

SPOTLIGHT: CONSERVING CREATION | THE SOUND OF SILENCE | WORSHIP IN THE CLUBS

# new identity

MAGAZINE

God in focus. World in scope.

## *Coming Out Christian*

MAKING YOUR FAITH  
PUBLIC IN A PRIVATE  
WORLD

## **LITTLE WHITE LIES**

BIBLICAL LIARS AND  
EVERYDAY FIBS

## **CLOSELY LOVING THE FAR AWAY**

LEARNING HOW TO FORGET  
AGENDAS AND LOVE  
AUTHENTICALLY

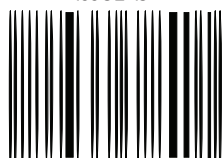
## **FILTERING THE FICTION**

MEANINGFULLY  
CONSUMING MODERN-  
DAY MEDIA

**THE  
HOOK UP  
CULTURE**

pg 32

ISSUE 15



ISSN 1946-5939

**THE MAGAZINE FOR NEW BELIEVERS AND SEEKERS**

# contents

## DEPARTMENTS

ISSUE 15

16

Closely Loving the Far Away



45

Filtering the Fiction



48

Coming Out Christian



### GROW

Spotlight: In Perspective

6 Conserving Creation

Should humans preserve the natural environment?

Growth & Maturity

10 The Sound of Silence

Sometimes God's silence can be a sign of his presence.

Practical Application

13 Murder in the Heart

The 6th Commandment 'do not murder' gets personal.

Foundation

16 Closely Loving the Far Away

Learning how to forget agendas and love authentically.

20 Little White Lies

Biblical liars and everyday fibs.

### CONNECT

Life Together

24 Keeping the Romance Alive

Fun dates and helpful advice for new parents.

27 Culturally Christian

Finding genuine faith as a generational Christian.

Discovering God

30 Bleeding for Jesus

A cancer survivor's testimony.

Community

32 Hooking Up

Waiting until marriage in a sex-saturated culture.

God Talk

35 A Spiritual Lens

Photos to spark thought, thanksgiving and love.

38 It is True

Faith inspired by beauty.

### LIVE

Give Back

40 The Draw of the Surf and the

Love of the Savior

Christian Surfers International's impact in and out of the water.

People

42 Worship in the Clubs

The Calling of Tracy Thomas

Culture & Creativity

45 Filtering the Fiction

Meaningfully consuming modern-day media.

Careers & Callings

48 Coming Out Christian

Making your faith public in a private world.

### IN EVERY ISSUE

3 From the Editor

4 News, Fun Finds & Opportunities

5 Masthead

52 Prayer

# welcome...



*"LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago." (Isaiah 25:1 NIV)*

SUCH WONDERFUL THINGS GOD DOES IN MY LIFE—SUCH AS giving me a close family and loving husband. Yet in the moment of an obstacle, frustration or pain, I easily lose sight of God's perfect faithfulness. It's easy to forget about God's trustworthy character.

I am constantly learning and striving to understand God's truth and faithfulness every day. Many of the articles in this issue remind me to trust more, love deeper, and grow stronger in applying what I learn from God. I want to take to heart God's wonderful gifts he promises and shares with us through Christ. Lindsey Frederick discusses public faith in the American culture, Wendy Van Eyck talks about the challenge of sharing your love of God with those you care most about, and Delbert Teachout shares his views on God's silence.

Through these articles I've learned about authenticity. Authenticity speaks loudest to those family and friends you care about most, and it's authenticity that speaks loudest to God when we pray. I want to be the most authentic person I can—and this means following Jesus' lead in every area of my life. Confessing my shortcomings, understanding the truth he speaks for my life and not just everyone else, believing in his perfect faithfulness and that he is shaping and transforming me into a whole person. Jesus is the perfect being. He is God. Our life joined with his is an authentic life. The more of him that I let show, the more "the real me" comes through.

*Cailin*

CAILIN BRIODY HENSON  
Editor-in-Chief

Like what you're  
reading?

PLEASE support our  
nonprofit magazine by  
DONATING today.

www.  
newidentitymagazine.  
com

## WRITE TO US:

What are your thoughts on this issue? What topics or perspectives do you want to read about or hear from? We love getting feedback. Send your message via e-mail or letter and please include your name, address and daytime phone number. *New Identity Magazine*, P.O. Box 375, Torrance, CA 90508. Phone: (310) 947-8707; [feedback@newidentitymagazine.com](mailto:feedback@newidentitymagazine.com)





## LIFT

LIFT is an organization founded by college students whose mission is to combat poverty and expand opportunities for the underprivileged. LIFT is based in five U.S. cities (Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Washington D.C.) and is staffed by trained volunteers, most of whom are college students. LIFT clients and volunteers work one-on-one to find jobs, secure, safe, and stable housing, find public benefits and tax credits, and obtain quality referrals for services like childcare and healthcare. Simultaneously, the LIFT experience pushes volunteers to grapple with our country's most challenging issues related to poverty, race, inequality, and policy. Since LIFT's founding, over 6,000 volunteers have served more than 40,000 individuals and families. There are plenty of ways to get involved from volunteering at one of LIFT's locations to serving as an intern to becoming a community partner. Visit [www.liftcommunities.org](http://www.liftcommunities.org) to find out more about their successful programs. —*Rachel Gooneratne*



## World Affairs Councils of America

The World Affairs Councils of America is the largest nonpartisan, non-profit grassroots organization in the United States dedicated to educating and engaging the American public on global issues. The national office of the WACA works to develop new program opportunities to distribute to member councils in 40 states, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. This includes a speaker series, a national conference, leadership missions, and other flagship programs. Many member councils reach out to young professionals through events that are designed specifically to connect individuals with a passion for international affairs, helping them expand their networks and knowledge of world issues. For details and to join, visit [www.worldaffairscouncils.org](http://www.worldaffairscouncils.org). —*Rachel Gooneratne*



## Mocha Club

We've often heard about giving up our daily coffee break in order to save money. Mocha Club has extended the idea in order to fund various development projects in Africa. Those who want to help with clean water, education, HIV/AIDS prevention, vulnerable children, and women at risk projects join Mocha Club and commit to giving \$7 a month (about the cost of two mochas) and designate the project that will benefit from their gift. Supporters can also help meet other specific and emergency needs, or support Mocha Club members planning to volunteer at project sites in Africa. Visit [themochaclub.org](http://themochaclub.org) for more details. —*Rachel Gooneratne*



## Creation 2012

The Creation music festival has been around since 1979. Today it happens in two locations in the United States, Pennsylvania and Washington. Tim Landis, the co-founder says, "Each year Creation seems like a family reunion, a chance to put aside our theological differences and to worship the Lord as one Body." This year the festival in Pennsylvania will take place June 27-30 and in Washington July 18-21. Not only does the festival offer music from artists such as Switchfoot, Crowder, Tenth Avenue North, and Kye Kye, there are also multiple booths selling Christian books, t-shirts and other merchandise. Attendants camp out together bringing tents and sleeping bags, or stay at local hotels. Each night of the event there is a special speaker and a community bonfire. Tickets can be purchased for one day, two days or the entire event, \$50, \$75, and \$105 respectively. If money is an issue, they hire part time and full time staff to help set up and run different elements of the festival. If you volunteer part time your entire event ticket comes down to \$55, and if you volunteer full time your entire ticket is only \$20. [www.creationfest.com](http://www.creationfest.com) —*Anna Anderson*

# new identity

MAGAZINE

## ISSUE 15

VOLUME 4 NUMBER 3

*For new believers and those interested in what Christians think about the world we live in.*

God in focus. World in Scope.

Publisher/Editor-in-Chief Cailin Briody Henson

Associate Editor Anna Anderson

Editorial Board Cailin Briody Henson, Anna Anderson, Jerine Griffith, Monisha Belgarde, David Carr, Ramon Mayo

Copy Editor Jerine Griffith, Monisha Belgarde  
Fact Checker Crystal Lassegard

Layout & Design Cailin Briody Henson


Research Editor Rachel Gooneratne

Contributing Writers Anna Anderson, Kelli Ward, Nicholas Sowell, Delbert Teachout, Tom Koel, Erica Mongé-Greer, Eric Lee, Wendy Van Eyck, Nathan Rutan, Sara Napier, Kevin C. Neece, Kimberly Davidson, Lindsey A. Frederick, Matthew Hamilton, Lara Tovmassian

Board of Directors Sean Estill, Sandra Estill, Ramon Mayo, Yvette Mayo, Tim Henson, Cailin Henson

Cover photo credit: © Casey David | Flickr (CC)

Send letters to the editor via [feedback@newidentitymagazine.com](mailto:feedback@newidentitymagazine.com) or to New Identity Magazine, P.O. Box 375, Torrance, CA 90508. Copyright ©2012 by New Identity Magazine. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without written permission is prohibited. The opinions and views contained in this magazine are those of the author exclusively and do not necessarily reflect the views of the New Identity Magazine organization, staff, volunteers or directors. New Identity Magazine (ISSN 1946-5939, Vol. 4, No. 3) is published quarterly, four times a year by New Identity Magazine, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, P.O. Box 375, Torrance, CA 90508, 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 as a publication is to help people find their new identity in Christ by presenting interesting topics from multiple Christian perspectives. Through this, *New Identity Magazine* hopes to generate communication and understanding to unite people that have different perspectives and encourage thought provoking discussion and commonality through Christ. By using scriptures of the Holy Bible as the source, the Word that binds Christians together, and highlighting different insights into their intention and application, *New Identity Magazine* aims to help readers live a more stimulating, inclusive, and passionate life with God. In addition, *New Identity Magazine* is a publication that encourages learning, wisdom, creative expression, and showcases the cultural and world aspects of life and following God.

Our goal is to represent true-to-life followers of Christ that wonder, dream and have a willingness to learn about varying viewpoints. We desire to dissolve the rules, categories and stereotypes placed on Christians and non-Christians, shed God's light into the areas that may be forgotten or rarely talked about but are vital in many people's lives, and provide coverage of topics often overlooked by the mainstream media or in religious circles.

## REFERENCING THE BIBLE:

There are many Bible translations out there. Just a few are the New International Version, The Message, and the New Living Translation. You'll see these referenced as NIV, NLT, The Message etc. When we reference a Bible verse, such as John 3:16, 'John' is the book in the Bible. There are 66 books total. 3 is the chapter in the book and 16 is the verse in the chapter.

•Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

•Scripture quotations marked (The Message) are taken from The Message. Copyright 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

•Scripture quotations marked (AMP) are taken from the Amplified Bible, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

•Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

•Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

# IN PERSPECTIVE

*Showcasing today's touchy subjects.*

## *Conserving Creation*

*Should humans preserve the natural  
environment?*

## SARA NAPIER

Born in Southern California, Sara Napier has spent most of her life between California and Arizona. At the age of 22 she has begun to be established as an entrepreneur, musician and writer and has worked in ministry with Kingman Foursquare Church for the last 6 years. In her spare time Sara performs, designs clothing and writes for various blogs, including her own [KingdomJournal.tumblr.com](http://KingdomJournal.tumblr.com).



**T**he first words in the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” explain that God created the universe and everything in it (Genesis 1:1). Not only did he create everything, God also gave humans dominion and stewardship over the earth. Genesis 1:28 says, “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” Our responsibility for God’s creation often gets worked into Sunday morning sermons and bible studies. It is both reassuring and humbling to think that God would entrust something so vast to our care. Countless worship songs have been written on the matter and endless Christian catch phrases focus on being thankful for the beauty of creation. It is surprising then that conservation has become a controversial issue for many in the church today.

Some think that conservation is simply green living and is just another word for ‘environmentalism.’ The two are actually a bit different. Environmentalism is a broad term for an entire movement that aims to protect the natural environment from harmful human activity. Conservation is a sort of sub-category to environmentalism and is mainly concerned with ecosystems, vegetation and wildlife—making sure that these areas are protected, preserved and restored. An example of conservation is rallying to prevent laying a giant oil pipe through a wildlife reserve. Christians interpret the idea of conserving the earth in different ways—some think that conserving God’s creation is a part of loving God and loving your neighbor, while others think that spending time worrying about conservation is unnecessary and may even hinder the spread of the gospel.

## Respecting God's Gift of Dominion

*It is both reassuring and humbling to think that God would entrust something so vast [like his creation] to our care.*

For some, respecting God’s creation is viewed as one of the fundamental beliefs of Christianity. It is considered an act of worship, a privilege of God’s children and an honorable responsibility. Most believers would agree that since God took the time to make us individually, with purpose and detail, we should treat God’s other creatures with similar care. Humans, animals and nature are all God’s creations made to work together.

Through conservation we are good stewards of God’s resources. As it says in Genesis 1:28 mentioned earlier, God gave us dominion (also defined as “exercise of control” or “authority”) over creation. By giving this responsibility to the male and the female, God certainly expects us to care for his creation. Note that we aren’t given ownership, only dominion—the way you might borrow a friend’s car and take care to return it in good condition. In Genesis 2:15 it says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” To “keep it” suggests a duty to care for the earth and conserve the natural way God designed it to operate—just like Adam and Eve did in the garden. Creation works together like an orchestra—all the different members play a part in sustaining a beautiful and diverse harmony.

Other Christians disagree with this interpretation and see dominion as God giving humanity all of creation for their own use. The way in which humans use his creation is up to them. For example, if humans need water to drink and water their plants, then worrying about preserving the fish in the pond seems to harm people more than help them. With God giving humans dominion, that means he allows them to make the hard decisions about when and how to use his resources.

## Preservation for Future Generations

Psalms 112:1-2 says, “Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments! His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.” This verse, like many other verses in the Bible, speak of future generations receiving God’s blessing by obeying God’s commandments. There is no doubt in scripture that the way one generation lives affects the next—for example, in 1 and 2 Kings the Israelite Kings’ poor leadership and the citizens’ sin bring about the downfall of their nation. In the same way, Christian conservationists believe that Christians should conserve today’s ecosystems and resources in order to avoid disaster for future generations. Just as exercise and a balanced diet will produce desirable results in the human body, conservation is something that offers a tangible blessing. One example of conservation affecting future generations is the parameters put on fishing, like requiring licenses and enforcing specific seasons. By making sure that fish do not become extinct, rivers are able to sustain their ecosystem and remain beautiful and vibrant for future generations. Instead of only selfishly thinking of

how you want to fish whenever you want, requiring licenses allows future generations to enjoy the river and enjoy a hobby of fishing for years to come. By being a good steward of God's resources, without reaping all the benefits immediately, Christians can bless future generations.

On the other hand, some Christians believe we will find a solution to avert any disaster or serious situation that might come from neglecting conservation. Technologies like battery-powered vehicles, solar power and other methods of sustainable resources continue to advance and are helping to reverse some of the effects of our past environmental impact. It seems like only a matter of time before someone will create an alternative to the natural resources we've always relied on. If this is true, we don't need to spend so much time worrying about preserving things, because future technology will fix all our problems. However, many still feel we shouldn't always expect to be able to fix an outcome, but should be proactive to prevent damage to the earth and ourselves in the first place. Since we're not collecting water from Mars, or iron ore from Neptune, even our filtration systems and alternative energy solutions rely on nature. Though we can create everyday substitutes to displace us from nature, there is no way for humans to create a replacement for God's creation.

