

new identity

God in focus. World in scope.

MAGAZINE

FORGIVING FAILURE

LESSONS IN
ABANDONING THE
PRESSURES OF AN ALL-
TOO-WELL-BEHAVED
LIFESTYLE

LOVE OR DEPORT?

AN IN DEPTH LOOK AT
WHAT CHRISTIANS AND
THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT
IMMIGRATION

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

EMBRACING THE
EXPRESSIONS OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES

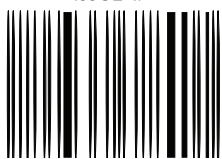
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THE REALITIES OF
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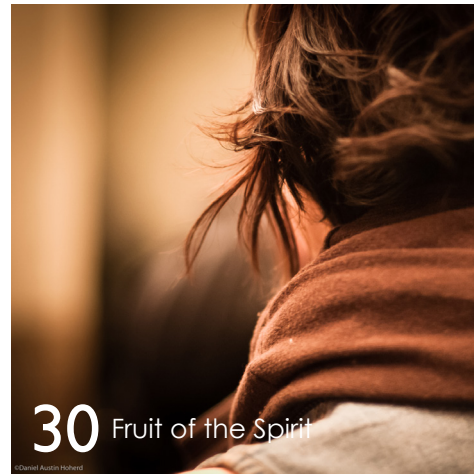
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Glorifying God With Your Story...



"Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant^[a] and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant." —Jonah 4:5-6



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 day-time phone number. *New Identity Magazine*, P.O. Box 375, Torrance, CA 90508. Phone: (310) 947-8707; feedback@newidentity-magazine.com

IN THIS ISSUE DELBERT TEACHOUT WRITES ABOUT A MAN NAMED Louis Zamperini. Louis Zamperini is a local hero here in the city of Torrance where the headquarters of *New Identity Magazine* is located. Zamperini has become more of a celebrity in recent months with the publishing of a book called *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* by Seabiscuit writer Laura Hillenbrand. Zamperini, who grew up in the oldest neighborhood in Torrance, went on to live a life that movies are made of. (And I venture that will literally be the case soon.) I don't want to spoil his incredible story here, so you'll just have to read about him on pg. 30. In interviews when Zamperini talks about his life adventures, he speaks about God's divine path and protection throughout all of it. While some may see the circumstances of his life as unbelievable, Zamperini considers them miraculous and credits God for saving him in every way imaginable.

No matter where we're taken in life, we can glorify God in our story. When we give God the credit for how he's made us and the places he's put us, our story can touch others in a powerful way, just as Zamperini's has. Our story doesn't have to be dramatic or amazing, like we'd expect from the movies, but rather a humble and honest story of how Jesus has saved us, and God has helped us _____ (you fill in the blank). We all have something in our lives that we can share about that gives glory to God. Essential things that God provides for us, such as a roof over our head, or food in our fridge we easily forget to be thankful for. A loving family, deep relationships, fulfilling job, or church community to be a part of are even more special and we should glorify God with those gifts. Remember that your story can make an impact. No matter how insignificant you think you are, the God who is working inside you is the most significant of all.

Cailin

CAILIN BRIODY HENSON
Editor-in-Chief

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Christmas Gift Guide

Consuming less by reusing, repurposing and recycling is gentler on the environment and your community.



Reuse

Pavel Sidorenko calls this unique wall clock that a "RE_VINYL." It is masterfully upcycled into something extremely interesting and functional. He shares on his website that "his aim is to create functional and playful products that retains its simplicity, interacting with the space and user." Pavel Sidorenko makes a variety of designs, from cities to animals shapes. His clocks come in wall and tabletop styles. This design titled "BAND" would be a great gift for those in your life who love the nostalgia of vinyl.

Find it at www.pavel-sidorenko.com.

Repurpose

At her Etsy store, jewelry maker Valerie of Additionsstyle makes incredibly chic necklaces, earrings, rings and bracelets made out of recycled hardware like washers and bolts. Her designs are so skillfully thought out that this jewelry is anything but a remodeling leftover. You can shop her store at www.etsy.com/shop/additionsstyle



Reuse

For the commuter or beach cruiser, storage is always a good thing. These recycled wooden crates make an excellent and sturdy accessory to any bicycle. You can find this Vintage General Cinema box and other crates at the Etsy store [EleanorsNYC](#).



new identity

MAGAZINE

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

God in focus. World in Scope.

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MISSION STATEMENT

New Identity Magazine's mission 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.

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IN PERSPECTIVE

Showcasing today's touchy subjects.

Love or Deport?

An in depth look at what Christians and the Bible say about immigration.

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WENDY VAN EYCK

Wendy Van Eyck is a writer, idea generator and TV producer. She manages a 24-hour Satellite TV channel in South Africa and still finds time to write a couple of times a week on her website: ilovedevotionals.com. You can also follow her on twitter: @wendyvaneyck.



