

# Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

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# We PRAYERFULLY Value Christ's Kingdom

Our Christian faith is not merely a Sunday faith for our brains and emotions. It is to be applied at all times everywhere.

PHOTO CREDIT: VITALY VITORSKY



BY DOUG  
BEACHAM

DOUG BEACHAM is the presiding bishop of the IPHC. He has served in various roles in the church including Georgia Conference Superintendent, executive director of Church Education Ministries, and executive director of World Missions Ministries. You can follow Bishop Beacham on [Facebook](#) or Twitter [@DougBeacham](#).

There are some books that I read in seminary that continue to impact my thinking. One of those is Hans Kung's book *The Church*. Near the close of the *Epilogue* he writes:

"The Church is a minority serving a majority. This fellowship of believers, this community of those who confess and bear witness is a sign among the nations, often hidden yet always becoming visible again; it is a living invitation to the world to unite itself with the Church and join in testifying to the great things the Lord has done, not only for the Church but for the whole world.

"The whole of mankind is called upon to share in giving praise and thanks, to hear the word of grace and to celebrate the meal of love once again, in order to bear witness to Christ in everyday life by being men who not only love each other, but all men. The Church does not wish to remain isolated. It wishes to be a vanguard."

It's the image of the Church as a "vanguard" that has often caught my imagination. This is how I think of the Church and her mission in relation to the kingdom of God. The Church is the vanguard, the advance party of a movement that is here and is still coming.

The kingdom of God did not begin with the ministry of Jesus. God's kingdom began in the Garden of Eden. Rebellion and disobedience have caused humanity to dwell in the realm known as "east of Eden" (Genesis 3:24; 4:16). The whole created order is suffering from this rebellion. But

God's kingdom has been seeking God's estranged children and creation ever since. The story told in the Hebrew Scriptures is the story of God seeking His lost sheep.

This is why the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth must be seen as part of this Hebrew Scripture story. Jesus' life is the fullest revelation of God's quest for His sheep. Jesus' life is the centering point of the work of God for this lost world. Jesus the Christ is the center that holds and links together God's love and humanity's lost condition.

Thus, St. Mark's Gospel account quickly gets to the content of Jesus' preaching: "The gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14, NKJV). Jesus' life is a literal fulfillment of kingdom oriented prophecy: His birth (Isaiah 7:14/ Matthew 1:23), His anointed ministry (Isaiah 35:5-6/ Matthew 11:5; Isaiah 61:1/ Luke 4:18), His atoning death (Isaiah 53:1-12/ John 19:21-34).

Jesus understood that His mission was to establish a "beachhead" that would extend for and through Israel for the sake of the whole world. That beachhead is visible to the world and is known as the church. The book of Acts is the story of how that beachhead grew in the first decades of the Christian era. Sociologist Rodney Stark in *The Rise of Christianity*, has shown how this "beachhead" expanded across the Roman Empire in three hundred years.

I think the beachhead imagery is fruitful for us as we reflect on what

it means to extend the borders of the "reign of God" (the kingdom of God) in our world. We are not called to set up a theocracy; we are called to live holy and loving in our homes, work places, and everywhere else. Our Christian faith is not merely a Sunday faith for our brains and emotions. Our Christian faith is manifested everywhere we place our feet, every time we open our mouth, every decision-making moment.

We need to live out our faith wherever our feet tread! This is why Joshua 1:3-9 is important in our understanding of extending the kingdom of God. It's through our daily lives that kingdom influence occurs. If we can discern this and grow in this knowledge, we become more effective ambassadors of reconciliation and peace in this world. We do our part to extend the beachhead of what Jesus is doing in every generation.

*We Prayerfully Value Christ's Kingdom* is the fourth of the IPHC core values. As we grow as a place of hope and a people of promise, we are on a journey of learning what it means to faithfully serve Jesus through this movement. Through 2017, and as a special focus on our General Conference, this core value will be our emphasis.

As the fourth of seven core values, Christ's Kingdom is the "door" that connects the other core values. The first three, Scripture, Pentecost, Holiness, reflect the spiritual work of God in redeeming, sanctifying, and empowering us for service in the world. The final three, Every Generation, Justice, and Generosity, are the daily outflowing of God's work in finding us as lost

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**A place of hope. A people of promise.**

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sheep, saving us, bringing us into His folds, and preparing us for His service.