Christians unconcerned with conservation may argue that since Christ is coming back we do not need to be concerned for future generations. They know that when Christ comes at the end of all things, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. If God is going to make a new earth, why worry about conserving the present one? Also, because Christians hold to the promise that Christ is returning, it's easy for them to assume that Christ will return before the earth becomes uninhabitable.

## Loving Your Neighbor Means Good Health

Jesus said in Luke 10:27 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind," and "Love your neighbor as yourself." Many



*Some think that conserving God's creation is a part of loving God and loving your neighbor, while others think that spending time worrying about conservation is unnecessary and may even hinder the spread of the gospel.*

Christians see conservation as an expression of loving your neighbors because the deterioration of ecosystems and natural environments often directly affects the people living in close proximity to those areas. Oil spills can damage the livelihood of generations of fisherman. Production plants who don't keep in check the toxic chemicals they emit can effect the ozone and allow more harmful ultraviolet rays to seep into the atmosphere. This causes an increased risk of skin cancer, asthma or allergies for those among the nearby communities.

Another reason that some Christians think conservation is loving to one's neighbor is because caring for the environment could actually help future health discoveries. One example of this is the Amazon rainforest. Some people think that since it is so large, it doesn't hurt to do logging and other forest clearing for human use. However, because the Amazon is so vast, there are plants and species living there that scientists haven't even discovered. Already, humans use many plants as natural remedies for sickness, like ginger for a stomach ache. Destroying parts of the Amazon is potentially destroying undiscovered natural remedies and medicines for

people.

A lot of Christians who like the idea of conservation initially may disregard it because of radical conservationists. Earlier this year in Sydney, Australia, a group had to be disbanded by riot police over a protest to preserve 80-year-old trees outside of a library. The Bible makes it clear that our actions should be honoring to God. Taking a love for creation to the extreme of rioting quickly becomes dishonoring. Since there are radical individuals, a lot of conservationists get unmerited negative attention. This is similar to the way some people claim to follow Christ but live a life that goes against his examples. Ironically, some Christians find it difficult be a conservationist while separating themselves from protesters or select politicians. Rather than causing problems, Christians concerned with conservation view their care for the environment as a way to serve God and serve their neighbor.

## Provision

For some Christians, conservation seems like a lack of faith. The Bible teaches that God loves us and will provide. In verses like Romans 8:28-39 and Matthew 19:26 we learn that when we have faith in him, all things are possible. For some, it feels like conservation is a lifestyle that doubts the power of God by assuming that he will not provide more resources. In Acts 14:16-17 Paul preaches about God's provision, "In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." Other Christians argue that through "dominion" he has already given us all we could ever need and he is trusting us to use what he's already given wisely. Luke 16:10 says, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much." (NIV) If we are to ruin what we've already been given, can we expect to receive more?

## Priority

In Matthew 28:18-20 it says "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" This is often called the great commission. For some, it is simply not the job of everyone to care for the planet. Some feel we should take responsibility for our own actions but to go any further, like to fight for the health of other communities or ecosystems across the globe is a waste of time. The average person is lucky to make it to their 80th birthday. We have limited time on this earth so we must take the time to live to the fullest for God.

Sharing the gospel is a priority for Christians and for some, to spend time preserving forests, purifying polluted water and planting vegetation seems like it gets in the way of witnessing to people. However, this idea may act more as an excuse than

*It is not that people do not care about the conditions of living environments; instead some feel that we must touch the lives of the people spiritually in those environments first.*




an evangelistic mindset. It is not that people do not care about the conditions of living environments; instead some feel that we must touch the lives of the people spiritually in those environments first. So while they are not actively against conservation, they simply feel evangelism is their top priority. If there is time left over to focus on the environment, then it is okay to work in that area.

Loving God and loving your neighbor does not need to be polarized on one side of the debate or the other. Building a fresh water well, preserving a natural habitat or planting trees to improve air quality can serve a need. These are some great ways to show the love of God to a whole community of people whether it's for a small village, an urban garden or a suburban neighborhood. In Matthew 25:35-46 the Bible says that when we help others, it is as though we are doing it to God.

There are also situations when people do not need or want help with their natural habitat. They are simply hungry for God, and need Jesus first before other work should be done.

For as many people as there are rallying to stop overfishing in an area, there are going to be the same amount or even more that disagree entirely. Some simply feel powerless against the free will of others when there is strong opposition. While not everyone feels defeated before the battle is fought, some simply don't see a need to get involved or develop an opinion at all. They feel the issues of environmentalism and conservation have nothing to do with their life

Perhaps a reason there is such apathy towards conservation is that some people are just confused. Conservation is tied to strong opinions and it's often hard to decipher both sides. Some may dislike the idea just because it seems pointless. Others may dislike it because of what has been associated with it. Some may love everything about it and some may just be tired of hearing about it. No matter the belief, it is clear that the topic of conservation is important. As Christians, even if we're not sure what we believe on the matter, we should keep our hearts open to see every side of the subject. Our responsibility is to figure out what we believe the Bible teaches and do our best to honor God. 

# The Sound of Silence

*Sometimes God's silence can be a sign of his presence.*

Photo © Mait Jürriado | Flickr (CC)



## DELBERT TEACHOUT

Delbert Teachout has been married for 36 years. He is currently retired from military and civilian careers. Ordained into ministry in 2002, Delbert is now pursuing freelance writing as a ministry. You can read his blog at [dteachout.wordpress.com](http://dteachout.wordpress.com)

**W**hy is God silent when we pray? In the Bible we find God speaking with multitudes of people. Starting in Genesis we read about God talking with Adam. In Revelation, we read about God talking to John. Throughout the entire Bible we can read about God speaking to people. Were those events restricted to the Bible, or does God still talk to people? If he does still speak, why does he seem to be silent when we need him? Jeremiah 33:3 says, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." God has invited us to call to him, anytime, for any reason, and he will answer us. Since God wants us to call on him, why would he remain silent? Let's see what scripture says about this.

### Are we listening to God?

Sheep learn to recognize their shepherd's voice and follow only their shepherd. In basic training, soldiers, sailors and pilots learn to recognize the voice of their training instructor and follow only that voice. As Christians we need to recognize God's voice. In 1 Kings 19: 9-12 the word of the Lord came to Elijah. First Elijah saw a whirlwind, and then he experienced an earthquake, next he saw a fire. "And after the fire came a gentle whisper" (verse 12). God did not speak through the wind, earthquake, or fire. God spoke in a gentle whisper.

For more than fifty years I have been a Christian and have never heard an audible voice from God. When he speaks to me he speaks a whisper in my heart. Some may call it a "gut feeling." To me it's God speaking. He does not speak to my ears or my mind. When something is in my mind I know it is me thinking, but when it is in my heart I know that it is God speaking. If I am not careful, I miss him. So the first thing we need to do if we are to hear from God is recognize his voice. If we have unconfessed sin, God may be

shouting at us to get our attention. We need to listen for him.

### What are some barriers that keep us from hearing God?

We need to be able to discern God's will. I John 5:14-15 tells us, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we ask of him."

How can we know God's will when we are new Christians? We can read the Bible. The Bible says it is God's will that everyone believes in Jesus, that we tell others about him, that we love other people, that we do not neglect gathering with other Christians, that we have no other gods before him, that we seek first the kingdom of heaven, and many other examples. I have heard people when they pray say something like, "If this is your will, let it happen." We need to learn to pray for and accept his will.

Jesus said his new commandment is to love God with all our hearts and love others as ourselves (Mark 12: 30-31). Failure to do so may hinder our prayers. Matthew 7:11-12 says "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you." Why would God give us anything if we are cruel or unkind, negligent or unconcerned about others? We need to treat everyone we meet the same way Jesus would.

Another thing that may cause God to be silent is our lack of faith. Matthew 13:58 says, "And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith." I know from personal experience

that God will allow circumstances to continue until we learn to have faith in him. That lesson was painful and I have not forgotten it. I know my faith is not perfect, but I believe without any doubt that God will take care of me.

### Does God choose to be silent sometimes?

A humorous commercial I've seen shows a young lady calling her boyfriend to tell him she is giving him the silent treatment. Does God ever

give us the silent treatment? Isaiah 59:2 says, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God." 1 Peter 3:12 says, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." Were Peter and Isaiah saying that sometimes God refuses to listen because of our sin? Possibly. Or perhaps, God wants us to wait, because patience is a virtue that strengthens our love for the Lord (2 Peter 1:6).

Sometimes God's silence can be a sign of his presence.

*Sometimes God's silence can be a sign of his presence. When he is silent we become so hungry for him we seek him in such a way our relationship with him has been strengthened.*

When he is silent we become so hungry for him we seek him in such a way that our relationship with him is strengthened. I remember stressful events when I thought God was silent. I pleaded with him to show me what I did wrong, or what I failed to do. I begged him to finish teaching me so I could receive my answer. Those experiences taught me to trust him without a doubt. God did not even speak to Jesus from Gethsemane to the cross. If he was silent to Jesus, we can expect him to be silent to us.

## What should we do when God is silent?


What do we do if we have learned to recognize his voice, forgiven others, confessed our sins, are trying to walk according to God's will, are treating everyone as we want them to treat us, and believe with all our hearts he will answer our prayer, but he is still silent? Daniel chapter nine tells about Daniel praying, but the messenger who was bringing him his answer was delayed for twenty-one days. Sometimes our answer is on its way but we need to wait for it. The book of Job (pronounced J-oh-b) is a story of a man who went through tremendous calamities yet he remained faithful to God. We need to continue to have faith because we have God's promise that he will never leave us.

Something I was taught many years ago is that God has three answers to prayer: yes, no, and wait awhile. We need to be attentive to listen to God; he speaks in different places and in different ways. He speaks to me when I pray, read my Bible, attend a worship service, drive my car, take a shower, or any place he chooses. He speaks through prayer, worship, a pastor, or another person. He sometimes prevents some things from happening and allows other things to happen, called closing and opening doors. Sometimes when we think God is silent he is opening or closing doors, maybe he is speaking through a spouse or friend, our pastor, or maybe the answer has not arrived yet.

How many times should we ask for something? I have heard people say if we ask for something more than once we show a lack of faith. Jesus said to keep on seeking, keep on knocking, and keep on asking until we have our answer (Matthew 7:7). Sometimes we have to accept no as an answer, sometimes we have to wait for our answer. We must always remember, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight," (Prov. 3: 5–6).

We have seen some reasons why God might be silent and some reasons why it may seem as though he is silent. For more information on this topic we can read books like: *When God is Silent* by Charles Swindoll, *When Prayers Are Not Answered: Finding Peace When God Seems Silent* by Elizabeth Rockwood, *Silent God* by Joseph Bentz, *When God is Silent* by Barbara Brown Taylor or *Why is God Ignoring Me?* by Gary Habermas.

Many say that a formula for prayer is a helpful tool in overcoming the barriers to hearing God. One formula is called the ACTS method: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (requests). When we pray with adoration, confession, and thanksgiving, we prepare our hearts to receive what God

is saying about our supplications. Instead of telling him the answer we want, we need to be listening to hear the answer he is giving. However, if our request is wrong, he will deny us; and if our life is wrong, he will discipline us. He is waiting for us to call to him so he can show us, even in his silence, great and unsearchable things we never knew. 

## JARGONWORSHIP

### *Dictionary of Christian Jargon for the Ordinary Person*

**Worship.** To some, the word sounds otherworldly, religious or just plain boring. The truth is, everyday and in so many different ways we engage in the act of worship. Worship comes from an old English word that means worth+ship or to show how much something is worth. So instead of being reserved for Sunday morning, worship is a display of our true heart's desire and ultimate allegiance. Anything can be an object of worship and many choose to worship money, fame, the latest hi-tech gadget, another person or themselves. The fact is everybody worships.

While everybody worships there is something genuinely special about Christian worship. It is an impossible task. Why? Because Christian worship involves showing how much Jesus Christ and God is worth. However, that is a goal that is unreachable. We can only grasp and reach at the goal of showing the universe how much the God who loves us so much that he died for us is truly worth. And so we write songs and make art and travel to the most remote places on earth for this very purpose. Sometimes our worship gatherings are fresh and exciting and sometimes it feels like the same old thing, but we keep going because we are worshipping the same God whose greatness we could never truly express. Everybody worships. Christians fail at it. While that may sound depressing it actually is a joyful thing. To show the value of a God so immeasurably amazing is a guarantee that we will never get bored. In fact it is the reason why we exist. —Ramon Mayo

# Murder in the Heart

*The 6th Commandment 'do not murder' gets personal.*

Photo © Nasos3 | Flickr (CC)

## ERICA MONGÉ-GREER

Erica Mongé-Greer is a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary with a MA in Biblical Studies and Ancient Near Eastern Language and Literature. She teaches at Vanguard University and Life Pacific College, while writing occasionally for freelance publication. Erica lives in Pasadena with her husband, Joshua, and two children: Caleb and Emma.



What we know as the sixth commandment is a verse made up of only two words in its original Hebrew context. *Do not murder*—an imperative command. We can easily understand the meaning of this phrase as a command

that forbids God's followers from carrying out destructive behaviors against another individual. It is important to recognize that this command stands apart from other legal precedents.

Previous codes of law, such as Babylon's ancient "Hammurabi's Code," provided an "if ..., then ..." qualification and a consequence for murder. People were free to make their choices and then required to stand in judgment based on these codes. Often times, an act of violence would require monetary compensation. Because of this, an act of murder could easily be forgiven legally by way of payment. Those who had wealth could control the population as they saw fit, eliminating whoever they like for a cost.


The Biblical commandments come in a form that is absolute, preventing any form of compensation or reprieve for murder. The implication is that these commands must be followed as they are essential to the way of life ascribed by God for his followers. The sixth commandment is absolute: *Do not murder*.

In a more natural time, before laws were written down and adopted, people may have been more animalistic, finding self soothing satisfaction in personal vengeance through murder. The opening chapters of the Bible provide an example of this kind of action. Cain's jealousy toward Abel led him to commit an act of murder against his own brother in Genesis 4. In later times, tribal groups were in constant strife with neighboring enemies. The chapters in Judges demonstrate these sort of conflicts even among the tribes, or "brothers" of Israel. By the time Hebrew laws came to the people of Israel in writing, the notion of a direct commandment was acceptable. The Hebrew people understood that in order to maintain a strong position in their ancient world, they needed to preserve their community. And they knew it was best to preserve their community in God's way.

After Jesus comes, as we see in the New Testament, God's community grows in a new and more abstract way. The church, as a community of believers, was learning to exist as God's community. According to the New Testament writers, Jesus sheds light on Old Testament laws that may have seemed culturally and temporally distant from the new church.

Jesus redefines who the enemy is and is not. "Love your enemies," he says. "Pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5:44, Lk. 6:27, Lk. 6:35). In traditional reasoning, an enemy does not fall under protection of the commandments. Jesus' followers may have asked, how can one's enemy belong to one's own community? In this way, the commandment *do not murder* applies not only to family and known community, but also to extended community, even unto one's enemies.

Jesus also redefines the moral imperative of the Old Testament commandments. Jesus states that murder may be committed within the heart, or in the intention of one's own mind. For example, the text reads: "If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council (for murder)... if you say 'you fool' you will be liable ...." (Mt. 5:21). Even angry attitudes or actions can be considered murder. Jesus also said what proceeds from the heart is what defiles a person—whether it be an evil intention of murder, adultery, fornication, theft, etc. (Mt. 15:19). Jesus continues in the New Testament to lift up the commandments which were (and still are) widely familiar. But, he clarifies how they are to be defined for Christ followers—those who make up a new kind of faith in God, which crosses cultural boundaries and stretches us to accept outsiders (Jn. 3:16). In this context, it is not only actions which are held accountable, but even the thoughts and attitudes hidden within the heart that are held accountable.