What biblical principles or insights should guide Christian thinking on immigration? How do different Christians interpret this issue? Is it more important to extend grace or execute justice defined by the law of the land?

Immigration

In a world that is constantly shrinking through technology but in which the divide between rich and poor keeps growing, it really shouldn't be surprising that one out of every thirty-three people thinks the grass is greener in another country. In fact, the United Nations International Migration Report in 2010 found that migrants constitute the fifth most populous country in the world.

At it's most basic, immigration involves the movement of a non-native person into a country where they would like to live and settle. The United Nations estimated in 2010 that 214 million, or roughly 3% of the worlds population are international migrants. Males and females appear to migrate equally with 49% of migrants being women.

The United Nations statistics reveal that the countries with the highest percentages of migrants are: Qatar (87%), United Arab Emirates (70%), Jordan (46%), and Saudi Arabia (28%). While on the other side of the scale, countries with a low percentage of migrants include South Africa (3.7%), Slovakia (2.4%), Turkey (1.9%), Japan (1.7%), Nigeria (0.7%), Romania (0.6%), India (0.4%) and Indonesia (0.1%).

A revealing study in 2012 by Gallup showed that given the chance, approximately 640 million adults would migrate permanently to another country if they had the opportunity. The United States topped the list of the most desirable country to migrate to with nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents selecting it. The other desirable nations respondents wanted to migrate to were the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Germany and Spain.

The world economic downturn has had a surprising effect

and resulted in what some are terming "remigration." *The Turkish Review* reported in June 2011, that many Turks who migrated to the Netherlands are now returning to Turkey. They are taking with them the education and skills they've gained abroad and returning to what appears to be Turkey's more appealing political, social and economic conditions.

It is plain that, whether legal or illegal, immigration is not going to go away, so it's worthwhile considering whether there is a Christian position on this topic.

Factors That Influence Immigration Policies

All countries have policies which govern who may enter the country and under what circumstances. To a greater or lesser extent, countries also have laws and policies that determine what should happen to immigrants who enter or stay in a country illegally. Some common reasons for these laws include controlling economic prosperity of it's native people; the governments responsibility to protect the country and have knowledge of who inhabits the land and finally as an attempt to protect the integrity of a nation's historic culture, traditions and society.

Christians and Immigration

The Bible is full of stories of migration. In Genesis 37-46, we read of Joseph who was sent into slavery in a strange land and later was joined by his entire family. Then there is Moses who fled to Midian to learn the lessons of a migrant before overseeing the migration of the entire nation of Israel. In the book of Ruth, we find a widow who accompanies her mother-in-law to a new land, remarries and has children there. And then later, in the New Testament we read the story of Mary and Joseph who moved to Egypt when Jesus was a baby to hide him from the King (Matthew 2:13-15). In the Epistles we read all Christians are spiritual migrants and that our citizenship lies elsewhere (Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 13:14).

However, despite the many references to migration in the Bible, Christian churches have not managed to come to a consensus on the issue of migration. Most churches adopt one

of the following positions:

1. *The church honors God through obeying the law.*
2. *The responsibility of caring for the needy, including aliens and strangers, rests with the church.*
3. *Immigration is an issue that the church should stay clear of.*

Dr. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, summed up

It is plain that, whether legal or illegal, immigration is not going to go away, so it's worthwhile considering the whether there is a Christian position on this topic.

some of the tensions that churches feel in this area at a 2006 forum hosted by the conservative Christian group Family Research Council: "We have a right to expect the government to fulfill its divinely ordained mandate to punish those who break the laws and reward those who do not. Romans 13. We also have a divine mandate to act redemptively and compassionately toward those who are in need."

Not all Christian groups take the middle ground however, as shown by the following statement made by Michele Combs, director of communications for the Christian Coalition of America, "We believe that immigrants like everybody else should respect the laws and the laws are tighter security."

On the other side is the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops who believe, "The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected... Often they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment from enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary."

Perspectives on Immigration

In any conversation about immigration, whether legal or illegal, it is likely that at least a few of the following topics will come up. What follows is an exploration of each topic from a statistical, social and biblical point of view.

Jobs & The Economy

Many immigrants who move countries are seeking a better-paying job than one they could get in his or her own country. However, better paid doesn't necessarily mean a better job, and many immigrants will take agricultural or factory jobs to earn an income. This often means that immigrant labor can actually complement a native workforce rather than replace it.

In America, tougher immigration laws in some states have forced farmers to look to Americans to do the work previously done by immigrants. "Many Americans simply don't want the backbreaking, low-paying jobs immigrants are willing to take," potato farmer Keith Smith told Associated Press. "Most show up late, work slower than seasoned farm hands and are ready to call it a day after lunch or by midafternoon. Some quit after a single day."

The British economy shows a similar trend with Britons taking only 13% of 400,000 newly created jobs in 2011, with the balance going to immigrants. Frank Field, the former Labor minister of the UK advising on this situation believes unemployed British citizens are refusing jobs that they believe "are only fit for immigrants."

