

new identity

God in focus. World in scope.

MAGAZINE

THE LIGHT OF GOD'S LOVE

Letting God's love change you

Connecting with God

CAN HOBBIES BE A
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE?

@#\$/+?! I Swear

CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES
ON THE USE OF PROFANITY

The Gift of Tongues

HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERED
COMMUNICATION WITH GOD

Who can be against me?

WHY THE DEVIL IS OUR ENEMY



ISSN 1946-5939

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ISSUE 29

VOLUME 8 NUMBER 1

PUBLISHER/ EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cailin Briody Henson

COPY EDITORS

Ruth Montgomery
Sarah Mariano

EDITORIAL BOARD

Ruth Montgomery
Sarah Mariano

LAYOUT & DESIGN

Cailin Briody Henson

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Lindsey A. Frederick
Ramon Mayo
Richard Rowlands
Luke Geraty
Hannah Helms
Brandon Hurlbert
Gary VanDeWalker
Crystal Alexander
Marie Fiebig
Melanie Watson

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Sean Estill
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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.

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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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New Identity Magazine (ISSN 1946-5939, Vol. 8, No. 1) 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.

A serene winter landscape featuring a large, snow-covered mountain peak in the background, partially shrouded in mist. The foreground is a snowy field with several evergreen trees, some of which are dusted with snow. The sky is a soft, pale blue, suggesting a clear morning. The overall mood is peaceful and majestic.

JOY COMES IN THE MORNING

Photo © Cailin Henson

*Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints,
and give thanks to his holy name.
For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.
Psalm 20:4-5*

The world is often a scary place. This is nothing new. You've no doubt heard people comment that there seems to be an increase in reports of hatred, violence, and killings in the news and wonder what the world's coming to. It's tragic, and awful, and talking about it is a downer. It's easy to get depressed at the state of societies or nations in conflict, and the fallen world that is full of sinful people (that's us) and all the evil we're capable of.

But in such times, we also need to remember that God is rich in mercy and deeply in love with us (Eph. 2:4). He's gifted us his son Jesus as a way out of the decaying world and a way to recover what it once was before we tainted it. Christmas is a celebration of this gift.

Christmas is the good news that hope has arrived; it's here. Christ's birth brought light into the world and brought hope for a better future. Christ died to free us from the sin that plagues us, and rose from the dead to give us a future free from it forever. When we remember that the tragedy we experience or read in the news is the reason why Jesus came to earth and fought for us through his sacrifice: we can have joy, we can give thanks. We can echo David's Psalm 20 that even if there is sorrow and tragedy, there is still love and joy right behind it. We no longer have to be swayed by the wavy ocean of uncertainty that dreadful events leave us with because of the hope that is Jesus.

When Jesus was on the boat with his terrified disciples in Matthew 8:24 and "the boat was being swamped by waves," Jesus was asleep. It's not that he didn't care, but rather his trust was somewhere else. He trusted God with whatever plans he had for him. When we put our hope and faith in Jesus, every news story that grieves our heart, doesn't have to affect our ultimate joy and peace in uncertain times. It may sound counterintuitive, but it's what God wants for us.

It doesn't hurt to have help to move in this direction. In this issue Lindsey A. Frederick talks about how hobbies can bring us into closer communion with God, Brandon Hurlbert talks about how we can live in the light of God, and Gary VanDeWalker talks about how the Devil messes with our minds, but we can beat him when we rely on God's truth to trump his lies. I hope you are encouraged in peace, joy, and hope in this issue.

Cailin

LIVE



By LINDSEY A. FREDERICK

Photo © Rachel Kramer | Flickr Creative Commons

CAN HOBBIES BE A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE?

CONNECTING WITH GOD THROUGH
REST AND RELAXATION

I used to work for a guy known for saying, “I’ll rest when I’m dead!” He ran a ministry and believed there were too many people who needed to hear about Jesus to take much time for himself. I thought this was admirable. But I noticed he also got sick a lot.

For awhile, I also felt the weight of his responsibility. In the summers, the organization hosted a four-week camp at which I was on call around the clock. At about week three, I was so sleep deprived, I ended up huddled in a corner of my office, sobbing. What good was pouring into the spiritual lives of others when I had nothing left to give? Even God rested at the end of a work week (Genesis 2:3).

When my supervisor ordered me to take the afternoon off, I did what any good Christian girl does: I went to bible study.

“Bible Study” is what I named the blue, plastic wading pool in my backyard. I pulled on my bathing suit, slathered on sunscreen, and took to some of my favorite hobbies: reading, journaling, listening to music. Chilling in Bible Study helped me get back in touch with myself, and back in touch with God. And this got me thinking: what if some of our


What if SOME of our most spiritual activities are ACTUALLY disguised as our favorite pastimes?

most spiritual activities are actually disguised as our favorite pastimes?

AND ON THE EIGHTH DAY, GOD CREATED HOBBIES

I’ve heard some Christians say hobbies are selfish and frivolous and don’t glorify God. I disagree. Did you know the first recorded hobby is in the Bible?

OK. I’m not a biblical scholar, so perhaps this is a stretch. But while the Bible doesn’t say, “And on the eighth day, God created hobbies,” it does say God placed the first man, Adam, in the Garden of Eden and gave him something to do. He told Adam to take care of the Garden. This is where things get interesting.



Our activities do
not limit God from
revealing
something about
himself, and about
the Christian life,
to us.

After God gave Adam a job he declared, “It is not good for man to be alone,” and said he would make a companion for Adam. Best-selling author Donald Miller makes an interesting observation about this event in his book *Searching for God Knows What?* “God did not create Eve directly after he stated Adam was lonely.” He first gave Adam another task.

Enter Adam’s hobby: “He brought the animals to man to see what he would call them” (Genesis 3:19).

Have you ever considered how many years this would keep a guy occupied? A quick Internet search turns up results for 2 to 50 million species of animals. Miller says naming the animals could have taken a hundred years. And this whole time, Adam couldn’t find a living creature like himself (Genesis 2:21). It is only at the end of this major task that God gives Eve to Adam. And when Adam sees her, he remarks about her likeness to him, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23, NIV). Adam names her “woman.” Miller says, “God had [Adam] hang out with chimps for a hundred years. It’s quite beautiful, really. God directed Adam’s steps so that when he

It takes DISCIPLINE to push pause when so many things around us scream for our ATTENTION.

created Eve, Adam would have the utmost appreciation, respect, and gratitude.”

These tenets are foundational to our relationship with God—they’re foundational to any healthy, meaningful relationship. Our activities do not limit God from revealing something about himself—and about the Christian life—to us.

“GOD MADE ME FOR A PURPOSE. BUT HE ALSO MADE ME FAST.”

To be honest, I’m kind of floored some Christians need a biblical justification for having a hobby. If you type “Christians + hobbies” into a Google search, you’ll discover a page full of anxieties: “Are hobbies sinful?” “Is it wrong for Christians to have hobbies?” “Are hobbies idolatrous?” “Is it selfish to spend time on a hobby instead of praying?”

Yikes, people! Calm down. Hobbies don’t have to separate us from God. In fact, they may help us stay more spiritually connected.

I know a guy who is a concert violinist. He says he feels God’s presence when he’s alone in his practice room. Another friend loves to dance. She says she feels most alive in the middle of a cha-cha. One guy communes with God when he’s fishing. And another friend says she feels closest to God when she is playing with her kids.

This helps me understand another piece of the story of Adam. Of all the things God could have given Adam to do, why name a bunch of animals? I have to think Adam was a nature lover. Otherwise, it would be cruel to plop a guy who hates bugs, and trees, and wild animals in the middle of a territory and say, “Care for it.” And, honestly, if you’re looking for a guy to do a good job, that’s just bad hiring. If God created Adam to love nature, then discovering and naming the animals must have been great fun for Adam. I imagine him chuckling as he watched penguins waddle across glaciers, slip-sliding on their bellies into the Antarctic. I imagine him silenced by the graceful dance of a bloom of jellyfish. And can you imagine when he first saw Eve?

I have to think Adam’s delight made God very happy, too. A line from the movie *Chariots of Fire*

about Olympic runner Eric Liddell articulates this exchange: “I believe God made me for a purpose. But he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.” Not many would call running or playing football particularly spiritual, but I believe God is pleased when we enjoy being who he made us and acknowledge him for it.

DON'T WAIT UNTIL YOU'RE DEAD

If our Type-A, American culture and its multi-billion-dollar coffee industry tells us anything, it's that rest does not come naturally. It takes discipline to push pause when so many things around us scream for our attention. But God demonstrated the importance of rest (Genesis 2:3), and commands us to care for our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19–20), which includes our minds and our spiritual well-being. Far from frivolous, hobbies are just one of many ways we can do this, all the while connecting with God and, in the process, developing a deeper relationship with him. Don't wait until you're dead to get a hobby.

7 Benefits of Hobbies

Reduce stress

Lower blood pressure

Boost confidence

Help you live in the present

Stimulate your mind

Help you meet new people

Uncover new ways to connect with God



Lindsey A. Frederick

Lindsey A. Frederick is a communications manager in the Washington DC area and writes frequently about life, art, and faith. You can follow her on Twitter @la_frederick or on Facebook @ /lindseyafrederick

GROW

@#\$\$%&?!
I SWEAR
(I DIDN'T MEAN IT)



CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE
USE OF PROFANITY

By RICHARD ROWLANDS

Profanity, defined in the Oxford English dictionary as *blasphemous or obscene language* (commonly known as swearing or cursing), is unavoidable and pervasive in the modern world. From movies and song lyrics, to schoolyards and offices, profanity is all around us.

