

new identity

God in focus. World in scope.

MAGAZINE

DO I HAVE TO
GO TO CHURCH?

MY ENEMY IS ME

On why our flesh is our enemy

A FORK IN THE ROAD

*Conviction vs. condemnation as we
deal with our mistakes*

GOOD IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH

*On why our actions alone (no matter how good they seem)
cannot save us from eternal separation from God*

CONSCIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

Dating for health, wholeness, and spiritual growth

NO COOKIE-CUTTER CHRISTIAN



ISSN 1946-5939

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ISSUE 28

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 4

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New Identity Magazine (ISSN 1946-5939, Vol. 7, No. 4) is published quarterly, four times a year by New Identity Magazine, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, P.O. Box 1002, Mt. Shasta, CA 96067, United States.

New Identity Magazine is printed on FSC certified, 50% recycled paper - 10% post-consumer and 40% pre-consumer waste.

MISSION STATEMENT

New Identity Magazine's mission is to provide diverse, Bible-centered content to help lead new believers and seekers to a fuller understanding of the Christian faith.

OUR VISION

Grow

Educating you about different Christian perspectives, understanding Christian concepts, jargon, disciplines, practical application of Scripture and more.

Connect

Encouraging you with testimonies, articles about relationships, fellowship, church, community, discussions and expressions of faith.

Live

Engaging you to live out your faith in the real world, with stories of people actively pursuing God and their passions, organizations and resources to apply ones gifts, talents and desires to serve God and others, sharing the love of Christ in everyday arenas.

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DOING LIFE TOGETHER



I LIVE IN A CULTURE OF **DO-IT-YOURSELFERS**, INDIVIDUALISTS AND THOSE WHO HAVE A **HARD TIME** ASKING FOR OR RECEIVING **HELP**. I've grown up with the mindset that to accomplish things on your own is somehow better, more highly valued, or more efficient. It's a mindset that's really hard to shake. No one in the Bible did things apart from God and most had people around them to speak into their lives i.e. a community. As I've grown in my faith, it's become more clear that it's not better to do things on your own, it's better to do things in community. Even in ministry, there's an underlying idea that if leaders ask for help they might be seen as not doing their job or "not-having-it-together." This mentality has led to many burned-out, energy-stripped and bitter followers of the Lord. I've seen it happen. The truth is that none of us "have it all together" without God and without community. We're not supposed to. And though doing-it-yourself can seem to have an upside (like obtaining certain results or getting things done on your own schedule), the stress it creates is not doing our health or our relationship with God any favors.

Since I moved back to my hometown a little over one year ago, I've struggled with feeling isolated from community because my close friends and confidants, many fellow believers, are now half a day's drive from me. I miss the community that I had come to take for granted, a community of people that knew my story, knew the journey I was on and just knew me down deep. Even though my hometown still has some familiar faces since I last lived here, most are strangers and it's been a slow process cultivating a new community with depth and substance. When I get frustrated that the community building is not happening fast enough, it's important to remind myself how important community is to God and not give up and default to my own individualistic ways. Not only is God a triune God himself, but he encourages life together, be it tasks, decisions or spiritual growth. It says in Colossians 3:16, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." God wants us to share about him, talk to him (pray), and teach each other of him through his Word in community, because he knows that through community we derive strength, accountability, and wisdom. The theme of community is central to this issue of New Identity Magazine as Brandon Hurlbert talks about the importance of the local church and the necessity of our participation, Nicholas Sowell also talks about enjoying the company of others who are different from ourselves through the unifying work of Jesus, and Lindsey A. Frederick talks about conscious relationships as it relates to dating. I hope that these articles as well as our others can encourage you as you pursue your relationships with others and with our great God.

Cailin



UNCOMMON UNITY

ON ENJOYING THE COMPANY OF
OTHERS WHO ARE DIFFERENT FROM OURSELVES
THROUGH THE UNIFYING WORK OF JESUS.



COMMUNITY, OR **LACK** THEREOF, IS AN **EPIDEMIC** SWEEPING OUR NATION. We've replaced face-to-face conversations with text messages and quality time in the company of other people with time on Facebook. The contrast between these things cannot be overstated. There is a generation of Millennials who seem to value relationships less than previous generations and who give them less time.

A group of twenty and thirty year olds at my church—singles, marrieds, and those in between—discussed this question: what does community look like to you? There were a lot of different definitions of community. Some had only experienced community in family, some had experienced it only in church groups or other non-church groups, others had experienced it in combinations of groups. Some had never fully experienced community at all, having what I call a “Lone Ranger” mentality or existence. Because there were so many different definitions of community, there were different expectations of what it should be or what it should provide.

With the young adults ministry I lead, there is naturally a diverse group of people. The young twenties

When we
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of community.

are still in college or just out of college, trying to start careers and lives in the real world. Our late twenties are starting families, and our thirty-somethings have older kids. It is a challenge at times to reach people in such different stages of life and maturity, with many different hobbies, passions, and interests as well. Because of this, it was hard for our group to gel at first. I tried to get the group to really bond, but it wasn't happening.

Community allows
you to THRIVE
and stay healthy in
tough times, and it's
community
that provides
STRENGTH.

One day, God began speaking to me about how to get breakthrough. The truth is most communities are built around one thing: a similar focus. A community is built around a “common unity.” It’s usually easy for people to find others of like interests. Unfortunately, this young adults group didn’t have many like interests; in fact, there was only one: Jesus. This led us to let our focus and hunger for God unite us. We celebrated each others’ differences—graduations, new jobs, new babies—but we allowed our time together to be pointed towards the Lord. It’s often easy for us to spend time with people who are like us, but when we celebrate others who are different than ourselves, we step up to another level of community.

Community allows you to thrive and stay healthy in tough times, and it’s community that provides strength. Proverbs 13:20a (NASB) says, “He who walks with wise men, will be wise.” In other words, he who walks in the community of wise men will gain the strength and wisdom of those men. We need people around us who know us fully, who can tell us the truth, pray for us, and give us support. The beauty of community is that you share strength and grow in ways you wouldn’t grow on your own. Proverbs 27:17 (NKJV) says, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”

When you allow a **COMMUNITY** of people to see into your life, they can **ENCOURAGE** you, call you to a higher place, and come under you when you're **WEAK**.

In community, people build each other up. I believe this is truly what the body of Christ was created to do. As Christians we should never grow complacent about where we are, and that's another role of community: people can see into your life—your gifts, the calls on your life, and, at times, the things you're struggling with. When you allow a community of people to see into your life, they can encourage you, call you to a higher place, and come under you when you're weak.

We need the best of others because at times, our best is not enough. When God said one could put a thousand to flight but two could put ten thousand to flight (Deuteronomy 32:20), I believe he was referring to the strength of community. Corporately we have greater strength than we do alone. Proverbs 11:14 (NKJV) says, "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety." If we want to live purely, if we want to live wisely, if we want to walk out the call on our lives, and the ministry God has for each of us, we need the best of others. The truth is this:

we have wisdom and experience, and other people have wisdom and experience, but no one has it all. The exchange of these things happens in community.

What you are looking for you will find. If community is a core value in your life, you will do what it takes to find people with the same focus as yourself. May Jesus be your focal point, and may you always find others who burn for the Lord to warm you, inspire you, and, if needed, start your fire.



Nicholas Sowell

Nicholas has been involved in full time ministry since age 16. He has served as a lay minister, youth pastor, Christian radio DJ, Christian music production company owner, surf missionary, and now young adults pastor. Nicholas has used his love for writing to inspire, educate, and most importantly: further the kingdom of God. Now married and living in Austin, Texas.



5 TIPS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY WHEN YOUR ONLY COMMON INTEREST *is* JESUS

Pray Together

Being able to grow towards Christ subsequently grows your relationships with one another in your community.

Study The Bible Together

Digging into the Bible together allows relationships to grow on a personal level as well as a spiritual level. Community was such a big aspect in the Bible that people grew within community. We can share insights and wisdom when we get together to unfold scripture, we can wind up learning so much more from the insights of others.

Have Fun Together

Fellowship is a core of relationships and doing life together. There should always be an element of fun, knowing God is just as much about fun as it is prayer and bible studies.

Serve Together

Being able to serve, which is what Jesus came to do, focuses our lives on giving rather than getting. When Jesus said it is better to give than to receive, it's because he knew there was even more joy in doing so. Sharing this experience with a group of people, regardless of a lack of common interests, ties people together.

Share Testimonies

To this day, the most powerful thing we've done as a group is share our testimonies. By being vulnerable and trusting others one might not know well, the group has come fully alive, knowing they can be themselves and still be loved and accepted. I've rarely seen anything knit a group together closer than sharing journeys and stories.



MY ENEMY *Is* ME

ON WHY OUR FLESH IS OUR ENEMY

Photo © martinak15 | Flickr



By GARY VANDEWALKER

There is an enemy of mine, living closer to me than any other. He comes with me wherever I go. He lives with me. No matter how fast I run, he is there. He remains with me because he is Flesh, the desires I have as a human being. As in, “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:41, NASB)

A British newspaper, *The Times*, asked the greatest minds of Britain to answer a question, “What is wrong with the world?” Among those queried was the Christian writer G.K. Chesterton. His answer came in these few words:

Dear Sir,

I am.

Yours,
G.K. Chesterton

Flesh makes life a dilemma for me. I am my flesh. My other two enemies, the world and the devil, exist apart from me. But Flesh is a companion never shaken. Paul writes words which give hope and yet perplex me. “For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to

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nature.

bear fruit for death” (Romans 7:5, ESV). The hope is given as Paul says, “we were living in the flesh.” Paul uses past tense. There is some sense in which Flesh, which surrounds my soul, can be escaped. I’m sure Paul does not mean I become disembodied from Flesh. Rather the corrupt nature of Flesh and its authority over me may be eluded.

We have an amazing amount of power as beings of flesh. God designed us as flesh with free choice. The choices we make are significant. As seen in the case of Adam and Eve, they can change the whole course of creation. But the decision in the Garden of Eden also changed humanity. Because of human choice, Flesh, which was meant to cooperate with God, is now an enemy. Flesh takes on a corrupted nature.

Flesh is corrupted, sinful. “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out” (Romans 7:18, ESV). Flesh controls me, keeps me from doing what is right. However, in Romans 7:5, Paul tells me something has changed in relationship to this enemy. To know what has changed, I must first understand what was true when Flesh was controlling my passions, desires, and thoughts.