The kingdom of God is the door through which we walk into the world. We discern the world as God's place. We take on John Wesley's motto, "the world is my parish." Through the kingdom door we discern that God is at work among people and places we would not easily discern. The kingdom takes us beyond our own denominational history, traditions, culture, and practices. The kingdom opens the door to God's great work of grace among the peoples of the earth past, present, and future.

Kung concluded his *Epilogue* by asking the question "does the church have a future?" He answered it by writing, "the Church has a future; it has *the* future." I concur. God has entrusted to the church the mystery of His kingdom. God calls us to live as fully as we can in the blessings of that future that has been revealed and displayed. With such obedience, we live with confidence in the future that is yet to be revealed. ■



# The Old Testament and the KINGDOM OF GOD

We cannot understand our New Testament authority if we don't look to its source in the Old Testament.



BY RYAN JACKSON

DR. RYAN JACKSON holds a Bachelors of Religion from Emmanuel College, a Masters of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and both a Masters of Philosophy and a Ph.D. from Cambridge University. Throughout these academic pursuits, he has been actively involved in serving the church locally and globally. He currently serves senior pastor of The Capital Church near Raleigh, North Carolina, where he lives with his wife, Emily, and their three daughters.

The Gospel of Mark records that Jesus began His public ministry with a proclamation of good news, that “the time” had been fulfilled and that “the kingdom of God” was “at hand.” The time to which Jesus refers is the timing of God’s redemptive plan that covers all human history. The ministry of Jesus was not an interruption of the story line of God’s promises. It wasn’t as if Jesus came on the scene to do something entirely different from what had been happening throughout the history that preceded Him.

Jesus taught that He did not come to annul the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Jesus came to accomplish the plan God had set in motion from the beginning of time. This is why Mark and the other Gospel writers refer to the kingdom of God without defining it. Every Jew of the first century would have immediately understood what that meant because of their familiarity with what we now call the Old Testament. It follows that in order for us to grasp fully Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God, we will need to be sure we are hearing Him from the context of that narrative.

Although the term “kingdom of God” never appears in the Old Testament, it is indisputably clear that God is presented as the absolute sovereign ruler over His people, over the nations of the earth, and even over creation itself. The creation story tells us that humanity is created in the image of God. The essence of that image is not physical likeness, but it has to do with the character and the ruling authority of God.

The way that Adam and Eve would reflect God’s image was by fulfilling their prime directive, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion.... (Genesis 1:28 NKJV).” God intended Adam and Eve to reflect His sovereign authority on Earth. Where Adam and Eve executed their responsibilities, God’s own authority and character was reflected. When humanity reflected the authority and character of God, creation was illuminated by the light of God’s image.

Sadly, it was not long into the story that Adam and Eve failed in their role of representing their great King. Their actions brought devastating



consequences in their wake. Sin and darkness spiraled into a descending vortex of depravity that ultimately culminated in God's judgment in the form of a flood upon the good world He had created. Their failure distorted the beauty and order of God's good creation, but it did not alter the purposes of God.

Even after the flood had destroyed the Earth, Noah and the remnant that were saved from destruction were given essentially the exact same commandment that had been assigned to Adam and Eve. God told Noah, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1)." Once again, God wanted His people to be representatives of His righteous rule on Earth. He wanted them to reflect His glory by embodying His character in the world He had created.

As had happened with Adam and Eve in the Garden, God's assignment to Noah also failed (Genesis 11), and judgment came upon Babel that enforced God's plan and further demonstrated that He would not allow His story to be subverted. To ensure that the perpetual failures of humanity would not thwart God's plans, He established a unilateral covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15.

Even if humanity failed to live up to what God expected of them, God would act in grace and mercy to fulfill His promises. He promised Abraham a land and a people, but He also promised that the nations of the earth would be blessed through him.

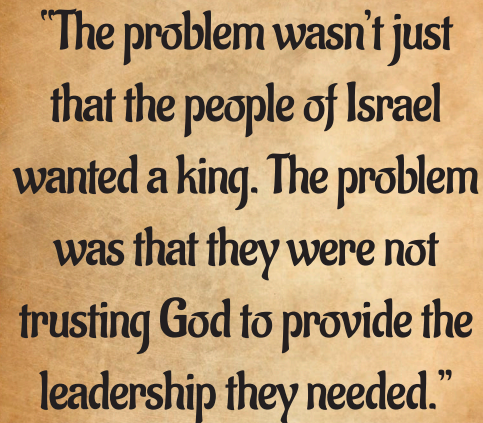
Many generations later, God's promises to Abraham seemed threatened by the slavery of Abraham's descendants in Egypt. But the miraculous deliverance of His people from slavery was a demonstration that God was the ultimate king on the Earth. He was far more powerful than the Pharaoh, and He intended His people to come to a place where they could once again embody His perfect law and reflect His glory in the world. But, the problem of sin had distorted the human ability to reflect God's image, and the establishment of God's rule through his people would again be postponed by the idolatrous episode with the golden calf.

