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A CURE FOR THE RESTLESS CHRISTIAN

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(Gary Haugen is CEO of IJM, International Justice Mission, a human rights organization based in Washington, DC. He is a Christian attorney who was director of the U.N. genocide investigation in Rwanda. His ministry works in dark places to free slaves - sex-slaves, children, and even families. This is extremely dangerous work. There are over 29,000,000 people in our world today who are enslaved by ruthless tyrants, gangs, drug-cartels, etc. The following is from his book, Just Courage.)

"We fret over what might happen to our stuff - our reputations, children, ideology, investments - and forget that we have all these things so that we can fully live for Christ. All the things we have were never meant to be safeguarded. They were meant to be put at risk and spent, for we are in a life and death battle. *We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.* (Eph. 6:12-13)

Thus, in one of Jesus' parables, when a servant reported that he had successfully safeguarded what the master had entrusted to him, the master's response was, "**You wicked, lazy servant!**" (Mt. 25:26) And Jesus declared about the Kingdom of God, *The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* (Mt. 16:18) He was saying that the forces of darkness cannot resist the forces of light. But note that these are metaphors about conflict, fighting, war. **You can't be both brave and safe!**

I recently returned from a dangerous Muslim country in the middle-east. A leader there told me there were 50 Christian missionaries working in that area, and 48 of them were women! Where are the men? Is the Christianity presented in the American church effeminate and passive? Don't we understand that following Christ in this fallen world can lead us (you and me) to a cross? Didn't Jesus tell His disciples that, *If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you, and The time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service?* (John 15:20, 16:2)

John Richmond was a young lawyer on the fast track of success with his law firm in Roanoke, Va. - and then he heard that IJM needed a lawyer to help slaves like Shaibya and her family, who had been locked away as slaves inside a rice mill for three years. Of course, moving his wife and young family to the third world in order to confront violent slaveholders wasn't safe. But sometimes the will of God is frightening. Indeed, God is asking us to choose between being brave and being safe in order to love those who are hurting. Not only is loving others not safe, it doesn't look smart. Many of John's colleagues heard about his plans and scoffed at him:

- You can't rescue slaves. It will never work.

- You will be walking into a buzz saw.
- You will imperil your family.
- You will have no future.
- You're a fool.

The fact is, when people choose to be brave instead of smart, their courage is generally so threatening to those who are smart rather than brave that they end up being maligned, not congratulated. This is what the Bible says we can expect. Because loving the needy doesn't look smart. And, sadly, in much of our culture this is one of our deepest fears: looking like a fool, naïve, unsophisticated, a loser.

And generally there is no wealth and very little regard in helping the needy. Having returned from his term of service overseas, John is neither wealthy nor famous. But then again, Shaibya is no longer a slave. John was able to send his investigators on a daring undercover operation that exposed the terrors inside the rice mill, he mobilized a police raid to rescue the slaves, and initiated prosecution of the slaveholders. John and his colleagues have secured land, houses, livestock, and micro-loans for these newly liberated people. I've seen it with my own eyes.

Another friend of mine, a brilliant lawyer named Sean Litton, decided to obey Jesus and throw away his life at an elite national law firm in order to work in the Philippines and deal with child sexual assault, sex trafficking and illegal detention. Then he decided to take his wife and two kids along. Sean admitted he wasn't afraid of going overseas but was afraid of coming back...to a goofy job, working with goofy people, I would live in a goofy house, wear goofy slacks and drive a goofy car. But I just thought, how could any sacrifice I make possibly compare to the daily abuse and suffering of a child locked in a brothel forced to serve four to seven customers a day? It was like math, no emotion. I didn't have faith to believe that God could somehow provide for me and that I might even find joy in it. No, I just expected to be lonely and to suffer. But I signed on to try and save that one child.'

And what happened? God used Sean to lead the rescue of hundreds of women and girls from commercial sexual exploitation and to virtually shut down child prostitution in a city that was once a cesspool of forced child prostitution. Sean said four things almost held him back:

1. Comfort - a nice couch, air conditioning, a vanilla latte.
2. Security - freedom from danger.
3. Control - power over the circumstances of my life.
4. Success - the appearance of wealth and the high regard of my peers.