How can an understanding of this commandment help us in our own modern context? Clearly, we are expected not to commit murder, which can be interpreted as an attitude or action of selfishness, jealousy, or vengeance. Our selfish actions or thoughts can be destructive to God's community. In order to preserve community and human relationship, the commandment *do not murder* forbids destructive conflict. In order to live out this commandment actively, our main concern should be in the effort of building honorable relationships with one another. So that we encourage and lift up each other in the community of believers. 

Cellist  
Surfer  
Comic  
Cyclist  
Vegetarian  
Composer  
Teacher  
Poet  
Chef  
Golfer  
Carpenter  
Dancer  
Hiker  
Actor  
Gamer  
Parent  
Singer  
Doctor  
Dreamer  
Baker  
Tennis player  
Sculptor

Who are you in Christ?

WRITE,  
PHOTOGRAPH OR  
ILLUSTRATE FOR US

FIND THE WRITER'S GUIDELINES AT  
[www.newidentitymagazine.com](http://www.newidentitymagazine.com)



TATTOOS & FAITH | EGYPTIAN COPTIC CHRISTIANS | WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP  
God in focus. World in scope.

# new identity

MAGAZINE

## A La Carte Faith

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

THE  
MAGAZINE  
FOR NEW  
BELIEVERS

## Deciphering Bible Translations

FINDING THE BEST BIBLE  
FOR YOUR NEEDS

## Nightclub Ministry

ONE DJ WANTS TO BRING GOD  
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?"

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK





Photo © Gryphes | Flickr (CC)

# CLOSELY LOVING THE FAR AWAY

*Learning how to forget agendas and love authentically.*



## WENDY VAN EYCK

Wendy Van Eyck blogs about her journey at [www.halfformedwish.blogspot.com](http://www.halfformedwish.blogspot.com) and is currently earning her keep as Head of Production of a 24-hour Christian Music Channel in Johannesburg, South Africa.

I once tried to save a guy. I didn't do CPR on him until the medics came but I tried to introduce him to Jesus. I prayed for him every week. I strategically worked God into our conversations. I even wrote an article about him. I thought I could impress him into heaven with my intellect and arguments. Or at the very least I could help him see how far his lifestyle was from God's ideal (through my gentle prodding and poking at things I considered to be wrong or immoral in his life) and then he would not be able to stop himself accepting Jesus.

I'm still trying to figure out this whole evangelism thing and I have learnt from past mistakes so here is what I know so far. Evangelism or more simply, introducing people to Jesus (in New Testament times this was often referred to as the "good news") is nothing new. The term evangelism actually comes from the Old Testament in the Bible. When the Old Testament was written cities were walled off to protect the people who lived inside. When a city was at war watchmen would stand on the walls looking out for messengers returning from the battlefield. These watchmen learned to discern from the runners style whether or not the runner brought good news. The Greek word for "good news" is *euangelion*. This led to the runners being given the title of "evangelistes" which literally meant bearers of the good news.

Every time I've tried to force a conversation about Jesus or convinced someone into coming to some Christian event, the person I'm trying to let know that Jesus is crazy about them hasn't looked at me like I'm the bearer of good news. Same thing when I suddenly start to rehearse the story of how I came to know Jesus in a minute speech that I've prepared in my church's midweek meetings. If I'm honest these exchanges didn't feel a lot like good news to me either, they felt a lot like a chore or mission to tick off before I get to be welcomed into heaven.

I don't think Jesus meant for us to introduce our friends to him through some agenda. After all, think back on most (if not all) of the relationships that you have in your life. How many of them came about because of someone near you strategizing for you to get to know, love and want to be with that person forever? In my experience whenever someone is too keen for me to get to know someone I get weary and suspicious and unapproachable. This got me thinking that perhaps the same thing happens when we try too

hard to “get” our friends to know and love Jesus.

Since losing the friend I mentioned at the beginning of this article, I’ve come up with a four step process of my own which isn’t guaranteed to make your friends and family find Jesus, or to go to church or even to like your Christian friends. In fact these four steps don’t guarantee anything, but they might just mean you remain in a position to love closely those who are far from God, and hopefully, find yourself in a position where God can use you to reveal himself to those you want to be in heaven with you and him.

### Live Authentically

Put simply: be yourself. There is no need to be a person who has no struggles and doubts and fears just because you are a Christian. Be the type of person who cries when life is tough or horrid or just too beautiful to contain in a giggle. Let people see what God is doing in your life but let it be natural and part of who you are and not contrived.

One of my friends doesn’t want God in her life. When we meet to discuss our hopes, dreams and realities, over a cup of tea and slice of cake, I talk about God, the same way I do my husband. If he fits into the conversation I bring him up because I love to talk about him not because I want to force her to swallow salvation with her cake crumbs. I don’t know if she’ll make a choice for God one day but I do know that through our conversations she is aware that God can be a living, breathing, real presence in her life if she just asks him.

### Love no matter what

Now this is the hard one, and maybe the one that is most attractive to those who have yet to turn around and realize that God has been with them all this time. Jesus followed up the command that we love one another with the statement in John 13:35 that says by our love for one another the world will know that we are his disciples. So it seems pretty self explanatory—love is the key to win over those who don’t know how wonderful life with Jesus is.

Gary Chapman, author of the book, *Love as a Way of Life*, names seven characteristics he believes a loving person displays: kindness, patience, forgiveness, courtesy, humility, generosity and honesty. If you’re really sincere about your colleagues, family and friends getting to know Jesus, then spend time working on these traits in your life. I tried practicing one trait a day for a week and I was amazed how often I failed to simply be kind or have patience (let alone the other five traits) with those around me. Don’t doubt for a moment that the people in your life are watching to see how this “Jesus thing” will change you. So instead of setting out to change those around you, set out to let God turn your life into one of loving others consistently and extravagantly. You’ll be surprised what

people notice when you think no one is watching you.

### Lose your agenda

Remember the last time you answered the phone and it was a telemarketer trying to sell you something you didn’t want? Chances are you disconnected from the conversation as fast as you could. The same thing happens with our friends and families and colleagues when we approach their salvation as something we need to get them to buy into. So the message here is don’t get so caught up in trying to convert your friends to your beliefs that you lose

sight of forming, maintaining and building good relationships with them. If you’re going to have an agenda let it be to love them like a crazy person. Let go of all your other agendas, like having the person recite the sinners prayer on Christmas Day or having them come to church with you.

I think the times that I’ve been most effective at evangelizing has been when I’ve been unconscious that I’m doing it. The company I work for has a mixed staff, some of us are Christians and some of us aren’t. In my department the majority

of us are. A year after our department was established one of the staff members decided to become a Christian. None of us had been actively evangelizing her, we had just been sharing our lives, lunches and hearts with her and in the process she’d noticed that Jesus wanted to be her friend the same way he was ours. It wasn’t our sales pitch or agenda that won her but us living in such a way that she was able to see God living in us and decide she wanted to like him too.

### Let God work


Finally, step 4, is all about realizing that the salvation of the people we care for has less to do with us than we like to admit. Never forget that Jesus wants your friends, family members and colleagues to spend eternity with him as much (I’d guess even more than you do) so he’s going to be taking every opportunity to open their eyes to his presence in their lives. Trust him, he’s working even when you don’t think anything is happening.

I’ve been praying for my boss to discover Jesus for five years now, not every day, but every month or two. We’ve had a few chats about God and church, but mostly I just try to do my job in a way that would make Jesus proud and hope that my boss will see that. I was reminded that God is working in the situation yesterday when my brother, a school teacher, messaged that my boss’ wife is about to become his student teacher at school. What are the chances? I think God is using us to do something in that family’s life, I’m not sure what yet, but I’m grateful that God is doing it.

It’s easy to forget that God is working even when it

*Don't get so caught up in trying  
to convert your friends to your  
beliefs that you lose sight of  
forming, maintaining and  
building good relationships with  
them.*

doesn't seem like there is any progress in our friends and family moving closer to God, easy to stop hoping that things will change. Never forget that you and I can't save or redeem or rescue anyone, that is absolutely, 100% God's job and Jesus' work on the cross. Perhaps the most important lesson we need to learn in becoming evangelists is to open our ears to hear who and what God wants us to be to the people around us, and then do just that, no matter how small. Perhaps it is our task to just trust that God, who loves our friends and family so much more than we do will find them and woo them to him.

I do believe as much as we need to give God space to work we need to keep doing our part: praying, asking, and engaging. If you're feeling like you need a bit more encouragement grab your Bible and read 1 Timothy 2:4 (the MSG), "He [God] wants not only us but everyone saved, you know, everyone to get to know the truth we've learned: that there's one God and only one, and one Priest-Mediator between God and us—Jesus, who offered himself in exchange for everyone held captive by sin, to set them all free. Eventually the news is going to get out." Don't give up hope, eventually, your friends and family will see Jesus for who he is, if you hang in there, live what you believe, and gently point them to the one who thought they were worth dying for. 



EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINING

ENLIGHTENING

We Thank You For Your  
Support.

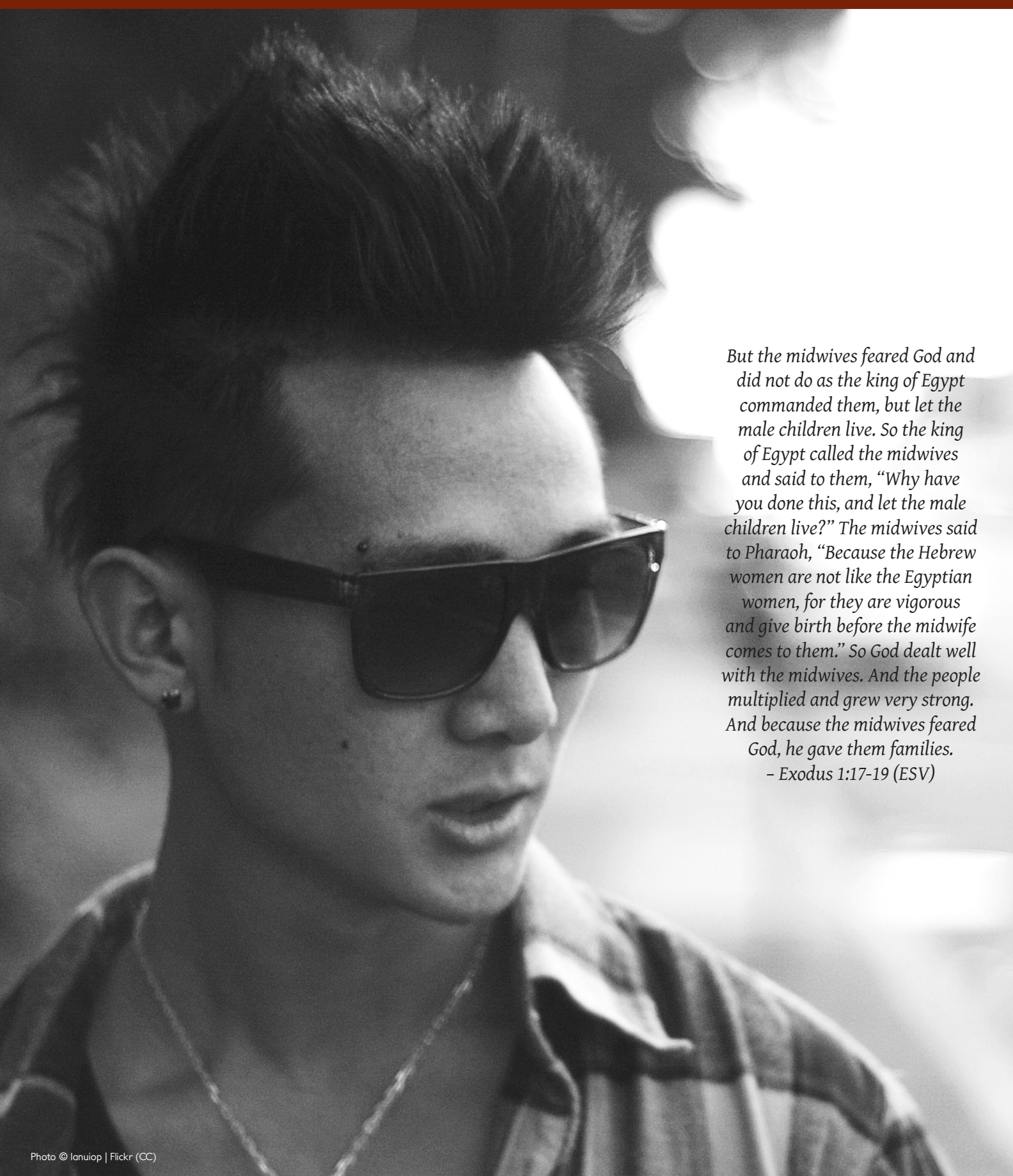
Please,



**DONATE TODAY**

[www.newidentitymagazine.com](http://www.newidentitymagazine.com)

We appreciate your encouragement  
and support for our mission and vision.  
As a classified 501(c)(3) nonprofit  
organization under the Internal  
Revenue Code, all  
contributions are tax-deductible.



*But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.  
– Exodus 1:17-19 (ESV)*

## ANNA ANDERSON



Anna Anderson is a recent graduate from Biola University and received her BA in English. She will be spending the next year in China teaching oral English at an International University. Anna enjoys drinking English tea, re-reading childhood novels and backpacking in the Trinity Alps.

# Little White Lies

*Biblical liars and everyday fibs.*

When I was three years old, I ripped off my mom's freshly pasted wallpaper. She spent hours carefully pressing on the flowery paper and meticulously rubbing the bubbles out.

I bounced around and watched, doing my best to avoid the pail of glue while running back and forth between my Barbies and my dad's office. My mom started a shower, and I took advantage of my time alone. I ripped off a sizable chunk and wisely hid underneath a bathroom towel right outside my mom's bathroom. "Anna Elizabeth! Oh my—what did you do? Did you do this?" I quivered under my tower and croaked "no."

This childish story provides a good analogy for our human propensity to lie. I did not want to admit my mistake. I hid, and when I was found, I lied.

Most Christians would agree at first that lying is always wrong. I should not have lied to my mom about the wallpaper. I should have admitted my action and apologized. Surprisingly, the Bible does not always condemn lying. There are several stories when someone who believes in God lies, and God either rewards them, or at the very least, ignores the lie.

One of these stories about lying takes place at the beginning of Exodus, the book right after Genesis. Genesis ends with a story about a man named Joseph who is sold into slavery and eventually becomes a government official Egypt. After a famine, Joseph's large family, the "Israelites" or "Hebrews," move to Egypt. Joseph dies and Israel grows so large that the Egyptian government starts to see Israel as a threat. To prevent the Hebrews from becoming powerful, Egypt decides to force them into hard labor making bricks and farming land.

As if it couldn't get any worse, the Egyptian Pharaoh instructs two Hebrew midwives named Shiprah and Puah to kill all male babies born to Israelite women. Shiprah and Puah face a decision—save their own lives and follow the Pharaoh, or follow God and save the Hebrew babies. Exodus 1:17 tells us, "The midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live (ESV)."