A study by the National Foundation for American Policy found that highly skilled immigrants have a positive impact on job creation. A recent study found that for every immigrant who is hired on a "specialty occupation" visa, five new jobs are created. An example of this in America reveals that companies begun by Chinese and Indian immigrants in Silicon Valley, grossed more than \$19.5 billion in sales and created nearly 73,000 jobs in the year 2000.

Research by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia reveals that finding a job as an immigrant isn't always easy, "In Europe, 28% of foreigners between the ages of 25 and 49 are unable to find work, with unemployment rates as high as 35% for Turks and Pakistanis and 60% for recent immigrant groups such as Somalis."

This picture of life as an immigrant either being one of plenty or one of being forgotten and overlooked is seen in the Bible. Immigrants such as Joseph rose to prominence in Egypt after serving time as a domestic worker, and Moses was raised in a palace (Exodus 1-2). Daniel served several kings with distinction (see the book of Daniel in the Bible). Then there is Esther who

became queen of the Persian Empire (see the book of Esther in the Bible) and Nehemiah who was cupbearer to the Persian king, Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11).

However, even in the Bible, foreigners who rose to prominence were often stigmatized and ridiculed. Moses fled the palace in fear of his life (Exodus 2) and Daniel was punished for his faith and mocked in public (Daniel 5-6).

Taxes & Social Services

In the 2005 United States Economic Report of the President it was noted that, "more than half of all undocumented immigrants are believed to be working 'on the books'... [and]... contribute to the tax rolls but

are ineligible for almost all Federal public assistance programs and most major Federal-state programs." According to the report, undocumented immigrants also "contribute money to public coffers by paying sales and property taxes (the latter are implicit in apartment rentals)."

All documented or undocumented immigrants pay taxes, whether income, property, sales, or other, despite the fact that in most cases immigrants can't benefit from federal and state local assistance programs. In fact, a survey by the Immigration Policy Centre found that in over 25 states in America immigrants contribute more to state and local coffers than they take out.

In America, undocumented residents are not eligible for most welfare benefits including: food stamps, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid (except for emergency services), Medicare

All documented or undocumented immigrants pay taxes, whether income, property, sales, or other, despite the fact that in most cases immigrants can't benefit from federal and state local assistance programs.

“Premium Free” Part A, and public housing and Section 8 programs. Most countries with high numbers of immigrants only allow non-citizens to qualify for access to emergency health care (as mandated by law) and public elementary and secondary schooling for their children (if this is mandated by law).

In Matthew 2, we discover that Jesus was familiar with the life of an immigrant and a refugee—his family having been forced to flee to Egypt. While Jesus never tackles the subject of how to care for immigrants directly, we can draw on some of his teachings to create a model for our response.

In Luke 10:25 -37, we encounter Jesus having a conversation with a man who thought he knew it all. After hearing Jesus say he must love his neighbor the same way he loved himself, he followed up with this question, “Who is my neighbor?” In response, Jesus told him the story of a foreigner who was the only one to stop and help a wounded man.

Throughout Jesus’ teaching we find him reaching out to the people who others classified as not worthy and redefining who we think our neighbors are and how we should treat them.

Weighing in on this issue, pastor Dean Cothill from Lorraine Methodist Church in Port Elizabeth, South Africa says, “I do think that I can never say that anything is “wrong” unless I am willing to be part of the solution. Maybe we need to respond the same way we do to drunk people at a bar. Maybe instead of laughing, we offer people a ride to get home safe. Maybe churches need to help with the paperwork or speak up for those who can’t speak for themselves.”

The question can arise why don’t more undocumented immigrants work towards becoming documented? The answer is complicated. Different countries have different requirements regarding what it takes to become legal. For example, The Indiana Bar Foundation advises that in the US to become a legal resident you either need a close relative who is a citizen to sponsor you, be in a profession or trade in which there are not enough American workers or face danger or persecution in your own country. In addition, an application to legalize may be turned down if you’ve been in the United States for more than 180 days. Legal fees to get everything processed can cost in the region of USD\$5000 which is way out of reach for the average illegal resident in the US.

Assimilation

Moving to a new country and fitting in is no easy task for the legal or illegal immigrant. Matthew Soerens, World Relief Immigration Counselor and co-author with Jenny Hwang of *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, & Truth in the Immigration Debate* says, “Refugees and other immigrants face many unique challenges: language confusion, cultural barriers, the haunting memories of the circumstances that led them away from their country of origin, and very often separation from family members left behind.”

In a nutshell, they experience culture shock and it can take awhile for them to fully integrate into the new country and culture. In almost all countries and cultures, immigrant integration takes more than one generation, sometimes two. There are two key factors that drive assimilation: learning the language of the country and the education and upward mobility of the immigrants children.