Sean said he got four things in return:

1. Adventure.
2. Faith.
3. Miracles.
4. Deep knowledge of Jesus. (We want miracles inside our comfort zone, but that is rarely where they happen. Read the book of Acts.)

Jesus is telling us that we have to choose. We can't have adventure, miracles, faith and a deep knowledge of Jesus while holding on to comfort, security, control and success. Do the math. Jesus invites us to choose what we really desire. In fact, we are making that decision day by day, week by week, year by year. Let's be honest with ourselves and with God: Do we want to be brave or safe?"

ADDENDUM:

A REFLECTION ON CONDEMNATION

When I read Gary Haugen's book (or David Platt's book, Radical), and think about the incredible faith and courage that he and his colleagues exhibit, rather than inspire me it tends to make me feel condemned. Then I remind myself of the "Make more bricks!" analogy. It was not God, it was Pharaoh (a type of Satan) who made slaves of the Hebrews and pounded them with the impossible command to "Make more bricks! Make more bricks!" (Exodus 5) I also call to mind Romans 8:1 - *In Christ Jesus there is no condemnation.* Thank God for that verse!

Is obedience to God an important part of the Christian life? Well, duh! One time I heard John Wimber say that for a Christian the words, "No, Lord" are an oxymoron. If He is God, if He is my God, then the only response I can ever make to Him is "Yes, Lord!" Obedience is important but not central. Love is central. Jesus said, *If you love me, you will obey Me.* Someone asked John Wimber, "Do you always obey God?" He said, "No, but when I don't obey Him I don't feel good about it, and as time passes I repent and start being obedient." That was because John loved the Lord - in response to the Lord's love for him.

I also remind myself of the way God has led me over the years. The depressing truth is that I am not a brave and courageous guy, I am a fearful and wimpy guy. Every little step forward in following Christ has required that I overcome my wimpiness and decide that I would trust God and be obedient. For instance, when I started feeling that God wanted me to go into prisons, I had a lot of resistance within. Just think about it: You go inside those forbidding walls topped with razor wire, you go deep into the facility with doors clanging shut behind you, and you go into a big room with a bunch of guys who look like Raider fans! Terrifying! Of course, once I said, "Yes, Lord!" and obeyed, I discovered that I really loved going into prisons to visit.

There have been many steps where I can see that God was challenging me to trust Him and not listen to my fears: when I first received Christ as Savior, when I first started tithing, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the decision to leave my secular job and go into the ministry (at age 35, with a wife and four children), the decision to leave the security of the Methodist church and start an independent church, the decision to start making trips to Mexico, etc. You may think, "Come on,

Glenn! Don't make yourself out to be a spiritual giant because of your taking some trivial steps in life." I agree. The point is that I am not a spiritual giant but a spiritual midget, and every little step has required a big wrestling match with my fears. Nor are we to strain our arms patting ourselves on the back whenever we obey God. Jesus said, *When you do everything you were told to do, you should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."* (Luke 17:10)

I have heard it said, "Faith in God requires instant obedience. If you don't obey instantly, the way Abram immediately responded to God and lit out for Mt. Moriah to sacrifice his son, Isaac, then you are being disobedient." I don't believe it. Jesus told a parable about a father who gave an assignment to his two sons. The first immediately said, "OK, dad, I will do it." But he never did go and do it. The second said, "No, dad, I will not do it." But later he changed his mind and did it. Jesus asked, "Which son obeyed his father?" Jesus is gentle and patient with us. He knows our weaknesses, and He knows how to lead us, step by step, to do things we never imagined we could do. He may not be calling you and me to go to the Muslim world as a missionary next year, but He is calling us to do something that is beyond our comfort zone. Will we trust Him and obey?