The surprise comes when Pharaoh confronts the midwives. He asks them "Why have you done this, and let the male children

live?" The midwives could respond "because you're an evil man and we choose to follow our God," but they do not. Instead they tell Pharaoh, "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before we come to them" (ESV Exodus 1: 19). In other words, Shiprah and Puah tell the Pharaoh a white lie. They claim Hebrew women have their babies so quickly, that they give birth before the midwives arrive to help. In reality the midwives conspire with Hebrew women to keep their babies alive.

God honors these women by blessing them with families. In Hebrew society, if a woman was not able to have children it was a great shame. These midwives may have been unable to have children before, which explains why they had to work to take care of themselves. God blesses their brave action—their white lie—by giving them a husband and children.

### Is lying okay sometimes?

There is another story in the Bible where a woman is honored for lying. Her name is Rahab. Rahab lies to a town official to save the lives of two of God's people. God not only protects Rahab, she also ends up being in Jesus' genealogy (Joshua 2). The Bible also relates other stories of deception, like when King David pretends to be insane to escape an evil king (1 Samuel 21:10-15) and when God puts a lying spirit in the mouth of false prophets (1 Kings 22:21-23).

In fact, the Bible talks about lying a lot—from the Serpent's lie to Eve in the Garden of Eden, to the Apostle Peter's denial of Jesus. The Bible calls Satan "the father of lies" (John 8:44) and calls the Holy Spirit a "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17). Furthermore, Paul exhorts Christians, "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col. 3:9). If Satan is the father of lies, and Paul commands us not to lie, why would Shiprah, Puah, and Rahab receive God's honor?

### Lie? Never!

Some staunchly argue that it is never permissible to lie. They say Shiprah and Puah should have confronted Pharaoh's wickedness and told him they would not murder babies. Rahab should have admitted she was hiding spies in her house even though they would probably be killed. Instead, she offered protection. People who think that lying is always sinful argue that the Ten

Commandments teach us not to lie. One of the Ten Commandments does say, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"—but this is actually different from "do not lie" (Exodus 20: 16). Bearing false witness against another refers specifically to lying in court in a way that ends up hurting a neighbor.

### The Greater Good

Although some are satisfied to say that Shiprah, Puah, and Rahab did wrong, others are convinced they made the right decision to lie and save another's life. The "greater good" suggests that some "goods" are more important than other goods. For example, perhaps while you're on your way to church, a friend texts you and says they really need your help. Although getting to church on time is good and respectful, it's the greater good to be late to church and love your neighbor than to ignore your friend and get to church on time. Along this same line, it is greater for Shiprah

and Puah to lie in order to save another person's life. God commands us to "do justice, and to love kindness" (Micah 6:8) to "bind up the brokenhearted" (Is. 1:1) and "not murder." (Ex. 20:13) Saving someone's life fulfills the greater commandment to do justice, even if it forsakes the call to tell the truth.

This idea of "the greater good" occurs in the story of John the Baptist's beheading. John the Baptist, the last prophet before Jesus, is beheaded because

a young girl obeys her mother's request. The young girl dances before Herod, and Herod is so pleased he tells her, "Whatever you ask me I will give you." The young girl does not know what to ask for, so she asks her mom, and her mom tells her to ask for John the Baptist's head (John 6:23-24). The king follows her request, beheads John the Baptist, and brings his head to the young girl. It's easy to see that this girl should not have asked for John the Baptist's head. Even though the Bible commands, "Children, obey your parents," there is a time when obeying your parents dishonors God. The greater good here would have been for the young daughter to save John the Baptist's life, and instead she chooses to obey her mother.

### Re-define "lie"

Another way to explain Shiprah and Puah's actions is to define "lie" differently. Perhaps there is a certain category of falsehoods that are not biblical lies. For example, maybe deceiving one person to save another's life would not be considered a lie in God's eyes. If our definition of lie means 'telling a falsehood

that dishonors God,' then Shiphrah and Puah are off the hook because their lie honored God and God honored them. Therefore, they cannot be accused of committing a biblical lie, because their falsehood did not dishonor God. When Paul says, "do not lie" he is speaking of falsehoods that grieve God. Since Shiphrah and Puah did not grieve God with their falsehood, it must not constitute as a biblical lie.

## How should we then live?

Identifying loopholes may make some people think God does not care if you lie. In an online blog, Marcandangel.com, Marc posts on white lies and says, "Stretching the truth is a natural component of human instinct because it's the easy way out. We all do it, so there is no reason to deny it. Honestly, I think the world is probably a better place because of our white lies."

Lying for your own comfort is not a good reason to lie. Sure, calling in pretending to be sick is easier than confessing you're ditching work. Telling white lies sometimes seem to make a situation better. In actuality, the lie breeds more harm than the truth. Lies feed our pride and make us think we don't need to take responsibility. White lies also may cultivate a habit of lying. Corporate officers accused of embezzling money are just people—people that justified lying to the point of serious harm.

The Bible gives examples of people speaking truth, even at the cost of their lives. In Acts, the apostles Peter and John are "charged not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." They do not try to save their lives by falsely telling the officials they will stop teaching about Jesus. Instead, Peter and John tell the authorities "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). God's followers spoke the truth about Jesus' death and resurrection with boldness, even if they could die for it. Clearly some situations exist when truth telling trumps your very life. Representing Jesus is one of those situations.

Finally, what does all this have to say about us? Most of us are not in situations where we have the choice of saving someone's life with a lie. However, we do live in a culture that tells us lying is okay and that white lies don't hurt anyone. From lying about speeding on the freeway to pretending we didn't receive an email, we use lies as shortcuts all the time. Maybe lying to the police officer doesn't hurt you, but maybe the person in your passenger seat—whether it's your child, friend or sibling—sees you lie, and thinks lying is fine in all situations. As Christians, it's important to prioritize living

with integrity, not taking the easy way out.

Elizabeth Kobayashi, a senior film student from Biola University says, "The reason most people tell white lies is because of irresponsibility or flattery." She certainly has a point—the lies we most often tell like, "I didn't mean to do that" or, "Sorry I'm late; traffic was bad" stem from irresponsibility and a failure to own up to our mistakes. Other times we lie to make people feel good about themselves. For example, if your friend asks you how you like her new haircut, and you don't like it, what are you supposed to say? If her hair cut truly is an embarrassment to society and will harm the way people perceive her, then as a good friend you have to tell the truth. But if it's just your opinion, and you don't like it, telling her that it's ugly will probably harm her more than saying, "It looks great!" Christ tells us to love one another, and to only speak words that will build each other up.

To be honest, a question like "Do you like my haircut?" is sometimes just fishing for a compliment. As Christians, we should know better than to expect people to flatter us. Our worth and self confidence does not stem from how fashionable we are, but from holding onto the promise that we know God, and that he calls us his daughter or son. Therefore, one way to avoid awkward answers all together is to create a culture where we don't ask questions seeking flattery.

From what I've said, it might sound like it's okay to lie, as long as you are lying out of love. Jesus expects us to love, right? However, this answer is too simplistic. Many parents lie to their children because they want to protect them, or they think it is best for them. Perhaps a child hears her mom arguing with her dad and asks "is everything okay?" The mom may respond "yes, everything is fine" to try and keep her daughter from worrying. However, if the mom later tells her daughter that she is divorcing her dad, the daughter will feel betrayed. Lying just because it seems loving is often not loving.

So, should we tell lies? I know I've given many caveats to lying, but I think it's safest to say, "No" first. Do there seem to be exceptions to what we generally believe is a lie in the Bible? "Yes." I think based on the lives of the Shiphrah, Puah, and Rahab, we can confidently tell a falsehood to save someone's life. We want to live a life of integrity, and sometimes this may conflict with reporting things accurately. When it comes to knowing how to tell the truth, we need to fall back on Jesus' greatest commandment: are our actions loving God and loving people? That is what God wants from us—no more, no less.



*Perhaps there is a certain category of falsehoods that are not biblical lies. For example, maybe deceiving one person to save another's life would not be considered a lie in God's eyes.*



*Fun dates and helpful advice for new parents.*

# Keeping the Romance Alive



## ERIC LEE

Eric Lee lives in Orange County and is an active member of Converge Family Church. In his spare time, he enjoys rooting for the Los Angeles Angels, packing his mind with as much trivia as he can, and blogging. Eric is a stay-at-home dad and takes care of his two-year-old son. You can read Eric's blog at [e-rock-wwwericmlleeblog.blogspot.com](http://e-rock-wwwericmlleeblog.blogspot.com) or email him at [elee64@gmail.com](mailto:elee64@gmail.com).

**S**o now that you've thoroughly fallen in love with your baby, how do you keep the love fires burning between you and your spouse? I know firsthand as a new parent, the last thing on my mind after a day of feeding, changing diapers, and cleaning bottles is, "How could I be more romantic towards my wife?" My first thoughts are, "How am I going to get enough sleep and when can I rest?"

I know these thoughts sound very selfish but they are a reality for many new parents. We get so fixated on taking care of our newborn we forget what life was like before he or she came along. So how does romance fit in?

Finding a sitter is the first step in the process of getting some time alone to keep the romance alive between you and your spouse. For us, finding a family member made the most sense. Early on, we let relatives see our son, Elijah, often. Because of this, in time, he got comfortable with staying with grandma, uncle, or auntie for extended periods of time.

Our pastor, Don, had some good suggestions for keeping the romance alive between spouses when you have kids:

1. Let your husband or wife sleep in.
2. Give each other a night off.
3. Be proactive in household chores.
4. Plan a date night at least once a month, organizing the babysitter and everything else.
5. Love on each other *before* you love on the baby. Be genuine in asking about his or her day instead of running off to play with the baby.

## Building Intimacy

*"It's important not to forget date nights. Sometimes it's not even dinner. It's having coffee together and being able to talk."*

Start with simple things. Physical things make a world of difference. Taking the time to give my wife a massage lets her know I care. I know that I appreciate a good hug now and then. It helps to relieve tension and stimulates some 'feel-good endorphins.' When you go out, hold hands, kiss, and touch often. One of my friends, Angela, who has a baby girl, said, "Humor makes life fun and light-hearted and definitely keeps the romance alive." She and her husband act goofy with each other. They also are best friends. They can talk about anything and be truly vulnerable. Something else that helps is to find out how your husband or wife is doing (and to not wait until the end of the day). If you can, send them an e-card telling him or her how much you care about them Or send a text, e-mail, or even chat with them on-line to see how the day is going.

I asked another couple at our church, Shelly and Cesar, who have been married for several years, "What they do to keep the romance alive in their marriage?" Shelly said, "It's important not to forget date nights." When her kids were younger, her sister would watch her kids while she and her husband had a getaway weekend. Cesar added, "Sometimes it's not even dinner. It's having coffee together and being able to talk." Or if Shelly knows Cesar will be away for a retreat, she will send a note along with him telling him how much she loves and misses him.

If you can't find a babysitter, you can always have a "home date." After baby has fallen asleep, you can cook together, listen to some good music, drink some wine, have a good conversation, or pop in a movie.

There have been nights when we don't have anyone to watch Elijah until after 7pm. In those cases, when our sitter is available, we go out to shop together at the store and have some alone time for a couple of hours. This is also a good opportunity for us to catch up and have some adult conversations.

## Role Reversal

In my particular case, my wife and I mutually decided that I would stay home with our son. So if this is the case, the question after a long day becomes, "How can the wife be attentive and show love towards the husband and not just the baby?" Something that my wife does periodically is to bring home gifts for me. Now and again my wife, Cyndy, will go out shopping with friends or girlfriends while I stay home with Eli. One day after she had been out she surprised me and brought me home a baseball tape dispenser since I love baseball. Another time, she brought home some nice sunglasses. Or other times, she brings home certain foods I like. These things definitely make me feel loved.

## Common Ground

Common interests often cement the bond of love. Both Cyndy and I enjoy good food, movies, and watching TV shows

together at home. Recently, we had an opportunity to have dinner alone and then go watch a movie. We got to have dinner but we missed the movie because we forgot the movie time. I was pretty disappointed about the movie but we still got to have a “date” at home watching our favorite shows on-line.

## Lone Ranger Syndrome


Being a stay-at-home parent can be a very lonely job at times. I feel like a one-man show that just keeps going until my back-up comes. I've told Cyndy this sometimes. There have been some weeks where she would work all day and then have to do something on Saturday all day. I felt like a single parent of sorts. I have to realize that I can't have it both ways. It's inherent in my job that I will have the bulk of the responsibilities. As time has passed, I have fallen more and more in love with my son. What was once a chore is now a labor of love. Realistically though, each partner needs some time alone. Oftentimes I will talk to Cyndy about this when we are in bed or when she comes home. If I've had a tough day, I'll let her know. If she isn't tired herself, she will encourage me to go to the gym or go to Starbucks to have some “me-time.” I also give her the space to go shopping with friends or to the gym after work.

So when you do get the time to have a date, what can or should you do?

## To Go Out or Not to Go Out?

1. Movies – Going to the movies or renting a movie is one idea. It's a good time to relax, hold hands and escape.
2. Enjoy a meal out – Having a chance to enjoy a good meal at a restaurant is also a great date! Sometimes that's all you'll have time for. I can remember one night when we asked our friend to watch Eli. It was the first time we left him with her. We were having dinner nearby and got a call during dinner that Eli was crying and wouldn't stop. We had to hurry up and finish and get back to pick him up.
3. Make a mix CD of songs that express how you feel about your spouse or songs that have a special meaning to the both of you. Your spouse can listen to it on the way to work or download it on his/her iPod. I've actually done this. I included the song “Love of My Life” by Jim Brickman. I sang this song to Cyndy at our reception on our wedding night.

These are just a few suggestions that don't take too much planning and are manageable if you can find someone to watch your child. Whatever you do together, make sure that you try to reconnect with your partner. You may even have to re-learn what it is to go on a date with your spouse as well. It's hard not to think about the baby, but try. Be in the moment. Also remember that

the small gestures like kisses, hugs, or touches add up to as much as big gestures like planning a night out or giving your partner a chunk of time alone. Just remember that not everything has to be a grand production when you are trying to be romantic—it's really the thought that counts. 

## Great Inexpensive Date Ideas

*Here are some great suggestions for cheap dates I found at [Parentsconnect.com](http://Parentsconnect.com). I hope these help give you some good ideas on what to do to keep the romance alive in your marriage after you have kids. I hope it helps romantically-challenged people like me.*

**Go to the park.** Not all dates have to be costly. If you have a park near you, you can have a picnic. Just bring sandwiches or a salad. You'll get some fresh air and some romantic time alone.

**Go to a drive-in theater.** Even easier, make your own drive-in by bringing a laptop with you and park somewhere with a nice view of the city or natural setting.

**Take a leisurely stroll together.**

**Have a dessert date.** If you're on a budget this is particularly appealing.

**Heart art.** If both of you appreciate good art, you can go to a gallery together and talk about what you see and how it makes you feel.

**Coffee date.** Sip some of your favorite coffee and maybe even hear some music.

**Matinee date.** If you can't get someone to watch your child at night a matinee is a good option. You will get a lower ticket price and won't be too exhausted to enjoy the rest of your day.

**Wine tasting.** Either visit a winery or a local store that has such tastings.

**Book worm date.** Browse through your favorite section at the bookstore or even catch a reading from a author you like.