As time passed, the people of God pressed forward into the hope that

God would establish them in the land of promise. The time of the Judges further shows us the repetitive cycle of the human experience—sin, judgment, repentance, deliverance. The height of sin in this era was in the people's rejection of God as their king in their desire to have a king like the other nations (1 Samuel 8:7, 20).

The problem wasn't just that the people of Israel wanted a king. The problem was that they were not trusting God to provide the leadership they needed. They wanted a king to fight their battles for them and take responsibility for representing God in their stead.

Despite the sinful motivations of the people to have a king, God was nevertheless at work to accomplish His purposes. After the disastrous rise



**"The problem wasn't just that the people of Israel wanted a king. The problem was that they were not trusting God to provide the leadership they needed."**

and fall of Saul, God chose David, a man after His own heart, to anoint as king; and God promised to establish an eternal kingdom through him. It seemed that God's purposes would finally be fulfilled through King David; but it became clear within one generation that the peace and prosperity promised to David were not immediately coming to pass.

After David died, his kingdom was divided into a Northern and Southern Kingdom. Sin and rebellion continued to mark both kingdoms, and God sent judgment upon them both. In 721 BC, the Assyrians utterly destroyed

the Northern Kingdom of Israel; and in 586 BC, the Babylonians deported the remaining Southern Kingdom of Judah into exile.

It would be impossible to overestimate the emotional, spiritual, and psychological impact the Exile had on the people of God. Taken away from the Promised Land, forced to live in a pagan culture, separated from the Temple and the place of God's presence, the people of God were painfully aware that their own sin had brought disaster upon them. The messages of the prophets are in general either messages of warning about this impending doom or messages of consolation communicating God's plan to restore His people from its effects.

Through the prophets, God renewed His promises that He would bless His people beyond their wildest imaginations. He would establish His rule through them. He would imprint his character upon them. They would reflect His glory and His image in the world. He even promised to restore creation itself. But, those glorious hopes and dreams never found fulfillment in the Old Testament. Though the exiles returned to Israel, they repeatedly found themselves under dominion of other pagan nations.