As modern Christians, what stance should we take on the issue? Are we to ignore the use of profanity? Actively avoid it? Chastise those who use it? Is it ever acceptable for us to use profanity ourselves? Why has profanity become part of human interaction, and what advice does the Bible provide about its use?

WHY DO WE SWEAR?

The use of profanity is commonplace across cultures around the world. The Association of Psychological Science's *Perspectives on Psychological Science* published an article by Timothy Jay (2009) on profanity. According to Jay's research, people swear on average from 0.3% to 0.7% of the time. Jay notes, "Swearing is like using the horn on your car, which can be used to signify a number of emotions (e.g., anger, frustration, joy, surprise)."

People don't swear
for just **ONE**
reason, they use
profanity to
EXPRESS a wide
range of
EMOTIONS.

Jay's article discusses a wide range of swear words including sexual references, blasphemy, slurs and vulgar terms. These words range from the mildly to the extremely offensive. Clearly, then, the use of profanity is deeply ingrained in our culture. There are many types of profanity, and many applications. People don't swear for just one reason, they use profanity to express a wide range of emotions. Jay asserts, however, that the majority of swearing (up to two-thirds) is used to express frustration, anger or surprise.

Many people around the world use profanity when dealing with pain. Why is this? The psychologist Richard Stephens conducted an experiment in 2009 in which a group of volunteers were asked to place their hand in ice water for as long as possible while repeating a swear word of their choosing. The experiment was then repeated with the participants repeating a common word with no vulgar meaning. The results of the study showed that the volunteers were able to withstand the freezing water far longer when they repeated the swear word. Stephens put forth the theory that the use of profanity triggers a strong emotional response that helps to downplay threat (in this case the pain from the cold water). When suffering pain, using

profanity seems to distract us from the present situation. The meanings attached to some words we consider swear words are powerful enough to dull very basic instincts such as pain.

Another example of a situation in which people often use profanity is when trying to exercise a feeling of power and control. In his article *Hell Yes: The 7 Best Reasons for Swearing*, the psychiatrist Neel Burton writes: "Swearing can give us a greater sense of power and control over a bad situation. By swearing we show, if only to ourselves, that we are not passive victims but empowered to react and fight back." The power of profanity to shock others allows us the illusion of control over a situation in which we feel threatened.

Researchers believe the use of swear words is on the increase. The psychologist Kristin Jay, along with her husband Timothy, carried out research in 2013, in which data was collected from a group of American adults who had been asked to record each instance they heard a swear word in public over the period of a year. This data, when compared to the results of a similar study from 1986, showed that the frequency of swearing had increased over time. In an interview, Kristin Jay

pointed to the media as another possible reason for this marked increase in the use of profanity: “We see changing speech standards in the media we consume...The media we used to consume were much more sanitized, and we had fewer things to choose from and less control over what we exposed ourselves to.”

IS THERE A CHANGING CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON SWEARING?

With profanity becoming so commonplace in society today, have modern Christians become more accepting of its use? What are their views on using profanity themselves? How do their beliefs shape those opinions? To answer these questions and others, six Christians were interviewed for *New Identity Magazine*. Their answers show the wide range of opinions Christians have on the issue.

PROFANITY AS AN ACCEPTED PART OF LIFE

Meet Crissy and Emily. Crissy is a 26-year-old student nurse, who became a Christian three years ago. Emily is 28 years old, a lifelong Christian, and works as a secretary. Both women say they encounter profanity on a daily basis in their college or work environments and have come to accept it as a part of daily life. While not particularly offended by profanity in the media or used casually by others in conversation, they are offended and upset by others using profanity directed towards them to demean or belittle them. Crissy says before becoming a Christian she often used profanity. She admits to occasional slip-ups but believes that God is compassionate and wants us to repent and persevere with our Christian life. Emily believes that many Christians can be hypocritical, swearing on a regular basis, but holding strong views on other issues they believe are incompatible with their faith.

Both Crissy and Emily assert that the use of profanity is never compatible with the Christian life. Crissy is of the opinion that “it only stirs up anger and wrath, and doesn’t produce any good fruit out of the conversation.” The two hold firm in their belief that the Bible strongly prohibits profanity. Crissy quoted Ephesians 4:29 (ESV) to back up her view: Let no corrupting talk come out of your

mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Crissy and Emily's views suggest that there is a realization among some Christians that profanity is not going away. They would prefer that others didn't use it, but have come to accept it. The message they give us is that we should focus on our own behavior, and how it relates to our beliefs, rather than being brought down by the words of others. The two women are an example of Christians who choose to let their beliefs guide their actions. They believe they can accept how others act without sacrificing their own moral code. Our next interview subjects had very different viewpoints.

USING PROFANITY AS A CHRISTIAN

Daniel is 36 years old. He works as a college history professor and has been a Christian most of his life. Patrick is 33 years old, a lifelong Christian, and a PhD student. Neither man is offended by or uncomfortable with the use of profanity, and, in

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who hear.

Ephesians 4:29

fact, both use it regularly, despite their Christian beliefs. Daniel cites his local culture as one reason for his acceptance and use of profanity: "I'm from New Jersey, that's how we talk." Patrick says he does use profanity, but tries not to swear habitually "as I think it betokens a lack of creativity and imagination."

Both Daniel and Patrick agree that the Bible prohibits profanity to some extent. Daniel points out that the meaning of profanity has changed since biblical times:

Modern culture and society has the very concept of "profanity" meaning "offensive language," but ancient languages were quite different. Oaths or references to pagan gods are referred to in the Bible but are culturally specific...by a strict reading of the New Testament, curses, oaths, and using the Lord's name in vain are considered sinful, whereas scatological or sexual terms are used in a frank and straightforward manner.

Patrick referred to several passages in the Bible that prohibit the use of profanity, such as Colos-

sians 3:8 (ESV), which reads, "But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth."

The main difference in attitudes concerning profanity between Daniel and Patrick is over the issue of whether it is ever compatible with the Christian life. Patrick says, "Like most Christians (like most people) I try and stick to my own moral compass, picking and choosing, and I believe I can swear and still be a good person." Daniel adds a different opinion: "Call me a hypocrite – I am human (hence in need of Christ). 'Compatible' is a loaded word. I say Christians should never offend, unless it is with the Truth (as we see it), not through word choice..."

Patrick's and Daniel's opinions point to a trend for some Christians to increasingly question the interpretation of the Bible, and how the teachings relate to modern life. Both men are well educated and work in higher education. This may explain their tendency to make their own decisions on how they should behave as Christians. They believe that some issues are not clear-cut, and that we are required to use our own judgement together with the advice we find in the Bible. Our final two

interview subjects hold more traditional views that are in stark contrast with these two. They believe the Bible contains strong and conclusive teachings against the use of profanity, which as Christians we must follow.

STRONG FEELINGS AGAINST PROFANITY

Alice is a 94-year-old housewife and Christian of 60 years. Jennifer is a 65-year-old Christian Charity worker, who has been a Christian for 43 years. Alice believes that the media normalizes and encourages the use of profanity and that swearing has become a way of life for the younger generation. She is very offended by and uncomfortable with any profanity, whether in the media or in daily life. Jennifer echoes these views and says she actively avoids profanity in the media by carefully choosing the movies and TV shows she consumes.

Both women say they believe that the Bible strongly and directly prohibits profanity and that swearing indicates a lack of discipline and self control. Alice feels particularly saddened by profanity

because it “grieves the Holy Spirit.” Jennifer considers swearing by Christians a strikingly bad example to set, particularly the casual use of blasphemous phrases. Living in London, England, she is part of a multicultural society and observes that other faiths are much stricter about not using profanity. Alice referred to Matthew 15:11: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.

Alice and Jennifer’s views on profanity are clear and easy to relate to for many Christians. Both women feel the media has a large part to play and are saddened by how pervasive swearing has become in most areas of life. They believe that a Christian must follow the words of the Bible as closely as possible and demonstrate their beliefs through their actions.

WHAT ELSE DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT PROFANITY?

The verses provided by the interview subjects throughout this article suggest that profanity is

strictly and directly prohibited in the Bible, but is this the full story?

Certainly there are many verses throughout the Bible that speak against profanity. Take Ephesians 5:4, which reads: "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving." Similarly, Psalm 10:7 says, "His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity."

What about the instances in the Bible our interview subject Daniel referred to? In his article for *Relevant Magazine*, "What the Bleep Does the Bible Say About Profanity," author Preston Sprinkle argues:

But religious people have been covering up obscene language in the Bible for years. Jewish scribes in the middle ages, who copied the Hebrew Old Testament used as the base for all English translations, edited out some vulgar words and replaced them with nicer ones. For instance, God originally prophesied through Zechariah that women in Israel would be raped by wicked, invading armies. The word God inspired is

shagel, and according to Hebrew linguists, *shagel* is an obscene word that describes a sexual act.

It's clear, then, that the Bible is not totally bereft of words that could be considered vulgar. Why does the Bible contain this kind of language when elsewhere there is such heavy reference to the prohibition of profanity? Sprinkle argues that:

The biblical prophets sometimes use offensive language, but not to produce shock for its own sake...God's messengers used vulgar images to shock their religious audience out of complacency...So how do we reconcile Ezekiel's filthy tongue with Ephesians 4:29? "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Does this outlaw all forms of vulgarity? Not exactly. The word for "corrupting" (*sapros*) literally means "rotten, decaying, unwholesome." The whole point is not to forbid certain words that are labelled "cuss words" by its culture, but all speech that does not "build up."

