

April 21, 2019/EASTER SUNDAY

NEVER GO BACK

The images of the fire at Notre Dame Cathedral saddened many of us this week. The embers weren't even cooled before officials began inspecting the building, assessing the damage and trying to determine if the structure itself is still sound.

French President Emmanuel Macron hopes the country can rebuild Notre Dame within five years. Although some architects are skeptical that the timeline will be met, hundreds of millions of dollars have already been pledged for the rebuilding project.

What remains to be seen is whether the building will be restored to what it was or whether changes might take place. Is it better to rebuild as is or modernize? Regardless of the outcome, one thing is certain: When Christians gathered to worship in Paris this morning, they celebrated the same risen Christ who has been the center of worship there for all these centuries. Some things never change.

For the Sundays leading up to Easter, we have discussed things we should change – bad habits to which we should never go back. Never choose short-term comfort over long-term benefit; never return to what hasn't worked before; never try to change another person; never believe you can please everyone; never fail to ask why you are where you are; and never taking your eyes off the big picture.

All of these ideas come from Dr. Henry Cloud's book *Never Go Back*, in which he offers 10 things we should never do again. In the last chapters of the book, he discusses the steps to help us make changes so we never go back.

The first step is to wake up. Dr. Cloud points out that we wake up in a wide variety of ways. Sometimes we slowly awaken; sometimes an alarm or a crying child startles us

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awake. The form of our awakening is immaterial, but for us to never go back to old ideas or habits, we must awaken. We must come out of our denial.¹

Mary Magdalene had a very rude awakening on Easter morning. At first light, she comes to the tomb intending to anoint the hastily-buried body of Jesus – but finds the stone is rolled away. She immediately runs to tell the disciples, and Peter and John run to the tomb. They actually go into the tomb and realize the tomb is empty.

After they make their discovery, the two men leave the scene, but Mary Magdalene remains behind. She too looks into the tomb, but she finds it isn't empty. Two angels sitting there ask her, "Why are you crying?"

Mary is so full of grief, she doesn't recognize them – she doesn't even recognize Jesus who is standing alongside her outside the tomb. Now, I'm not sure I would be looking for a dead man to come back to life either. But as soon as Jesus speaks her name, Mary Magdalene awakens – she realizes Jesus is alive.

This leads to the second step we need to take if we are going to change. Just awakening to the need doesn't make us change. Even desiring change won't make anything change. We need to accept that we need help.

This doesn't mean we cannot do things for ourselves. Self-improvement and growth are important and valid, and we don't want to totally depend on another person to do things for us.

But in Dr. Cloud's words, "If a car is out of gas, it cannot 'self-gas.' It must get gas from outside itself. It does not have extra gas on the inside."²

¹ Dr. Henry Cloud, *Never Go Back: 10 Things You'll Never Do Again* (Howard Books: New York, NY, 2014), pp. 204-5

² *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.

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After Mary sees Jesus, she doesn't take off to the mountaintop and spend the rest of her life marveling in what she has experienced. She returns to the disciples and tells them, "I've seen the Lord."

We need one another – we need community. Experts tell us if we want to make a physical change in our lives, we need to get connected to at least one other person. If we're trying to walk each day, get a walking partner. We might be willing to roll over and stay in bed instead of taking that walk if we're on our own. If we have a partner, however, there is extra motivation to stick to our plan.

Most of all, it is important to stay connected to God. Mary and the disciples didn't just set up a museum at the tomb and tell others about their experience at that place for the rest of their lives. We're told the disciples and the women began meeting in the Upper Room to worship and pray. They began to minister to the orphans and the widows in Jerusalem, demonstrating who they were by their love. Finally, they began to travel throughout Asia, Africa and Europe telling the Good News of Jesus – his life, his death and his resurrection.

But they did this in the company of the Holy Spirit. Not for a moment did they think they could accomplish anything on their own.

How many people here have a computer of some sort – a laptop, desktop, tablet or smart phone? Pretty much everyone has some form of computer nowadays. And what is the message all of us dread seeing two to four times a year? "Updates are available."

What do updates mean? Technically, they mean there is new information that needs to be loaded onto our computer so it can continue to operate the way it is supposed to. But

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what it means to us as individuals is that we are going to have to go without our computer for 10 minutes to maybe even an hour as the new information is downloaded and installed.

Most of us really don't like to take that time out. We have things we want to do on that computer. We need to follow the news or stock market, check in with our friends on Facebook or play Candy Crush. Whatever it is we want to do, we can't do it during updates.

For this reason, many of us will put off the updates. We get reminders, and we put them off too. Initially, this isn't a problem. We can keep operating the way we always do.

But sooner or later, we begin to have issues. The computer needs that new information or a new app to do the work we want it to do. Until we allow the computer to connect to the internet and upload new information, our computer is stuck – and so are we.

As Dr. Cloud notes, "One of the most important teachings of the Bible and realities of our lives is that we were designed to be connected to God and His power. ... We need to be 'online with God' all the time, every moment. Do not unplug even for a day. Stay in constant relationship with him... Then, as you encounter obstacles in the day or in relationship or in work, you are constantly asking God to show you what to do and to give you the ability to take the next step."³

Easter was never intended to be a one-day-a-year celebration. Every day is intended to remind us not only that Jesus rose, but that he lives today. In light of Easter, we can make whatever changes are needed because God is the one who gives us power and authority over all things, including death itself.

This week's fire at Notre Dame was not the first time it has faced destruction. The building was close to being demolished because it was in such disrepair, but was saved by

³ Ibid., p. 240-42.

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Napoleon who ordered repairs after being crowned emperor in that building in 1804. It has endured other fires, although none as devastating as this week's.

But my hope for all that has transpired this week is that as we see Notre Dame rebuilt in coming years, we will realize that Christ's Church likewise cannot be demolished. It will undergo remodeling and changes throughout the ages as we continue to share the good news to the world: Christ is risen – he has risen indeed!