every registered voter whether they requested one or not—a clear formula for disaster.

From shady neighborhoods to trailer parks to luxurious homes and empty lots, I drove around with a new friend, investigating over 200 locations and—over the course of three days—filling out over 58 incident reports of voter fraud.

Our team from around the country completed over 2,000 incident reports in under a week as we went door to door asking questions of people who had received a ballot in the mail for someone who no longer lived there. The exercise was maddening, but necessary.

As a Bible teacher, motivational speaker, 15-year political consultant and former congressional candidate, I have devoted my life to seeing good people get elected and helping them serve our nation. It doesn't take discernment to know that the struggle is real. The intensity of the ideological divisions has been widening for decades. Unfortunately, few Christians have paid attention. For years, Christians on the front lines of the political movements have felt alone and often misunderstood.

Most of us based our vote for president and for other leaders on our biblical values. We hold convictions that the unborn are worth protecting; our democratic ally in the Middle East, the nation of Israel, is worth defending; and our religious liberties need to be upheld against a culture that wants to cancel us. We made choices to vote for those we felt would represent God's desires for our country.

Many of our national leaders, including former President Trump, didn't respond to this post-election conflict perfectly. So how do we keep moving forward with motivation to vote and engage again?

Awaken From Sleep

God used Trump, former Vice President Mike Pence—and an army of bold leaders around them—to shake many Christians from their sleep. Though our president was imperfect, misunderstood and sometimes combative, he shook up the norms and the political class system. He tried to focus the American mindset on the issues that mattered most.

Whether you loved him, tolerated him or hated him, Trump demanded a

response from everyone. And many of us in the Christian community were thankful he was willing to defend our faith and our family values, standing up for the issues we cared about regardless of the backlash.

As someone who has worked in ministry and politics for almost two decades, I saw a Spirit-fueled awakening in ordinary Christians. The Lord gave me a prophetic word from Romans 13:11 (NKJV) as a mandate to go find the awakening people: “Do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we first believed.”

God called me, along with my army of friends, to plug Christians into a system of praying, voting and engaging regularly for the sake of our nation, asking God to bring discernment as we taught biblical values and our basic civic duties as American citizens.

The Holy Spirit has been breathing on us as the church and awakening us to pray amid a nation that is increasingly more hostile toward biblical values. We have grown in an understanding that our elected officials and government leaders have more power over our lives than we ever understood before. The COVID-19 lockdowns have served as a case in point. How many of us did not know the name of our county judge or mayor before early last year?

Through this season, the Spirit has awakened many of us to the fact that our republic is in trouble and demands our participation. So what do we do now that the courts have said there wasn’t “significant evidence of voter fraud”—at least not enough for a do-over? What do we do after the Supreme Court’s refusal to take a case, responding with “no standing”?

We cannot go back to sleep. America needs me, and America needs you.

Trust in God

The night before the election, our ministry held a prayer call with faith and political leaders across the state of Texas. One of the members of Congress on that call made a statement

that, a week later, hit me as profound. He said, “One of the worst things that could happen is that the election goes exactly like you want it to go, and then you put your trust in elections rather than God.” This came from someone who had a lot to lose if his candidate did not win.

His point, a good reminder to all of us, is that Jesus is ultimately our King. We must place our trust in Him regardless of what administration is in the White House or if our candidate won or lost.

God did not wake up in shock on the day after the election. He was not taken aback by a lack of voter turnout in some places, voter fraud in others and a system that did not answer the questions we asked.

“I will lift up my eyes to the hill, from where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:1-2, MEV).

We do not find our hope and peace in human institutions or governments, but in our walk with Jesus, which holds us together day by day.

Scripture admonishes us to pray for our government leaders—“for all who are in authority” (1 Tim. 2:b) regardless of whether we agree with them. This takes faith and obedience on our part with great trust in the King of kings and the Lord of lords. We turn our eyes back to Jesus.