Flesh wants to rule over my passions. “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:1-2, ESV). Focus on verse 2. Paul writes, “so as to live for the rest of the time in the

flesh no longer for human passions.” Flesh controls my passions, and my passions control me. You find this in Cain early in scriptural history:

The Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it’ (Genesis 4:6-7, ESV).

Flesh grabbed Cain’s anger, moved him to hate his brother, and, goaded by Flesh, Cain murdered Abel. Flesh manipulates my emotional life to lead me away from living my life for God. This manipulation by Flesh is temptation. Temptation is the subtle tugging of my being to choose sin over the priorities of God.

My thoughts are open to Flesh. “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit” (Romans 8:5, ESV). When Flesh is in control, my thoughts are less than pure or righteous. Flesh takes anything I’m thinking and turns my ideas against the Kingdom of God. I look at a homeless person, and I think of their laziness, their lack of value in the world, and config-

ure a path, which brings me away from them. I forget people are made in God's image. I discard a view of my own sin and see myself as superior. I choose to ignore Jesus' words, "And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'" (Matthew 25:40, ESV).

Flesh creates in me desires apart from the life the Spirit of God has for me. "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (Galatians 5:17, ESV). I am made in God's image, and I know what he wants me to do. Yet Flesh redirects me, away from what is spiritual, even if the spiritual is what I want to do. I should desire what is good for me.

Flesh crafts my desires in the physical, mental, and spiritual realms. My flesh makes me the focus of my own need. I eat in excess, unmoved by those around who don't have enough food. In my thoughts, I anchor the world to myself, unable to forgive those who offend me, while expecting forgiveness from them. As for my spirit, I stay in bed on Sunday morning, worshipping my own needs rather than choosing to worship God. Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre tried to resolve this trap by classifying Flesh's control as a virtue: "Man



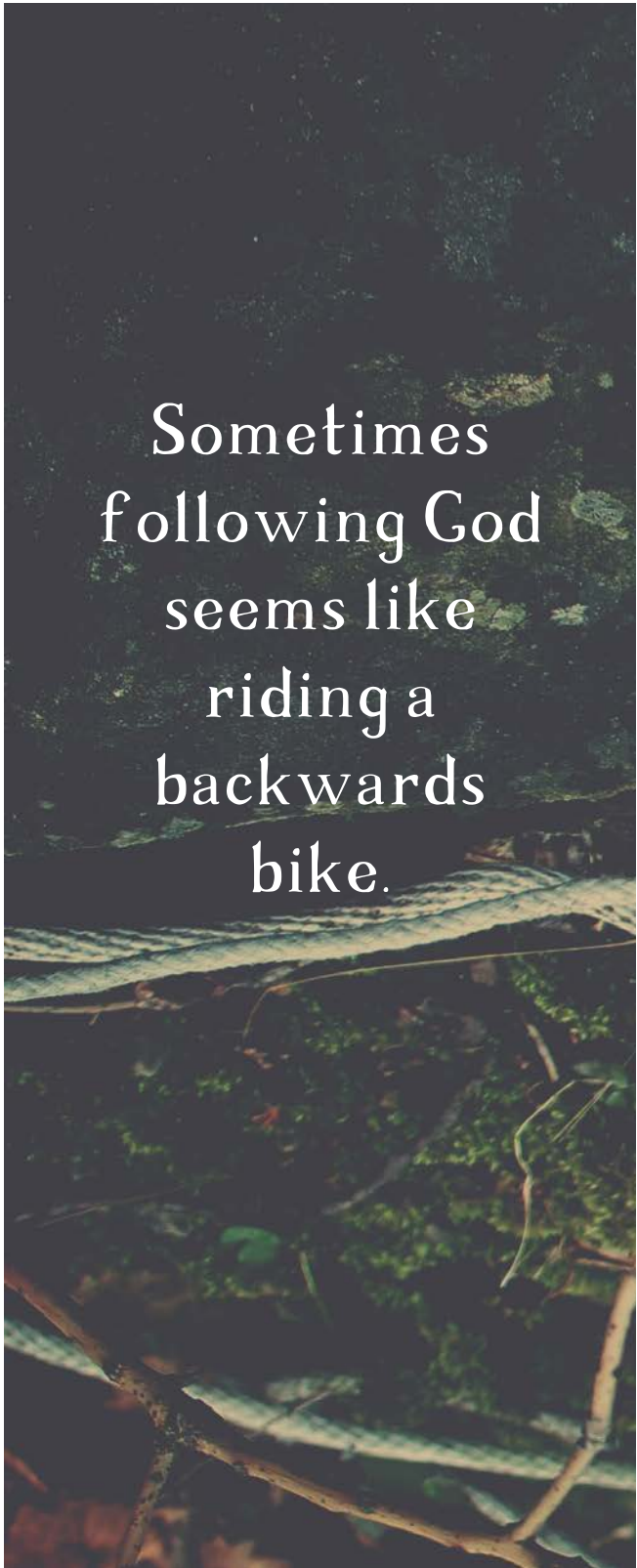
Flesh CREATES in
me desires APART
from the life the
Spirit of God has
for me.

can count on no one but himself.” But this existential solution only leads one to conclude that Flesh really is a door to despair. I discover no matter how much I listen to my own flesh, I’m disappointed by the results. My excess, my lack of forgiveness, and my laziness set me back, rather than making me satisfied with life.

As Chesterton notes, the problem is my own flesh.

Flesh works much like riding a bike. It is nearly impossible to forget. Destin, a YouTuber, demonstrates this on his YouTube channel, SmarterEveryDay. Welders designed a unique bike—when the handlebars of the bike are turned to the left the front tire moves to the right, and vice versa. Destin tried riding this bike and couldn’t do it. Only after eight months of practice did Destin master the backwards bike, but, once he did, he discovered he could no longer ride a regular bike. Once Flesh learns a habit, it is seldom broken, and Flesh knows only how to ride a regular bike.

There is my dilemma. Following God seems like riding a backwards bike. But Paul gave me hope, “we were living in the flesh.” Past tense. My present can be lived with someone else in charge. “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who



Sometimes
following God
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bike.

When I
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BELIEVER in
Christ, I'm made
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SAME.



lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, ESV). Once Destin could ride the backwards bike with ease, the regular bike, his old ride, was no longer in his command. He was transformed. When I come to know Christ there is a transformation in my relationship to the flesh.

Christ in me. The difference is when I become a believer in Christ, I'm made new and my interface with Flesh is no longer the same. “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard

him thus no longer” (2 Corinthians 5:16, ESV). Now while this is a great truth, we may question it in light of our experience. I try, but I fall right back into the pattern of the regular bike or life I've always known. However, when I submit my life to Christ, I no longer see my life through the temptations of my flesh. I understand God is working within me to change me. In his power, my flesh can be overcome. I view others as spiritual creatures. Flesh which seemed all there was, is now the servant of my spiritual life in God as I let God become my master.

Paul warns of this tendency to return control to Flesh.

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:14,

ESV). Here's my problem, I make provision. Destin picked up a regular bike again. He fell off. He fell off again. He tried and tried until, finally, a switch was thrown, and he could no longer ride the backwards bike but could ride the regular bike again. Christ transforms me, I put myself under his control, but then I pick up my old emotions, thoughts, and desires. They fail, but I keep trying until the moment comes and they work once again.

Sanctification is the process by which God is making us holy in this life. Flesh no longer has control, but we will at times try to give it back. We have to keep dying to our old way of life, putting the regular bike aside. Paul says, "For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Corinthians 4:11, ESV). But through the Spirit we can end Flesh's authority over our wills.

Jesus came in flesh, and he identifies with our struggle. He knows temptation. He knows pain. He knows sorrow. He knows death. Jesus gives us hope for our flesh in two ways. First, while on earth, he lived by the Spirit and overcame temptation. He never allowed Flesh to control him. He asks us to surrender Flesh to

him, so we can live a life in his power. My dependence is not on my own ability or on Flesh; I benefit from the Holy Spirit working through me. Second, his flesh was transformed, raised from corruption, made eternal. In Jesus, Flesh will be restored to what humanity was given in the beginning. This is the promise of what is to come for each of us when our new bodies come.

For now, the key to the struggle is submitting the flesh to the Spirit, and every time we fall off the backwards bike and find ourselves pursuing sin, we need to get back on again, knowing the day is coming when Flesh will be our enemy no more.

Next issue: Dealing with Satan



Gary VanDeWalker

Gary VanDeWalker is a senior pastor in Mount Shasta, California. He has a Ph.D. in Philosophy and apologetics. He and his wife Monica run the Narnia Study Center, along with their three boys. He can be found reading, searching for new books, or watching Star Trek when no one is looking. He has a passion for all things C.S. Lewis.

CONSCIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

DATING FOR HEALTH, WHOLENESS, AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH



 **LINDSEY A. FREDERICK**

Photo © philhearing | Flickr

I FELT GUILTY THE FIRST TIME I LOGGED ONTO eHarmony. “I’m just looking”, I told myself, “There’s no harm in looking.” But I felt like I was cheating on God. Wasn’t I supposed to wait for him to find my match?

If you’re a Christian single, you’re probably no stranger to this concept. Well-meaning moms and married friends drop the phrase into our laps along with a copy of *Waiting for God to Write Your Love Story*. But some of us have been waiting an awfully long time. Do we even know why?

Your reason might depend on which type of single you are. Our upbringing, personality, and past wounds can all affect how we approach and interact in dating relationships.

THE WAITER

On the surface the Waiter appears calm and patient. You are caring and love to serve. You can be found working in the church nursery or leading a Bible study. While you’re keeping yourself busy, you believe God will plunk the perfect person in front of you. Yet you

We ALL long for a perfect kind of love, the kind of love that **ONLY** God can give us. Another person can’t fill that GAP.

feel like a discontented and dateless casualty as your friends pair off, and you’re attending another wedding by yourself. You probably won’t say so, but, secretly, you blame God.

I did.

Once upon a time, I was a nice girl, waiting for a nice guy to sweep me off my feet. A guy did come along. He was everything I thought I wanted—handsome, sweet,

accomplished—and everything my Christian community said he should be. He was a great guy. But deep down, I knew he wasn't *my* guy. It took me a while to realize that what I thought I wanted and what I actually wanted were not the same thing. And I needed to figure that out.

Many people encouraged me to think and pray and keep waiting for God to bring the perfect match to me. But, honestly, I was over it. That's when I found myself on eHarmony, setting two rules for myself: Meet early. And date often. This meant I would not invest more than a few weeks chatting with someone online before I met them. And I would go out with anyone—online or off—at least once if they were attractive to me and passed my finely-tuned creep-o-meter test. So I was nervous and excited when a cute match, who went to my church, asked me out.