In the United States within ten years of arrival, more than 75% of immigrants speak English well. Amongst Latino immigrants unable to speak English on arrival in America 88% of the second generation of US born children are reported to speak English fluently.. In addition, these immigrants believe that in order to succeed in America and avoid discrimination they need to learn English. However, many immigrants find access to classes that teach the official languages of the new country to be difficult or too expensive to access.

Some countries put a great emphasis on basic language proficiency simply to qualify for immigration status. Canadian Immigration Minister Jason Kenney says, “You can’t succeed in a society if you don’t have the capacity to communicate in it. And it’s unfair, I think, to newcomers to make them believe otherwise.”

In the Bible we find a whole range of examples of immigrants who assimilated to a greater or lesser degree. These stories remind us that immigration is a very personal journey. Each person incorporates a new culture, tongue and experiences differently and each immigrant receives different reactions for their attempts.

At the one end of the spectrum there is Ezra, who does not want to make a home in Persia, because his hope is to return to Jerusalem and re-establish a life there. Then there is Nehemiah who remains informed about the situation back in his ancestral

There is a common belief that most immigrants enter countries illegally. However, in the United States at least, almost half of all undocumented immigrants entered the United States on temporary visas - either as tourists, students, or temporary workers - and only became undocumented when they didn't leave the country.


land (Nehemiah 1) but seizes the opportunity, with his employers support, to leave Persia for a time to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. At the other end of the spectrum is Joseph who adopted the Egyptian culture so completely that his brothers do not recognize him when they meet him (Genesis 42).

Crime

There is a common belief that most immigrants enter countries illegally. However, in the United States at least, almost half of all undocumented immigrants entered the United States on temporary visas—either as tourists, students, or temporary workers—and only became undocumented when they didn't leave the country. Research by the Pew Hispanic Center, reveals that one third of all immigrants are undocumented, one third have some form of legal status and one third are now legal citizens. This applies to immigrants from Latin America as well as others.

Another common belief is that immigrants increase the crime in an area. In a 2000 report prepared for the U.S. Department of Justice, it was stated that immigrants maintain low crime rates even when faced with adverse social conditions such as low income and low levels of education. Further research suggests that immigrant communities do not increase the crime rate and that newly arriving immigrants tend to commit fewer crimes than native born Americans. In fact, according to one study by the National Bureau of Economic Research newly arrived immigrants are particularly unlikely to be involved in crime. On the other hand, the simple fact that immigrants are illegally in the country is a crime in itself.

The Bible verse most often used to address the issue of legality and immigrants is Romans 13:1-7. This verse clearly calls for submission to government authorities. Dr. M. Daniel Carroll R. author of *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* puts this passage into context, "Christians should recognize that their agenda is set forth in chapter 12 of Romans, where it says that believers are not to be molded by the "pattern of this world" (12:2). Their lives should be characterized by service and compassion—even toward enemies (12:3-21)! The authorities, however, have a different purpose and way of doing things (Romans 13). While Christians are called to respect the government, this does not mean agreeing with everything that it might legislate or do."

Whether you agree or disagree with government policies, there are a number of ways that Christians can make their voices heard on subjects like immigration. You can do this through voting, joining or establishing organizations that defend others and their points of views or lobby for changes and action in a particular area. Two helpful resources for those interested in immigration issues can be found on faithandimmigration.org and welcometheimmigrant.org. 

Join the Conversation! What do you think? We want to hear from you. Post your thoughts and ideas about immigration at www.newidentitymagazine.com or on our Facebook page.

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Who are you in Christ?

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Forgiving Failure

Lessons in Abandoning the All-Too-Well-Behaved Lifestyle.

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SALLY BLOTZER

Sally is a Biola graduate, receiving her BFA in Writing in 2012. She works part-time at Rock Harbor church and is a full-time foster mom to three wonderful boys. Her weekends consist of football games, baseball games, tantrums, timeouts, and tickle-fights. Sally is an activist and advocate for orphans and victims of trafficking, and has a deep love for God's word and people.

I love to have everything set up perfectly before beginning a project. Whether it is painting, writing, studying, or even reading a good book, I like to feel equipped and prepared, I like to have my house clean and my space and mind to be clutter free. I want the perfect ambiance, the perfect music playing, the perfect room scent occupying my space; and I like to feel accomplished in something before I sit down to tackle a bigger task or embrace something enjoyable. And this is how my walk with God often looks as well.