For too long, we, as the American church, have had our heads in the sand, waiting for Jesus to come back yet letting our cities, states and nation be corrupted by unbelieving and damaging forces. Our own prosperity, entertainment, academia and the media have lulled us to sleep. Opposing worldviews tell us that everything is wonderful in this “enlightened” new America and that we should just stay focused on taking our children to soccer, dance recitals and church activities. Socialism creeps in—now in broad daylight—as elites tell us how to live and what not to say, and Big Tech threatens to shut down any opposing viewpoint. Since many pastors sit on the sidelines, sharing positive feel-good messages from their pulpits every Sunday, the church

“Jesus is ultimately our King. We must place our trust in Him regardless of what administration is in the White House or if our candidate won or lost.”

receives no marching orders to change anything.

Over this last season, truth has been spoken in many places, and many in the church have awakened to the fact that they must be a voice for change. God has given us His Word, not just to meditate on in our homes but to disciple the nations (see Matt. 28:19). Through a national election process and its aftermath, prayers were lifted up worldwide for our beautiful nation, and many people for the first time joined national intercessory efforts to see God’s kingdom impact earth. He heard those prayers.

Regardless of our personal disappointments over this last election and its effects playing out on our television screens every day since, we cannot give up. As we agonize over the trajectory of our culture and the laws that further ungodliness, God knows our turmoil. He has not forgotten us, and we must trust in Him to accomplish His work.

Press for Election Integrity

Voter fraud has occurred throughout America’s history. Robert A. Caro’s award-winning book, *Means of Ascent* (Knopf, 1990), documents the fact that Lyndon Johnson’s U.S. Senate race in 1948 was rigged—the one in which he overcame a 20,000-vote deficit to achieve his famous 87-vote victory in a Democratic runoff primary against a



former Texas governor.

Four other presidential elections in our history were disputed with furious allegations of fraud, including John Quincy Adams' win in 1824 and John F. Kennedy's victory in 1960.

In Texas, where we have some of the toughest voter ID laws in the nation, Attorney General Ken Paxton announced in 2019 that the state had 95,000 non-citizens on its state voter rolls since 1996, 58,000 of whom had voted in at least one Texas election.

In Dallas County, where I live, we have been dealing with a corrupt elections department and ballot integrity issues for over a decade.

We have problems everywhere. No county or state is exempt. So what do we do to change it?

We can't throw up our hands and shout, "My vote doesn't matter!" Every citizen in America can do something to protect our democratic system as it relates to voter fraud.

» **Because elections are held by the states, make sure your state legislature passes strong election integrity bills.** We cannot just blanket mailboxes with mail-in ballots again because of a pandemic or any national crisis. We need paper ballots that are numbered, and we need National Technical Information Services standards put in place on all voting machines to minimize fraud and hacking. Election integrity should be the No. 1 priority of every elected official. If it is not the top

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priority for your leaders, communicate the importance to them. Follow bills on the state level and testify in front of the committees for their passage. Recruit others who are frustrated to do more than sit on the sidelines and complain.

» **Get involved in putting pressure on your county and state to clean up the voter rolls.** Check with your elected officials and political party leadership (this should be a bipartisan issue) to make sure the election administrator in your area and your secretary of state are doing their jobs and removing voters who are deceased, non-citizens or who have moved out of state from voter files. It could take some concentrated work: making phone calls as a concerned citizen, raising money for a national organization to get involved or even supporting a lawsuit, but it will protect the integrity of our elections. We owe our children and grandchildren the benefit of thoroughly investigating and rooting out fraud.

» **Make sure trusted eyes are on every election by getting trained as an election judge, election worker or poll watcher.** Election departments, political parties and candidates are always looking for volunteers to help run elections and to be eyes and ears on the ground. We need trusted American Christians, full of integrity, to be the ones who step up and lead. It doesn't take much time—but it can make a lasting impact to protect the integrity of our elections.

Move Into Recovery

It is time for believers to dig deep in the Word of God and get politically educated. We must use discernment and critical thinking skills to examine the people we are listening to, including ministry leaders. The U.S. as a whole lacks civic understanding, but the body of Christ cannot settle for ignorance.