Let your speech always be gracious,
seasoned with salt, so that you may know
how you ought to answer each person.

Colossians 4:6

As Christians, however we feel about the use of profanity in our daily lives, whether we choose to tolerate it, use it ourselves, avoid it at all costs, or simply ignore it, we should consider its effect. There are many reasons for the use of profanity and its increasing use. Opinions of profanity range from profanity as a personal choice, which stands apart from Christian beliefs, to the belief that Christians should steer clear of profanity and set an example for others.

Whichever position we take on the issue, the teachings of the Bible provide some common ground. Matthew 5:22 reads, "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." This passage concludes that the heart of the issue is the intention with which profanity is used.

While the Bible contains language which could be thought of as vulgar, its intention is never to

demean, to destroy, or to corrupt. This message of the Bible is clear—as Christians, our words should be used to encourage, to give grace, and to rejoice. They should build others up, rather than knock them down. As Christians we must strive to reflect Christ in all we do. Our language is a big part of us, and we must be aware of the effect it has on others. Despite differences of opinion, perhaps we can all be humbled by the advice laid out in Colossians 4:6: Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.



Richard Rowlands

Richard Rowlands grew up in the seaside town of Plymouth, England. After completing a bachelor's degree in Sociology at The University of the West of England, he has been involved in community work in his hometown, and taught English in public schools in South Korea. He is now a freelance writer living in coastal Japan, and enjoys exotic foods, reading, and traveling. Please follow him on Twitter at @RowlandsWrites

THE LIGHT *of* GOD'S LOVE

LETTING GOD'S GOODNESS CHANGE US



By BRANDON HURLBERT

The Christian life of faith is very comparable to a new relationship. This new life in Christ is exciting and freeing. It is different than anything you have ever experienced. There is so much to learn about God, his word, and even this new quirky family we call the Church. However, much like natural relationships, there is a spiritual “honeymoon” phase which inevitably ends at some point. Your old life begins to creep back in, sins that you thought you had left behind begin to come alive, and old fears consume your mind.

“Why am I struggling with this?”

“Why do I keep failing in this particular area?”

“I thought I was a different person, so why do I look like my old self?”

Perhaps these are your thoughts too. In these thoughts, we feel guilt and shame because we know that the Christian life is supposed to look different. We feel that there is something wrong with us—certainly no one else feels this way! We respond to the guilt and the shame that we feel by hiding or covering. We do not like the way we look, so we hide ourselves from others and from God himself.

We can be
TEMPTED to
 believe that it is our
 works, or being “good
 Christians,” that make
 us **PRESENTABLE**
 to one another, and
 even to God.

We can hide and cover our true selves—selves that still struggle with sin and living our new Christian life—in many different ways. Sometimes, our attempts at hiding look like running away, keeping our heads down, and well, hiding. Other times, our attempts at hiding look like doing a lot of good things, which may even include reading our Bibles, praying, serving at church, or even joining a small group. In our efforts to relieve the burden of guilt and shame, we can be tempted to believe that it is our works, or being “good Christians,” that make us presentable to one another, and even to God. However, this isn’t the type of relationship God wants with us.

SIN AS HIDING IN THE DARK

In the beginning of God’s story, we find that sin destroys relationships. Adam and Eve, our first parents, were tempted, and, unfortunately for us, they sinned. Then:

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man

and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” (Genesis 3:8-10, NASB)

What we see here is the pattern for our own sin. There is a broken relationship horizontally between people—evidenced by Adam’s covering himself from Eve and the blaming for sin (Genesis 3:12). There is also a broken relationship vertically between people and God. When Adam sinned, he hid himself from his Maker because he was afraid. God had only shown him love and grace, and yet, when Adam sinned, he felt the need to hide.

Throughout scripture, sinning is described as being, walking, or living in darkness. In Psalm 107:10-12, people who had rebelled against God are described as those who are dwelling in darkness. In Psalm 119:105, God’s Word is described as a light that guides us. In the Psalmist’s mind, “no Word” equals “no light.” Without the Word of God, we live in darkness.

LIGHT AS RESCUE FROM DARKNESS

God's plan of salvation is described as light breaking into the darkness. As Jesus begins his ministry, Matthew, citing Isaiah 9:1-2, describes Jesus' work: "the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (Matthew 4:16, ESV). Furthermore, the gospel of John describes Jesus in this way:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:1-5, ESV)

Like the Psalmist, John describes Jesus as God's Word who brings light and life to the darkness. Jesus is God's Word that comes to us, to those who are dwelling in darkness. In fact, this is exactly what Jesus declares his mission to be in John 12:46: "I have come into the world as light, so that

whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness." This Light and Darkness imagery pervades the gospel of John. People love darkness because they don't want their actions, thoughts, motives to be exposed by the light. But the truth is that deep down we need (and want) to be seen. We want to be loved despite our dirtiest deeds and foulest feelings. We need to restore the relationship that Adam and Eve once had with God—complete openness, and deep love—but we can't do it on our own. Only God can (and did through Jesus) bring that relationship back.

LIGHT AS OUR NEW IDENTITY

Due to the work of Jesus on the cross, we no longer have to be identified as people who dwell in darkness. The rest of the New Testament describes our new identity as children of light (1 Thessalonians 5:5) and as those who have been rescued from darkness (Colossians 1:13, Ephesians 5:8). We now are characterized by the light instead of the darkness due to God's saving work through, and our restored relationship with, Jesus.

However, as mentioned above, the Christian life is often plagued with sin and temptation. So much of our old identity, what the apostle Paul calls the flesh, begs us to live in the darkness again. Our old habits, our old sins, encroach upon our new identity and threaten to extinguish this new light. We are tempted to cover and hide ourselves either by running or trying to be our own measure of good. But we know that this won't work. So what are we to do?

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

The author of 1 John reminds his readers of what they experienced in Jesus. He proclaims that God is light and that there is no darkness whatsoever in God.

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we are walking in the light, as he is in the light, we are having fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son is cleansing us from all sin. (1 John 1:6-7, ESV)

Our old habits, our old
sins, ENCROACH upon
our new identity and
threaten to
EXTINGUISH this
new light.

These two verses explain how we are to act in our new identity. Instead of walking in darkness as we had previously done, John exhorts us to be “walking in the light.” This is a reminder of our new identity: walk with God who is in the light. John does not leave us wondering what this looks like, for he provides an example in Jesus. We are to walk in the light as Jesus did. This can mean variety of things, but a clear example for us is how Jesus talks to his Father the night he is betrayed. In Matthew 26:36-46, we see the tense emotional agony of Jesus as he is crying out for another way. He does not hide his feelings from God nor from his friends. Instead, he confesses them, and “he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8).

Looking back at 1 John, what is more amazing is that he details the result of walking in the light. First, we are having fellowship with one another. The result of walking in the light is a reparation of the broken horizontal relationships. Just as sin makes us hide from one another, walking in the light allows us to have real, genuine relationships where we can be transparent, vulnerable, and

Just as sin makes us
hide from one
another, WALKING
in the light allows us to
have real, GENUINE
relationships where
we can be transparent,
vulnerable, and loved.

loved. Second, the blood of Jesus is cleansing us from all sin. The result of walking in the light is a reparation of the broken vertical relationship with God. No longer do we have to be afraid of God, for Jesus’ blood spiritually cleanses us, making us presentable before the Father. Furthermore, when we live a life characterized by “walking in the light” then Jesus will begin to wash us clean from the sins we have been struggling with.

LEARNING TO WALK IN THE LIGHT

There is no comprehensive list on how to do this or a book entitled, “7 Easy Steps to Walk in the Light Today.” However, I will share a few ways in which we can practically live these truths out.

Believe Your Identity

Walking in the Light means walking in the truth of who you are as a child of light. Practically it looks like praying to your Father in heaven as someone who knows that they are loved. It means that you don't have to be afraid of God when you fail. You don't have to hide from him, and there is no more need to be afraid of the dark or the light. God has broken into your darkness and saved you, bringing you into his marvelous light. When we struggle with sin, and when we struggle with our guilt and shame, we can remind ourselves and each other of our new identity. We are loved immensely by our Father, and his perfect love is casting out our fear. (1 John 4:18).

God ALREADY
knows where you
STRUGGLE,
he already
knows how you
have failed, but he
wants to TALK
to you about it.

Come Out of Hiding

Walking in the Light means that because of your identity in Christ you can confess your sins and your failures to your Father. Knowing that God loves you unconditionally means that you can bring everything before him. You can do this simply by crying out and talking to him. He already knows where you struggle, he already knows how you have failed, but he wants to talk to you about it. There is no condemnation any longer for us (Romans 8:1). He lovingly wants to remind you that you are his son or daughter, and that he is here for you. You don't have to cover yourself with good deeds so that you are made presentable to God — he has already done that in Jesus. Instead, we can be honest about where we are at with God.

Confess Your Sins Boldly

Walking in the Light also means that because of your identity you can confess your sins and your failures to his people. This doesn't necessarily mean a long post on social media, but conversations with people in your church who love Jesus. This isn't something that makes you more presentable to God, but confident in the love that God has for you, you can boldly confess your sins to others. When you are honest with where you are at with others, your relationships will deepen, and you will see how much people care about you. We were never intended to go through this life alone. In his grace, God has provided you his Spirit to empower you, his Son to sanctify you, and his people to care for you. Living in that knowledge and in light of it, is a way in which you can "Walk in the Light."