**Do-gooder date.** Build a house together with an organization such as Habitat for Humanity. By the end of this date, you'll be able to have a memorable shared experience that you can look back on with fondness.

**Skate date.** Strap on some roller skates or ice skates, get some exercise and have fun!

**Open air music date.** Check out an outdoor concert or free summer concert series under the stars.

*Finding genuine faith as a  
generational Christian.*

Photo © John Steven Fernandez | Flickr (CC)

## *Culturally Christian*



### RAMON MAYO

Ramon Mayo is the former pastor of a multiethnic church in Los Angeles, CA. Currently he lives in Pittsburgh, PA with his wife Yvette and their two kids Kaydon and Syenna plotting his next moves in the kingdom of God. Ramon blogs at [ramonmayo.com](http://ramonmayo.com)

I wasn't born a Christian but I definitely feel like I was born in a church. Growing up I spent a bare minimum of three nights, an afternoon and a morning in a church activity of some form or another. That was my normal. Sometimes on special occasions we would spend every night of the week in church. I would always think, "How did I end up in this family?"

As an African American I have strong Christian roots because most of us are culturally Christian. By that I mean

we know the gospel story and have no problem with believing in God and praying. Of all ethnicities in the United States we attend church the most. I would have to say it also means that Christianity for many of us is just a matter of holidays, film scenes (Tyler Perry and James Brown's appearance in the Blues Brothers comes to mind) and phrases that have lost their meaning. So when I say I have strong Christian roots I mean it in that way but I also mean it in a way that is unique. My Christian roots run deep. My great grandfather on my mother's side was a Methodist pastor. My great grandfather on my Dad's side was not only a pastor but a bishop. That's like the MVP of church positions. It's pastoring pastors. My grandfather on my mother's side was a pastor for 30 years in South Central Los Angeles and my mother and father helped with the administration of the church. That being said I would have to clarify that I was immersed in church as a way of life, but I was not immersed in Christ.

Being raised in a Christian family and being exposed to Christian culture has its advantages and disadvantages:

### **Advantage #1 Not having to grasp a whole new worldview.**

When you grow up in Christian family you do not have to stretch your mind to accept the stories of the Bible. It is much easier to believe because you are immersed in these stories from birth. In my case not only was I immersed in the Biblical stories of miracles but I also had the privilege of seeing real life miracles before my very eyes. One time my Grandfather prayed for a lady in a wheelchair and she got up and walked. On top of this I saw countless exorcisms and incidents of demonic possession (I know freaky huh?). Living in an environment like that made it easy to digest the Bible's claims of miracles and healings.

I was raised with a very sensitive conscience and a foundation of Christian morality. Reciting the Ten Commandments as a child proved to be very useful. Reciting "thou shalt not covet" and "honor thy father and mother" convinced me that certain things were wrong or out of bounds. Coming to Christ with a background in Christian culture made it much easier to give up certain sins because well...I knew better.

The cherry on top of not having to grasp a whole new worldview was that I did not have to work hard on certain disciplines of the Christian life like prayer or tithing. They were natural to me as inhaling and exhaling. In fact, during my days as a "sinner" I don't think I actually stopped praying or giving money to the church on Sunday (my biggest problem was what I did on Saturday nights). Growing up with these disciplines contributed to a rapid growth in my faith and helped me join church leadership. I had hundreds of scriptures already memorized and once I became

a committed Christian they bubbled back to the surface of my mind and took on new life and power. Whenever I faced temptation or discussed Christianity with someone I could easily wield the verses I memorized to my advantage.

### **Advantage #2 Having a ready made community to support your faith and lifestyle.**

One huge advantage to being a "generational Christian" was that I was not breaking away from my family. I actually became closer to them. I can remember the days that I spent going to my Grandfather's house and having conversations about things I

couldn't understand in the Bible or in life. There was no awkwardness over different things such as praying over food or attending church. There were no arguments over different lifestyle choices. Once I became a committed Christian my new lifestyle fit together with the rest of my family's to form a seamless whole.

While it may be that some people label my experience as "smothering," I treasure the ready-made community of people I love.

Family support was valuable in the very beginning of my faith. I believe it was one of the main factors in helping me to persevere through the rough patches of being a new Christian. Many times a new Christian has to face challenges in regards to their family of origin and their new faith and lifestyle clashing. Many Christians in countries that are hostile to Christianity have to endure being shamed, persecuted, and even killed by their own family members. I did not have to go through this at all and I am grateful for the community God gave me in my family.

### **Advantage #3 Receiving guidance and prayer and benefiting from the prayers and blessings that come from your Christian heritage.**

I know for sure that I have benefited from the long history of sincere faith in my family. It has given us a strong work ethic and sense of morality and helped us avoid inner city pitfalls and traps. Strong morals have also helped us secure the blessings of material prosperity such as home ownership and being able to provide for the family's basic necessities even in the midst of seemingly impossible circumstances. At the same time I would have to say that a strong work ethic and sense of morality are not the only major factors. I truly believe that even right now I am being guided by the prayers of my great grandfathers, my grandmother and grandfather, my aunts and uncles, and mom and dad.

I have benefited immensely not only from their wise choices and example but also from their prayers which reach me

*Without a spiritual second birth  
we will always be attached to the  
culture of Christianity but not  
have a relationship with Christ  
himself.*

right now in the 21st century. The choices that they made to stay in faithful marriages and to work hard and save money have helped in forming me into the man I am today. Being raised as a fourth generation Christian has made me a recipient of untold blessings from God.

On the flip side, there are many disadvantages to being raised as a generational Christian:

### **Disadvantage #1 Not knowing how those who do not have a Christian worldview think.**

I know I said having a Christian worldview was a plus but it can also be a minus. When you interact with others who don't have the same worldview it can be hard to understand them. This limits your capacity to empathize with those who have different views on morality and the Bible's supernatural claims. In turn this limits your capacity to lead and share your faith. In order to truly listen to others we must be able to understand their point of reference and many people's point of reference is not the Bible. It is a jump for some people to believe that God could make seas part or choose to come to earth as a Palestinian Jewish man and die for people's sins (however that works). It is an even further jump for some to believe that there is a God. I think I am better now at understanding different perspectives, but it is still hard for me to truly empathize with non generational Christians.

### **Disadvantage #2 Danger of not truly owning your faith separately from your family.**

There is also the danger of having a "borrowed" faith and not a faith you can call your own. Many have faith but it is the faith of their parents or grandparents. To have a borrowed faith is to be a cultural Christian. It means that you have inherited the customs and culture of Christianity but not the substance. They used to have a saying in my old church that "Going to church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than sitting in a garage makes you a Cadillac." We can never be born Christian in the same way that we can be born African American, Caucasian, Korean, or Guatemalan. We are all sinners and we need to have a spiritual second birth. Without a spiritual second birth we will always be attached to the culture of Christianity but not have a relationship with Christ himself.

Borrowed faith can never stand the tests of life and I am grateful that the examples of those around me were of a sincere faith and not just going through the motions. As a generational Christian I have experienced life crises that remind me how important a personal understanding of Jesus is. I am always being

pushed into experiences where I cannot rely on my grandfather's faith but must summon up my own. There are situations that I deal with that my great grandparents and even my mom could not have imagined. Experiences such as dealing with hostile Muslims, how to counsel Japanese believers, what to say to my homosexual friends who are seeking Christ have pressed me to own my faith and seek God for myself.


God uses trials and decisions in my life to sift out what is my faith and what is my family's. I have had to actually disagree with my family on such topics as music, tattoos, and alcohol consumption.

It is here where careful discernment is needed in regards to my spirituality. I have to decide on certain things based on what the Bible says, my context, church history (which is probably a bit longer than my family history) and the input of family and friends. While I still have love for my family, these situations show me how much I need to grow in my faith and not the Christian culture that was passed along to me. It is one thing to be shaped by my religious culture but another thing to develop the character of Jesus portrayed in the gospels and elaborated on by the rest of the New Testament. It is this path of growth that will not stop until I lay in the grave.

### **Disadvantage #3 Judging others who do not have the benefits of a Christian heritage.**

Another thing that I succumb to on a regular basis is judging others who do not have the benefits of my Christian heritage. I am constantly tempted to look down on people who have a different sense of morality. This temptation is usually sparked when I see someone's poverty or addiction and I want to point the finger and say look where your choices have landed you. It is usually when I see an alcoholic person or someone who is on welfare or in prison (or on Jerry Springer).

The reality is, probably someone is looking down on me. If it wasn't for God's grace I could be that very same person I am looking down on. The reality is I should not be pointing the finger at them but pointing my finger at God and saying, "Thank You" a thousand times. Not because of my choices but because of his choice of placing me in the family that I was raised in.

With all of the advantages and disadvantages it's hard to say whether it's better to be a generational Christian or not. I think either way being a Christian is good enough for me. Like most things in life there is a upside and a downside. In my life I have seen the upside and the downside and I'm hoping to see more of the former and not the latter. As I think about the different choices I have made I can see the hand of God in my family line and in a way I am glad to be the link in a chain of ancestors who have walked this path before me. 

*Borrowed faith can never stand the tests of life and I am grateful that the examples of those around me were of a sincere faith and not just going through the motions.*

# Bleeding for Jesus

*A cancer survivor's testimony.*

Photo © kirstinmckee | Flickr (CC)



## KIMBERLY DAVIDSON

Kimberly received a MA from Western Seminary, is a board certified biblical counselor, spiritual development coach, speaker, and founder of Olive Branch Outreach—dedicated to bringing hope and restoration to those struggling with body image. Kimberly also volunteers in youth and prison ministry. She is the author of four books and has contributed to five books.

**A**nticipation. Exhilaration. Young Ryan Murphy felt these strong emotions as he approached his first football game at a Montana high school. Sitting in the stands were Ryan's proud parents. But today Mom could sense that something was just not right as she watched her son. He seemed to tire more easily. He didn't have the same energy level. Dad discounted it as nerves and anxiety, but Mom went with her intuition and wanted him to be checked out by a doctor.

Prior to the opening game, the team doctor examined Ryan. He noticed a lump and asked Ryan if it hurt. Ryan said “No,” and the doctor gave the all-clear to play. Mom and Dad now recalled this incident. Two days later the lump was biopsied. It was cancer. A doctor referred Ryan to a children’s hospital in Seattle for more tests. Cancer is one of the scariest words in the world. We fear hearing it from the doctor. We fear hearing it on the phone when a friend or family members calls us to break the news.

Bad news for this active adolescent couldn’t have come at a worse time. Sadly, for this freshman boy football fantasies were soon replaced by disappointment and fear. Leukemia. Now Ryan had a different game to play. Ryan didn’t need a playbook to win, he needed a plan to survive.

Most forms of leukemia are treated with pharmaceutical medication and combined into a multi-drug chemotherapy treatment. Some are treated with radiation therapy. For others like Ryan, doctors recommend a high-risk bone marrow transplant. The next challenge: find a bone marrow donor. If God blessed him with the perfect recipient then he’d have a 95 percent chance of living.

Family and friends prayed around the clock putting their complete trust in a holy God and in his Word. God raised up the one and only perfect donor—his youngest brother Patrick—the brother who came into his parents world seven years earlier as an unplanned gift. Now he’d be Ryan’s greatest gift. The procedures went on as scheduled. A front row seat had been reserved for Patrick to watch his bone marrow being infused into Ryan. He literally witnessed God pumping new life into Ryan. Patrick also witnessed an ugly physical reaction as the rich new foreign substance invaded Ryan’s entire body—a lengthy violent shaking. Doctors indicated this is a normal reaction, and in time Ryan’s body and demeanor quieted down. The recuperation period was wrought with pain, vomiting and other distressing symptoms for Ryan. Again, the doctors reassured them this was a normal part of the recovery process. He was in the process of becoming a “new man.”

Later a sample of his bone marrow was examined and not one cancer cell could be found. Incredibly, his blood count returned to “normal.” Moving forward, Ryan’s doctors advised him to be overly cautious about where he chose to travel because his immune

*Bad news for [Ryan] couldn’t have come at a worse time. Sadly, for this freshman boy football fantasies were soon replaced by disappointment and fear. Leukemia. Now Ryan had a different game to play. Ryan didn’t need a playbook to win, he needed a plan to survive.*

system was still terribly weak.


The way Patrick gave his bone marrow to save his brother is, in some ways, similar to Jesus’s story. Two thousand years ago, God came down to earth as a man, in the person of Jesus Christ, which we call the incarnation. He came for everyone. The Bible says it was because all people sinned. Jesus’s mission was to restore broken relationships between people and God because of that sin.

Jesus Christ died on the cross, shedding his blood as the only acceptable payment for our sins. Then he rose from the grave and instantly death, as we know it, was crushed. Because of what he did every human being would have a chance to be born-again—born into the kingdom of God! All who acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior can enter into God’s presence—now and forever. Jesus came to earth to make people alive and to set the captives (that’s us) free. This is good news—the key to unlock a direct connection with God Almighty!

Despite this great news, we still ask, “Why doesn’t God heal every cancer patient? Why did God let my child die?” I can’t answer why God

heals some people and not others. Termed “the dark night of the soul,” great believers have, and still do today, experience bouts of agonizing doubt in their God. In Robert Kelleman’s book, *Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African-American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*, Nellie, a former slave from Savannah, Georgia says, “It has been a terrible mystery, to know why the good Lord should so long afflict my people, and keep them in bondage—to be abused, and trampled down, without any rights of their own—with no ray of light in the future. Some of my folks said there wasn’t any God, for if there was He wouldn’t let white folks do as they have done for so many years.”

A slave, Polly, responds and embraces hope, “We poor creatures have need to believe in God, for if God Almighty will not be good to us some day, why were we born? When I heard of his delivering his people from bondage I know it means the poor Africans.”

God has promised to bless us; but I believe those blessings can often be more spiritual than physical. In those difficult or questionable times, God says, “Just watch what I am going to do!” He knows what is best for us. God in his infinite wisdom will use Ryan’s experience to give others hope and build Ryan himself into a stronger person. That is love. 

# HOOKING UP

*Waiting until marriage in a sex-saturated culture.*

Photo © Angelo González | Flickr (CC)

## KELLI WARD

With an intense love of and for the Lord (which didn't manifest itself in her until her early 20's), Kelli wants to share her experiences in being a Christian with the world in a down-home-direct way. Understanding that writing for New Identity Magazine is her mission field, Kelli has made a commitment to be transparent, plain, and candid in all her articles so the new believer will know that he or she is not alone.

**H**earing stories from friends struggling in their marriages, one day I thought to myself, what's the point of marriage? I enjoy coming and going as I please, not having to clean up after someone else, going to see any movie I want and not having to compromise. My life is rather uncomplicated. Then I started to think, what if I just keep a lover—someone who I can have sex with to satisfy my loneliness?