Believers have a greater responsibility than other Americans to understand the systems we are trying to influence. God calls us to be salt and light in our culture and represent Jesus in the public arena. We need

basic political education and a constitutional understanding as intercessors, voters and concerned citizens of this great land, and we need to demand it of our faith leaders as well. Almost anyone can learn about political parties, take classes on the Constitution, follow trusted ministries that get Christians involved with politics and self-educate for the next battle. Do research, becoming a trusted source who encourages others with good, solid information.

As believers, we must be careful not to compound the real, verifiable issues facing our nation by elevating and sharing dubious information that might undermine the integrity of our arguments and convictions. Social media networks—where anger, outrage and fear are driving forces—amplify misinformation. We must verify our sources.

"He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; He who keeps understanding will find good" (Prov. 19:8).

As we take the time to process this last election season and recover from it, we cannot lose heart. We must put our faith firmly back on God and see voter fraud and the injustices of the last season for what they are—yet in the context of history. We can't go back to sleep; we must allow the Holy Spirit to turn what has been a disappointing season for many of us into fuel to learn and do more. Change for our nation lies in our capable hands, so we must educate ourselves and prepare for future battles.

God is not done with our beautiful America. He is also not done using His glorious bride in this nation we call home. Recover, church, and let's get back to prayer, voting and engagement. ◀

READ MORE: Find more spiritual information on the 2020 elections at 2020election.charismamag.com.

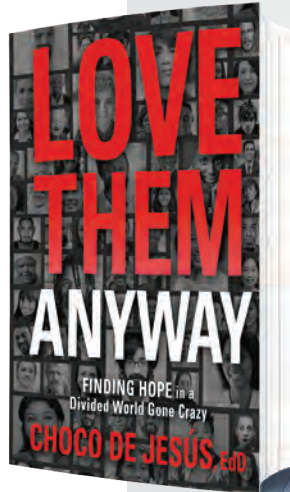
BUNNI POUNDS is the president of *Christians Engaged*—a Texas-based non-partisan nonprofit connecting believers to habits of prayer, voting and political engagement. She is a former congressional candidate, 15-year political consultant, author and motivational speaker.

Compiled by Nadia Joy Schult

Love Them Anyway

Choco De Jesús
Charisma House

How do you love people who don't look, act or sound like you? Wilfredo "Choco" De Jesús explains that in those situations, the power of the gospel is revealed, and in every circumstance, the supernatural love of God can flow through you and me. Filled with stories and personal testimonies, *Love Them Anyway* is a must-read for those desiring to go deeper in their walk with God.



"Choco" De Jesús



Prophetic Spiritual Warfare

Kathy DeGraw
Charisma House

Scripture tells us we are in a spiritual battle every day. How do we find the victory God has ordained for us in His Word? It comes through accessing the power of the Holy Spirit and functioning in the authority God has given us.



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The Sound of Go

YWAM Kona Music
Integrity Music

The gospel means "go," or at least it always will to these missionaries! Carrying a sound of revival and missionary zeal, *The Sound of Go* cuts through mainstream Christian music and invites listeners to be the answer the world is seeking.

Change Is Possible

Lois Flewelling
charismacourses.com

Lois Flewelling's free mini-course, *Change Is Possible*, is a game changer. She reveals how men of God, whose mindsets were full of doubt, insecurity and uncertainty, had encounters with God that changed their lives forever. The men went from a stagnant place of impossibilities into one of faith and courage.

God took the least of these and made them His prophets, kings, warriors and evangelists. Flewelling plumbs the depths of these individuals' negative belief systems to allow us to identify our own negative beliefs, which keep us in a rut. She masterfully explains how we can embrace the change God has for us to pursue Him with hunger and desire.

Receive the change you long for. Run with passion the race God has set before you. You have been longing for change. Now is the time. Watch this course, and see that change is possible.