There are many things that could influence my time with him, both physical and spiritual. I need my coffee at my right hand, my perfect pen in reach, my journal, book, and Bible neatly stacked, waiting to be opened, and I need to feel like I am ready to be in right relationship with the one who created me. I need to feel like I have had a “good” day, with no yelling at my kids, with no lazy refusals at doing all the dishes, with no bitter glares at the person driving too slowly in front of me on the way to the market. And this is what it boils down to...this is what it all boils down to: I need to feel worthy. I need to believe in my heart that I am wanted, that I am desirable, and without baggage. *I need to feel good enough.*

And so, I sit at my kitchen table, with my favorite mug in one hand, and my favorite pen in the other, and I stack my books, Bible, and journal so neatly at my center. And I stare...I stare and fidget with the alignment of the stack because I realize that I don't really know where to begin. I stare because I am nervous to waste this all-too-precious time by reading something that will not hit my core, evoking me to change and bringing me to new depths in my relationship with God and others. I get so wrapped up in my fear of wasting this time and letting both myself and God down, that I forget the truth of the matter: I will not let him down. *He* is the one calling me to this time, and yet I waste it on my perception of what it is *supposed* to look like, rather than just accepting the truth that *I am accepted.*

And I sit with my brow furrowed and my mind believing the lies of God's disappointment and frustration towards me.

When will we ever experience the freedom to just sit with God? It has been given to us. Jesus tells his audience that who the Son sets free is free indeed [John 8:36]; yet we confine ourselves to the yoke of slavery shaped like perfectionism.

But what about grace? Can it ever just be enough? God has made it clear in his Word that, indeed, grace is enough. But in light of our shortcomings, and the world's notice of failures, we so easily get whisked away with the feeling that God must be looking at us disapprovingly. Some respond by simply walking away from God, or walking away from trying at all to please him. Others, like myself, walk too far in the other direction. We walk in desperation to earn the approval, doing as much good as we can, and avoiding all bad, for the sake of false-assurance that he won't forget us.

But what if it is our falling short that can lead us deeper into God's embrace? As I have been placed in positions that

are uncomfortable and times that are trying, I have noticed my exhaustion in trying to attain the “good child” persona. Let me repeat that: *I am exhausted.* And, what God has taught me in my failure to myself and my own expectations is that something very beautiful happens there. The failure is painful. Nobody wants to let themselves down, but at the end, I am reminded of the need I have for God and his grace. It is in perfectionism and attaining my own expectations on myself that I lose sight of my need for grace that flows incessantly.

When I was a kid, my friends and I would throw our bodies loose into oncoming waves. We would get thrashed, not knowing which way was up and which way was down. My knees and face would get scraped with sand as my body toppled over itself, and then, when I would begin to believe I drowned myself, I would reach the shoreline. That first breath was like heaven; suddenly fresh air filled my nostrils and lungs, and the sun above never seemed so bright. Those waves are much like the trials of life. Before we are able to get off our knees, another lie hits from behind, and then another hard circumstance, and another let-down, until we are unable to regain our strength; so we give up, and finally let our bodies loosely go with what has been thrown at us. When we feel we've reached the end of our ropes, and stop trying to save ourselves from the raging seas, that all-too-necessary fresh air called grace captures us, and delivers us from the tumbling waters. And the brightness of the sun captures us, and refreshes us, and renews us; so we regain our strength, and walk.

*I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore,
Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more,
But the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry,
From the waters lifted me, now safe am I.*

--James Rowe

So where do good deeds fit into all this talk of abandoning the “good” life? For the sake of accepting grace, does that mean we are to live as if we never heard the good news of Christ at all? No! We are not told to take the grace we receive for granted, but rather live gratefully under the gift we have received! The good things we do and desire to do are to be outpourings of a redeemed and grateful heart. Barbara Hughes, author of *Disciplines*

I am reminded of all the times I failed myself, my boy, and my God; times I lost my temper and patience, and times where I didn't want to watch Dora the Explorer for the eighth time in a row.

of a Godly Woman, tells her readers that, “Good deeds are the redeemed heart’s response of gratitude for the gift of God’s grace.” It seems impossible to be freed of the need to earn the love, grace, tenderness, mercy, and favor that define the goodness of God. The wonderful and heartbreaking news is, however, that no matter how hard we work, God’s love will not increase towards us. God’s love will never be severed from us, and his love will never grow deeper. Our experience of his love will, however, grow deeper, as we attempt to sail across the oceans of his grace. As we begin to understand his never-ending favor upon us, we will begin to see an outpouring and desire to do good things. We will seek to please God for the sheer enjoyment of displaying gratitude and pleasing our Father rather than to attain an already received reward. We are trained from our youth to do good and earn reward. Do bad, and earn discipline. But, according to Jesus, the well of grace will never run dry, and “...whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again...” (John 14:14).