Walking in Grace

Walking in the Light is a step by step, moment by moment, conscious and unconscious journey to the fulness of the Christian life. It takes faith in who God is and who he says you are, but it also takes obedience. This obedience is not perfect either, for it is a long journey of learning how to walk and stumble as a new creation. It is both conscious effort, but also walking in the light can become part of your unconscious mode of being. Like any walk or hike, we focus on our first few steps, but then gradually we focus less on how we are walking and more on where we are walking to. It is the same with our spiritual life. As our relationship with God grows, we grow too, in humility, thankfulness, confidence, faithfulness and other innumerable ways.



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.

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A La Carte Faith

THE PITFALLS OF TAKING
WHAT YOU LIKE FROM THE BIBLE
AND LEAVING THE REST

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A TESTIMONY OF HOW GOD IS STILL WITH US
EVEN IN OUR MOST DIFFICULT TIMES



By MELANIE WATSON

One night in 2008, I happened upon a website called Christian pen pals. Out of curiosity I made a pen pal ad. I wanted to be friends with other Christian women who held my values and beliefs. As soon as I saw the picture of Sarah, I knew she was different.

We began emailing back and forth and found out we had similar tastes in music, TV shows, and a love for books. We both longed to have close friendships with others, who wouldn't reject us for our belief in God. It has been seven years, and we are still in contact and closer than ever. Ours is a friendship forged in heaven. We can bare our souls, our faults, and our weaknesses, and ask for prayer. We pray that God will fulfill his purpose in our lives. As you read this interview you will see just how special Sarah is to me. She shows mercy and compassion for anyone she is in contact with. She has endured hardships, but her faith keeps her going.

What is your name and age?

My name is Sarah, and I am 32 years old.

Where do you live?

I am a homegrown Canadian, who lives in southern Ontario.

How would you describe your childhood?

My childhood was something that impacted and shaped my entire life, including my career, personality and outlook on life. I grew up in the country, the eldest of five girls. Our lives were not easy, but we were always blessed.

Did you grow up in a Christian home?

My mother is a strong woman who did her best to provide and look after us. She raised us to follow God, to listen to his voice and to trust in his ways, even when we didn't understand what took place in our lives. My parents divorced when I was 7 years old, and it was a time of struggle for all of us. We moved out of our small family home and moved to a new town. No longer could we go to our small church, or meet with our friends. My mother suffered with depression due to the changes that took place in our lives; and the things she struggled with we never knew about until later in life.

Despite all these things, and all the pressures that she faced, my mother never lost her faith. There were times when it was low, and she struggled, she always believed, always had faith and always looked to God.

As a child, I knew that my father enjoyed drinking and using prescription medication in an abusive way. He cheated on my mother and moved in with the woman he would eventually marry. After we moved, my father stopped visiting us, which created insecurities and rejection within me. My mother did her best to help us through this time, and even with our lack of money, friends and the new environment, we had special times and memories that could never be replaced. My mom eventually remarried and had more children, but my stepfather presented more challenges within our family. These challenges (mental health and addictions) helped prepare me for the work I was to do as an adult.

I work at a homeless shelter and care center, where I am a Hostel Support Worker. My duties include working with young boys and men who are chemically dependent. I must have sound judgment in order to address their needs and how they need to

be helped. I work with guys between the ages of 16-35. We are doing our best to help them in finding safe housing (although not much is available). We also do our best to work with them in regards to their addictions, physical and mental health. Patience and compassion is key in my job, I respect and care for the people I was employed to help. I also help people with various degrees of mental illness. I refer them to organizations that can also help them such as Social Services. I also work with the youth. We do our best to figure out where they are in their lives. We connect them with services inside the city. We also try and get them into treatment if they need it, as well as group homes (if they are able) and help them get back into school.

What are your hobbies, interests?

I enjoy sci-fi movies and TV shows, as well as anything having to do with comics, heroes, history and things that make you think. I love all the foods that are bad for you, especially burgers and pizza. But, being a Canadian, I also enjoy a good poutine from time to time. You cannot live here without enjoying something from Tim Hortons, especially the coffee (which was lovingly described once as liquid gold by some visitors to our country).

There have been times where I have not walked where I should have, or made DECISIONS that were not of him, but DESPITE this, he is still with me.

What biblical characters do you most resemble and why?

I had to laugh at this question. I feel at times that I want to be like David, the man close to God's heart or Moses, the man who spoke to God like no other. In reality, I believe I am closest to an Old Testament prophet, the one who says what does not want to be heard. In 1 Kings 22, King Ahab consults a prophet named Micaiah about a decision he must make. It does not go as planned, and he does not take the news well. At the current time, that is who I feel like.

Are you an introvert or extrovert?

Being an introvert, it helped to have many hobbies and interests that can be enjoyed by myself. I am an avid reader, especially anything having to do with history. History fascinates me in a way that I cannot describe. I believe God placed this hunger within me for some reason that someday will become apparent. Each time I read anything in history; I cannot but help compare it to the world we live in now. God also sprinkled in a lot of geekiness into

the mix when he was creating me, so I also enjoy video games, movies and comics.

Where have you seen God work in your life?

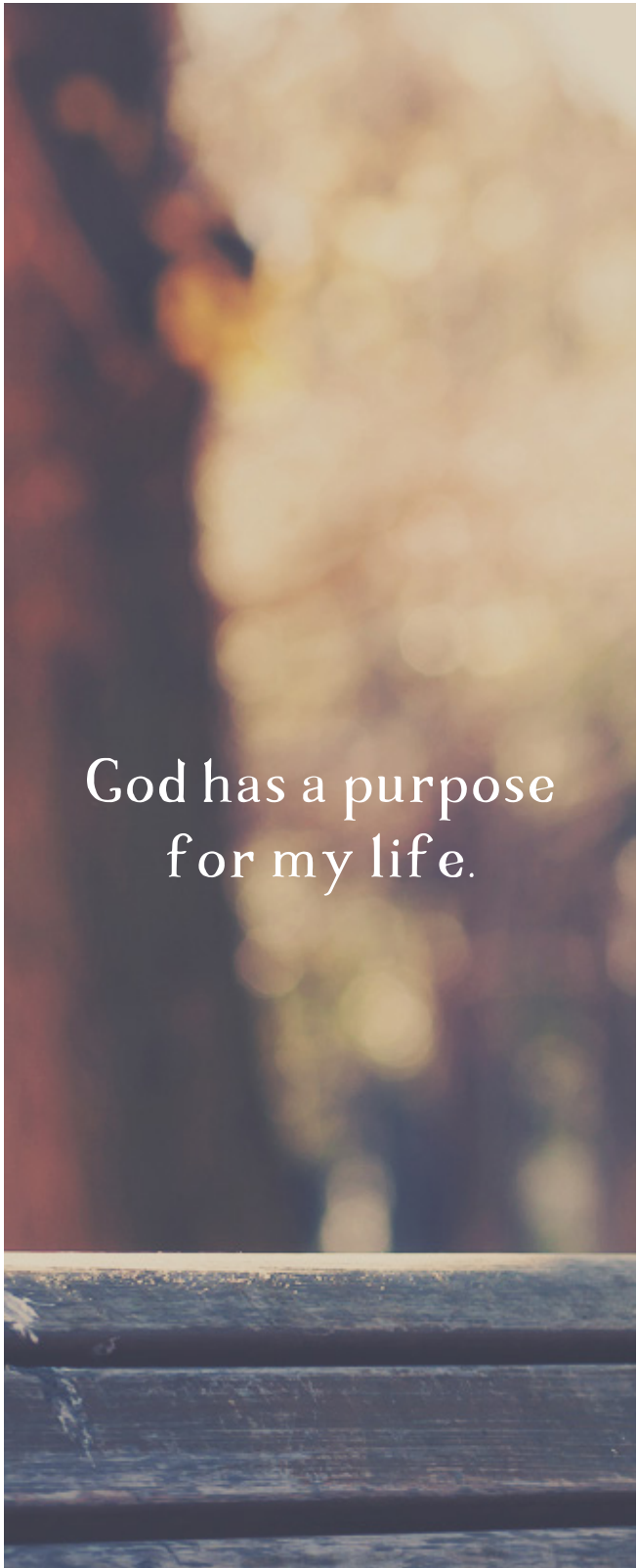
Due to everything that took place in my life, I developed and cultivated skills God had given me. Over time, I realized that there was a reason my family and I went through all that we did. With all the difficulties that arose in my life and the life of my family, we were able to understand things that others could not fathom. We were able to work with difficult individuals, those with addictions and mental health issues. Almost all my siblings and I work in environments that others are afraid to be around. Over the years, God has given me gifts of mercy and of patience to continue my work, despite frustration and setbacks. It is only because of God that I am able to move forward, and still have a heart that yearns to help the poor, the sick, the vulnerable and the misunderstood. God is my constant rock and help in times of trouble. There have been times where I have not walked where I should have, or made decisions that were not of him, but despite this, he is still with

me. It is because of these times that I know the true love and forgiveness of our heavenly father. There were times when I was at the bottom, and wallowing in my sin, and he reached out. He picked me up, forgave me and helped me to move ahead. God is the reason I keep my sanity, the reason I am alive, and the hope for my future. He is my sun and moon and without him, I lack understanding, direction, grace and all that is good inside my life. God has a purpose for my life. I know that there is more that I am to accomplish, and each day I wake up and pray that I will walk the path that he has for me.