Lois Flewelling

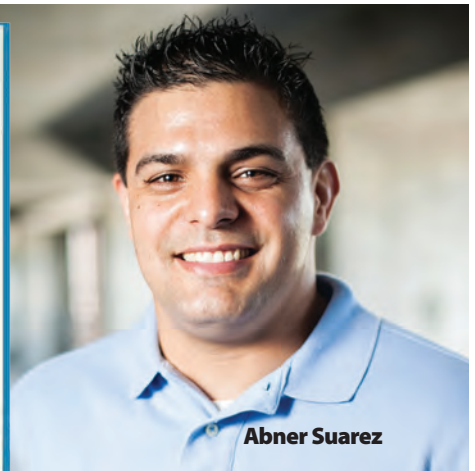
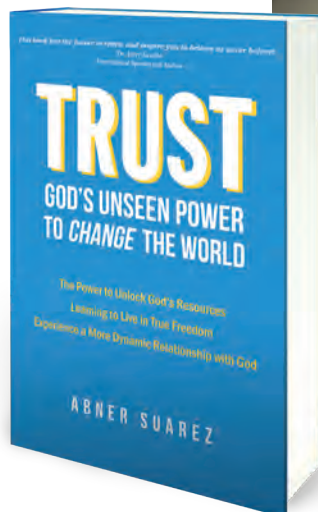
Trust: God's Unseen Power to Change the World

Abner Suarez
HigherLife Publishing

It's time for God's people to operate in faith once again. Prophet Abner Suarez brings the topic of faith back to the body of Christ in a new and unique way in his book *Trust: God's Unseen Power to Change the World*.

Suarez explains that faith in God is a deeply personal act that communicates our reliance on the power God has revealed Himself to be in His Word. "Our simple choice to trust God is a gift from Him. Through it, we can shape the world according to God's divine design!"

While spending his life in ministry traveling to nations, preaching the gospel, seeing the sick healed and prophesying to church and governmental leaders, Suarez realized that for believers to step



Abner Suarez

into their divine calling, they must operate in faith and think from God's perspective.

Every chapter is filled with Scripture and application points that will make an impact on readers looking to grow in faith and influence the world around them.



How a 3,000-Year-Old Psalm Predicts What's Happening Today

IHOPKC's Mike Bickle explains King David's fascinating prophecy.

These are certainly uncertain times politically, culturally and spiritually. On my *Strang Report* podcasts I invite Christian leaders to help put things into perspective. One with Mike Bickle was so good I want to devote this month's column to showing how the current crisis was actually foretold 3,000 years ago in Psalm 2.

Mike Bickle is a longtime friend and the founder and director of the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri. He believes this Scripture helps us understand why Christians are experiencing increasing levels of bias and even persecution for their beliefs. It seems this occurs not just in America but around the world, not just with governments but powerful corporations and institutions that seem to work in tandem to censor the role of Christianity in public life.

"I'm convinced it's already starting in a mild way," Bickle says in our podcast interview. "For the folks who are getting hit, it doesn't feel mild, but it's a small number right now. But I see that number increasing dramatically."

Bickle wrote about this topic several years ago in his book, *God's Answer to the Growing Crisis*, which details the Psalm 2 prophecy by King David: "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us'" (Ps. 2:1-3, ESV).

"The kings of the earth" and "the rulers" who will come together, Bickle says, are "the leaders of the culture, not just smaller political leaders and the kings, but the leaders of academia, the media, marketplace, economics, military, sports—all of those rulers of the culture, they will come together, not 100% of them, but enough of them for David to say, 'They will come together.'"

What those leaders will do, he says, is work together to "plan and scheme." Their goal is laid out in verse 3, where King David "in essence says they're going to drive the influence of the Word of God out of the culture."

"Now he doesn't use the words 'the influence of the Word of God,'" he says, "they're going to break God's bonds off the people and cast away God's cords. God's bonds are God's cords. To the secular mindset, God's Word is bondage, and it stifles our human potential—old archaic laws in the Bible that are keeping us back from our full potential.

"The kings of the earth are going to plan—together with the rulers of the culture—to take the bondage of God's Word, from their point of view, and break it off of cities



"Like the sons of Issachar we must be aware of the times."

and nations, break it off the culture," Bickle says. "That means to get rid of, dismiss the Word of God in the public square in every way possible. And that has really accelerated in the last 12 months and then much faster in the last 12 weeks."