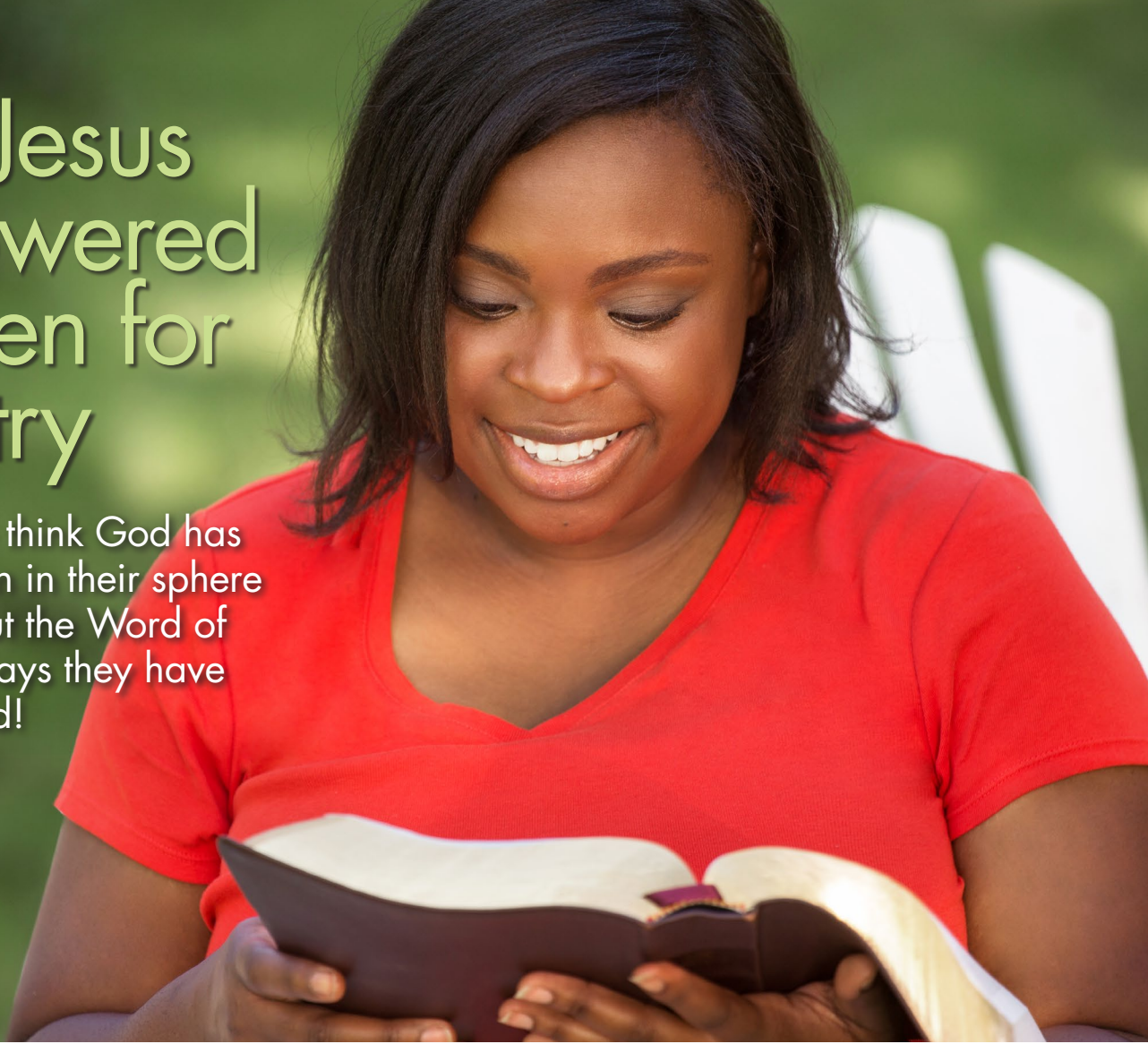
So, the only possible conclusion the people could draw was that they were still living under the curse. This is why the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and in the time of the first century, the Romans were able to oppress the people through whom God was supposed to bless the world.

Then Jesus came on the scene, when these hopes and expectations had reached a fever pitch. When He talked about the kingdom of God, the Jews of his time were all ears—desperate for the fulfillment of the promises.

We see however over the course of Jesus' ministry, they wouldn't necessarily accept how He defined what the kingdom of God was to be... and to be honest, neither do people in our day. Jesus preaches a kingdom that is very different from this world's conception of power and authority. In next month's article, we will explore more fully what that looks like from His perspective. □

# How Jesus Empowered Women for Ministry

Many people think God has limited women in their sphere of ministry. But the Word of God clearly says they have been liberated!



BY CHRIS  
FRIEND

CHRIS FRIEND is the national leader for IPHC Ministries in Australia and the senior pastor of Collective Hope, a cluster of congregations in the north eastern corridor of Perth. He is passionate about Jesus, the Bible, leadership, people, architecture, kayaking and fast cars (not always in that order). He has a Masters of Arts in Theology and is an adjunct lecturer at Harvest Bible College. He is married to Natalee, and they have two children.

Let me tell you the tale of the two gardens. One garden was full of life. In fact, it was where life actually began—the Garden of Eden—and the other was full of death. It was also a place where people were buried and where Christ Himself was buried.

But these two gardens became places of reversal. In the first garden, sin entered the world on the day a woman said yes to temptation, followed by her husband. It was a lush and fruitful place, but it became barren. It became a place of death.

In the second garden, hope entered the world on the day when a woman realised that the gardener she was speaking with was actually Jesus. This woman went from there to proclaim the good news of the resurrected Messiah. That second garden became a place of hope. It was the setting for a divine reversal.

In my mind, these two biblical accounts help frame the debate around women in ministry. By extension, this could also frame the discussions around Christian women as leaders in business, education and government.

It also frames the discussion of misogyny, gender-based violence and the tragic number of women who are killed at the hands of husbands. The oppression of women will always go back to the Garden of Eden when the enemy had his way. But the global change in women's rights—with women flourishing—will



always point to Christ who changed the world when He rose again!