What brings you joy?

When I am helping others, it makes me happy. I hope someday to be able to do even more. I would love to be a missionary and travel the world. I want to teach others the word of God and feed the hungry, and clothe the poor.

Do you believe that God has given us each certain spiritual gifts?



God has a purpose
for my life.

I believe that God wants to do a work in each of our lives, that he has equipped each of us with gifts. As long as we listen to him and do our best to follow him, then he will speak to us and guide us. He will help us to understand our giftings and use them to share with those around us.

Do you believe that Christians are misunderstood?

As Christians, I feel that we are often misunderstood, but we also forget our place. As Christians, we are to be in the world, but not part of it. While we are to do our best to be at peace with those around us, we are also called to stand for what is right, what is holy and what is true. There will be times that this will cause the boat to rock, but God will always stand beside as we do so.

People in the world have such a negative view of Christians from all the things in the past and that are currently happening. Who are we to judge others? Who are we to despise and hate? Have people, especially Christians forgotten that God has called each of us to love everyone? That is what needs to happen. Leave everything else at the door, open your heart, let God's love inside and share it with the world. Do it however you can, as long as you do it for God and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

What are things in your life that you want God to heal?

During school as a child, I experienced a lot of problems. I was never much of a talker and my introverted nature made me a target for bullies. I struggled all through grade school with bullies, not understanding why these children centered me out for pain and anger. It was not until I was homeschooled for a bit that I finally found a bit of peace and rest. All of these things compounded on me and led to me developing depression and a bad self-image. To this day, it is something that God and I are working on and overcoming together.



Melanie Watson

Melanie Watson has always had a passion for writing and using her gift to uplift, and uphold the body of Christ. She believes that writing for the kingdom of God is important and that edifying and exhorting the church is needed now more than ever. She is a recent college graduate who is pursuing her MFA. When she isn't writing, she is reading from a multitude of books. Her love of reading began when she was five years old and her heart still skips a beat when she passes a library or bookstore. Books are like potato chips, you can't just have one.

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THE GIFT OF TONGUES AS PRAYER, PRAISE, & THANKSGIVING

By LUKE GERATY

WHAT IS THE “GIFT OF TONGUES”?

Perhaps the most controversial of the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament is the “gift of tongues.” People seem to either insist that everyone should speak in tongues or that *no one* should speak in tongues! My friend Matt jokingly told me that the only time he prayed for the gift of tongues was when he was about to take a Spanish test! Yet in addition to evoking strong opinions, the controversial topic of “tongues” is often so misunderstood that it is avoided.

This is unfortunate. None of the spiritual gifts, which are empowerments through the Holy Spirit for the work of the Church, should be avoided or ignored. In fact, the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:1, “Now concerning spiritual gifts... I do not want you to be uninformed.” While there are certainly some topics found in Scripture that are more challenging to understand, spiritual gifts are not as mysterious as some make them sound. Understanding the nature and function of tongues is laid out along with teaching about the rest of the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, and is featured in several of the narratives found in the Book of Acts. Let’s consider what Scripture teaches about this controversial gift.

Some of the confusion related to the “gift of tongues,” I believe, is related to Bible translation issues. Here in the United States, most of our Bibles are *English* (or Spanish!) translations of the original languages, right? As you may know, the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic, and the New Testament was written exclusively in koine Greek, the common language of the 1st century Roman world.

The Greek word *glōssa* is translated by most of our English Bibles as “tongues,” but in the context of the Apostle Paul’s teachings on spiritual gifts, a more helpful word would be “languages,” because that is how Paul intends for the word to function, as we shall see. While *glōssa* is literally the Greek word for “tongue,” the context of both Acts 2:6 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 indicate that unknown *languages* is in mind. In fact, this is how the New Living Translation renders *glōssa*. Such a translation takes away a lot of the mystery associated with this gift because it clarifies that the gift is related to *communication*. Paul lists “speaking in unknown languages” as one of the spiritual gifts in 1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30, as well as chapter 14.

Author Wayne Grudem, who wrote the widely taught *Systematic Theology*, defines “speaking in tongues” as “prayer or praise spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker.” We also need to remember that spiritual gifts are empowered by the Spirit, which means that they are distributed by God to his people as he wills (1 Cor. 12:11).

Grudem’s definition suggests that the gift of tongues is a Spirit empowered, vertically directed, form of communication (in previous articles I have discussed “horizontally directed” Spirit empowered communication such as the gift of prophecy). By “vertically directed,” I mean that it is communication directed *toward* God, not people. This is *exactly* what the New Testament teaches. The Apostle Paul states that tongues is a form of prayer (1 Cor. 14:14-15), a form of singing to God (1 Cor. 14:15), a form of praise (1 Cor. 14:16), and a form of expressing thanksgiving to God (1 Cor. 14:17). You’ll notice that each of these functions of tongues are directed to God, not toward other human beings. The gift of tongues is expressed when the Holy Spirit empowers a person to communicate with God in a unique and supernatural way.

We need to
REMEMBER that
spiritual gifts are
EMPOWERED by the
Spirit, which means
that they are
DISTRIBUTED by God
to his people as he wills.

Correspondingly, the gift of *interpreting* these languages is when the Spirit gives someone the supernatural ability to translate these prayers, songs, and expressions of praise and thanksgiving into a language that other people can understand.

Some have taught that the “gift of tongues” is an ecstatic expression of the Holy Spirit, which some Christians take as an indication that worship gath-

erings can be marked by disorderly conduct. This idea that the gift of tongues is “ecstatic speech” suggests that people aren’t in control of themselves, that the Holy Spirit has “taken over,” and people are not responsible for their actions.

However, this is quite different than how the New Testament describes this gift. The Apostle Paul writes:

“No more than two or three should speak in tongues. They must speak one at a time, and someone must interpret what they say. But if no one is present who can interpret, they must be silent in your church meeting and speak in tongues to God privately.” (1 Cor. 14:27-28 NLT)

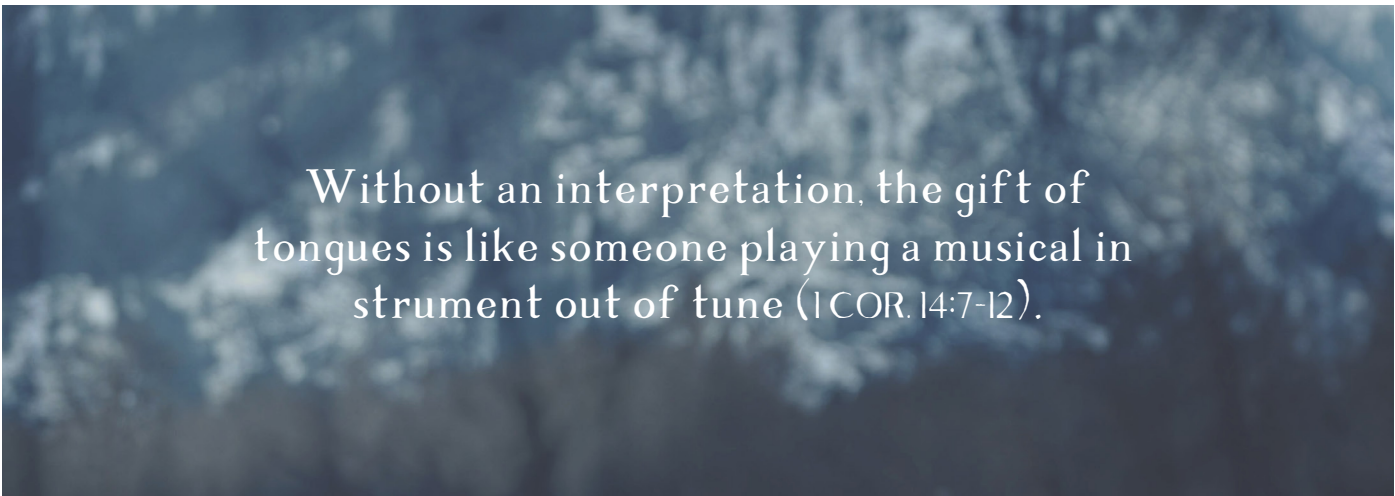
The Apostle Paul taught the Corinthians that they should require those who, under Spirit’s empowerment, speak in tongues do so by *taking turns*! Furthermore, he limited the number of those speaking in tongues to three people during the Corinthians’ worship gatherings! This indicates that the person who was speaking in tongues was in control of their minds and bodies and could use self-control in relation to whether or not to speak in tongues!

Without LOVE,
spiritual gifts, includ
ing the gift of tongues,
are a WASTE of time.

HOW SHOULD THE “GIFT OF TONGUES” FUNCTION?

According to Paul, the most important quality that must surround all expressions of spiritual gifts is simple: love. The Apostle Paul states, “If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1 NLT). For Christians to be empowered by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts without love is something that Paul says leads to ineffective and empty ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-3). *Without love, spiritual gifts, including the gift of tongues, are a waste of time.*

Paul also writes that if a person speaks in tongues around other people, *someone has to interpret!* Without the interpretation, the gift doesn’t build any-



Without an interpretation, the gift of tongues is like someone playing a musical instrument out of tune (1 COR. 14:7-12).

one up because no one understands it. So tongues shouldn't be expressed unless someone can interpret it, which implies that churches would be aware of who has the gift of tongues or ask God to help them interpret the tongue. Paul actually writes that "anyone who speaks in tongues should pray also for the ability to interpret what has been said" (1 Cor. 14:13 NLT). Without an interpretation, the gift of tongues is like someone playing a musical instrument out of tune (cf. 1 Cor. 14:7-12).