Shortly after this thought I met someone. (See how quickly we can get into mischief if we're set on it?) We flirted a bit, had a few quasi-intimate conversations, and could tell that we liked each other. Soon I stopped caring about what his conversation was like because I couldn't keep my mind off of his triceps and biceps and how he looked in his grey slim-cut suit. I had it made up in my mind about a month into flirting that I wanted to kiss him and nothing was going to stop me, not even the Holy Spirit telling me to leave this man alone. In hindsight there were other signs that the relationship was going nowhere. He had my personal and work email addresses, my cell number and still hadn't contacted me. On the day that I planned to kiss him, I asked if he was single. *Note: Ladies and gentlemen, ask this before you exchange numbers and ask about their relationship with Jesus Christ.* He told me he had a girlfriend overseas and they were in an "open" relationship. He wasn't going to stop her from "dating" anyone and she wasn't going to stop him. So this really couldn't go anywhere. He was already committed to someone so much so that even being over 8,000 miles apart, they were still together. But I had to satisfy my curiosity and see if I could keep a lover. We fooled around a bit without having sex. In the moment I kept thinking, why am I doing this? I barely know him. Not to mention that the whole time leading up to this encounter I knew that I should leave him alone and that

he didn't want a relationship. I knew better, but indulged anyway. This is how sin becomes a part of our life and gathers traction. Our hearts are seeking something good, but we go about getting it in the wrong way.

Afterwards not only did the experience leave me feeling confused, empty, and used, but thank God it left me with a new understanding, for which I am deeply thankful. To keep a lover is neither what I want nor what I need; it was just what I was seeing around me. But we can't go by what we see around us. As the redeemed of Christ we are to live by a higher standard. God often reveals the depth of his Word and the truth of his Word when we experience it. After we endure challenges or life situations we come out of these with a deeper understanding of who God is, how he works, and the true meaning of the scriptures we read in the Bible. Kind of like an "a-ha" moment. Not only did this remind me of God's promise in Isaiah 40:31 that, "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (in my case strength to wait until marriage), it also reminded of Romans 12: 1-2 where we are told to "avoid conforming to this world and commanded not to use our bodies as instruments of sin and uncleanness but to set them apart for God and put them to holy uses being devoted to God in service." (from *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*) Jeremiah 1:5 also tells us that God has set us apart which means that he's pulled us out of the crowd and kept us as his own and that we no longer blend in and shouldn't try to. In essence we are now called to go against the status quo. Peer pressure shouldn't govern us but the love of God and the delight of God's law should.

## Cultural Pressures

We have to be aware that hooking up is often glamorized by the media and Hollywood, like in the film *He's Just Not That Into You* and other movies like *Friends with Benefits*. Teacher Akira Atkins, age 30 and single says, "Hollywood always uses their best looking stars to shack up and have amazing guilt and disease free one night stands. Who wouldn't want that? We never hear much talk about Christianity and its standards when watching these shows and movies. It's easy to "think" this behavior is all right. I know though as a woman growing in Christ that this sort of behavior is not what God wants for me." Although we see hooking up being celebrated in films and media, we have to remember these fictional movies

are sexed up and over-dramatized to sell more tickets. What we go through as Christians is real life, a life of guaranteed struggle, sacrifice, and refraining from sin, but the good news is that we are no longer slaves to sin because the Holy Spirit gives us a way free from sin (Romans 8:2).

"Hook up" defined by UrbanDictionary.com is "to engage

in any type of sexual activity; a purposely ambiguous, equivocal word to describe almost any sexual action; a hook up can range from a make-out session to full out sex." Today's culture pushes against the standards of past culture (i.e. no sex or living together until marriage). We hear the words hook up multiple times a day and rarely hear the words faithful marriage, although many couples are committed in this way. My parents were married in 1970 at 24 years old. My aunt was married at 22 in 1967. My grandmother was married at 16 in 1944 (divorced in 1948; remarried 1950). Young marriages in this time seemed to be the trend. In 1960 nearly 72% of Americans were married, that's now dropped to 51%. In the article "Marriage Rates in America Drop," from *The Huffington Post*, one of the reasons why people aren't getting married is because "there are other kinds of living arrangements that are socially acceptable now that may not have been in the past, such as living with someone without being married, living on your own, or even living as a single parent."

Phillip Olive, 38, an architect who's single, makes an interesting point about how the topic is really *chastity* in a hook up culture: "Christians often take their cues on the validity of God's word from what they see around them instead of what they read. I've dated Christian women who were shocked that I wouldn't have sex with them. I think that they see premarital sex as a pervasive thing in Christian culture and don't think that anyone is being hurt as long as no one is cheating. They put it in

the category of minor sins like white lies. I think that some think of premarital sex as inevitable so they don't try very hard to avoid it." This real experience serves as another reminder that as believers in Jesus Christ we cannot live by the standards of the world or by the world's flawed way of thinking in reference to relationships or sex.

Other people I talked to also had insights into not hooking up on their dates. Helena Fils, 26, an entrepreneur in a committed relationship, shares a little bit about her dating life after accepting Christ as Lord. "Once I declared I was going for this walk with Jesus, he showed me many things I did not like, and how I handled

*Jeremiah 1:5 tells us that  
God has set us apart  
which means that he's  
pulled us out of the  
crowd and kept us as  
his own and that we  
no longer blend in and  
shouldn't try to. We're  
special, we're his own.  
In essence we are now  
called to go against the  
status quo. Peer pressure  
shouldn't govern us  
but the love of God and  
the delight of God's law  
should.*

myself in this hook up culture was one of them. After five years of being single, I recently met someone and we have decided to take things very slowly. We talk, we hold hands, we watch movies, we laugh and we are genuinely getting to know each other.”

“If you get into something and then realize it’s not from God, get out as soon as you can,” says single writer, Alexis Davis, 32. “We are all going to make mistakes, but as Christians we are to acknowledge that we are broken humans that have real temptations and real sins, but have been offered salvation.”

## You Are Not Alone

The Christian way of life goes against the flesh and fleshly desires like hooking up. This isn’t to say that in this journey, and that’s what this Christian walk is, a long journey, that we won’t have some setbacks. Do not beat yourself up. Ask God for forgiveness, forgive yourself, move on, and don’t fall in that sin again. The good news is that when we take measures to change our actions and ways of thinking, God will help us to get to where we want to be when we pray earnestly.

When we endure to the end we will see our reward in having accomplished life well. I once heard a missionary say that true wisdom, Godly wisdom, is living life well. Just because we live in a world where the culture and things that are both acceptable and unacceptable change every day, it doesn’t mean that we have to change with it. Jesus said I am the same yesterday, today, and forever more (Hebrews 13:8). With his faithfulness, steadfastness, and grounding in our lives we can get to that point where we have unshakable conviction in him and where God-centered faithful marriage is our standard. Do not settle for less because our Savior died and came back to life so that we can have the best, *his* best. Be encouraged.



# A Spiritual Lens

*Photos to spark thought, thanksgiving  
and love.*

photos by Matthew Hamilton



## MATTHEW HAMILTON

Matthew Hamilton is a published photographer and writer that lives with his wife, two cats and a dog in Wilmington, Delaware. He has written articles for New Identity and the pop culture blog The Critical Masses at [criticalmassesmedia.com](http://criticalmassesmedia.com). You can also check out his personal blogs Black and White in Color and Five Questions Blog at [blogger.com](http://blogger.com).

"But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:14, NIV)

This verse reminds me that life is a road leading to a definite end – eternal life, or death. The idea of traveling on this road is to end up at heaven's gate. In many of his parables, Jesus often used descriptions of everyday surroundings to explain eternal ideas. While visiting a vineyard I noticed this pathway. Although many things have changed in the 2000 years since Jesus told parables, I couldn't help but think that this path may have been just like the one Jesus spoke of. The gate's size and the width of the road shows that it is a way that is not easy and is not for everyone, but those who seek will find life.





"You treat me to a feast, while my enemies watch. You honor me as your guest, and you fill my cup until it overflows" (Psalm 23:5, CEV).

I was walking around the property of the Ephreta Cloister, the site of a former religious community in Pennsylvania. In the mid-1800's a group of like minded people sought a life apart from all daily distractions that prevented true communion with God. Men and women decided to live, work and eat together in this utopia away from their enemies. This bowl was on the same community dining table that they shared over 150 years ago and brought to mind this verse illustrating that God provides a table for those that follow him. The 23rd Psalm is one of the most famous passages in the Bible, mainly because of the comforting image of God being our shepherd. Verse five stands out because in addition to showing God as our leader and someone who listens, the verse shows he provides for his followers always, especially when we need it the most. God provides in many ways for us today: our homes, jobs and most importantly those friends and family who stand with us during the toughest times.



"Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13, NLT).

Love and Hate. These two extremes are how we express our affection or disgust with all that we see around us. We are emotional beings that develop strong feelings about many things: the foods we eat, the books we read, even the way we approach our faith. Too often, we as Christians hide behind the idea of "love the sinner, but hate the sin." Even though this statement starts with love, more often than not all people remember is the word "hate." I was enjoying a leisurely stroll in Charleston, South Carolina on an unusually warm day in December, when I saw this creative graffiti on the side of a building: "Love is the new Hate." Granted, there are things that we should hate: violence, injustice, all of the things that make life in this world unfair. But it seems that too often, hate comes a lot easier than love. Love takes work, especially towards something or someone you dislike already. This simple phrase proposes a world where people first react with love.

IT  
IS  
TRUE

*Faith inspired by beauty.*

Photo © Casey David | Flickr (CC)

## TOM KOEL

Tom Koel became a Christian at 28, twenty years ago. They've been interesting years and that the Lord has done a lot of work on him. Tom has had several careers and currently works in real estate. He has been blessed to have his sweet wife by his side through it all and has two fantastic boys, ages 10 and 5.

**I** like to wonder in amazement at the faith. When I find a person who is really curious, I like to tell them about what really excites me about Christianity. This is very personal, and every person's testimony is personal to themselves. That is the testimony we should be sharing.

For me, I love two things. I love a thing that is true. I love awesome pictures of space and of nature. I love the wonders of science and the beauty of math. I love using the English language perfectly. Weird, I know. Secondly, I love a story. I love a hero. I love a hard fought victory, a real victory. I love a rescue. I love to cry for a well-earned happy ending.

When I come across a true story, I turn to jelly. Just writing this, my eyes are watering. Again, weird. I know. So you can imagine what Christianity does to me, right?

Take a fallen creature, like man, a ruined and doomed creature. Have him loved by his maker for no apparent reason and then have that pure good God do a thing that had never entered the mind of man in order to save him (1 Cor 2:9). These are things even the angels did not imagine (1 Peter 1:12). It is so grand, so stunning a tale, that it leaves me speechless, on my face. And it is true.

Follow that with the man Christ, who was born into simple circumstances, standing in front of kings, raising the dead. By all accounts this man defined the word hero. No, in fact, his life showed the word for all its shortcomings. In his light, there never was another victory, but just the shadow of it. Every other battle where good has overcome evil is no more than the throwing of rose petals at the feet of the one true victory this fallen world has ever seen. Christ has so many names because it takes the essence of so many grand words to attempt to fit an accurate picture of the man into the human mind. And if you understood all the languages of the world and all the words he has been truly called, I imagine you might just begin to get a glimpse of him. And it is true.

And while I cannot pick my three or five or fifty favorite verses of the Bible and print them here, I must say, that anyone who reads, and likes to read, and who knows anything about people, must, if he reads the scriptures with honesty, find it amazing. There is nothing like it. The words are mind blowing! Where could they have come from?! If you know anything about stories—I don't claim

*"The only way the Bible makes any sense is to take it at face value. Once you give it the kind of credit you give the daily newspaper, it blows your mind."*

to be an expert, but I sure do love them and have thought a lot about them—this story is different. It rings both true and shocking.

The defining moment of my conversion was when I was in my late twenties. I grew up basically agnostic. But for one well-placed Bible thumping grandmother, I had no real exposure to Christianity. I have a bachelor's degree in philosophy and a Masters in filmmaking. So, flash forward, I'm twenty eight. Two weeks earlier I'd had a sort of breakdown at around 2am in the living room of my apartment. Life sucked and I was yelling at the god I thought I knew, probably because I had no one else to yell at. In the middle of that tearful rant, God spoke to me. He said, basically, that for all my reading and knowing, I had never read his Word.

Now, this was off the point, I thought. I was ranting about my failed film career among other things and he was talking about the Bible. His point was that I could hardly blame him when I hadn't even looked at the most read book in history. That, for all my knowing, I had really not been very open-minded. And maybe before I started popping off, I should hear what he had to say.

It was a bit shocking to hear from him that way, and though, it did seem off the point, I did what he said. I think it spooked me a little. The next day I went and got a Bible and began reading it.

Two weeks later, I was going through the Gospels for a second time, because for some reason none of it really stood out to me on the first read through. I'd read a lot of stuff in my day, but I could not figure this book out. It was like I was blocked. Anyway, that one night, two weeks after the breakdown, it was like the words came off the page. I started reading The Gospel of John as a serious book. And I couldn't believe what I read. It occurred to me that this man, this Jesus, was actually who he said he was.

It added up. It made perfect sense. The only way the Bible makes any sense is to take it at face value. Once you give it the kind of credit you give the daily newspaper, it blows your mind.

Ever since then I've just been adding one amazing awareness after another to my faith and my testimony. And it just gets better the more you read it. The only time the Bible gets stale is when you stop reading it. Just yesterday I read Matthew 9:29, "Then he touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith be it done to you.'" I bet I've read that twenty times in my life. Maybe more. But right now I just can't get it out of my head. He healed a couple of poor blind guys because they believed he could do it. I think about that. Blessed are the poor, blessed are the pure in heart. He's fulfilling that promise, putting it in their hands. The fulfillment of God's love to people. Right there. And these guys are just two of many he did this for like he just bumped into them in the grocery store. I'm staring at this event as if I was there, and I can't get it all into my head.

That's the kind of stuff I love to talk about. Psalm 89:1 – "I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations." I'm not saying I live up to that, but I'm trying to. 🎧

# The Draw of the Surf and the Love of the Savior



*Christian Surfers International's impact in  
and out of the water.*

Photo © IceNinja | Flickr (CC)



## NICHOLAS SOWELL

Nicholas Sowell 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, Nicholas enjoys staying active and passionately seeking after the Lord.

**F**ounded in Cronulla, Australia, Christian Surfers International is an interdenominational mission movement seeking to share the gospel and Jesus' love with the global surfing community. Christian Surfers International works in over 25 different countries worldwide including the United States. Besides evangelism, Christian Surfers International (CSI) commits its time, efforts, and faith to the surfing community, serves communities with faith initiatives such as hosting surfing competitions with CSF (Christian Surfing Federation) and partnering with LRO (Life Rolls On) to bring surfing experiences to paraplegics and quadriplegics. Even more recently, CSI was engaged in tsunami relief in Japan. Different chapters all over the world provide aid to those in need, and also chaplaincy to the Association of Surfing Professionals (ASP) World Tour. As if that's not enough, CSI also puts on surf competitions, surf camps, and runs missions.

In 2008, CSI published "The Surfer's Bible," complete with testimonies of well-known Christians surfers who radically love God. Some of those surfers included Bethany Hamilton, CJ & Damien Hobgood, Tim Curren, and legendary surfboard shaper Al Merrick. Eventually CSI made its way to the United States and has flourished ever since. It now has 25 local chapters throughout the U.S. and 47 internationally. CSI seeks to bring Christ to the surfing community worldwide and wants to see every surfer in the United States connected to Jesus. They intend to achieve this mission by awakening surfing Christians to spiritual awareness and mobilizing them to become active in the mission. Many surf spots worldwide are known for being territorial, cliquish, and exclusive in nature. This involves blocking waves from outsiders or even breaking their boards if they happen to get in a local's way. There seems to be an ever-present spirit of pride and entitlement that comes with a good surf location. The problem with this is that it stands against everything


Christianity is about. By simply allowing others to take a wave before you or being willing to give a smile and talk to someone in the water, is, in many instances, counter-cultural to the surfing community. CSI also seeks to change this by reflecting Christ in how they act in the water as well as on dry land.