In my own life, I have noticed when I am seeking a pat on the back for my good deeds. Sure, I can buy that homeless person a sandwich, and feel good about myself, and feed into the belief that God loves me more when I do good. However, when my actions are rooted in the belief that I am absolutely accepted and unconditionally loved by God, the good works I do are an outpouring of thanksgiving. There is a beautiful picture of this in Luke 7:36-50. Jesus is invited into a religious man’s home for a celebration. A woman, described as a “sinful woman,” enters the home and weeps over Jesus in adoration, offering her precious ointment to anoint him. The Pharisee judges her actions and Jesus’ acceptance of the gift. Jesus knew the Pharisee’s response and told him a tale of two men in debt, one much deeper than the other. He goes on to teach Simon (the Pharisee) that this woman’s sins “...which are many, are forgiven—for she has loved much. But he who is forgiven little loves little” (verse 47). She understood her deep need of grace, and no amount of good works could “fix” her. She understood the weight of God’s full acceptance and love, and she lavished in it. How often we confuse God for a person with limited love, conditional grace, and a furrowed look of disappointment towards us? We often come to Jesus with this response—*how is it that You, a God so Holy, could look upon me, a [you fill in the blank], with favor?*


When I lay my three-year-old down to sleep, as his little hands grab my face and ask for a lullaby, pictures of the day flash

through my mind. I am reminded of all the times I failed myself, my boy, and my God; times I lost my temper and patience, and times where I didn’t want to watch Dora the Explorer for the eighth time in a row. As I lay him down in his bed, I pray forgiveness and repentance, and I simply have to believe in the mercy that is new with every sunrise. I am often tempted to make promises of big change and attempts to deliver myself from my weaknesses... I attempt to make promises of changes that only God can do in me. And then, I wake up the next morning, and fail myself; again, I lose my patience; again, my fuse is too short; again, I crawl into the cave

of shame and hide from God, because I want to be perfect before entering his presence.

And this is completely contradictory to the message of grace we receive and preach. Paul tells the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that, “... if anyone is in Christ, a new creation...” and we are told in Hebrews that we can “... draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22). The nights where my head rests on my pillow and my heart rests in God are the nights that I accept my shortcomings, and my inability to change them without

the grace promised me through Jesus’ death and resurrection. I do not need to make up for the areas I have failed before feeling the acceptance and love of God. His approval can never be earned, it’s already been given to me through his Son, Jesus, and, like falling rain, can never be taken back.

The presence of my sin reminds me of my great need for grace, and good works are the outpouring of a grateful heart; being a good child is not a means of earning the favor of God. In fact, the good deeds we do are given to us by the power of God: “for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand...” (Ephesians 2:10). The goodness we long to display is a response to the redemption we have received. We will love much, for we have been forgiven much (Luke 7:47), we will walk in the freedom that has been given to us, because “whom the son sets free is free indeed,” and we will begin to understand that the presence of good deeds can never overcompensate enough for the presence of our sin. No deed is good enough to outweigh the daily shortcomings we suffice to. And no perfect life can ever match the deep love of God. As we learn to believe that no sin can snatch us out of God’s hand, we must also claim the truth that no good behavior could ever strengthen his embrace. 

How often we confuse God for a person with limited love, conditional grace, and a furrowed look of disappointment towards us? We often come to Jesus with this response—how is it that You, a God so Holy, could look upon me, a [you fill in the blank], with favor?

The Sight Unseen

*Our battle between the realities of the
natural and supernatural.*

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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.

I find myself walking into a smoker-friendly room at a Motel 6 we rented for the night. Too far to drive home, my mother forgets to request a non-smoking room for her asthmatic son. Problems? Not at first. I simply got past the smell until I was no longer aware of it.

But 3:00 found itself waking me to a fatal situation never experienced before or since. I was experiencing an asthma attack while simultaneously hyperventilating, preventing me from taking the one thing that would alleviate the problem: my inhaler. My mother called 911 as I began to lose air and began to feel life slip from me. Throwing my inhaler against the wall in frustration of its inability to help me now, I resign to the fact that death is at my door. The room begins to black out as I remember falling to the ground. Black. Nothingness. Darkness. And then finally I wake. I'm sitting on my bed with my mother praying over me while her hands are on my shoulders. What could only be described as two hands gripping my lungs prohibiting air from coming in, was suddenly lifted and I could breathe as freely as I am while writing this very story. Now any skeptic could find some way to reason off the miracle I had experienced, *but anyone in a life or death situation will always see a life-saving miracle differently than the person looking in.* It was this very night I knew I needed no further evidence to understand my God was real and the power of prayer was near tangible. I could tell you I knew it was a spiritual attack on my life... but would you believe me? Even if you didn't, would it change the fact that the problem was solved by prayer before any emergency crew got there? That night I knew I would never again question God, or prayer again.

The topic of spiritual warfare has always seemed to be a sticky one. With such a vast majority of Americans finding it to be a joke or hoax, many people simply reason the idea of a spiritual realm or Satan and demons away. But nonetheless, the question still remains constant: do angels and demons really exist? Is there such a thing as an unseen spirit realm where angels and demons actually are battling over good and evil? Who and what are these creatures? Does it affect us and what really is "spiritual warfare?" Is there such a thing as spiritual attack, and if so what is it?

According to the Bible, angels and demons exist. If we refer to Scripture to look at an understanding for us in our present age, nowhere does it say that neither angels nor demons ever ceased to

exist, leaving us with a strong scriptural argument that, at least in the Christian sense, they are still among us today.