Many people claim that women can't be in ministry because that's the "tradition of the church." But this claim is incorrect. Scholars such as John Wijngaards highlight that it was the pagan Roman cults that promoted male priesthood. Tragically, the church came to adopt this model. The tragedy being how quickly the church came to abandon the hope found in the second garden.

## 1. The Power of Witness

What happened in the second garden? Most of us know that women in the ancient world did not have a voice. Women were not allowed to be witnesses in court, for example, and yet Jesus chose to reveal Himself first to Mary Magdalene in the garden. He said to her: "Go to my brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father.'" Thus Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord (see John 20: 17–18 NKJV).

In my opinion, we either need to accuse Jesus of making a mistake that day, or we should accept that it was all part of God's divine plan.

Did God get it right or did He get it wrong?

If we see it as the plan of God, we come to see the second garden unveiling a wonderful reversal of the first garden's error. This is God's redemptive power for women. Instead of Eve's disobedience, we see Mary Magdalene who was an eyewitness to the resurrection. She was a messenger of the good news, and by virtue, an apostle. If we define an apostle as one who saw the resurrected Lord, and became a messenger of this good news, then the first apostle was a woman!

When we see this hermeneutic, we see that this goes beyond the right for women to be seen as apostles, pastors, or evangelists. It goes to the restoration of the *Imago Dei*, the image of God. And this is where things get interesting!

The unique creation of humanity was more than just ensuring the procreation of the species. It was an outworking of the nature of the interactions within the Trinity. Joseph E. Coleson explains this when he paraphrases Genesis 2:18 in *Ezer Cenegdo: A Power like Him, Facing Him as Equal*:

"To end the loneliness of the single human, I will make another power, another autonomous being, like it, corresponding to it, of the same species, and facing it, standing opposite it in an equal I, Thou relationship, another human, it's equal. And when I have finished that last created step, the human species will be both male and female."

There is a lot we could unpack in this paraphrase, but let's focus on one aspect: the enemy's plan. The original sin in the first garden was not just an act of

"Women were not allowed to be witnesses in court, and yet Jesus chose to reveal Himself first to Mary Magdalene in the garden."

defiance against the very instruction of God, but a spiritual battle was over the revelation of the nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit through both human genders! Hence it shows us the need for redemption.

We cannot be the people of God, reflecting the Trinity, without understanding the nature of personhood that God as built into every man, woman and child. While it was lost in the first garden, Jesus restored it in the second garden!

## 2. The Full Restoration of Women

All of this points to who we are as the IPHC. This is why we must be so clear about the real reason why women should be allowed to minister. It is not because of political correctness, or even out of a need to fill empty pulpits. Our appreciation of women in ministry is an appreciation of their uniqueness as a reflection of the Godhead.

We see in both genders the glory of God revealed. What we saw 2000 years ago is exactly what we see today: Women who have encountered the power of the resurrected Jesus and are testifying of His power—women who are evangelists and teachers, pastors and prophets, apostles, and leaders of various ministries. For that, we rejoice!

Sadly, we also see women who are still caught in the first garden, trapped in the lie of the enemy. They believe the lie that God can't use them. They believe the lie that God can't save them from their curse. Whatever the lie, let us see it for what it truly is—a lie!

Ultimately, we are left with a choice: Which garden will we perpetuate? Are we going to restrict women in ministry through the misinterpretation of some of Paul's statements in the epistles, or are we going to get serious about the work and ministry of Christ? Which garden is your church living in?

Let's choose to live in the power of the second garden—where Christ is victorious over sin, and where He commissioned His women followers to take the gospel to the world. □

# Understanding the Three Types of **FEAR**

Your church must be free from fear—but the only way to find freedom is to develop a healthy fear of God.



BY JONATHAN  
PATE

JONATHAN PATE is an ordained IPHC minister and serves on the executive council of the Alpha Conference. He has been a part of numerous mission trips in Central America for church building, expansion and building of water wells. Jonathan has been a lead pastor for 15 years in his hometown of Anniston, Alabama with his wife April and their two children Oakley and Serenity.

**I**n my years of pastoral ministry I have learned that there are three types of fear. Two of them are not healthy—and we must disciple believers to reject these types of fear. The third is a fear that every believer must develop.