After serving as a surf missionary in Hawaii and Indonesia, I returned home to California in search of a similar Christian community. Having heard of this organization prior, I simply did a Google search on my computer, easily found my city's local chapter, and was put in touch with the director. After a phone call and invitation, I found myself in the midst of Jesus-loving surfers. They provided a positive mentoring and learning environment where I was free to be myself and learn more about the Bible. They held weekly bible studies, regular cookouts, and even hosted various social action initiatives like beach clean-ups and volunteering for Life Rolls On (a paraplegic/quadruplegic surfing program). My search to find other surfers who had the same heart for God started out as a mere need to find others that were like-minded in the surfing community, but what grew out of it became something much more and something I never expected. I now have life-long friends, accountability partners, and memories that will last a lifetime.

I've had the privilege and honor to be a member of this organization and participate in events such as beach clean-ups, movie debuts, Surf-a-thons, volunteer aid for accident victims who have been paralyzed and want to surf, the opening of a surf museum, and Christian surfer camps. This organization is community minded and looks to serve wherever possible. The people all over the world that make up this organization are the backbone by which others can see what true godly love looks like. If you live near a beach and would love a community of believers, look no further. Even if you've never surfed before in your life and you'd like to learn, these people will accept you with open arms. There

are few places in this world a man can walk into a new place and feel welcomed, but CSI has created just that. If you happen to live too far away from a beach, that's okay too. CSI's resources are still available to you as well, and anyone can help spread the word about this organization and its cause. You can find out more about them at [www.christiansurfers.net](http://www.christiansurfers.net). You can sign up for a weekly devotional even if you're inland.

*"These surfers found a way to incorporate Christ in the thing they love to do most. They found a way to incorporate Christ into their sphere of influence."*

These surfers found a way to incorporate Christ in the thing they love to do most. They found a way to incorporate Christ into their sphere of influence. Christ can use your passions to glorify him, you just have to find a way. Simply ask yourself today, "what are my passions?" Then follow up that question with, "how can I incorporate those giftings to also reach others for Christ?" Get creative and simply ask God for ideas. Even though I knew I was called to ministry, I never thought that one day my love for surfing might be a vehicle by which others would see God's love. We are all wired differently with different likes and passions, the question is: how will you use yours? 

# worship in the clubs

*The Calling of Tracy Thomas*

Photo © simongreenuk | Flickr (CC), All other photos courtesy of Tracy Thomas



## KEVIN C. NEECE

Kevin is a writer and speaker in Fort Worth, Texas. He has written for Art House Dallas, *Rethinking Everything Magazine* and more, including the forthcoming book *Light Shining in a Dark Place: Discovering Theology Through Film*. He's also a contributing editor for *Imaginatio et Ratio: A Journal of Theology and the Arts*. Connect with him at [kevincneece.com](http://kevincneece.com) and [undiscoveredcountryproject.com](http://undiscoveredcountryproject.com).

**T**racy Thomas is clinging to the side of a mountain. She's unprepared, inexperienced and hanging on for dear life. "Wow, this is really hard!" she thinks, "I am hurting! I don't know what I'm doing!" And she's doing this for five days. Why would she put herself in this precarious, dangerous position for that long? "You know," she tells me, "I just wanted to try it."

Thankfully, I'm not on the side of the mountain with her. Perhaps more thankfully, neither is she anymore, but she's imparting this years-old tale as we sit in our respective homes and talk via

Skype. So, she survived at least. That's a good thing. But, in a very real sense, Tracy Thomas is still on a rock climbing expedition—still struggling, still going through pain, still uncertain of what is coming next and feeling more than a little unprepared. Her current expedition, though, is a music and acting career and the rock she clings to is Jesus.

I've listened to her album the day before our interview and expect to meet a sweet, bright, perhaps slightly shy young woman. What I get is an almost startling burst of life force. She's as lovely, sweet of spirit and effortlessly put together as I'd expected, but her radiant, dynamic energy is happily surprising and quickly engaging. "When I was younger, people used to call me a Kamikaze," the Canadian-born performer tells me, "I used to take a lot of cuckoo risks when I was younger." Hence, the rock climbing story. But "cuckoo risks" might be a good descriptor of many of the things Thomas still does (though perhaps less threatening to life and limb), like jetting off to Germany to play at two churches, one of which is that country's largest Protestant church, with no guitar or band and no idea if she would have either when she got there.

"I just found them on the Internet and I just e-mailed the church and said, 'Hey, we're going to be over there and we'd love to play at your church if we could' and they're like, 'Okay!'" she laughs. "Didn't know them, didn't know anybody at the churches and just showed up ... I was like, 'Well, I hope this all works out, I mean, I didn't even bring my guitar. Lord, I just need your help to make this all work out.' And the churches put together bands for us and gave us instruments to play."

But, while the seat-of-her-pants circumstances of her decisions may sound random and crazy, they are borne from a deep, meditative prayer life, along with an assiduous commitment to Scripture and to seeking God's leadership in every decision. "I just feel like if I don't spend a good amount of time in the Lord's presence every day," she tells me, "I totally start freaking out about all the things that need to be done...and it gets really overwhelming."

Seeking God's will for her life and career is a daily process for Thomas that requires consistent dedication. "I journal out my prayers, and so I'll prayer journal first thing and I'll get into the Word and do a deep, deep word study." But she is quick to note her struggle in maintaining focus. "It's a hard battle every day," she says, "especially in Los Angeles because so much of living here is about pursuing success and career and there's a lot of...just spiritual environment that pushes that on a constant basis. So, for me it's just a matter of continuing to submit to God, asking him what his plans are for that day, praying about every single gig that comes my way, everything that people offer me."

Perhaps it was, in part, that environment of the pursuit of success that made LA an attractive venue for Thomas' longstanding commitment to acting as a primary career goal. Having done Television and feature films in Canada with the likes of Dave Foley and Dan Akroyd, her move to Los Angeles was originally focused toward greater opportunities in that arena. "I came down with the intention of becoming a very successful actor," she laughs, "and nothing really went even remotely the way that I wanted it to as an



actor."

Thomas had intended to return to Canada with very little to show for her efforts to expand her career. But, having met and married her husband in LA, she ended up staying south of the border. Then, through a three-year period of an undiagnosed and debilitating illness, she let go of her ambitions to be a full-time actor. "[God] basically brought me around to a place of repenting for the idolatry that I had committed in pursuing my career above pursuing my relationship with him and really revealed to me that my career was an idol before him and had been for a long time. And so, though lots of weeping and hardship and repenting, the Lord said, 'Are you willing to give this up for me?' and I said, 'Yes,' in tears, of course, I said, 'Yes, Lord. I'll give anything up for you.'"

Thomas asked God repeatedly what she should do. Should she go and get any job she could find to sustain her family through what had become a time of deep financial hardship? "God just kept speaking to me to make his music. And I really didn't know what that meant. I was like, 'Make your music. Okay, well...I'll try!'" She laughs again, then smiles. "At that point, my life totally transformed and I really started committing everything to seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and knowing that he would provide for my needs from a day to day basis," she tells me. "And so I just wholeheartedly sought after the Lord, was leading worship a lot, was spending time with him, was in the Word constantly."

She began leading worship music in a number of churches around the Los Angeles area until, in 2009, a friend and colleague gave her the opportunity to record an album, something she'd wanted to do since she was a teenager. "God basically opened up a door for me to record an entire record at a multimillion-dollar studio for free and it was, like, the most incredible..." she pauses, "I mean, I got a hundred thousand dollar record for about ten thousand bucks total, all said. And then, ever since I released the record, I've been pursuing leading worship and playing the music all



Tracy and her band

over the place pretty much full time now.”

“All over the place” is no understatement. Though she will sometimes take her guitar to a park and sing worship music as people gather and listen (“I don’t have to be playing The Staples Center,” to fulfill God’s purposes, she says), that’s hardly her most unusual venue. “God spoke to me about going and playing the clubs and playing this worship music in the clubs. And so that’s what we’ve been doing...And it’s been pretty wild.”

Once again, Thomas’ path has taken a turn she never imagined. “I thought I’d probably play a lot of churches,” she says. “I just figured I would probably play worship events at churches all over the place and I was not at all remotely expecting to play in clubs; I wasn’t.” But opportunities in the church world were not coming together for her. “It just wasn’t unfolding. I was like, ‘Oh, okay. Guess I won’t be doing that.’ And then, all of a sudden, God spoke to me about going to the clubs. And I was like... ‘What?’” Her laughter comes out again at yet another step into uncertainty.

Bizarre as it may seem to take worship music into clubs, even more bizarre is the fact that Thomas can actually get booked there. “I just e-mail them!” she says. More laughter. She just has to laugh. How else can she respond to the seeming absurdity of the way events have unfolded against the current of her farthest speculations? “There’s always so many loose ends on everything,” she tells me. “You kind of have to, like, throw up your hands and say, ‘Well, this is in God’s hands and I just have to relax about it because otherwise I’m gonna be a mess.’”


In a way, though, clubs don’t seem odd venues at all. Thomas’ music, she says, is “about experiencing God’s love in the midst of the hardest times and in the darkest places and being called by him in love.” Wherever she plays—but particularly in the clubs, she tells me, “[God’s] light and his love comes out in a way that I don’t think maybe has ever been seen in those places before. And people who come who don’t necessarily know God’s love leave there having been touched by his infinite love and so many times people come up to me after a gig and they’re like, ‘I just felt all of this love,’ or they’ll say ‘There was just this light coming out of your

face and it was shining so bright,’ or they’ll be like, ‘I feel happy! I left feeling uplifted. I felt so happy the rest of the day.’ They don’t necessarily know what that’s all about, but I think that’s part of my call—to go into the places where other people won’t go, to the darker places where a lot of people are afraid to go.”

The road she has traveled to get here has not been an easy one by any means. But, she says, “I feel like, for the first time in my life, that I’m doing what I was really called to do.” Although she has continued to act in a few plays and even a web series, she no longer makes her career as either an actor or a musician into an idol. Listening to God and following his leadership, though, also means she can’t make an idol out of her desire for order. “I’m a Type A person,” she says. “I like everything to be structured, organized, all my ducks in a row and [at times] I was like, ‘I can’t handle how stressful this lack of structure is!’” Her theatre background seems evident in her propensity for telling stories with dialogue. “God is like, ‘Do you trust me?’ and I’m like...” she squints and sheepishly squeaks out, “‘Yes, I trust you.’” She continues, “‘He’s like, ‘Do you trust me?’ and I’ll just have to be like, ‘Yes, okay, I’ll just let this go.’ And he always comes through. He never leaves me hanging.”

*“I just feel like if I don’t spend a good amount of time in the Lord’s presence every day,” she tells me, “I totally start freaking out about all the things that need to be done...and it gets really overwhelming.”*

So, fingers gripping the rock face, Tracy Thomas shows no sign of letting go or trying anything less risky anytime soon. “I have a bit more of a fearlessness now than I did before because I’ve seen God’s track record, you know what I mean?” She laughs again. “So, more than anything, I’m usually pretty excited about the new, different things that are gonna happen.” If the past is any evidence, new and different is exactly what she will have to look forward to. “You just have to be loose,” she says, “because God...he’s always working and he doesn’t want to be limited to our little structures. It’s good to be prepared and planned, but it’s also absolutely essential, I feel, to be ready for however his Spirit leads and just go in whatever direction he’s going.”

Learn more about Tracy Thomas, listen to her album and find out where to catch her in concert at [TracyThomas.com](http://TracyThomas.com). 

# Filtering the Fiction

*Meaningfully consuming modern-day media.*

Photo © Freewill Photography+ | Flickr (CC)



## LARA TOVMASSIAN

Lara Tovmassian is an English:Writing major at Biola University who has been passionate about writing since she was a child. Lara is eager to use her writing for the advancement of God's kingdom and hopes to pursue a career in magazine writing after she graduates. Some of her favorite past-times include journaling, reading, exercising, and baking.

“Q uiet on set!” In an instant, the chaotic set, once crowded with shouted orders and frantic footsteps, falls into silence. As the cameras start to roll, the main actor convincingly assumes his fictional identity. The entire crew watches in anticipation of the moment when they too forget that the actor is not who he says he is. Reality pauses while the imagination offers a refreshing escape from it.

But while this crew temporarily steps out of our world and into the screenwriter's reality, traffic continues to pass outside

the studio. Shoppers check off grocery lists and pick up laundry. Children do math homework and play at the park. The world as we know it persists in subtlety, providing a warm home to return to after the thrill of imagination passes.

Films, books and magazines remove us from everyday life by drawing our minds to fictional times and places. If only fleetingly, we can lay aside our worries and fall into a world outside our own. While fictional stories often lead us to a greater understanding of human nature, we must receive them with discretion. As Christians we are called to be “in the world but not of it.” Therefore, we must be especially sensitive to the messages that we receive from the media. Many Christians try to avoid the influence of modern culture altogether by refusing to read provocative novels or watch controversial films. This is not the answer. Avoiding culture will only stunt our growth and create a unhealthy judgmental gap between ourselves and the world around us. If we want to influence the world for Jesus Christ, we must be aware of the other influences that affect both us and those whom we are trying to reach with the Gospel.

Media messages are bold and varied. Magazines give us flawless women and chiseled men who, between workouts and cocktail parties, still find time to hold stable jobs and volunteer at soup kitchens. Up and down the Pinterest homepage, consumers find themselves longing for the ideal lifestyle they are invited into. One popular online bumper-sticker reads “Pinterest: Where women go to plan imaginary weddings, dress children that don’t exist, and decorate homes we can’t afford.” Television commercials have the uncanny ability to convince us that Magic Bullets and Snuggies are absolute necessities and good old-fashioned blenders and blankets are obsolete. Every eight minutes, we are invited into these glamorous worlds that tempt us with luxury and impossible ideals.

In theory, we know that these mediums do not portray reality; yet, we buy into them. We turn to the media as a retreat from our own lives, but often forget to acknowledge it as simply that—a retreat. Over time, the media has become adept at convincing its consumers that the world it portrays is standard. We want to live in this retreat because it is paradise. We want to prolong the thrill. This lust for everlasting paradise however makes it difficult to separate our own world from that which we have experienced in books, movies, magazines and television shows.

C.S. Lewis, a 20th-century Christian scholar and author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, comments on the entanglement of these two worlds in his book *Mere Christianity*. He writes “Our experience is coloured through and through by books and plays and the cinema, and it takes patience and skill to disentangle the things we have really learned from life for ourselves.” After becoming aware of the media’s subtle influence, we must learn to sift through its messages and consider them in light of biblical truth.

In a word, we need filters—ones that encourage us to

determine truth and falsehood for ourselves without resigning this authority to magazine editors or Hollywood producers. The media should not form our beliefs; it should simply inform them. Books and films have the power to convict us with honest truths about humanity, but well-written novels and good films also have the power to convince us of just about anything. The right angle on any topic can cause people to question their convictions. Without developing filters for media messages and advertising agendas, we can easily fall into skewed mindsets and ideologies.