About 76-80% of Americans identify themselves as Christians. That's a startling number of people who identify themselves with a religion that most certainly believes in a spiritual realm. Almost more startling is the fact that the vast American public, with very little knowledge or acceptance to the idea of a spirit realm, are unaware of it. In my years of mission work across three different continents, I've found that America and Western Europe literally remain the exception with regards to acceptance of belief in a spiritual realm. In many third world countries, people who have never heard the gospel still believed in a spirit realm long before Christian missionaries showed up on the scene. This makes evangelism even easier in many aspects outside of the U.S. because more people are willing to believe in an invisible God that changes lives. It seems in America we've made it much more of something fake, something of a joke, or something reserved to Hollywood horror or fantasy films. This couldn't be further from the truth.

Many Christians today question whether Satan and the demonic realm are real. But, even as recently as 1972, Pope Paul VI, restating the Catholic belief and understanding of scripture, wrote:

"It is contrary to the teaching of the Bible and the Church to refuse to recognize the existence of such a reality... or to explain it as a pseudo reality, a conceptual fanciful personification of the unknown causes of our misfortunes... That it is not a question of one devil, but of many, is indicated by various passages in the Gospels of Luke 11:19-20; Mark 5:9. But the principal one is Satan, which means adversary, the enemy; and with him many, all creatures of God, but fallen, because of their rebellion and damnation; a whole mysterious world, upset by an unhappy drama, of which we know very little..."

What shapes our belief in whether or not we believe angels and demons exist? There are two answers to that question: our experiences and scripture. It's hard to read through the Bible and not find a plethora of scripture involving Jesus confronting Satan and a whole realm of demons. Jesus' chief title in scripture is Savior or Redeemer, meaning of course that he actually saves us from something, from a real danger from something evil. The evils we see Jesus confront in scripture are sin, sickness, affliction by evil spirits, and death. 1 John 3:8 says, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." When Jesus teaches us to pray, he gives us the Lord's prayer in which he tells us to pray "deliver us from evil." When you read the New Testament, you see an enormous reference to evil spirits. You read many accounts about how they harm and attack people. The gospels tell general and specific stories of Jesus freeing people from demonic powers.

To list a few specific accounts:

The man in the synagogue tormented by an unclean spirit (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:31-37)

The blind and mute demoniac (Matthew 12:22-29; Mark 3:22-27; Luke 11:14-22)

The demonized Gerasene men (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)

The Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30)

The epileptic boy (Matthew 7:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43)

The woman with a spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:10-17)

The possessed mute (Matthew 9:32-34)

Further scripture tells us of the same: Acts 10:38, "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." Here we see scripture of Jesus freeing people from those "under the power of the devil." It's actually in Isaiah though, that we get a glimpse of the Satan story and where demons come from: Isaiah 14:13-14 "For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'" Satan sets his sights on the kingship of God and in the process is thrown down from Heaven along with all of the angels that partnered with him in his rebellion. Lucifer was one of three highest ranking angels in the heavens. Scripture's accounts suggest that a third of all of heaven's angels were thrown down with him. This is the root of where demons came from, having been expelled angels from heaven.

Though scriptures overflow with depictions of the demonic realm left and right, many theologians and preachers profess a profound skepticism as to whether it actually exists and accounts of the "demonically oppressed" can be taken credibly. Human accounts aside though, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 says, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." As well, Ephesians 6: 10-12 says, "Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

First question: if there was no such thing as demons or an unseen spiritual realm, why is scripture showing us how to fight against it and says that it is the very thing that we war against? Though some may not read this passage in a literalistic sense (and rather demythologize and interpret it more metaphorically without having to buy into the reality of things like demons,) my personal belief is that this scripture conveys out that our struggle isn't against each other as humans but it's against the powers of the unseen realm. Furthermore, as we read in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 "...bringing every thought captive to Christ," we can understand that Satan's strategy is to introduce his thoughts and ideas into our minds and deceive us into believing they are ours. Have you ever been driving and

thought to yourself, "I'd like to run my car off this road?" Many people have had that thought. It stands to make sense our thoughts don't have to necessarily be our own, especially if we're directed in scripture to take thoughts captive. I would propose that this verse isn't designated solely to sinful thoughts on our own behalf.

So where does all of this information leave us? It leaves us with a mandate to be aware of the unseen around us. When Christ left, he broke the curse of sin on the earth and took the authority away from Satan. It says in Colossians 2:15 that "He....disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." He gave us his authority to rule and reign in him on the earth. It says in scripture that you are seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6).

