

How to Take a Stand

Former Public Official Denounced for Sermons Found More Faith in the Fight

It was never my intention to preach, but the pastor who influenced my decision to study at Oakwood University, prophesied that one day I would. It was there that I learned that my first profession must always be my profession of faith.

After I completed medical school, two residencies, a masters and doctorate in public health, God opened doors. I landed my dream job running the health department in Pasadena, California.

As Director/Health Officer for the health department, our initiatives succeeded. We passed ordinances banning smoking in apartment buildings to protect neighbors from drifting second hand smoke. We instituted policy that required vending machines to meet certain nutritional standards while I promoted a whole-food, plant-based (animal product free) diet.

I am most proud of our work providing services for lower income individuals living with HIV/AIDS. We built a dental clinic for HIV patients and expanded services for HIV care by millions of dollars as well as adding dozens of jobs. Care for this population is personal, as a childhood friend succumbed to this terrible disease.

Anchor in Soon-Coming Storm

While working in Pasadena, I helped pastor a church in Altadena. It kept me anchored, though success had me slipping away from Christ. God, however, allows storms in our lives to remind us that he is our only true anchor.

My faith became an issue when I was asked to be the commencement speaker for a local college. I had no idea of the controversy with the initial speaker who was disinvited over his alleged misconduct on the Internet. That speaker was a renowned, Hollywood-acclaimed alumnus. He was a prominent member of the LGBTQ community and a few students rallied to his defense. Had I known all this, I would have stepped aside to avoid drama, especially since they determined to destroy whomever the replacement speaker would be.

Students found some of my sermons online, and labeled me based on my messages. A prominent LGBTQ magazine published quotes from them, quotes taken out of context. That went viral, and a storm ensued. I was labeled a hater, unfit for scientific jobs as a creationist, and foolish for preferring my children pray to God than to “wish upon a star”. My creationist beliefs and statements against spiritualism in modern entertainment, even garnered an editorial in the Los Angeles Times. The Pasadena paper that gave me accolades for the success of the HIV dental clinic, now painted me as a brutish, bigoted monster.

When Your Convictions, Preaching and Teaching Get You In Trouble



The sermons were from youth programs and purity retreats. I have never preached a sermon on homosexuality. Yet teaching simple Bible truths will cause many to seek to quiet or destroy the messenger.

Daniel could have closed his window after the king's edict became law to avoid the lion's den. The three Hebrew boys could have justified bowing before the golden image to avoid the fiery furnace. Jesus could have stopped performing miracles and kept quiet to avoid death on a Roman cross. Yet, in the lion's den Daniel showed the king who the true God is; in the fiery furnace the three Hebrew boys met Jesus, and at the cross Christ paid the ultimate price for humanity granting us the opportunity for eternal life. It takes courage not to cower from sure persecution but to hide truth to escape punishment is to fear our enemies more than we trust our God.

Though they invited me to recant my beliefs and restore my position, I couldn't do that. In Matthew 5:9-12 Christ speaks to the trouble that will come to followers of Christ, but He promised blessings to the persecuted. I knew that what God has in store is far greater than anything man can offer or take.

| *It is when we feel the burn of difficulty*

that we are driven to our knees and rely more completely on Christ.

Blacklisted

Instead of recanting, I resigned my position. I had done nothing wrong, but as a public servant, it's difficult to work when the media is destroying your reputation and thus the public's trust in you. But, God had a plan.

Months earlier I applied for a job with the state of Georgia. After two successful interviews by FaceTime, I was invited to interview in person. The interview was about a week after the scandal exploded in Pasadena. I interviewed successfully and was quickly offered the position. I believed God had paved a way out of the storm. I didn't know my trials were just beginning. Forces in California, determined I not work in public health, contacted Georgia. Soon I was on the news in Atlanta, as a "controversial" hire. A voice message from Georgia officials informed me I no longer had the position. When they failed to hang up properly I could hear them laughing at my demise. At that point I wept.

Just When You Think You're Left Alone

Unlikely as it is, 1 Kings 19:4 became my comfort verse. Elijah the prophet, "requested for himself that he might die; and said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.'"

Some closest to me went furthest, and released a statement that distanced the denomination from me. That hurt because no one even called to hear my side of the story. I survived that dark time because many prayed for me and buoyed me with their prayers. The book of Psalms became my antidepressant and personal prayer my anxiolytic.

When news outlets called for interviews I never spoke up for myself. Many felt I was foolish and should vigorously defend my reputation and career. A voice whispered, "Like a lamb led to the slaughter is dumb, so said He not a word". God told me to keep quiet. God would have to fight for me, fighting for myself was futile.

Pastors from other churches anointed me and prayed over me. God sent an incredible religious liberty law firm, First Liberty, to take my case and the lawyers were simply amazing.

Faith Muscles

I may be blackballed from Public Health—years of training and experience seemingly wasted—but, God has never left me. I increased my hours at a clinic where I moonlighted, as God illuminated my next steps. After the door opened for me to do missionary work in Guam, I worked there for 11 months, and considered it a great blessing.

As always, God showed up! The law firm took the initiative of restoring my reputation. Lawyers filed against the state of Georgia, and the case ultimately settled in my favor. Hopefully bi-vocational Pastors of all denominations will be protected if someone finds their sermons objectionable.

Like the muscles in our bodies that develop under resistance, so should our faith be. When everything goes smoothly, there is no stimulus to grow faith. It is when we feel the burn of difficulty that we are driven to our knees and rely more completely on Christ.

Will You Be Able to Stand?

No matter what is said of me, I worked to improve the health of many, especially patients with HIV. As a Christian physician, it is my duty to serve others as Christ did.

God allowed this trial to show that He guards His own, to set precedence protecting religious freedoms, and to grow me as a Christian. Every follower of Christ will face persecution (II Timothy 3:12). There will be no way to placate our way out of what is coming upon the commandment-keeping people of God. I pray we are able to stand.

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