Even so, this is not to say that we as believers have access to a worldview that is void or separate from modern culture. On the contrary, our culture, whether we realize it or not, shapes the way we read the Bible and think theologically. Pure, culture-less Christianity does not exist. It can’t. We live in society and will consequently, both subconsciously and consciously, be impacted by its messages. With this in mind, we must find effective ways to understand Christianity as embedded within our own culture. Our faith is informed by culture; the two cannot be neatly separated. Even so, we can gain wisdom by looking at modern culture from a Christian perspective.

In light of this, we must consider several questions when we encounter a media message. What aspects of my faith does this message challenge or complement? If it appears to be in complete opposition to my faith, how can I still glean wisdom from it? Why do the ideas explored in this novel make me uncomfortable? Should my response to this movie be different from that of my non-believing friend? Asking these simple questions can lead to discussions and thought processes that keep us aware of biblical truth in the midst of a primarily secular medium. To answer this basic template of questions, we must look at a specific message.

Take film, for example. Consider Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight*, a gritty and brooding contribution to the Batman series. This film explores several issues, including sacrifice, purpose, fear, vengeance, selfishness, and depravity. It challenges conventional ideas of morality, encouraging the audience to discern good and evil for themselves through witnessing an ongoing battle between the two. For a believer seeking truth in controversial media messages, the filtering begins with the recognition of this battle. After recognizing the battle, we can consider the moral system that Nolan creates in the film.

In *The Dark Knight*, Nolan blurs the line between good and evil. The Joker serves as a chilling embodiment of pure evil, bluntly affirming many skewed moral messages by finding thrill in doing evil and rejecting authority for the sake of self-advancement. In an attempt to understand the Joker’s criminal mind, Bruce Wayne’s faithful butler Alfred states “Some men aren’t looking for anything logical, like money. They can’t be bought, bullied, reasoned or negotiated with. Some men just want to watch the world burn.” While the Joker’s character is heavily contrasted with that of

*While fictional stories  
often lead us to a  
greater understanding  
of human nature, we  
must receive them with  
discretion.*

## *Part of having filters means knowing our limits and protecting ourselves from falling into temptation.*

Batman, Batman is by no means portrayed as a pillar of supreme goodness. In his efforts to protect Gotham City, he often brings great affliction upon its citizens. Thus, without a plain standard of perfect goodness to look towards, the audience is left to question the existence of true benevolence.

So how do we as Christians respond to this complex message of confused morality? What aspects of the faith does this message challenge or compliment? What does the Bible tell us about righteousness and moral living? The fact that true righteousness cannot be found in the depraved Gotham City highlights the need for something greater than human morality. No single man's effort to do good in the world will result in lasting righteousness unless that man's name is Jesus Christ. In his letter to the Romans, Paul the Apostle writes "The righteousness of God... is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (3:21-22). The film forces us to consider the value of truth by giving us a confusing and unsettling understanding of it. Even the honor of Bruce Wayne's self-sacrifice in the final scene is tainted by an awareness that Wayne is unrightfully taking on the weight of somebody else's crime. Ultimately, the film leaves us disappointed in man's inability to avoid or overcome evil.


Thankfully however, Scripture does not let our story end with depravity. God relieves us from it and offers hope in Christ. In light of this realization, how can we glean biblical wisdom from this film? By being challenged to consider the nature of good and evil, and referring to Scripture as a means through which to make sense of the two. The film poses the question and gives the audience space to answer it for themselves. This leads to yet another consideration: How does the film influence our reading of the Bible to show us things we had not seen before. Often times, we think of ourselves as working in a direct, linear movement from Scripture to thought and thought to action; it is important, however, to also consider how much we bring to Scripture when we read it. In one way or another, the entire Bible is about the battle between good and evil. Therefore, being offered different frameworks through which to consider this tension can help enhance our understanding of Scripture.

There are many more themes worth exploring and many more questions worth asking about this film, but they cannot all be covered in this one article. These topics are pervasive in our society, and conversation about them should arise often and naturally. Suffice it to say that a valiant and

careful search for biblical wisdom in the media will surely be rewarded. Craig Detweiler, in his book *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century*, writes, "The same God who spoke through dreams and visions in the Bible is still communicating through our celluloid dreams—the movies."

Part of having filters means knowing our limits and protecting ourselves from falling into temptation. At some point, it becomes my responsibility to evaluate my intentions behind exposing myself to a certain media message. Ours is a culture of excess and overindulgence. While it is important to engage with this culture, we should approach it with moderation. Completely dismissing our inhibitions for the sake of gleaning wisdom from unexpected sources would be, for lack of a better word, unwise. There is also wisdom in identifying an overtly inappropriate film or novel and knowing that exposure to it will not be edifying. For example, a movie with more sexual content than verbal dialogue is not likely to convey a profound and vital moral message that could not also be more appropriately explored through an alternative medium. Read novels and magazines. Watch films and television shows. Enjoy them. Interact with them. Learn from them. But know when to use the wisdom you have gleaned from the media, Scripture, and personal experience to establish boundaries.

After sifting the media through these filters, we may notice that the charmed world it presents loses some of its luster. We are awakened out of an illusion and, quite frankly, this can be disappointing. Once the thrill is gone, we are left with our thoughts. Even so, our encounter with the media does not end with this disappointing loss of thrill. When commenting on Christian love, Lewis writes, "it is just the people who are ready to submit to the loss of the thrill and settle down to the sober interest, who are then most likely to meet new thrills in some quite different direction." God calls us to both contentment and joy. Combining the two creates a sober and lasting passion that will not fade.

The moments that define our lives won't be dramatic clips from romantic comedies and they likely won't run on national television. They may not be glamorous or extravagant, but they will be our own, and they will be real. There's a great deal of adventure in our lives that is waiting to be realized. To find it, we must give ourselves time to settle in the silence and find thrill in the subtlety of God's mysterious plan. 

## *The moments that define our lives won't be dramatic clips from romantic comedies and they likely won't run on national television.*

# Coming Out Christian

*Making your faith public in  
a private world.*



## LINDSEY A. FREDERICK

Lindsey Frederick is Assistant Editor for Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group and a freelance writer and editor in the DC metro area. You can follow her on Twitter @la\_frederick or visit her online: [www.wix.com/lindseyfrederick/writes](http://www.wix.com/lindseyfrederick/writes)

**J**ustin Bieber inks it on his calf. One-armed surfing inspiration, Bethany Hamilton, wears it on her would-be sleeve. Bono wears it in (RED). And former Denver Broncos quarterback, Tim Tebow, displays it on his knees after every infield victory. This is how some of today's biggest figures in sports and entertainment publicly display their faith. When it comes to Jesus' instruction to, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19a) it seems like these guys have it made. So, how does the faith of the famous bear any relevance to the average Jesus-loving citizen? How does the average person share his or her faith with friends, family and coworkers?

Spotlight or not, coming out Christian is a bold move. And if you've been in Christian culture for a while, you might have felt (or still feel) the pressure to go big and loud with your faith. The Tebows of this world might make us think *if that's how he does it, maybe I should too*. But sharing your faith—much like living your faith—is not a one-size-fits-all experience. God created each of us uniquely, right down to the pads of our fingers and toes.

### The Tebow Approach

For Tebow, the spotlight works. For better or for worse, kneeling in the middle of a stadium to thank Jesus for a victory is effective. It caught your attention, didn't it? Sure, some are leery, and rightfully so. We've seen our share of public figures claim Christianity while secretly wrapping their arms around sin.

In a recent article in *Relevant* magazine, Kent Woodyard writes, "Tim Tebow isn't the first Christian luminary to garner attention from the national media. Others have tried it, and, more often than not, the results have not been pretty." Woodyard says whenever a well-known Christian uses faith as a marketing tool he becomes the spokesperson for all Christians. If he falls, we all fall. But Tebow says he doesn't pray in public for the sake of anyone except himself. I daresay it isn't a publicity stunt when he can boldly thank "my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" in one breath, and in the next, make an innocent admission about something as private as his virginity to a sea of shark-like reporters. His approach may

Photo © TarrafPhotography | Flickr (CC)

puzzle some people, but one thing is certain: openness is integral to effective faith-sharing.

The Tebow approach works for my friend John too. As a percussionist for the St. Louis Symphony, John thrives in the limelight. He's not a quiet man. Yet he's not quite loud either. John exudes a peace and confidence that makes people tilt their heads in curiosity. And if you hang around him long enough, you won't even have to ask him about it. John walks around saying things like "It's not the Saints come dragging in, it's the Saints go marching. Get moving, people!" And if you give John about five minutes, he can make you laugh in one and weep in four (don't worry, he sticks around past five). This happened the first time I met him and he said to me, "Do you know why you're crying? Because the Holy Spirit is talking to you." I wanted to tell him, "No! It's because God read my journal to you!" John mentions God almost as much as he breathes. And you know what? People listen.

## They Shall Know We Are Christians By Our ... T-Shirts?

Other Christians, who don't have a celebrity platform, might turn to Christian swag as an evangelistic tool. Do you like clothing from popular retailer Abercrombie & Fitch? Take a closer look, because that shirt might actually say, "Abreadcrumb & Fish." Are you a fan of the iPod and iPad? Consider picking up an iPray hat. Got milk? What about Jesus?

Yes, you can rock t-shirts, bags, bumper stickers, and jewelry with popular slogans or brand names cleverly hijacked by the Christian market. Some see this as an ingenious strategy to share Jesus' message in culturally relevant ways. Indeed, throughout Jesus' ministry he spoke in ways that made sense in his culture. He used stories and commonly recognizable illustrations to make a point and reveal the deeper meaning of life on earth and beyond.

Charlotte McGinnis, a mother of two, says she's seen some "seriously cool old dudes" wearing message-bearing t-shirts. She appreciates their confidence and unapologetic attitude toward their fashion and their faith. "More power to you, if you're not a Bible thumper and truly have the heart behind the attire," says McGinnis.

My friend Joy can make even the brightest, tackiest, neon-Jesus-shirt look like the latest underground fashion. Joy says, "I used to think my 'Christ Supreme' shirt that looked like the Krispy Kreme logo was cool!" More than her attire, though, people are attracted to Joy's charismatic personality and genuine interest in them. And since I've known her, I've seen her successfully engage people and tell them about Christ.

On the other hand, you can't rely on a shirt, a pin, or a cross around your neck to save someone's soul. In an article on WorkLife.org, author John Fisher tells the story of a young man who bought a t-shirt with a blatant Christian message, hoping it

would generate curiosity from strangers. He wore the t-shirt a lot over several years, but realized no one ever asked him about it. The day one of his shirts broke the ice was the day he wore his Fender guitar tee. Three people asked about it and the man shared his faith with one of them. "The lesson here is pretty simple" writes Fisher, "T-shirts don't witness; people do."

## Speaking the Truth Doesn't Always Mean Wearing It

On the other side of the faith-sharing spectrum both Christians and non-Christians roll their eyes at en vogue expressions. While the non-religious folks might find these outward expressions just plain irritating, some Christians criticize them as a second-rate marketing campaign that draws more attention to ourselves than to our God.

Twenty-eight-year-old Leilani Squires was insulted when she saw a shirt on a Christian apparel kiosk in a mall that said "Trust me, it's huge" in large letters and then in smaller font beneath, "God's love for you." Squires says, "Why would we want to represent Christ in a way that at first look is something crude and then piously back it up with 'God loves you!'"

Allison Banks, a college student, doesn't like to see faith symbols glammed up as decorative or fashion statements because she feels it devalues the cross. Banks says, "It shows that we spend too much time trying to make Christianity, the cross, the Gospel look 'cool', instead of truly sharing its deep value and necessity in our lives . . ."

While we should be less worried with how cool we look for Christ, perception still counts for something. Our concern with image might be better repositioned to examine how such unabashed messages negatively impact culture. Perhaps the eye-rolling, irritation and criticism stem from the notion that "those who shout the loudest have something to hide."

*Sharing your faith—much like living your faith—is not a one-size-fits-all experience.*

## What about Introverts?

For those of us who prickle at such outward expressions, the spotlight just doesn't cut it. In fact, the spotlight sends us into a mad, sweaty-palmed dash for the nearest closet. I know; I am one of those people.

Several years ago, when I worked for a Christian organization, the director asked me to read a passage of scripture in front of a large audience. Who knew 300 expectant faces could give me cotton-mouth and blurred vision? I recited the passage with all the eloquence of Dustin Hoffman in *Rain Man* then slinked off stage, curtaining my red face behind my hair.

Now swap that stage for a small table and a cup of coffee; whittle that audience down to one or two and I will share with you my latest epiphanies on life and faith, and I might even

*The key is to be comfortable  
enough with your faith that you  
can share it in ways that express  
who God is, through how he  
made you.*

make you laugh in the process. This is the setting where I am most comfortable sharing; no Tebow-ing, no “WWJD” bracelets—just you, me (and coffee).

My friend Amy wears her faith like a skin. Amy and I were in a class together and I wanted her high energy, girlfriend-no-you-didn't attitude to rub off on me. She never really spoke about her faith, but I could tell there was something special about her by the way she cared for people. I remember sitting in a classroom when several classmates arrived visibly upset. They just received news their friend was in a car accident and had been taken to the hospital. In that moment of sick-dreaded hush, Amy asked almost casually, “Is it OK if I pray for your friend?”


“Please!” the girls said.

The prayer was not long or grandiose. Nor was it stilted or awkward. Amy talked to God like she talked to anybody. *That's how I want my faith to look*, I thought. Fun-loving and natural, with a dose of discernment and timing; that's what works for Amy.

But maybe you're a platform and lights kind of guy or gal. And maybe you find this approach too passive. Certainly there is a danger for the more introverted to make excuses like “It's just not my personality” or “Oh. No, no. Evangelism is not my *spiritual* gift.” Sorry friends, that doesn't cut it either. The Bible is pretty clear about this (see Matthew 28:19-20). Where it's a little less clear is in how we share our faith.

After Jesus gave the Great Commission, the book of Matthew ends with him on top of a mountain promising his eleven remaining disciples (Judas, the twelfth, betrayed Jesus) that he is “with them always.” Story over. Flip to the book of Mark.

I imagine the disciples were a little confused about the next step. Maybe even a little scared. Perhaps they rubbed their stubbly chins and shared a round of bewildered glances as they thought, *Great, Jesus. That's cool. But what should we do now?* To fulfill his promise, Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit to guide and empower their steps. But whether they walked, ran, or leaped forward was entirely up to them and the condition of the ground beneath them.

The Bible says to both revere Christ in your heart and be prepared to give an answer for the hope within you (1 Peter 3:15). So perhaps we can learn both from those who wear their faith on their sleeve and those who keep it closer to their heart. The key is to be comfortable enough with your faith that you can share it in ways that express who God is, through how he made you. Faith is not relative. But as long as we hold fast to scriptural truths, how we share can be. Try that on for size. 

Cellist  
Surfer  
Comic  
Cyclist  
Vegetarian  
Composer  
Teacher  
Poet  
Chef  
Golfer  
Carpenter  
Dancer  
Hiker  
Actor  
Gamer  
Parent  
Singer  
Doctor  
Dreamer  
Baker  
Tennis player  
Sculptor

Who are you in Christ?

WRITE,  
PHOTOGRAPH OR  
ILLUSTRATE FOR US

FIND THE WRITER'S GUIDELINES AT  
[www.newidentitymagazine.com](http://www.newidentitymagazine.com)





# new identity

MAGAZINE

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