However, Paul did *not* say that without interpretation the gift of tongues is useless. Rather, he told the Corinthian Christians that he wished they could *all* speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5) and thanked God that he spoke in tongues more than them (1 Cor. 14:18), which I assume means he had a high view of this gift and that he did it often, in private.

If the gift of tongues is communication between us and God, which Scripture seems to teach, interpretations of these "tongues" should always reflect these messages by the Spirit. Interpreted tongues are not messages from one person to another person; that is what the New Testament calls "prophecy." Those who suggest that interpreted tongues can be "prophecies" often point to 1 Cor. 14:5 as

supporting evidence, which reads:

"... For prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues, unless someone interprets what you are saying so that the whole church will be strengthened. "(NLT)

However, careful readers will notice that Paul is not suggesting different *functions* between uninterpreted and interpreted tongues; rather, he is contrasting their *value*. Both interpreted and uninterpreted tongues are Spirit empowered forms of communication between *Christians* and *God*; yet uninterpreted tongues do not have the same value in the context of corporate worship gatherings because everyone isn't able to understand the communication in order to say, "Amen" (1 Cor. 14:16).

For example, if someone speaks in an unknown language, empowered by the Spirit, and someone else interprets it, everyone has the opportunity to understand what is being said and can come into agreement with it. If someone speaks in tongues and no interpretation is provided, it's difficult for anyone in the church gathering to agree or share in that prayer or praise.

TONGUES AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

Some Christians suggest that speaking in tongues is the only way to be sure you have received the Holy Spirit. However, we are *explicitly* told that Christians receive the Holy Spirit by becoming followers of Jesus (Gal. 3:1-14; Rom. 8:1-17) and there are numerous evidences for the Spirit's activity in our lives, especially the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23). The gift of tongues is also not a gift that *every single person will have*, as Paul's rhetorical questions imply in 1 Cor. 12:30:

"... Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not!" (NLT)

Scripture indicates that not everyone will have the gift of tongues, but all Christians are encouraged to desire (pray for and seek after) the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:1).

There is a tension here. On one hand, no one should feel pressured to speak in tongues, or assume

that unless someone has spoken in tongues, that the Holy Spirit is not present. On the other hand, Paul teaches that the gift of tongues builds up the church, both collectively (when interpreted) and individually, and it is a form of Spirit empowered communication with God—a thing all followers of Jesus would desire.

Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you with all of the gifts you need to glorify Jesus, build up the Church, and serve the world. Certain spiritual gifts will show up immediately, and others may not; we can trust God's timing and his purposes. Following Jesus means we live in an "already" and "not yet" kingdom and healthy Christian spirituality embraces the "both/and" rather than the "either/or." You can be content as well as desire more, especially God!



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.

IN PURSUIT *of* INTIMACY *Part 1*

CULTIVATING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

By HANNAH HELMS



PRACTICAL APPLICATION

“It’s not a religion, it’s a relationship.”

I’ve lost track of the number of times that I’ve heard this phrase uttered in reference to Christianity. The idea of being in a relationship with God is one of the things that sets Christians apart from other belief systems. We are not bound by the obligation to adhere to a rigid set of rules. There is an appeal in this—in the idea that the God of the Universe wants to be in a relationship with me, a mere person.

But it can be challenging when we learn that God expects something from us as well. A relation-

ship with God, like any relationship, is a two-way street, built out of intention and effort. In Matthew 22:37-38 Jesus instructs his disciples, “And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” God doesn’t just love us—he wants us to love him in return.

It can be difficult at times to know what that looks like—after all, loving and building a relationship with Someone who is not seen or near in the same way as a friend, family member, or spouse can be a challenging task.

So how exactly do we go about being in a relationship with God?

The answer is surprisingly simple. Much in the same way that we go about the other relationships in our lives, it's through communication, quality time, giving of our gifts and our talents on behalf of one another. Our predecessors in faith understood that an intimate relationship with God requires the same type of work that our human relationships need, and over the centuries Christians have cultivated ways to draw near to God, known as spiritual disciplines.

A spiritual discipline (or spiritual practice) is a formalized activity aimed at fostering a relationship with God. In the Bible, we see Jesus himself engage in different activities—fasting, prayer, celebration, and service to name a few—in order to stay closely connected to God the Father. Disciplines give form and action to our yearning toward God; they are habits that move us along in our journey to spiritual maturity.

But these habits (as with most “good” habits that we want to cultivate) take time and energy.

A spiritual
PRACTICE in itself
is not the GOAL of a
deep spiritual
intimacy, but
rather a means to
ACHIEVING this end.

While the terms spiritual discipline and spiritual practice can be used interchangeably, I prefer to use the word practice - it reminds me that a spiritual discipline is something that I may have to try a number of times if I want to experience greater intimacy in my relationship with God. In the same way that I had to learn to communicate with my spouse, or adapt my interactions with family as I have matured over the years, it takes continued effort to keep up my relationship with God—it requires practice.

This series will be an exploration of the various spiritual practices that Christians have cultivated throughout the ages. Whether you are someone who is just exploring Christianity, or if you have been a Christian for a number of years, spiritual practices are tools that you can use to get to know God better. A spiritual practice in itself is not the goal of a deep spiritual intimacy, but rather a means to achieving this end.

There are a wide variety of spiritual practices, and most can be put in one of two categories: inward practices or outward practices. Inward practices include prayer, fasting, study, meditation, and contemplation, and mark our inward journey toward becoming more Christ like. Outward practices are an external expression of the inward reality that we experience, and include simplicity, solitude, submission, service and giving. This series will delve into each of these practices.

I want you to know that I don't write to you from a place of expertise. If I am being honest, most days I struggle to live as if I love God with all my heart, soul, and mind. I don't have a well-honed set of disciplines that I choose from on any given day. I do

write to you from a desire to develop some spiritual practices that will strengthen my own relationship with God.

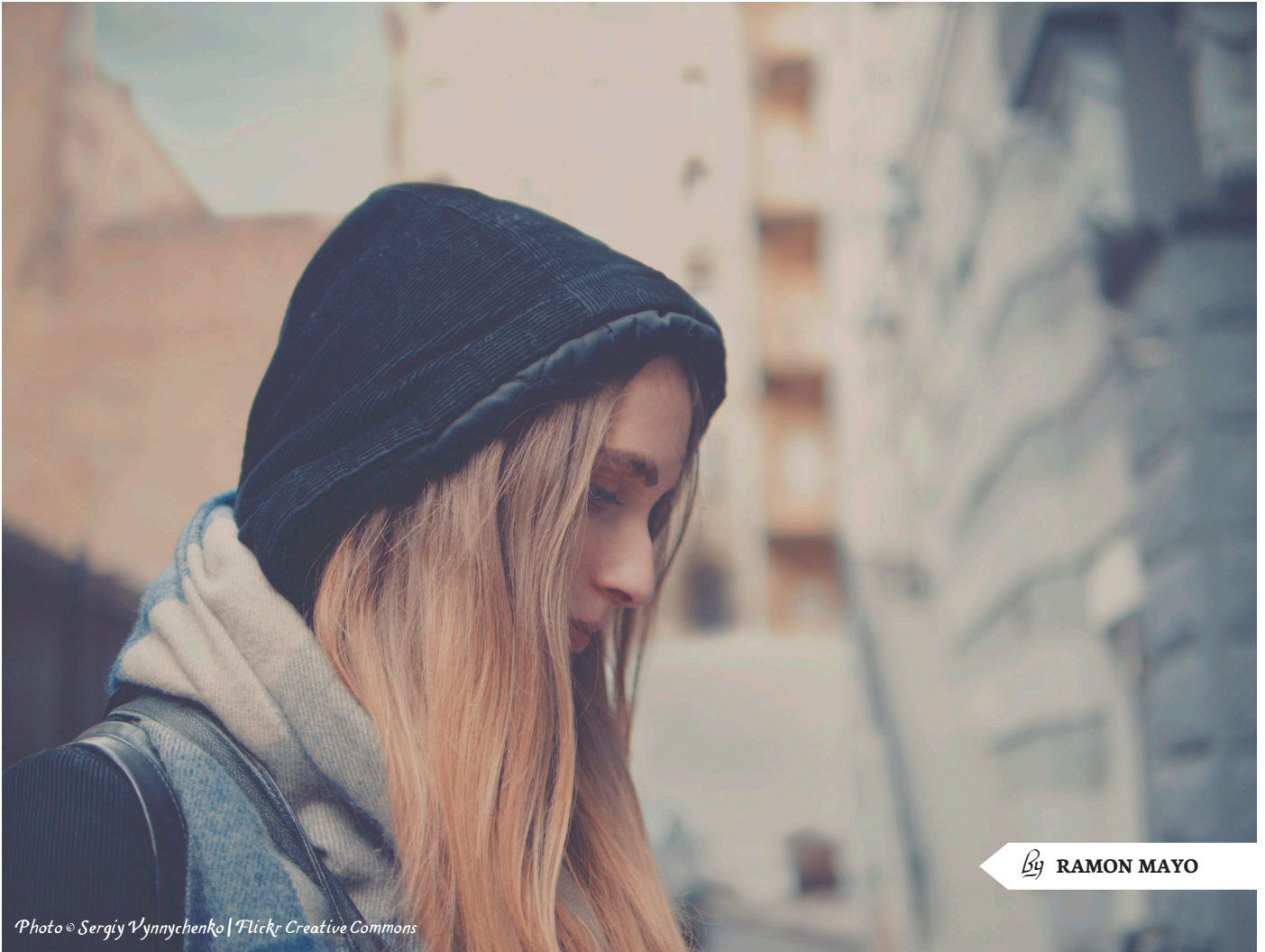
As we start this series together though, I will start with prayer, and I will be asking God for the ability to dive into these spiritual disciplines with enthusiasm and consideration for the people who will be reading this series. I invite you to pray this prayer along with me:

Dear God - I want to have a deeper relationship with you. I don't always know how to do that, and I don't always feel like putting in the time either. Please increase my desire to know you better, and the patience to practice spiritual disciplines that will help me to grow closer to you. Amen.