A few days later, I sat across the table from him fumbling with the rim of my cocktail. "So, what do you like to do for fun?" I asked. After a few seconds, he finally answered, "I don't know", and I knew it would be a long evening. I also knew I was taking a healthy step forward. The point of my exercise wasn't marriage; it was to find myself.

In his book, *How to Get a Date Worth Keeping*, Dr. Henry Cloud says a successful relationship is one that spurs you to find yourself. "The real issue here is what is the purpose of dating. One of the first steps people need is to be cured of the thinking the purpose of dating is to find a marriage partner," says Cloud. "Dating is as much about learning what you need and want, and how you need to grow and change, as it is about finding the 'right' person."

Cloud encourages going on lots of dates with lots of different kinds of people. Being challenged by different views and asserting your own values. Practicing vulnerability and honesty and establishing boundaries—what you will and will not tolerate in a relationship. And finding the answers to questions about yourself—like "What do you do for fun?"

THE RAIDER

To the Raider, "wait" is a four letter word. You are assertive and prone to be quickly swept into a tide of emotions, hoping for a serious and committed relationship. You believe if you don't command your dating destiny you will end up alone. So you plunder the dating market, armed with all the right moves.

Ironically, your headlong dash-and-swoop methods can push your date's panic button, signaling the destination down the aisle—rather than the person—is the real treasure. If you don't slow down, you could find yourself reeling from a series of toxic relationships that end just as quickly as they began, and standing confused with the map to coupledness sagging in your hands.

It might be time to push pause.

Your desire for companionship is natural, healthy—godly even. But do you know why you're chasing so hard after love? Often, Raiders are looking to fill holes in their lives—we all are. There are spaces in each of our lives that feel profoundly empty. I believe, in part, this is a longing for a perfect kind of love, the kind only God can give us. Another person can't fill that gap. Until we acknowledge this, and are able to fill our minds and hearts with how purely and perfectly God loves us, we will never be satisfied.

I believe another part of the emptiness comes from a wound that never properly healed. Maybe your heart was broken. Or you hold tightly to damaging messages someone once gave you—you're not enough, you're too

much, you're not lovable. Wounds can cause emotional baggage to explode in our faces, sometimes causing enough damage to end a relationship. Looking inward will both help you fill the emptiness and develop criteria for healthier relationships moving forward.

THE STRIDER

The Strider has a quiet confidence and approachability. You might not have started out this way, but time, experience, and personal reflection have taught you to take the good and bad in life—and in dating—as it comes. You aren't perfect, but you do accept responsibility for your faults and use them to nourish personal growth. You recognize that to be a good partner you need to be a good friend. You accept that on some Friday nights, Netflix and a pint of ice cream will be the best date you're going to find—and that's perfectly OK. And that saying yes to coffee is not saying yes to forever. You take risks. You understand that failing is an option—and one you can learn from. You've realized even good, healthy choices can have deeply painful consequences. And that grace is something you give, as much as something you receive.



What is the purpose of dating?

You may not always be patient or fearless, but you understand wanting to control your love life, waiting for it, and dating through it are all exercises in trusting God and you keep walking forward in your faith. The possibilities of where God will take you are as much about surrender as action, and as much about prayer as personal health and preparation.

Whether you're the quiet Waiter, the passionate Raider, or the confident Strider, the type of single you are isn't as important as understanding God's best for us often involves a balance of all three traits. And with a little self-examination, intentionality, and surrender, you can mature into the most attractive kind of single of all: real, honest, courageous and whole.



Lindsey A. Frederick

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IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Congrats! You've met a promising match.
Here are 10 questions to ask yourself before getting too serious:

Do we have fun together?

Do I feel safe with this person?

Do I trust and respect this person?

Are our friends/family supportive of this relationship?

Do we share the same views on marriage and children?

Are we spiritually compatible?

How do we deal with conflict?

Can we communicate honestly about difficult topics such as money and sex?

How have we each dealt with our own "baggage"?

Do I feel free to be the best and worst versions of myself with this person?



By LUKE GERATY

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The EMPOWERING *of* THE HOLY SPIRIT *For* EVANGELISM

HOW SPIRITUAL GIFTS RELATE TO GOD'S GREATER MISSION

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT **ROLES** THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN IS **RELATED** TO GOD'S MISSION. God's mission of transforming and redeeming the world includes the spreading of the good news about Jesus, including his life, death, and resurrection. Christopher J. H. Wright, in *The Mission of God*, writes about how the whole world is the *goal* of God's mission (cf. Acts 1:8), the *scope* of God's mission (Ps. 24:1), and the *arena* of God's mission (Matt. 28:18-20). If you look closely at Acts 1:8, you'll notice that the early church's activity of spreading the message about Jesus is deeply connected to the Holy Spirit:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere-- in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Act 1:8 NLT)

According to Jesus' words, the Holy Spirit gives power to the church *in order for the Church to spread the message about Jesus all over the world!*

Therefore, if the Holy Spirit is involved in the proclamation of the good news about Jesus, and, as we read

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in the last issue, the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to people, *what relationship exists between the spiritual gifts and God's mission?* In this article, we'll explore how spiritual gifts and evangelism (sharing our faith with others) are related. Spiritual gifts are sometimes not seen as being connected to the missional activity of sharing Jesus' story and message, but the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that one of the *primary* activities that the Holy Spirit is involved in is related to empowering the Church to spread the news about King Jesus and his kingdom.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS EMPOWER THE PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S PRESENCE & POWER TO THE SURROUNDING WORLD

In the last article, we looked at Michael Bird's definition of a spiritual gift as "an empowerment from God for God's people through the Spirit for spiritual work in the church." While this is a good starting point for

understanding spiritual gifts, it's by no means a complete definition *because* the focus is primarily upon *inside* the Church. Yet Acts 1:8 states that the Holy Spirit empowers the Church to spread the message of Jesus.

This leads me to conclude that a more balanced definition of spiritual gifts is to explain them as empowerments from God for God's people through the Spirit for spiritual work in both the church *and* the world. It's both/and rather than either/or.

In fact, one of the gifts that's given to the Church is the evangelist (Eph. 4:11). Evangelists are people who are especially gifted by the Spirit to spread the message of Jesus. Throughout church history we read of people who were especially effective at proclaiming the message of Jesus, including notables such as St. Francis of Assisi, George Whitefield, John Wesley, and the recent Billy Graham. Because teaching (1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:7) and speaking in general (1 Pet. 4:11) can be empowered by the Holy Spirit and are considered spiritual gifts, it's safe to say that the Holy Spirit can (and does!) help us as we share our faith in Jesus with others.

A few years ago I was in eastern Africa doing missions work. One of the opportunities we were given was to

The ONLY reason why there was fruit from what I shared was BECAUSE the Holy Spirit was involved.

go to the local city markets and preach about Jesus in front of the public crowds. Despite having taken a number of preaching classes in seminary, I found this to be absolutely terrifying! Yet I also knew that it was something God wanted us to do because that was one of the reasons we were there.

As I stood next to the Kenyan man who was introducing me to the nearly 1,000 people that had gathered in the public square, I began to pray and ask God for his help because I was extremely nervous and had absolutely *no idea* what I was going to say. I mean, I found out I was going to be doing this about fifteen minutes before I was going to be introduced!

The only way to describe what happened is to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit filled me up (Eph. 5:18) and empowered me to tell people about Jesus, just like Acts 1:8 promised! A week later, on the same trip, I was invited to speak at a large event that was said to have nearly 10,000 people in attendance and, again, the

Holy Spirit empowered my words. As thousands of people responded to the message of Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection, I could only marvel at the grace of God. I was (and am) 100% convinced that the *only* reason why there was fruit from what I shared was because the Holy Spirit was involved.

The great news is that the same Holy Spirit that filled Jesus and the apostles lives inside of *every single follower of Jesus*! While you and I may be afraid of the different opportunities we have, one thing we can trust is that the Holy Spirit is with us, and he is absolutely involved in spreading the message of Jesus.

Perhaps you are like the Apostle Paul was when he was sharing the message of Jesus in Corinth and you are afraid. Might Jesus' words *then* encourage you now? Jesus told Paul,

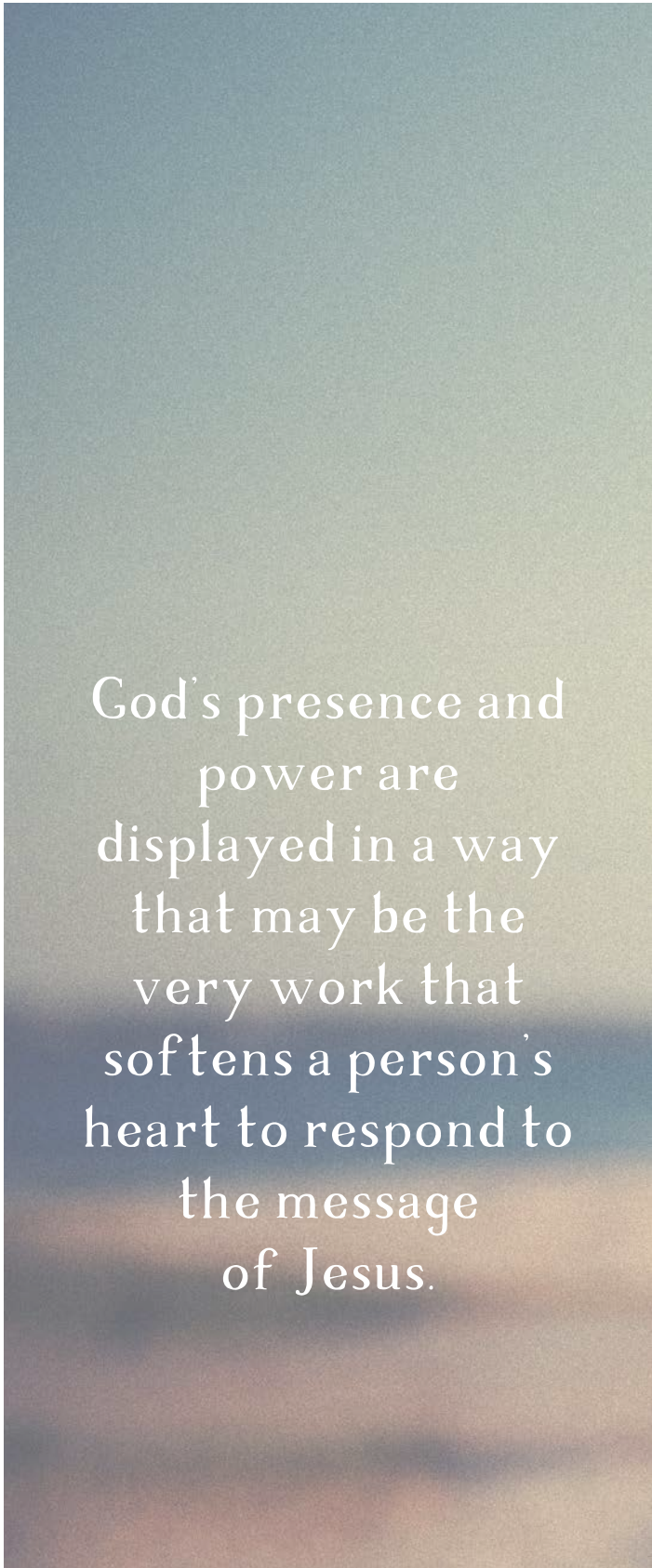
“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you

to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” (Acts 18:9-10 ESV)

Jesus is present with the Church through God’s Holy Spirit. You do not need to fear sharing how Jesus has worked in your life because you can trust that the Holy Spirit both dwells in you and also empowers you for God’s mission.