## **1. FEAR OF PEOPLE.**

The first type of fear is one that hinders us in our witness and our walk with the Lord. It is the fear of people and their opinions. This kind of fear can keep us from sharing our faith in Christ with others. It makes us look at the consequences of witnessing, such as ridicule, rejection or even persecution. This fear that attempts to stunt the growth of God's people and His kingdom can ultimately be tracked back to the enemy of our souls.

It is shocking to think of the millions of Christians across this planet who are held back from their full potential because of the spirit of fear. I've known of people that were afraid to give praise reports or testify because they were convinced that the devil would hear them and steal their blessing!

Paul told Timothy: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner,



but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:6–8, NKJV).

Even as a pastor, at times I have allowed fear to hinder me in obeying the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20). How quickly we can forget that we serve the higher power and that it is Jesus who has been given the title: King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords!

Our God is greater, and He counters the devil’s spirit of fear with His Spirit of power, of love and of a sound mind. We won’t even think of backing down when God has filled us with His love in such a way that we excitedly anticipate opportunities to minister to people who need the love of God demonstrated.

## 2. RELIGIOUS FEAR.

The second type of fear that is common among believers is religious fear. I’ve seen this fear used as a tool to bring in an offering, or to shape up a complacent church member. It actually works, but it distorts the reality of who God is and the kind of relationship that He wants with us.

If you use fear instead of faith to collect money from people, they might give but they will miss the blessing. When it comes to giving, Jesus said it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). In other words, if you have to be scared into doing it, you are altogether missing the joy that comes through blessing others and building the kingdom by cheerfully and generously giving to the Lord. When you give out of fear, there is a sigh of relief, but when you give God’s way there is a joy that floods your heart and soul.

Paul told us that our faith is not to be mixed with fear. He wrote, “So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves” (Romans 8:15 NLT). And also, “...for whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23 NKJV).

I’ve also experienced preaching that scares the hell out of people, if you know what I mean. I’ve watched as unbelievers run to the altars

in order to pray away their guilty consciences, only to go back to living in rebellion after this man-made religious fear wears off. That’s the thing about religious fear: It’s results are only skin deep and temporary. In order to keep people on track, this fear must be consistently pumped into their minds.

In my opinion, this is why we have church members who still have hearts filled with racism. This is why we have members who give every week right on cue, but refuse to disciple the next generation. This is why we have members that hold fast to holiness, but don’t give to or support missions.

Religious fear will never produce what God is looking for. It just can’t. Why would we even expect fear to do what it was never intended for? In most cases, converts who were taught with religious fear become leaders who teach and preach in the same model. As pastors, we are called by God to shepherd our sheep, not to keep them under our thumb by means of intimidation.

## 3. GODLY FEAR.

Believe it or not, there is a fear that actually helps! It is a Godly fear. This fear is different from the fear of the enemy that hinders, or a religious fear that hurts. This Godly fear is the byproduct of experiencing the awesome holiness and power of the Lord.

Proverbs 9:10 says: “Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment” (NLT). This holy awe of the Lord is the beginning of understanding that I am unclean in the light of His holiness.

It was this fear that came over Isaiah when he cried “I am undone” as he found himself in the throne room of God (Isaiah 6:5). It was this fear that caused the Apostle John to fall to the ground when He saw Jesus with His glory revealed. But Jesus didn’t leave John on the ground in fear. He put his right hand on him and said to John “do not be afraid” (Revelation 1:17).

Godly fear is the natural human reaction to the most powerful force in the universe, but godly fear never

hinders or hurts. Godly fear always leads to love. We come to Him trembling, but we end up being embraced by Him. Our relationship with God does begin with a foundational reverence of His great power and holiness.

It is this fear of the Lord that gives

us a proper perspective of who we are and who He is. The love of God becomes more complete in us and the fear of God’s judgment against us is replaced with the anticipation of living with Him forever.

1 John 4:18 says: “Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love” (NLT).

As a leader, I must put fear to the test. Is it leading people to timidity and anxiety? If so, it is fear from the enemy. Is it leading people into conformity without internal transformation and intimacy with God? If so, it is religious fear.

Is it leading people into a deeper relationship with the Father resulting in purity and maturity? If so, then godly fear has built a foundation upon which the love of God can work on us, in us and through us. □

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# Building Bridges in a DIVISIVE SEASON



The church was divided during this  
most recent political campaign.  
Let's work to repair the damage.