Hannah Helms

Hannah Helms grew up in the rural mountain town of Mt. Shasta, California. After she left to pursue her education at the University of Portland, she spent several years enjoying the rain and microbreweries of the Pacific Northwest. Now a hospice social worker in her hometown, she lives with her husband and their growing family. She has written for The Junia Project, and occasionally blogs at hannahjanehelms.wordpress.com.



FAVOR

CHRISTIAN LINGO EXPLAINED

Favor is usually given because of something we can offer or some innate quality we possess.

Maybe someone gives you favor at work and you get a promotion or a raise. Maybe a restaurant manager shows you favor in order to win more of your business. It seems mysterious when you take into account all the factors that could persuade others to show favor to you. It could be your smile or personality that causes someone to show favor to you. It could be that they are just in a good mood and are having a good day. It could be for ulterior motives. Maybe they want to sell you on something. You just never know. Human beings are fickle like that.

With God, favor is not that complicated. In the scriptures, God gives favor to all. This is expressed in Acts 10:34 when it says that God shows no favoritism. Jesus also said that God sends his rain on the just and the unjust and causes his sun to shine on the evil and the good (Matthew 5:45). The favor that God shows is not based on race or socioeconomic background. It is not based on whether you earned enough Christian brownie points by doing good deeds or going to church. When we talk about

God's favor we are talking about something that is given out indiscriminately.

God's favor is secured for those who are followers of Christ. As followers of Christ, when God looks at us he also sees his Son. You know the one he called his beloved and with whom he was well pleased (Matthew 3:17). God showed favor to Jesus by pouring out his spirit on him and also by approving his ministry and life (Acts 10:38). This doesn't mean Jesus escaped the hard things and the suffering that comes along with living on this earth. Jesus was tried as a criminal and executed. But ultimately, God showed favor on him by raising him from the dead. That's the kind of favor that every believer can expect from a God who looks at them and sees his son.




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. Also check out his blog at RamonMayo.com

GROW





MY ENEMY, *THE* DEVIL

WHY SATAN IS OUR ENEMY

 GARY VANDEWALKER

There are friends I would rather no one know I have. In the past, I've introduced you to two of these friends, World and Flesh. One surrounds me; the other is part of me. These should be my enemies. They distance me from God and dampen my love for Christ. However, I find myself drawing them closer than I should. The enemy that should repulse me most is often the one I pretend isn't there, while walking hand in hand with him. He is the devil.

You might ask how I don't notice the ugly guy walking alongside me in my spiritual life, but here's the thing, he doesn't appear as someone ugly, but as an angel of light. "For no wonder, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14, NASB). He's the suggestion in my ear that it is more noble to be honest and sin, then do good with an impure motive. He helps me provide the degrading criticism to my friend, in the name of improving my friend's character. I hear in his words the encouragement to be honest in my faith at the risk of being perceived as holy and aloof, by compromising and looking like everyone else.

When my vision is clear and I see the road to take, he jumps in front of me and creates a road block.

Paul experienced this, "For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us" (1 Thessalonians 2:18, NASB). He creates obstacles to discourage me. I adopt platitudes and convince myself I'm loving my neighbor by not bothering him with my faith. I choose to set my convictions aside, interpreting the devil's speed bumps as stop signs in the will of God. When there is resistance to my values, Satan persuades me that God is twisting my path. I accept sin, believing grace should abound.

God gave me a foundation of truth from the Bible, illustrated in history. The stories of Scripture reveal God's character. This foundation shows his love for me in the present, for God has thought of me, sending Christ into my life today. The devil focuses me on the future, making me fear it, wanting me to gain material wealth from what lies ahead and every other pleasure which comes before me. In his fictional work, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis has a senior devil propose to his younger nephew a way to derail the Christian's faith. While trying to hinder believers, the young tempter is to remember, "Gratitude looks to the Past and love to the Present; fear, avarice, lust, and ambition look ahead."

I assume that devil will appear big, loud, and abrupt.
But often he is the soft voice, the gentle touch, and
path of least resistance.

I listen to Satan's whispering, taking it often as my own thought. My proper response would be to remember Jesus' response to Peter. Peter listened as Satan had him oppose Jesus' notion of going to Jerusalem and dying. Jesus had no intention of letting the devil sway the conversation. "But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's'" (Matthew 16:23, NASB).

There's the rub. How often I forget to ask the question of what are God's interests. I ask about my own interests, seeking to love myself. But I ignore the interests of my neighbor and espouse the great virtue of doing what is right in my own eyes to serve God and my neighbor best. Yet, the interest of my neighbor and myself is always found in God's interest because he is the one who loves me and my neighbor the most.

Again the devil in Lewis' story, *Screwtape*, speaks of Satan's approach. "Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts." I assume that devil will appear big, loud, and abrupt. But often he is the soft voice,

the gentle touch, and path of least resistance. Paul warns of Satan's nature. "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3, NASB).

Apart from what Satan puts in my life, I need to also consider what he keeps out of it. *Screwtape* talks about how easy it is for Satan to tempt believers, "It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out." The simplicity and purity of devoting my life to Christ should be my focus. I need to take God at his Word, recognizing the straightforward commands to love God and my neighbor as myself. To derail my spiritual walk, Satan only needs to make me forget this focus.

Satan convinces me that he has great power. I fear at times what he might do to me. I wonder, within myself, how much of the world represents his strength. I forget the great one who lives within me. I could never measure the height of God's power or the Lord's might; and with Satan's power beside it, there is no comparison. Satan can no

more move against God's power than an ant can move the planet out of the orbit of the sun.

My enemy, who I befriend, has but one power over me. He lies. He changes my perception of the world. He makes me see things backwards and upside down. He convinces me of truths other than God's.

What I believe and how I think determine how I live. Satan has no power over me. He uses the simple lie, and then relies on me to use my own strength to carry out his wishes. He gives me a faulty prescription, and I think the unfocused, blurred world is reality. When I put on the glasses of God's truth, the devil's power fades away. Christ lives in me.

For those choosing to live outside the Kingdom of God, Satan blinds them to truth. "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The devil renders Christ invisible. He directs the minds of unbelievers to the flawed world and blames God. He promotes self-sufficiency, virtue without foundation, and a form of god-

liness without God. He attributes the problems in culture to Christians, the intolerant, and the weak. Again, the lie is his strength.

A final word from C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape* reminds me of the need to stay fixed on Jesus. "Do not be deceived... Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do [God's] will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of [God] seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys." No matter what Satan hides from my view, I must obey the truth of God. When God tells me to love him, to love my neighbor, to put his Kingdom first, I must see beyond the barriers Satan puts onto the landscape.

There are weapons that I can use in the battle against this false friend. (Ephesians 6:10-18) My faith is my shield. God's Word is my sword. His righteousness protects my heart. My feet are surrounded by his truth and move me through the world. Trust, truth, and righteousness are my pursuits. When I trust God, I don't trust the devil. When I know the truth, I see the world through God's eyes. When I cling to the righteousness that Christ gives me, apart from my own works, I can't

be shaken into a false sense of guilt. My sins can't be used against me, because Christ has forgiven them and made right living possible.

It's a struggle. These three friends, the world, the flesh, and the devil are really my enemies, I work at leaving them behind. I need to remember when I stumble, Christ picks me up. I must hold to the hope before me and the real future Christ has promised me—a new world and a new body which will no longer be plagued by sin. But for now I take responsibility and endeavor to follow God, God's Spirit, and pursue the Kingdom.

When I walk with Christ as my friend, I am dead to the world, the flesh, and the devil. I am transformed to God's character in my thoughts, my actions, and these enemies have no power over me.

And of the devil?

"Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night'" (Revelation 12:10)

My false friend, the devil, he will lose his place. Before Jesus returns, he will cast out Satan. Satan will begin the road to his final judgment. Humanity will see him for his true character. My flesh will be exchanged for a new body, the world will be made new and perfect, and Satan will be thrown into a lake of fire.

When Christ returns, my enemies will be brought to Jesus' feet. They will no longer be able to pull me from him. I will see God face to face and find my true friend.



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.

CONNECT



By CRYSTAL ALEXANDER

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BLESSED
To BE
A BLESSING

ON GIVING, GRATITUDE AND GOD

Proverbs 22:6 says “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” As parents, we want our children to trust that we are doing our best to provide for them. They are to focus on school and enjoying their youth. We want them to know we have their best interest in mind. Some of us even tell our children that the sky’s the limit. Just ask, and we will make it happen! As a child you naturally develop a sense of entitlement. After all, most things are given to you.