Now I don’t want to give you the impression that spiritual gifts, in regards to evangelism, are primarily about speaking, teaching, or preaching. Those are just *one* aspect of how the Holy Spirit may gift you to share your faith. Other ways include *doing* things that are empowered by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of inviting people into a transformational relationship with Jesus, to which we now look.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS DEMONSTRATE GOD’S PRESENCE & POWER TO THE SURROUNDING WORLD



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There are a number of spiritual gifts that are means by which people come into contact with the grace of God. One example would be what Paul refers to as “gifts of healings,” the literal translation of 1 Cor. 12:9. These empowerments of the Holy Spirit are used to communicate God’s love, grace, and mercy and point to the sovereign kingship of Jesus.

Additionally, expressions of mercy, miracles, words of wisdom and knowledge, and encouraging are all listed as activities that can be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Each of these gifts, when expressed and ministered to people outside of a relationship with Jesus, should point people to God. After all, Jesus’ miraculous healings were motivated by compassion for the sick and oppressed, for both individuals and for large crowds (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 20:34).

When the Holy Spirit empowers the Church to participate in these activities, God’s presence and power are displayed in a way that may be the very work that softens a person’s heart to respond to the message of Jesus. These miracles do not guarantee that people respond positively to Jesus, for many who saw Jesus’ miracles also rejected him. Yet there are numerous examples in the New Testament of God doing miracles for needy

and broken people and those people responding to those works by trusting in God.

In our next article I will begin to address the more controversial spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues, the interpretation of tongues, and the gift of prophecy. While you wait for those articles, I’d like to encourage you to remember that *all followers of Jesus have received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. All followers of Jesus have been given the task of spreading the message and story of Jesus and the reason why we know that we can be effective as Jesus’ witnesses is because we have the Holy Spirit’s presence and power.*



Luke Geraty

Luke Geraty is a young budding pastor/theologian interested in ecclesiology, missional theology, and coffee. Husband of one, father of five, and deeply committed to proclaiming Jesus and the kingdom, Luke contributes regularly to ThinkTheology.org, MultiplyVineyard.org, and VineyardScholars.org.

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WHAT YOU LIKE FROM THE BIBLE
AND LEAVING THE REST

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Deciphering Bible Translations

FINDING THE BEST BIBLE
FOR YOUR NEEDS

Nightclub Ministry

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INTO THE NIGHTCLUBS OF SPAIN

Breaking Bread & Breaking Barriers

OVERCOMING CULTURAL
DIFFERENCES

PLUS:

WHAT IS PRAYER?
SURFING AND SERVING IN PANAMA
HOW GOD CHANGES YOUR BRAIN
INSIGHTS FROM A CHRISTIAN VEGETARIAN

Equally Yoked

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE
"EQUALLY YOKED?"

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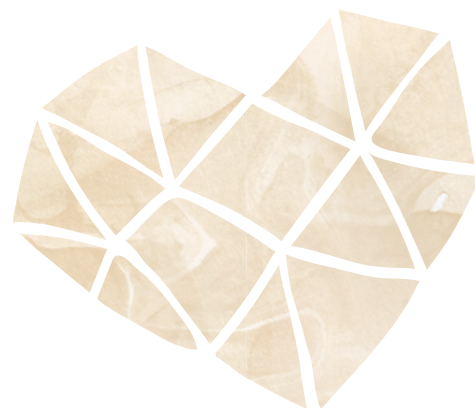
A person wearing a blue jacket and jeans is seen from the back, looking out over a landscape. In the distance, a church with a tall steeple is visible on a hill. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and a body of water under a hazy sky.

THE Beauty OF THE Bride

DO I REALLY HAVE TO GO TO CHURCH?
ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH
AND THE NECESSITY OF OUR PARTICIPATION

Photo © Nicola | Flickr

By **BRANDON HURLBERT**



IT'S NOT **UNCOMMON** TO HAVE AN UNPLEASANT CHURCH GOING EXPERIENCE OR BE **TURNED OFF** BY THE WORDS, BEHAVIORS OR ATTITUDES OF OTHER CHRISTIANS IN YOUR COMMUNITY. Flawed people often produce flawed results. The discomfort caused by such experiences can often lead us to ask the very simple question: "Do I really have to go to a church?" Visiting with friends over Sunday morning brunch is extremely enticing, especially when the church that you have visited numerous times can't seem to remember your name. Getting a few things done around the house seems practical, especially when you didn't really like last week's sermon. So what of this question, do I have to go to a church? The simple answer is, "No, you don't have to go to church." But the truth is you should want to go, and in many ways we need to be there. We get a lot out of a meaningful engagement with the local church and we contribute a lot as well.

Unfortunately, some of us have been burned, shamed, guilt-tripped, abused, and a whole slew of other descriptions, by people in the church. These descriptions scare you, and the thought of entering a church building this coming Sunday freaks you out even more. In fact, you may have been out on your own for a long

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time and you feel confident that you don't need the church. Whoever you are and wherever you find yourself, I want you to discover the beauty of the Bride of Christ (the local and global community of Jesus-followers we call the Church with a capital C), understanding that you are an integral part of the family that Christ has made through his death on the cross. But first, I

YOU are an integral part of the FAMILY that Christ has made through his death on the cross.

would love to share some of my own personal story.

I am the churchgoer of churchgoers. My grandparents were missionaries in Nigeria for almost 20 years. Two of my uncles are pastors, my cousins are pastors, my siblings are missionaries, and my parents are both missionaries and pastors. I grew up going to the maximum amount of services, programs, ministries, kids' choirs, Vacation Bible Schools (typically church-run children's summer camps), youth group events, service projects, lock-ins, prayer meetings, and mission trips. But my family was severely burned by the church, and I ended up hating it all together.

I came to college burned, burned out, and searching for a community who would just accept me. I remember distinctly a dinner with a bunch of friends in the cafeteria. We were all sitting around and telling each other "horror" stories of church. "Boy, do I have a story that can top that!" I explained in detail the gross amounts of sin committed against me and my family. Gently sneering, I recounted how hurtful and how idiotic my old church was. Halfway through my story, a friend said something that I would never forget.

"Hey, can you stop talking shit on the Bride of Christ?"

I don't think Jesus would appreciate that very much. Thanks."

He went back to eating along with everyone else, but I was haunted. I felt like Saul/Paul on the road to Damascus. Saul/Paul, who wrote around 30% of the New Testament, wasn't always such a saint. Before he met Jesus, he made a living persecuting Christians. On his way to imprison and likely kill Christians in Damascus, Jesus appeared to him saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4, ESV) It was through this experience that Saul began to follow Jesus and become the Apostle Paul that we remember today. Although this wasn't my experience, there were some similarities.

That conversation was a big wake-up call: my speech, my thoughts, and my actions were an attack on Jesus and his Bride. Throughout Scripture, the people of God are described as the Bride, and God as the Bridegroom (Isaiah 62:5, Hosea 2:16-20, John 3:29, Ephesians 5:22-33, Revelation 19:6-8). God demonstrates his love accordingly as a Husband who gives his life for his Bride. It was this same Bride, his Church, that I had been reviling, and, after our conversation that night, I knew it. A few months later, I became involved in a church

that God used to show me the beauty of his Bride.

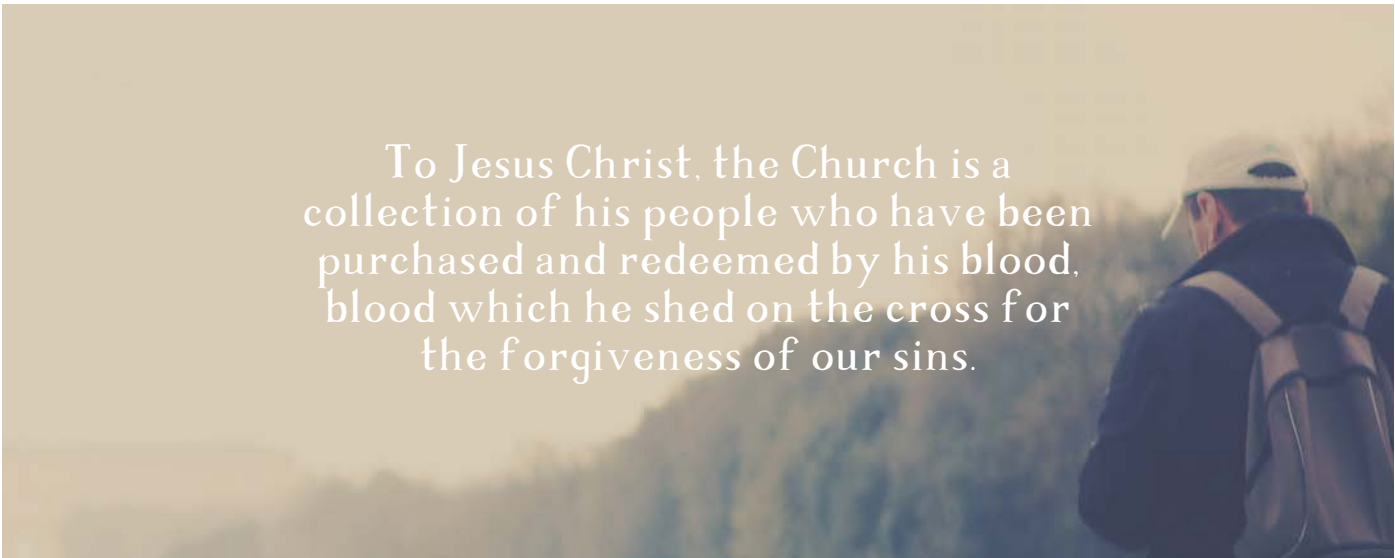
You may have been hurt by this same Bride. You may have been abused or burned. Or maybe this Bride just doesn't look as hot as she used to. I want to encourage you to look at the Church the way Jesus looks at her. To Jesus Christ, the Church is a collection of his people who have been purchased and redeemed by his blood, blood which he shed on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus is head-over-heels for these people, and he has brought them into his family. It is this Bride, this family, that he has called his beloved and whom he has called beautiful. If we are to understand how to think about the Church, we have to understand this from God's perspective.