BY J. LEE  
GRADY

J. LEE GRADY is an ordained IPHC minister who directs The Mordecai Project, an international outreach focused on confronting gender-based violence. For 18 years he served as an editor with *Charisma* magazine, and he is the author of several books including the newly released *Set My Heart on Fire*, a Bible study on the Holy Spirit. He and his wife, Deborah, live in LaGrange, Georgia.

**T**he votes are counted and the 2016 election is over. Those who voted for Hillary Clinton are grieving or protesting. Those who supported Donald Trump are cheering—secretly or publicly—over his surprise victory. Journalists are scratching their heads because they never imagined that Trump and the Republican Party would end up in charge of the White House and Congress.

But Mr. Trump will be inaugurated in January. And the church faces a huge challenge. Exit polls show the election was most definitely decided along racial lines, since 88 percent of African Americans and 79 percent of Hispanics voted for Clinton. How do followers of Jesus Christ—who is the ultimate reconciler—minister to people from all kinds of ethnic and political backgrounds when the election divided them?

During and after the election I decided to park myself in Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul's heavenly discourse on Christian unity. I urge you to read it several times over the next week. Paul's words fly in the face of our nasty political Facebook posts. He calls the church to declare a ceasefire from arguments and to embrace (are we ready for this?) gentleness, humility and reconciliation.



I've said this before, and some angry Christians have criticized me for it. They seem to suggest that following Paul's biblical guidelines doesn't apply during an election. They also think that being a peacemaker is a sign of weakness—even though Jesus promised special blessings to those who make peace (Matt. 5:9). Yet my concern is that if we don't dial down our harsh tone, the church is going to lose its influence as we congratulate ourselves for our voting power.

It's your choice. You can dig in your heels and be a cantankerous and offensive Christian, or you can become a peacemaker. Here are some steps you can take:

### 1. SEE THE WORLD THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE'S EYES.

I have immigrant friends who were scared of Donald Trump because of his comments about Mexicans. I've learned to say, "*Hablemos*" ("Let's talk"). Speaking to my Hispanic *amigos* in my broken Spanish tells them I care, even though I don't say my verbs correctly. Immigrants are not our enemies. Be a friend and try to understand how they feel.

### 2. REPENT OF YOUR OUTRAGE.

The apostle Paul told the Ephesians: "Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph. 4:26). It's one thing to be passionate about your political position; it's another to be so angry about an issue that you seethe with bitterness toward anyone who slightly disagrees with you.

That is sin. And when the world sees angry, judgmental Christians, they drive past our cold churches and vow never to visit. If you allow hate to dwell in your heart, there is no room for the love of God.

### 3. BITE YOUR LIP IN CONVERSATIONS.

Paul said, "Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building up, that it may give grace to the listeners" (Eph. 4:29). The apostle did not put an asterisk at the end of this sentence to say, "except during elections." This rule applies 365 days a year. We don't have permission to spew our verbal venom just because

a liberal Democrat is running for office. Ask the Holy Spirit to filter what you say. And if it's unkind, condemning, insulting, racist or crude, just be quiet.

(P.S. I am not sure when it became acceptable for Christians to swear at each other, but you are grieving the Holy Spirit when you use a derogatory term to describe a brother or sister in Christ. And remember: Jesus said in Matthew 5:22 that if you call someone a "fool," you are "shall be in danger of hell fire.")

### 4. PRESERVE AND NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE YOU DISAGREE WITH.

This election was intense, and the conversations between friends and family often got heated. Your candidate may have won, but if you burned bridges

because of your campaigning, you lost. Now is the time to mend broken relationships.

Paul told us to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). That means you have to work hard at staying connected to people. If you cut Christians out of your life because of how they voted, you are dismembering the body of Christ.

### 5. GENTLY CHALLENGE ANY FORM OF PREJUDICE.

We can't achieve Christian unity just by sitting in a circle and smiling at each other. True peacemakers are not wimps. Building bridges requires the courage to confront. Paul said true unity requires "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15).

Pastors, especially, have the responsibility to speak from the pulpit about racism. It is shameful for us to run from this issue when it is staring us in the face. Racism will never be defeated in America until it is first defeated in the church.

I challenge every church leader in America to carefully assess whether you burned any bridges during this election. Did people walk out of your church because of political statements? How are you going to win those people back? And how are you planning to reach people who are from a different racial group? Let's set aside all animosity and build a bridge with Christ's love. □

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