OBSERVATIONS and QUOTES

- All believers have equal access to the Lord, but there are different levels of closeness to Him. There were the 70, the 12, the 3 (Peter, James and John), and the 1 (John, the one who knew he was loved). God does not pick out certain ones to be close to, we decide by the amount of time we seek Him and spend time with Him. He truly loves us individually and yearns for more closeness with each of us.
- In Luke 24, when the resurrected Christ appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they didn't recognize Him, and He said, *O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken.....And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Jesus was more concerned that they see Him in the Scriptures than that they recognize Him in the flesh. The same is true for us. He may never appear to us physically, but we have the opportunity every day to discover Him in the Scriptures.
- "Emmaus" means "Warm bath." The Romans took the baths for their healing properties. Jesus is our warm bath, *By His stripes we were healed.*
- True or false: "As people get older they naturally get more mellow and Christ-like." You know better than that, don't you? My sweet wife, Doris, worked in a nursing home for a time, and she said there was an old lady there who was OK with most people but who reacted violently whenever she came into her room. What was that? I believe it was the Spirit of Christ in Doris to which the old lady was reacting. My daughter Jeannine and daughter-in-law Marilyn are both working in part-time jobs around old folks, and both say that some of them are wonderful, saintly people, and some of them are hateful and difficult

to be around. Remember when Jesus said, "*He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone,*" and they all left, starting with the oldest. Day by day, we are all either becoming more Christ-like or more devil-like. My earnest desire is that when I get old I will be more Christ-like.

- God did not say to Adam, "Don't eat of that certain tree in the garden or I will kill you!" He said, "Don't eat of it or you will die." Mom and Dad don't threaten their kids, "Don't play in the street or I will kill you!" God has so created mankind and the world that there are consequences to our choices: *Whatever you plant you will harvest*. But He never takes away our freedom to choose.
- When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost in Acts 10:44, "The Holy Spirit fell (*epipito*) upon all those who heard the word." It is the same word used in Jesus' story of the prodigal son. The father ran and fell (*epipito*) on his son's neck. Epipito is better translated: **love/hug**. (This is worth meditating upon.)
- The Buddha is always portrayed gazing into the distance with a half-smile, like the Mona Lisa. Detached. Our God is never, never detached. He is filled with fiery, zealous love for us. He is sometimes portrayed in Scripture as furious and wrathful - - at the sin which is destroying his children. He is portrayed as the Suffering Servant laying down His life for his children. But He is never detached.

PRAY FOR CONGRESS

As we enter the New Year, let us not forget to pray for our dedicated and brilliant congressmen: Larry, Curly, and Moe.

MINISTRY

Fred Feller, Lynn Cumming, Mike Stout, and I just returned from two weeks in Guadalajara. Some highlights and observations:

- We preached/taught nine sessions in five different churches.
- Ministered/prayed/counseled probably 60 or 70 people.
- A typical day was: At 9:00 AM drive one to two hours to have *desayuno* with a family. After breakfast, pray and minister to every member of the family. This would usually take two or three hours. At 1:00 or 2:00 PM drive to have *comida* with another family and spend two or three hours ministering to their family. Sometimes they would take us down the street to minister to other family members or neighbors. These were people with serious spiritual, emotional, and relational problems. (Like all of us.) In the evening go to a church to preach.

- In one family, the wife was ready to divorce her husband who would explode at her, the kids, the neighbors, at the drop of a hat. We learned that he was a policeman who worked undercover with drug cartels. His life was on the line every day. He had a serious condition of PTSD (like a serviceman returning from Iraq), and would fly into a rage over nothing. He had also developed a split personality. He had played the role of a drug dealer for so long that he was getting confused about who he was. Thank the Lord that Lynne and Fred have amazing gifts of prophetic insight. After an hour or so he was back in his right mind, and his wife said he was a different man and she was going to stay with him. Praise the Lord!
- I think of our team ministry like a MASH unit, an emergency field-hospital. Sometimes God can use us to do remarkable things, God-things. But we understand that the real work is done by dedicated people in the local church. And if the people we minister to don't follow through with prayer, Bible, relationships, and obedience to the Lord, they will soon be back in a mess.
- I went to preach an evening service in a new church - up the side of a mountain on a dirt and rock road to a little concrete church building with maybe 35 people. The young pastor remembered me from when I preached at Zion, a big church in Guadalajara, six years ago. At the conclusion of the service, I was thrilled when six people came forward to accept Christ. PTL!
- By the way, these trips are expensive, and I want to thank those who sent in special offerings to enable me to go.
- I came home with a really sore throat and cough, a stubborn Mexican microbe, am taking anti-biotics and would appreciate your prayers.
- Pastor Kirk asked me to preach the three services in our church on January 1st, and would doubly appreciate your prayers.

Blessings to you all,

Glenn

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I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry. If any of you want to receive tax credit for your financial contributions, you may send them to:

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