So where does the Church begin? It begins in God. God is triune which means that he is three separate persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—who are coeternal, coequal in majesty and in power, who exist in perfect unity, as one God—the Trinity. I am quite lacking in space to detail everything about the Trinity, so this will have to do. In God there exists a loving unity and thus a community of sorts. The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father. Same goes with the Holy Spirit.

This community—the Trinity—existed before creation. After God had made all things, he declared that it wasn't good for Adam to be alone. He provided Eve to be his partner (Genesis 2). All of this happened prior to the fall and to sin, so while mankind was still in perfect, sinless creation, God knew that his creation needed relationships with one another. In other words, we were crafted for community. We are made in the image of God, to be attached and involved in a community. So the Church—the people of God—begins in the very nature of God himself and is manifested in his image bearers—his people.

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, we can see the people of God struggling to act appropriately as God's family. We see them go through periods of doubt, periods of disobedience, and periods of distress when they cry out to God for deliverance. Time after time, the people of God realize that their actions don't line up with their identity and that they need God to save them. He does this ultimately through Jesus Christ.

It is through Jesus' sacrifice that we, the people of God, ultimately become his family. Jesus' mission was to save his people by cleansing them of their sins by his



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own sacrificial death. But much more than this was accomplished by his death, burial, and resurrection. John 1:12 (ESV) explains, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” Jesus is not just saving you from your sins; he is also making an alternative community, the church. “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19, ESV). Jesus repairs our relationship with God. In Jesus’ death on the cross, he forever made God’s fatherhood available to us. This is the Gospel, that we get God as our dad, and our fellow Christians as our brothers and sisters.

Part of Jesus’ ministry was to create this new family, beyond the natural family. There is a poignant scene when Jesus’ mother and his brothers come to get him (Mark 3:31-35). They came, not to follow him, but to bring him back home. John elaborates elsewhere that not even his brothers believed that Jesus was the Christ. (John 7:5). His family had come to take him back home so he wouldn’t heap anymore shame upon their family name. Jesus replies to his followers, “Who are my mother and brothers?” To Jesus, it is those who are doing the will of God, who hear and obey his voice.

In another instance, Jesus calls his disciples to forsake everything, including their natural families, to follow him (Mark 1:14-20, Luke 14:26, Matthew 8:21-22). Jesus is creating a new family which is not based upon blood or marriage, but on faith.

Our original question of “Do I have to go to church?” seems to be the wrong question. If you are a Christian, then by definition, you are part of the church because you are a part of the family of God. Dr. Joseph Hellerman, author of *When the Church was a Family*, makes some very interesting points. He quotes Cyprian of Carthage, an early church father who lived in the third century, “He who does not have the church for his mother cannot have God for his Father.” Hellerman elaborates by explaining that, “He who does not have God’s children as his brothers and sisters does not have God for his Father.” (73) By this Hellerman means that if you are a Christian it makes no sense for you to alienate yourself from your family. Referring to modern Christian culture, he writes, “By separating salvation from church involvement, in a culture that is already socially fragmented and relatively devoid of relational commitment, we implicitly give people permission to leave God’s family when the going gets rough—to take their ‘personal relationships with Jesus’ with them to

Humanity is built for community.

another church down the block, or worse, to no church family at all” (135). If you are saved, you are saved into the family of God, and thus you are a part of the Church, complete with brothers and sisters.

Thus, the question that should be asked is not “Do I have to go to Church and be a part of this family?” The question should be, “How should I act in this family?” Will you be the estranged aunt or uncle? Will you be the aloof older brother? Or maybe the parent who walked out? Instead of these strained familial relationships, Scripture encourages us to be loving brothers and sisters. 1 John is filled with these encouragements, “By this we know love, that he [Jesus] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers [and sisters]” (1 John 3:16). Sometimes this means sacrificing pride or possessions for this new family we find ourselves in. Sometimes it is as simple as taking someone out to lunch. There are an endless number of ways that we can contribute to our church families.

To review, humanity is built for community. We are made in the image of the triune God, so we require community for our completeness. Through Jesus we have new life individually, but also a new family corporately. We are saved into a new family filled with brothers and sisters. In this family, there is no divisions; we are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28-29). We are called to love and serve this family. Lastly, it is this particular family that Jesus gave his life for; He values this Bride over his own life. Therefore we should see the immense love he has for it and imitate this love.

How does this look in our day-to-day life? The universal church, the entire family of God, is a little too big to love practically. Instead, we love and serve the church as it exists locally in our communities. It might be that small Baptist church on the corner or that large church you grew up in. It also might exist as a church plant that meets at your local high school auditorium. Wherever it is, that church can and should be your family.

Look for a church that preaches the Bible faithfully.

So what exactly does loving our local church look like? It looks like going to their corporate gatherings which usually happen on Sundays. However it isn't just about going or attending, but *being*. It looks like being apart of the family there. Imagine that you went to a family reunion and just sat there without saying anything to anyone. After about an hour or so, you left without saying goodbye. Would an observer believe that you were a part of that family? The point is that just going isn't enough. We must *belong* to this local expression of God's family because it is *our* family.

There are many ways you can do this, and most of them are really obvious: Sunday mornings, serving somewhere, tithing, being apart of some kind of small group, etc. Don't just focus on the acts; focus on the goal of the acts. We must become family and we must share our hearts with one another. All of these events produce in us a deeper love for one another. The Holy Spirit promises to unite us in Christ (Ephesians 2:16-22). Essentially, the Holy Spirit knits our hearts together. Our unity, must become our focus as we learn to love one another. This unity that the Spirit produces in us doesn't mean we won't disagree with one another.

Rather, this unity is what we can gather around and celebrate, namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This unity, means that we elevate this above our differences; this unity means that at the end of the day, we are family.

I will make a very large disclaimer. This will not be easy. The Church is full of messy people learning to live like Christ. I am one of those people, and so are you. We were made for community, and through Jesus, we have been made into a new family. Luckily for us, this family is headed by God, who is a good father who loves his kids.

So, are we called to go to church? No. We are called to be a family.



Brandon Hurlbert

Brandon has a B.A. in Biblical and Theological Studies from Biola University. He also has a minor in English Literature which means he enjoys reading the classics when he has the time. His passion and his heart is for the Church, with specific focus on integrating academic thought with church life. He also really, really likes coffee. He currently lives in southern California. Brandon can be reached at brandon.m.hurlbert@gmail.com.



by RAMON MAYO

Photo © Jonathan Kos-Read | Flickr

ACCEPTING CHRIST

CHRISTIAN LINGO EXPLAINED

MANY PEOPLE **ACCEPT** THAT **CHRIST** EXISTED. MANY PEOPLE ACCEPT THAT HE DIED. Still others accept not only that he died but that he rose again and that he is God. Many would accept his existence and the facts about his life much like they accept that the world is round and spins on an axis or that you always lose at least one sock in the dryer to the Abominable Dryer Beast. Is this what it means to accept Christ? How do you accept someone who is invisible? What does it really mean to accept Christ?

There are atheist scholars of religion who can wholeheartedly say that Christ existed as a preacher who roamed first century Palestine and ultimately met an untimely death at the hands of the Roman government. They regard these things as facts, but they can't believe that Christ was God. To accept only the pieces of the story we find easy to believe is not the same as accepting Christ. Many accept the facts of his death and resurrection, but they still have only scratched the surface of what it means to accept Christ.

The phrase "Accept Christ" is more about accepting the person of Christ. It is a relational phrase that comes from a passage in the Bible. In Revelation 3:20, the

apostle John delivers a message to one of the churches in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) that Christ is at the door knocking and it is now their choice whether they will let him in—accept him. It is a rebuke and a challenge, asking whether they will embrace Christ relationally. They must choose whether he will be their master and King. Fast forward to the twentieth century. Preachers began using this phrase to invite people to have a relationship with Christ. To accept him is not just mental assent. It is to allow his reign to permeate every aspect of your life. It is to embrace his teaching, his character, and his directions and guidance in our relationships, finances, vocation, and even our recreation. To accept Christ is to embrace him as Lord.



Ramon Mayo

Ramon Mayo is an author and speaker. He resides in the Greater Chicago area with his wife Yvette and his three children Kaydon, Syenna and MercyAnna. He recently published his first book, a Christian Black History Devotional, titled *His Story, Our Story*. You can check it out at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Also check out his blog at [Ramon-Mayo.com](https://www.Ramon-Mayo.com)



TYLER WEAVER

by BEN HELMS

No

COOKIE-CUTTER CHRISTIAN

AN INTERVIEW WITH TYLER WEAVER ON
LIFE, THE MEDICAL FIELD AND IMPACTING
PEOPLE FOR CHRIST

I HAVE THIS **AWESOME** FRIEND. His name is Tyler. He's one of the smartest, funniest, and overall best people I've ever met. And when we did meet, back in college, we got along instantly. We just meshed. So when he told me he hadn't grown up in church—like I had—I remember being surprised. And when he said he'd first heard about Christ through his friends in high school, not at a young age through his mom—like I had—I was shocked. His testimony was so vastly different from mine, but somehow we'd both found Jesus—or rather, he'd found the both of us.

Tyler taught me that there's no cookie-cutter way to become a Christian. Through searching for truth, struggling with doubt, and investing in relationships, we can all find personal relationships with Christ.

Currently, Tyler's a doctor and in his first year of residency. I was able to steal some of his precious free time recently and interview him about his faith and how he got where he is today. I hope and pray that his story and the words expressed therein give you the same hope, encouragement, and wisdom they've given me over the years.

WHAT WAS YOUR PERCEPTION OF CHRISTIANS GROWING UP?

I had a pretty shielded view of Christians. I had a few friends growing up that were “church going,” so whenever I'd spend the night at their house on Saturday nights, I'd end up having to go to church with them. It was cool. There were treats and stuff so it wasn't ever a big deal. Thankfully, I never had a run-in with huge hypocrisy or anything like that, so it was kind of under the radar in my world growing up.