Bickle says this increase is due in part to the internet, which, he says, "has given language and accessibility for all kinds of people to voice their opinions and in essence to validate and embolden the people who are like them. ... People who would have never thought of certain things are now not only thinking about them, they're enraged about them, and they see themselves as experts on them."

Bickle also says that the internet, in some ways, represents the restoration of the unified language displayed in the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11. "At the end of the age, right before the Lord returns, the human race has entered into a realm of darkness and interaction with demons beyond any time of history," he says. Of course, he explains much more in his book.

I believe that, like the sons of Issachar (1 Chron. 12:32), we must be aware of the times. And I believe this somewhat obscure psalm helps us understand what is happening in our day. Most charismatics and Pentecostals believe there will be difficult times before the last days.

If you're like me, you probably assumed these would come after our lifetimes, but with the way the world is going, they may arrive sooner than we expected. Yet God's revelation of these truths to King David 3,000 years ago reminds us once again that He has everything under control.

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PETER AIELLO

Peter Aiello

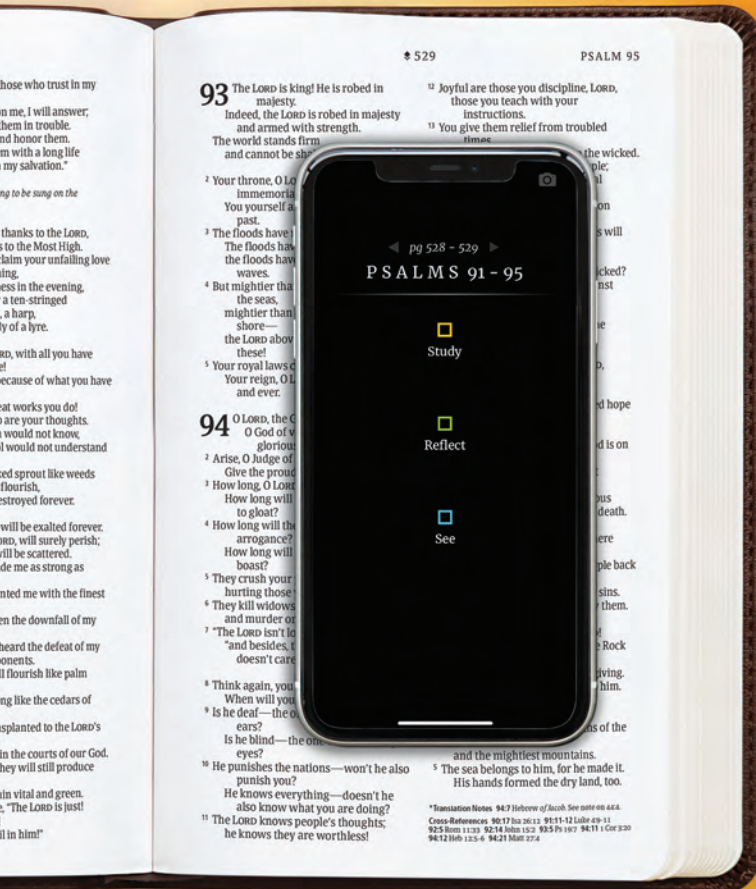
This book is about my personal testimony of how God taught me to surrender to Him through the instruction from the Bible. It told me to be anxious for nothing by casting all of my care on Him. *Hidden Treasure* shares my insights on Biblical spirituality and how to walk in the Spirit.

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—JOHN 1:5 NLT



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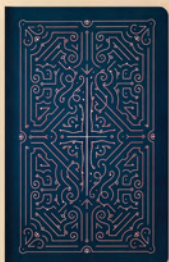
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Love this Bible!

★ ★ ★ ★ VERIFIED PURCHASE ★ ★ ★ ★ Reviewed in the United States on March 31, 2021

This is absolutely the best Bible I have ever owned. In the New Living Translation it is completely understandable and reads like a story. The Filament app that goes with this Bible is awesome and helpful. If you ever wanted to read the Bible and have been putting it off, this is the perfect Bible for you.



Original



Thinline
Reference



Personal Size



Compact



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