Even as adults, we have a tendency to take ownership in the getting and having of things, even when they are gifts from God. This creates the perception that we aren’t blessed. We go to work, pay our bills, don’t steal or cheat. We “pay our dues,” but in the same way as children, we begin to feel we are entitled to things. I earned them! I brought all these things! These are my accomplishments!

BEING A CHILD OF GOD

It’s funny how as we get older we don’t think of ourselves as “children” when we think of our re-

We have a tendency
to TAKE ownership in
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God.

lationship with God, even though the Bible clearly communicates this. Scripture tell us in Romans 8:16-17 that when we accept Christ, we become a child of God:

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Being a child of God is not the same as acting like a child or having a childish attitude toward what



God gives us
blessings because
it brings him joy to
bring us joy.

we have or are given. As children of God, we are loved and provided for by our Father in Heaven, but when we behave like children, we miss the opportunity to appreciate and properly allocate that affection and provision.

BEHAVING LIKE CHILDREN

Blessings come from God. We don't deserve them and we can't earn them. God gives such blessings because it brings him joy to bring us joy. 1 Timothy 6:17 (ESV) says, "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy." What God provides, we should steward to the best of our ability and with thanksgiving. Don't get caught up in trying to *make* things happen of your own merit. We are to work hard but also be humble (Col. 2:23). James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." Humility

keeps our perspective on God and not on our own accomplishments.

In realizing all blessings come from the Lord, we can learn to pray "Thank you God for your blessings" not, "Please God send me a blessing." We can appreciate more of what we've been given when we shift our perspective from give-me to gratitude. This can be a challenge. Sometimes it is hard to remember to mind our thoughts (2 Corinthians 10:5). In Psalm 19:14, David cries out "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." We can pray like David when we remember that God loves us, his children. Even when we don't know what to say or how to say it, we can trust that God will hear our prayers as they're meant to be heard.

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

When God made the great promise and covenant to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3 he said,

*"I will make you into a great nation, and I will
bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be
a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever
curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed
through you."*

Twice here God says we will be a blessing. And while these verses are a snapshot of God's great plan and Jesus' global mission to bring all peoples back to himself. What could this mean when it is related to material wealth or gifts from God? We are to be a blessing with our things because our things are given to us as a blessing. What we have should not lead to entitlement but to generosity. 1 Timothy 6:7 (ESV) says, "For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world." All things are from God; and God has given all things purpose. Consider the purpose of

Consider the
PURPOSE of your
things and either **USE**
them, **SHARE** them
with others, or pass
them on to **BETTER**
someone else's life.

your things and either use them, share them with others, or pass them on to better someone else's life. That is the purpose for which they were made. Don't just cling to things for the sake of having them.

Psalms 19 reminds us that the Lord should be our ultimate focus. Following his guidance and direction, and honoring his Word and reputation are the things we should desire to keep hold of. These things are more desirable than gold and more pre-

Being a blessing
INVOLVES not only
 the **ACTIONS** that we
 take with one another
 it's the **THOUGHT** we
 put in to the action.

cious than honey from a honeycomb. There is great reward in loving God. When we use the things that God has given us, such as money, time or talents to serve people or add to the enrichment of others, we are loving God, and using our things for his purposes, like Jesus Christ would have us do. It is in this way that we are blessed to be a blessing.

Being “blessed to be a blessing” also means helping someone and thinking beyond our own comfort or gain, not because it’s convenient but simply because God calls us to love others. Being a blessing involves not only the actions that we take with one another it’s the thought we put in to the action (1 Corinthians 13:3). James 2:8 says, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.” We can let go of our entitlement and trust God that all things are ultimately his and gifts from him. We can give without worrying about getting something back in return. We can give without getting praise or bragging rights. We can give without worry because as we learn from Psalm 71:21, that the Lord “will increase my greatness and comfort me again.” With confidence we know that God has blessed us to be a blessing.



Crystal Alexander

Crystal Alexander has moved around a lot—Chicago, to Denver to Palm Springs—all for love, life and the pursuit of happiness. She wants to share all she has learned and continues to learn about how she sees and feels the world, through God, love, life and sacrifice.

A large commercial airplane is shown from a low angle, flying towards the viewer. The plane is white with blue and red accents. Below the plane, a city is visible, built on a hillside. In the foreground, an airport tarmac and runways are visible. The sky is overcast.

MISSION AVIATION FELLOWSHIP

PILOTS SERVING MISSIONARIES AND OTHER NONPROFITS AROUND THE GLOBE

By **MARIE FIEBIG**

Photo © enrique | Flickr Creative Commons

“Every 10 minutes—somewhere in the world—a Mission Aviation Fellowship airplane takes off or lands.” This is how Mission Aviation Fellowship describes its reach. Mission Aviation Fellowship or MAF is an organization of pilots serving missionaries and other nonprofits around the globe. Focused on aviation, technology and training, MAF works in the hardest-to-reach locations. MAF has programs in 14 countries including Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Indonesia, Kalimantan, Papua, Lesotho, Mali and Mozambique. Highly trained pilots land in jungle clearings or on the sides of mountains to bring medicine and doctors, disaster relief, education and more to people isolated from the rest of the world.

After World War II, a handful of veteran U.S. and UK pilots asked themselves “How can we use our flying skills to reach isolated people with the Gospel?” They founded MAF in 1946 to fill their desire to give back and be involved in God’s global mission. Mission Aviation Fellowship’s goal is to “share the love of Jesus Christ through aviation and technology so that isolated people may be physically and spiritually transformed.” Technology is key in the MAF mission. MAF connects people to Jesus

and brings God’s Word to remote areas through email, radio installation and other digital solutions. The MAF Technology Resources team launched Estante, an Android™ app that works offline and allows isolated pastors and church leaders to easily store, view, and share digital Christian resources anywhere.

Training extends the reach of Mission Aviation Fellowship by helping pastors learn how to use technology. MAF teaches pastors culturally relevant methods to share the Gospel, such as oral communication strategies for reaching non-literate groups. Training takes the form of certified IT, digital security courses, plane maintenance and flight instructions.

In 2001, MAF launched Operation ACCESS! to survey 364 isolated areas in 64 countries where barriers impeded access to the Gospel. The survey identified transportation, communications, and technology barriers that MAF could address.

MAF was honored in 2010, when the Congressional Gold Medal was awarded to Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) who served during World War II. Honorees included Betty Greene who pi-

2014 saw 26,200 flights conducted, which delivered over 8 million pounds of life sustaining cargo and served more than 600 churches, mission organizations, medical groups, schools and relief agencies.

loted MAF's inaugural flight, taking two Wycliffe workers to a remote jungle location in Mexico. The award also honored 1,100 other women who performed often hazardous non-combat flying duties to free up male pilots for combat during the war. Today MAF is a thriving technology and training organization. In 2014 alone, MAF distributed 3,217 biblical resources such as computers, tablets, digital libraries, apps, software, and teaching materi-

als. They also trained hundreds of church leaders in using different technology resources which would allow them to safely and confidently share the gospel. MAF also flew doctors to treat 1,500 sick people affected by a deadly malaria outbreak in the village of Kinkodja in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In fact, 2014 saw 26,200 flights conducted, which delivered over 8 million pounds of life-sustaining cargo and served more than 600 churches, mission organizations, medical groups, schools and relief agencies.

Other advancements in MAF's mission include the installation of 75 new satellite communication systems to improve communication for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on health-care, agriculture and other development projects.

MAF relies on donations and volunteers to keep the airplanes in the air and the technology online. If you want to get involved in MAF, begin by praying for their teams and mission. Sign up for Prayer Connection and MAF will email you a weekly prayer bulletin that provides daily intercessions. To subscribe, go to <https://www.maf.org/get-involved/pray>.

You can also serve overseas as a missionary to reach others for Christ in remote areas around the world. Missionaries can focus on aviation, technology, teaching or business/ administration.

There are opportunities for people to serve as MAF advocates too, trained to inform others about the impact that people can have through MAF. MAF advocates accept a one year commitment to present the MAF ministry to individuals and groups eight or more times per year. All it takes to qualify is a growing personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the desire to reach isolated people with the Gospel, and active involvement in a local church.

You can serve in the U.S. by applying for a job. Current openings include front-end developer, system administrator, and database administrator.

Interested churches can partner with MAF to use airplanes and other technologies to reach the isolated with the love of Christ. Churches can help MAF financially by adopting a plane, country, missionary or sponsoring a one-time project. To find out more about supporting short-term mission trips, call Mike Snodgrass, Director of Ministry Awareness, at (208) 498-0659 or send an email to msnodgrass@maf.org.

You can also show your support by shopping online for apparel, books and novelties (they even have a clearance section) on the MAF website. Buy a new sporty cap or handcrafted ceramic coffee mug or give your favorite infant a cute, cuddly aviator bear. Order a book and read how God is using his church to transform lives throughout the world. All proceeds benefit the MAF worldwide ministry.

Contact information for Mission Aviation Fellowship is P.O. Box 47, Nampa, ID 83653. 1-800-FLYS-MAF, maf-us@maf.org or maf.org.



Marie Fiebig

After teaching high school journalism and college English, Marie Fiebig led the team that delivered procedures, communications and forms to Ford Motor Credit Company field locations throughout the country. Currently, Marie works as a technical writer for cyber security and compliance topics.



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