WHAT WAS IT THEN ABOUT CHRISTIANITY THAT FIRST INTERESTED YOU, OR CAUGHT YOUR ATTENTION?

I think like many outreaches, Young Life—which ultimately brought me to Jesus—used other ploys to bring me in to hear the gospel. (Young Life is a non-denominational Christian outreach found in most major cities in the U.S. that focuses on building relationships with teenagers, usually through youth groups and after-school programming.) In my world, Young Life was a very popular, fun thing to do with friends every Monday night. I went to club meetings, and hung out with

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a bunch of people being goofy. Basically I heard the message of God's love and sin—which I'd heard before at church occasionally, but I don't remember anything contextually from those Sunday morning sermons. In Young Life, when I showed up, I remember them speaking to something that for whatever reason would strike a chord with me or spark an interest in things I'd been thinking about, but just hadn't been able to put words to yet. You know what I mean?

Even though I was only in high school, I still thought about things like eternity. I thought about death. I thought about the meaning of life and all of this stuff. I just didn't know where to put that or how to answer any of those questions. Walking into Young Life and hearing the gospel gave me a context for that and made a ton of sense.

DEFINITELY, SO HOW DID YOU GO FROM THAT INTRODUCTION INTO THE GOSPEL TO SEEKING OUT YOUR OWN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD BEYOND YOUNG LIFE?

Well, I officially heard the gospel and accepted it as truth when I was fifteen, but it wasn't until over

three years later that I really ran with it as my own. It remained something that was just cool and was somewhat a part of my story that I did nothing about.

But three years later when I went to college, it removed some of the security and patterns of the life I grew up in and forced me to choose what I did with every

minute, and every decision was mine. I remember thinking, “I’m going to be making a ton of decisions in life, to go to parties, to not go to parties, which people to hang out with, to do whatever,” and I’ve always been the type of person who needs a tangible reason why I make decisions and not just make them because I feel a certain way.

There were influences from other people, but I just remember having this huge sense of independence freshmen year of college and I remember God blessed me with these people surrounding me, just random friends living next door to me in the dorm. They knew God, and the way they were choosing to live their lives was something I aligned with, and I realized they were doing that seemingly because Jesus was in charge of what was going on in their lives.

FROM THERE, AS YOU WERE MAKING YOUR FAITH YOUR OWN, WHAT KIND OF INFLUENCES OR INPUT DID YOU SEEK OUT TO MAKE THAT FAITH EVEN DEEPER?

I think I’ve gotten most of my influences and most of my growth from two main influences. This is some-

thing I still need to grow in, but the first is sermons. They’ve always fascinated me. I’ve always just zoned in and readily accepted (pastor’s) teachings. That being said, I still question and take it with a grain of salt. But I just love a good teaching; something that just slaps you in the face. Even from the get-go, as a young Christian, that was something that really taught me a lot. I remember Sundays were typically the days when I was able to understand the Bible and understand God’s will much more than the other days on my own.

As time went on, the other big influence was my relationship with my peers. Until recently, I’d never had a mentor, so it was my peers that helped me figure out faith and figure out what it all means. It was those long discussions with close friends and us just figuring out life together and struggling with all of these questions. That’s what helped me figure out the day-to-day stuff.

It was sermons and community that were my focus, but where I’ve been lacking and want to improve is focusing and drawing a lot more on the Word (Bible) in my own life and from prayer. And I do those things, and they build relationship between the Lord and I, but it does seem like I’ve gotten the most from those two things (sermons and relationships).

Times that BRING me closer to Christ are times of REST.

WHAT KINDS OF THINGS HAVE BROUGHT YOU CLOSER WITH CHRIST, AND WHAT KIND OF THINGS HAVE WIDENED THAT GAP?

For me, the things that widen the gap are stress and busy-ness. I've felt the furthest away from God and his presence when things get crazy and I become self-reliant. My reaction to being overwhelmed and busy is to take control of as many things as I can and try to work it out myself, even down to the details. And when I succeed in those things, it's almost worse because then it pushes me to become more self-sufficient because I think I can do it myself, which is just a large distraction.

Times that bring me closer to Christ are times of rest, whether that's a true Sabbath day, or vacation, or just a day when I just get to be and can slow down. I think in my line of work (as a medical doctor) it can be difficult because I have a lot of work-related stuff to read every night, but it helps occasionally being able to read what I want to read and stretch myself and challenge myself with books and thoughts and conversations with others about God and this world and how those things fit together.

And then those random times when sermons happen or realizations happen, or God just speaks and you get knocked on your ass and realize you've lost the big picture, and you're brought back to your true priorities. You realize it's not about me succeeding but about bringing him (God) glory. It's not about fighting for my pride but about becoming humble, getting outside my own head and my own means and loving people.

HOW DOES YOUR FAITH IMPACT YOUR DAILY INTERACTIONS?

Well, I wish I could say it was manifested in every relationship because I was aware all the time, but that's not the case. When I am aware and present with what God's actually doing around me, that affects the patients I have. I can visibly tell the difference those times. This aligns with the time when I'm self-sufficient as well. I don't look at people as people, but I see them as a means. But when I'm operating in the spirit [consciously letting the Holy Spirit guide me] or with awareness of what God's doing around me, I tend to see them more like I think God sees them; as a human being who was created and is loved. It's those times when I can talk to them and lose myself in their lives and find ways to encourage them.

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**YOU'RE A DOCTOR AND CURRENTLY IN
YOUR FIRST YEAR OF RESIDENCY. WHAT IS
IT LIKE BEING A CHRISTIAN IN THE MEDI-
CAL FIELD?**

There's this unspoken thought that's a big fear of mine that in the medical field, if you're a Christian, you're dumb, or you're illogical, or believe in some make-believe, fairy thing that's just not real. So I think

that sadly, there's this teeny, tiny voice inside of me that occasionally creeps up and says, "Hey, it's embarrassing that you're a follower of Jesus." But even though I try not to listen to it, it can sometimes speak quite loudly. So with that, it's fun to succeed and excel intellectually in the medical field and also represent Jesus at the same time. It seems to throw people for a loop occasionally when they see me be logical and intelligent and at the same time they know I believe in this whole gospel thing. And also it's been fun because I think I've gotten a reputation of being a very joyful person, even when things are very, very hard. So I just hope that continues to spark a question in their minds of why that's the case and how ultimately the answer is there are bigger things and bigger kingdoms than the medical world and job world.



Ben Helms

Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, Ben earned his degree in writing from Azusa Pacific University in Los Angeles. After a few years in Portland, he and his wife, Hannah, moved back to small town Mt. Shasta, CA, where they reside, raising their two beautiful daughters. A mobile app designer by day and musician by night, Ben occasionally finds time to write at

www.benhelms.com.



by **STEVEN BUTWELL**

Photo © philhearing | Flickr

GOOD IS
Not GOOD
ENOUGH

ON WHY OUR ACTIONS ALONE (NO MATTER HOW GOOD THEY SEEM) CANNOT SAVE US FROM ETERNAL SEPARATION FROM GOD

RECENTLY I HAD A **CONVERSATION** WITH TWO GUESTS ON THE FRONT PATIO OF THE RESTAURANT WHERE I WORK. You

could say this conversation was by accident, or you could say God meant for me to be there at exactly that moment (often called a divine appointment). I delivered two dishes to the ladies and asked them if there was anything else I could do for them. One of the ladies said “I have lower back pain. Is there anything you can do about that?” I smiled and said, “I can pray for you in Jesus’ name that the back pain would cease.” My response brought up an entirely new topic. The woman’s friend, who wasn’t a Christian, said to me, “I don’t think God would turn me away when I got to the gates of Heaven. I am a good person.” I asked her, “Who defines what is good?”

Who *does* define good? Consider this verse: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time” (1 Timothy 2:5-6). If being a good person gets us into Heaven, then why did Jesus have to offer himself as a ransom for all people? If being a good person saves us, then Christ died for no purpose, and we would all be

If being a **GOOD** person saves us, then Christ died for no **PURPOSE**, and we would all be able to **SAVE** ourselves through our “good behavior.”

able to save ourselves through our “good behavior.”

However, if Christ died to save us, then this implies something entirely different.

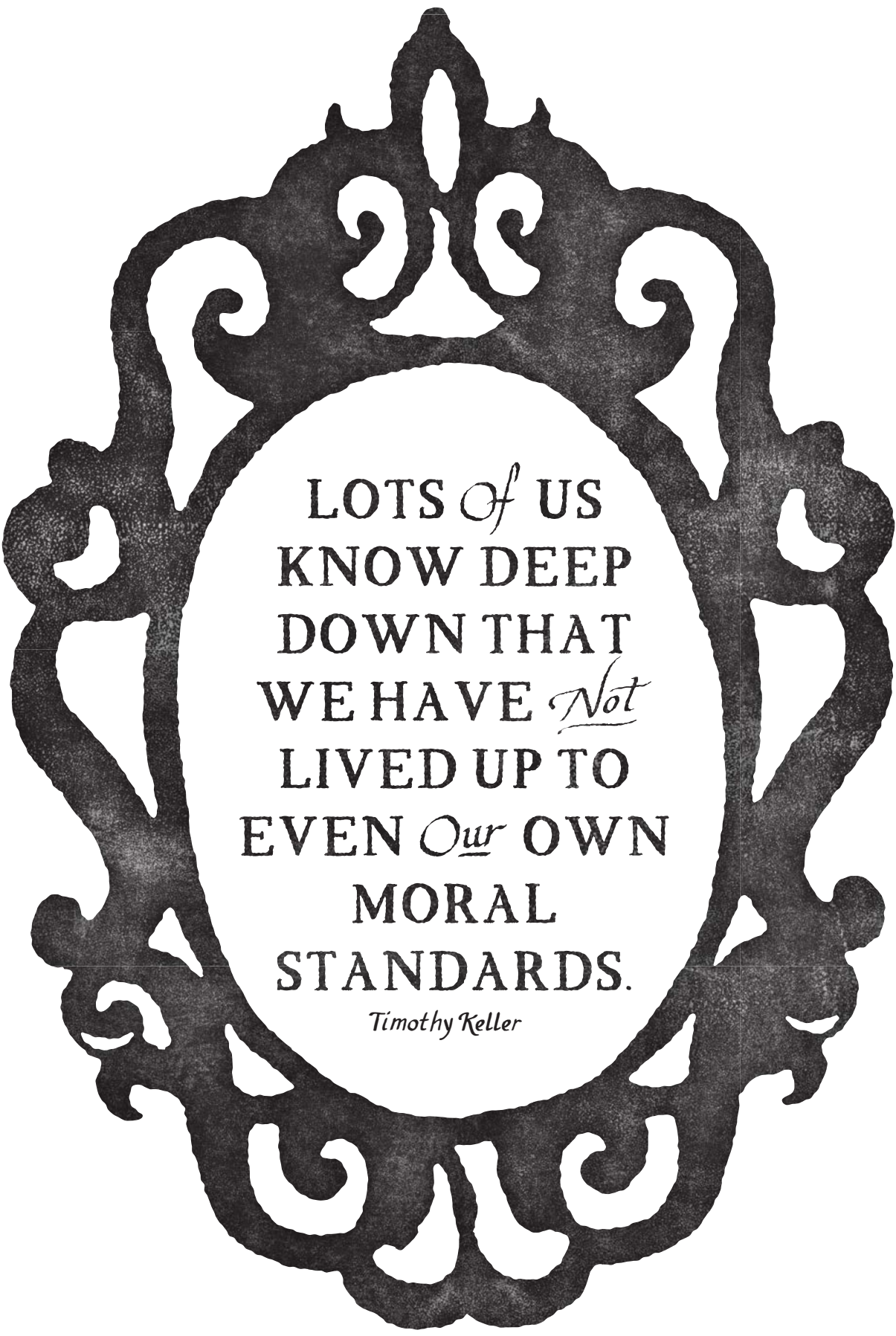
If Christ died to save us, our actions, no matter how good they seem, do not save us from eternal separation from God. Only Jesus can save us from that because, as the verse above says, “there is one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”

Think about the fall of man recorded in Genesis 3. Humans have always desired to be “like God” (the irony being that we actually *were* created in his image). It has always been the goal of people to resolve their own issues and rely on their own strength to do so. When someone says “I will go to Heaven because I am a good person,” that’s the same as saying, “What I do saves me. What I say saves me. Who I am is what saves me.” The teachings of the Bible directly oppose this and says this about the actions and intentions of the human heart: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one” (Rom 3:10-12, ESV). That could be per-

ceived as harsh, but think about it this way: If we are truly these kinds of people (and, face it, we are), what kind of God would save us? A very loving one! This sets the foundation and shows just how much and to what lengths God would go to save and restore us, to reconcile us back into right standing with him. That is amazing grace! That is unfailing love! That Jesus would take my place and punishment upon himself to save me from this type of rebellion and lifestyle convinces me how much God truly loves me, and how truly good God is.

There is a story in Mark 10 that I love. It touches a bit more on the perception people have about what is good.

And as he (Jesus) was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” And



LOTS *of* US
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MORAL
STANDARDS.

Timothy Keller

Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:17-22, ESV)

There was an obvious quality about Jesus that this young man had identified as “good,” because he goes so far as to call Jesus “Good Teacher.” And I love Jesus’ response to the man, “Why do you call me *good*?”

One of my favorite things about Jesus is that he often responds to a question with a question. He does it, not because he is being coy, but because he wants the person asking to truly contemplate why he or she is asking the question. What did the man see in Jesus that was good? What had he heard about Jesus that prompted this heart response? Why did Jesus respond that, “No one is good except God alone?” Jesus wants us to realize our complete need for God. A dependence upon him for all things.

Jesus says that no person is good. So if being a good person is what gets us to Heaven, no one will be there—only God, because he alone is good. Though we have the outward appearance of being good, he knows our

If BEING a good person is what gets us to Heaven, NO one will be there—only GOD, because he ALONE is good.

hearts are still prone to wander from the one true requirement needed for eternal life: to know and love God. To know God more deeply, we connect with him through prayer, fellowship with other Christians, and reading the Bible.

Even though the young man posing the question had “kept” the commandments since he was young, he wasn’t willing to give his whole heart and life to God. The young man was disheartened because Jesus was asking him to offer God the one thing that was most important to him: his wealth. Jesus looked compassionately at the young man and told him the truth he needed to hear: you lack true relationship with me if you hold something back from me.

The young man had kept the commandments and kept up the appearance of being a “good person,” but a relationship with Jesus is not summed up in a checklist of “do’s and don’ts.” God wants our whole lives to be his: our possessions, our hearts, our families, jobs, finances, thoughts, conversations, and the list continues. Counting on a checklist to accomplish a relationship with Jesus sets us up for immediate and everyday failure. And, even worse, it is a way for us to feel that we ourselves have accomplished “good” without the help of God.

In the beginning, our predecessors, Adam and Eve, ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is ironic to think that the knowledge that came from eat-

The GOOD NEWS is God wants to RESTORE us to the original setting: PERFECT.

ing that fruit showed us just how much we truly need God and that we were created to be in perfect fellowship with him. God gave us exactly what we asked for: the knowledge of good and evil, knowledge that apart from God we can do nothing good. If we don’t have a perfect relationship with him, we are against him i.e. evil.

The good news is God wants to restore us to the original setting: perfect. God wants to reclaim what was lost, that is, us. He did (and does) that through Jesus. Jesus says in John 14:6 (ESV), “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus is the only way of knowing God, the infallible truth of God, and the perfect picture of a life lived for God. Jesus is perfect.

Surrendering our hearts and lives to Jesus is what makes us whole.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19)

The Bible is clear: people are not capable of being good by God's standard (which is perfection, and we all know we aren't perfect people); we meet his standard by knowing Christ personally.

So being a good person does not save us from Hell (an eternal state of separation from God where there is no hope); God's perfect plan does. It is a plan for relationship, reconciliation and restoration that has been laid out in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For the grace of God has appeared in Jesus Christ, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live

self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14)

The Holy Spirit used me (and can use you in the same manner) to start the patio conversation off with a question: "Is there anything else I can do for you?" This question led into a conversation about whether or not being good can save us, which led into an even more important question: "Who defines what is good"? The truth is that God does, and he says that, "There is salvation in no one else but Jesus. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Steven Butwell



Steven is a former atheist who encountered Jesus face to face at age 19 in a vision. Since then, Steven has devoted his life to serving Jesus in every facet of his life. Currently, Steven is the youth director of EDGE church in San Juan Capistrano, CA where he passionately teaches the gospel of Jesus to students. Steven's other passions include: learning to be a godly husband to his lovely wife Jamie, reading the Bible, writing, traveling, playing Playstation 4 and public speaking.



A FORK IN *The* ROAD

CONVICTION VERSUS CONDEMNATION
AS WE DEAL WITH OUR MISTAKES

By RAMON MAYO

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CONVICTION AND CONDEMNATION ARE DISTANT COUSINS. I wouldn't call them siblings, but they do belong in the same family. They both have to do with the way we deal with our mistakes or, as the Bible puts it, our sin. They are universal feelings, yet they don't always stem from universal actions. Some may feel conviction from one thing and condemnation from another. Each situation is different depending on the person and the personality. What may condemn one person may only convict another.

Both emotions are common to humanity. Conviction is the more positive one, and condemnation is the more negative. What separates them is not necessarily how they make us feel but where they lead. Both of them cause us some sadness or sorrow, but they lead to two different places or final destinations.

Conviction is something that comes from the knowledge of our sin. One of the biblical definitions of sin is to "miss the mark" or target. Conviction is an acknowledgment that we have not hit the mark of God's righteousness. That being said, conviction doesn't leave us there to wallow in our imperfection, it motivates us to hit the mark. Conviction is the inner drive to do what is

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right. Conviction is what makes a liar stop lying. Conviction is what makes an adulterer become faithful. Conviction is what makes a thief become generous.

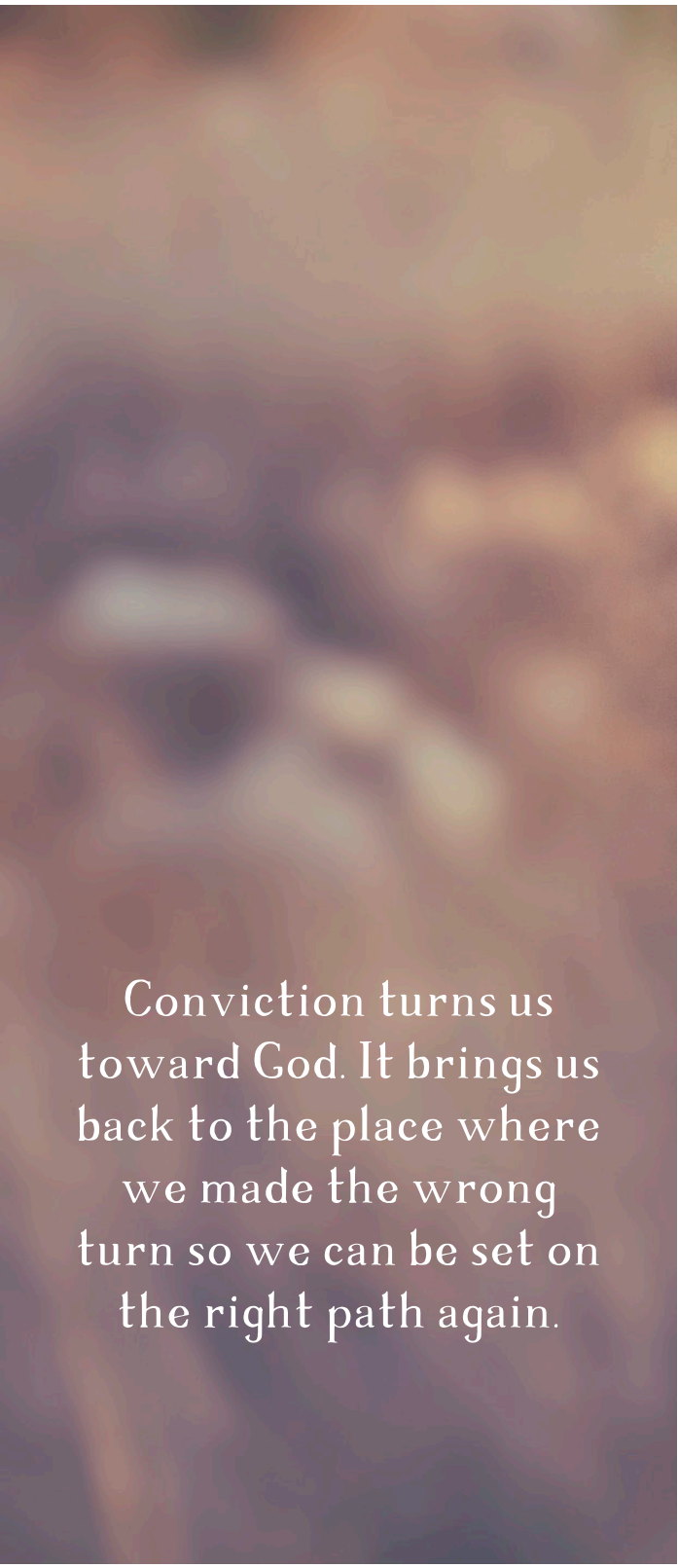
Conviction turns us toward God. It brings us back to the place where we made the wrong turn so we can be set on the right path again. In 2 Corinthians 7:10 (NIV), Paul talks about how "godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." Godly sorrow doesn't leave us in

sorrow but moves us to live righteously. It is sorrow for a purpose. It causes us to realize the true depth of what we have done. Conviction causes us to realize, not only what we have done to ourselves or to others, but also what we have done against God.

Condemnation is another thing altogether (Matthew 23:33, John 3:18). Where conviction motivates us to do what is right, Condemnation doesn't motivate us at all or at least it motivates us to stay where we are. Condemnation makes us immobile. It is ungodly sorrow. It is the sorrow that doesn't motivate us to do right but motivates us to stay away from God. It motivates us to stay away from community. It leads us into darkness.

Condemnation makes us regret what we have done but doesn't move us to take action to do the right thing. It is the dark cloud over our head. Condemnation is the sign of punishment that hangs over us whenever we do something wrong. It is the judgment of God on our sins without the righteousness of Christ in our place.

This is our natural human default when we do something wrong—run and hide. This is when we feel condemnation. Condemnation is what Adam and Eve felt when they first sinned in the garden. It is what



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Cain felt after he murdered Abel in cold blood and responded to God by saying, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9, b, NIV) Condemnation has been with us since the dawn of time.

We fall prey to condemnation when we do not turn to Christ. We would rather use our own means to avoid judgment, and then we realize judgment is still on us. Our ways and means to get rid of the judgment are not sufficient. We drift towards condemnation when we attempt to work our way out of judgment instead of relying on the righteousness of Christ.

Even followers of Jesus fall into this trap all the time. Knowing that we are not condemned by our sins and experiencing that same freedom from condemnation are two different things. You can know it in your intellect but not embrace it with your heart and your emotions. For many the concept of being free from condemnation is just words on a page. This is because our sinful nature prompts us to run and hide just like Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8-11). We believe we are excluded from God’s presence and marked just like Cain after he killed Abel (Genesis 4:13-16). This is totally contrary to the gospel that we have been called to embrace (Romans 8:1).

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Are TWO DIFFERENT THINGS.

The truth is sometimes churches preach a gospel of condemnation. This is because it is easier to control people through external means of behavior modification instead of the internal conviction that comes from a right understanding of the gospel. In order to control people and get them to behave a certain way, they use sin and law in the absence of forgiveness and grace. After hearing this type of message and partici-

pating in this type of culture, many find it hard to live free from condemnation.

This is legalistic or a law-driven Christianity which is an oxymoron. Many people who adhere to this type of spirituality go through a cycle of law, sin, and condemnation. They may continue to do all of the religious rituals and jump through all of the church hoops, but

in their hearts they don't understand that Jesus has paid their debt on the cross. Folks who are caught in this cycle continue to try to earn their way into heaven. At it's worst, this type of Christianity causes people to wallow in what they have done and even abandon their faith in Christ.

Falling into the trap of condemnation is also a matter of personality type. Some personalities are much more melancholy and tend towards the negative. It is mostly because they are seeking perfection and, when it comes to spiritual things, they seek a moral perfection on par with Jesus. The sorrow they feel distorts reality, especially the truth of the gospel. A person with this sort of personality needs to be constantly fed God's word, encouraged, and supported—so he or she will allow Christ to embrace them with all of their faults.

Condemnation and conviction are distant step cousins, but they can still seem a lot alike. God wants us to experience conviction. This is because God is all about relationship, and conviction draws us closer to him. Condemnation does the opposite. Even if we are not drawn away from him, condemnation can make it hard to even believe that God loves us. Conviction brings us closer to a loving Father. Condemnation steers us

toward a perception of God as a stern, harsh judge.

They both cause us sorrow, but only one leads to daylight. The other leads to darkness. The key is in knowing which one you are experiencing. It's quite simple really. All you have to do is look at the direction you are taking. If you find yourself going after God and turning away from your sin, then you are experiencing conviction. If you find yourself staying away from God and turning toward sin and doubt, then you are experiencing condemnation. It's all about direction. I encourage you to let God be your navigator and your refuge.



Ramon Mayo

Ramon Mayo is an author and speaker. He resides in the Greater Chicago area with his wife Yvette and his three children Kaydon, Syenna and MercyAnna. He recently published his first book, a Christian Black History Devotional, titled His Story, Our Story. You can check it out at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Also check out his blog at [RamonMayo.com](https://www.RamonMayo.com)

AFFECTION *Is*
A LOVE THAT IS
NOT *For* SHOW

A REFLECTION ON AFFECTION INSPIRED BY C.S. LEWIS' *FOUR LOVES*



C LIVE STAPLES LEWIS WAS ONE THE MOST WELL KNOWN THEOLOGIANS IN THE LAST 100 YEARS. A literature professor by trade, he was the author of over 70 books ranging from the fantasy fiction of the *Chronicles of Narnia* series to the allegorical fiction of *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce*. He also wrote books specifically about faith and its expression, most notably the classic *Mere Christianity*. His works are heartfelt and challenging at the same time but they are also approachable quickly bringing the reader into a greater understanding of his perspective on the condition of Man in relation to his Creator. If you or someone you know is new to Christianity and wants to know more about its application to everyday life, Lewis's works are a primer for showing both the immediate and the eternal effect Christ has on someone, in times of joy and times of despair and all of the emotions in between.

One of Lewis's shortest works is a book called *The Four Loves* written in 1960. While his other books are specific in topic such as *Mere Christianity* or *A Grief Observed*, (which dealt with the topic of mourning), *The Four Loves* deals with the universal concept of love and then spends time explaining its different forms. The loves that are examined are Affection, Friendship,

Eros, and Charity. Affection is where I'll be focusing. Friendship is the love between friends, Eros is the love between lovers or partners and Charity is the love of giving without the expectation of reciprocity. This will be the first in a series of articles talking about the Four Loves and how these loves are shown to us from God. Friendship applies to God's seeking our companionship, wanting to share our time and experiences. Eros love from God would deal with the intimate partnership that God can provide as a confidant and comforter. Charity is the living example of the dichotomy of the what is deserved by us people of Earth compared to what is provided. Affection on the other hand is, in the eyes of Lewis, the love of familiarity. It is the love that we are first introduced to from birth the love that is shown first from parents to offspring, but Lewis also recognizes that later on, with maturity, is shown by offspring to parents as well. (p.31)

Lewis composed the phrase of "Need-Love" to precisely describe to purpose of affection most notably in its first incarnation of love from mother to child. (p.32) Just as the only way that a child can flourish is from the giving and warmth from the mother, this same warmth and comfort can be found later on from being around those with whom you can feel at ease and be,

It is TRUE that we can SHARE with God any desires or concerns, but it is important to know it most effective when it is done HUMBLY.

well, comfortable. Lewis calls it the least discriminating of all the loves. (p.32) Unlike the other loves that can be identified with a certain starting point, such as the first day of school for longtime friends, a first kiss between lovers or a specific time and gift of charity, Lewis points out that affection usually has no starting point, sharing “I doubt we ever catch affection beginning” (p.33). The beauty of this fact is that since it’s difficult to remember a time that affection has started, it’s also hard to think of a time that one did not feel it. It is in this sense that God’s love is shown by affection. We often hear that God’s love is eternal. So if we consider affection as a love with no beginning and no end, then it is the most relatable form of love from God.

“Affection would not be affection if it would be loudly and frequently expressed” (p.34). Another characteristic of affection is that it is measured by its constancy

in our everyday life. Affection can be seen by others but it’s not for the sake of display. It’s purpose is not to excite, but to comfort and to sustain. It is important to also realize because affection is a love that is not for show, it can be shown to everyone no matter how rough and undeserving. “Affection can love the unattractive: God and his saints love the unloveable” (p.37).

Because of this presence of comfort and familiarity, affection can often have the downside of lacking courtesy. Because you can say anything to your best friend or a sibling, doesn’t mean that you should. “Affections at its best practices a courtesy which is incomparably more subtle, sensitive and deep than the public kind” (p.43). If you want to a friend and confidant, the other person has to be comfortable to confide in you. If a person is not taken seriously or listened to sincerely, affection would be the first level of love to go away. In the context of our relationship with God

within the frame of affection, I believe that the greatest barrier may be taking God for granted. It is true that we can share with God any desires or concerns, but it is important to know that it is most effective when it is done humbly. The danger lies when we become so comfortable in asking for our personal benefit, that we forfeit the close bond derived by simply sharing in God's presence.

Lewis also recognized that affection, much like the other Loves that will be reviewed later, can be a fleeting one. Familial bonds of childhood friends or siblings can often fade due to many reasons: change of proximity or the presence of ongoing maturity that decreases the likelihood of similar interests. If a younger brother still plays with video games, while an older brother has a new interest in girls, affection may not be as present as it once was. Lewis also relays this change in affection to other circumstances, where a person leaves the communal bond of things familiar such as when a member of an unbelieving family becomes a Christian or the reverse, "A church-going family in which one has gone atheist will not always behave better" (p.47).

Affection, along with the other Loves that will be reviewed can be a good thing that helps sustain a full life.

It is the first love that we receive and also often that we show. It is not the type of love that we pursue, but often comes to us without us recognizing it. But it should not be the only love that we experience. As Lewis puts it, "If we try to live by affection alone, affection will 'go bad on us'" (p.55). Affection's effect when working alone and not in concert with the other Loves: Friendship, Eros and Charity, is a love that is no longer beneficial. "If affection is made the absolute sovereign of a human life, the seeds will germinate. Love, having become a god, becomes a demon" (p.56).



Matthew Hamilton

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new identity

Dear God,

Thank you for the opportunity to read the stories of what you are doing in the lives of others. I desire to know you more and find my purpose and identity in you. I want to take my first steps by simply coming to you and asking you to forgive me for all the things that have kept me from you. Jesus, I recognize that my sins are forgiven because you cleared all my wrongs on the cross. May you cleanse me and make me new. Holy Spirit, guide me in all truth and give me the strength to follow in your ways.

In Jesus' name, Amen

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