Your identity as a child of God and your authority over spiritual powers are not things you are receiving or will receive sometime in the future, you have them right now. The only power Satan has over us is to get us to agree and partner with the lies he feeds us, once we come into agreement with the lie being spoken over us, he then has power in our lives. He has no power outside of what we give him in our lives. We fight better and harder when we realize our identity and authority in Christ. Our only authority is in Christ. How do we fight? By exercising our authority and praying. In Luke 10:17, Jesus' followers "returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name'" The word "subject" in the Greek is *hupotasso* and one use of the word is as a military term meaning "to arrange under." It pictures a group of soldiers snapping to attention and following precisely the orders of their commanding officer. This is the power we carry as believers!

The next question then is what many still wonder: Does the spirit realm affect us? What we do know is that the spirit realm affected people in the time of scripture as we see encounters with various kinds of angels and demons. There are countless stories where angels appear to, or help those in need. There are various accounts (many posted above) where demons have come to attack and oppress. Are there still reports of people who have reported

seeing angels or demons? The answer is overwhelmingly yes, as our current-day culture has even created television shows around both entities. Why is it possible to believe the "then and there" accounts of the word of God but not believe they still occur today? Scripture states Satan's plan of attack and it's three aspects include stealing, killing, and destroying. All three of these aspects can be broken down into countless ways in which we see a broken world suffering. Poverty,

dysfunctional families, addictions, murders, hatred, or strongholds are just a few examples of what could be categorized into "steal, kill, and destroy" territory. If Satan was clever enough to convince a third of the angels of heaven to join him, he's clever enough to blind a money-thirsty, self-independent, performance and competition driven culture to believe that much of what we do is actually worth something. We've already bought into the American dream, the

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same dream we work our whole lives to achieve and must leave behind when we're gone anyway.

There are realms around us co-existing at the same time. Even string-theorists in science now say they have evidence to prove there are as many as eleven realms! As far as Christians are concerned the word of God teaches that our battle is against "the unseen forces" all around us. What does that tell us? The attack of the enemy has continued to come without us seeing it! We live in the natural realm, however the natural realm co-exists with the spiritual realm around us. So we've established biblically that the spirit realm can and does affect us. One way is by what Christians call "spiritual attack," meaning simply that the demonic realm has once again done the will of their master (Satan) to bring destruction or death in some way.

The spirit realm is two-fold: angels and demons, Jesus or Satan, goodness or sin. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus illustrates his supernatural way into our hearts, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with me." The way to accept Jesus is to open your heart and let him in. Conversely, it's possible to do the same to the enemy. If we open doors that Satan or his demons are standing at, we give them permission to come in and torment us. However, many times we don't give permission and the enemy will come at us. "Spiritual attack" can look like sickness, mood swings, or a propensity to lust, hate or speak negatively towards someone. It might even look like your thought-life taking a mind of its own. That's because Paul instructs us to take our thoughts captive. Now if everything we thought in our mind was our own, why would we need to take it captive? Thoughts are a well-known place of spiritual attack for the enemy. I believe that the vast majority of the things that go on in our lives are affected in or by the spirit realm. That's not to say everything that goes wrong is because of the enemy, but we must be aware of our influence in the spirit realm and aware of its effect on us. At the same time we must be Christians that have a gospel of a big God and a little devil, not the other way around.

Many people see the enemy as being so powerful and involved in our lives as a quiet and defenseless God sits by and lets us take the bullets so to speak. But this isn't biblically accurate! When Jesus left, he left the authority of the earth in our hands. He took the power away from Satan and reversed the curse of sin on us. That means any power that Satan had was taken away and given to us. Where does that leave Satan to attack our lives? It leaves him with one weapon: agreement. Since he has no power, the only power he obtains is the power we give him. We give him this power by agreeing with a lie he feeds us. For example, if I believe the lie I don't have the authority of Christ given to me through the cross, I

will believe that I am powerless. If Satan can get me to agree that I have no power, he has just regained control over my life. If I believe, however, that I can stand against him and have been equipped to do so, and choose not to partner with the lie to the contrary, he gains no power. His job has been downsized to simply go around and get people to agree with his lies so he can speak more false truth to us.

The good news? We can affect the spirit realm as much as it affects us. In James 3:9-10 it speaks of those unaware of the authority they carry as Christians when it says, "With it we bless our God and Father, with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren these things ought not to be so." James is referring to a person who is careless and does not understand that words powerfully affect the people and situations of life. Proverbs 18:21, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." We carry the power to speak blessing and life into anything. We also carry the ability to curse or speak death over anything as Jesus did when he rebuked the tree not

producing fruit in season. It shriveled and died. Our words are meant to bring life and not provide a target for the enemy to proceed. As well, our words can also be used to stand against the attack of the enemy (Eph. 6.)

The unseen is simply that: unseen. But as we know, many things that are unseen remain very real. The idea of love, emotions, or the wind still remain unseen. Why do we believe in these things? Because we can feel them. But unseen realms can be felt as well. James 1:17 tells

us, "every good and perfect thing comes from above." That means accepted yet unseen ideas such as love, unity, and peace come from heaven. Next time you think about logically waving the spiritual realm away, ask yourself to reconsider. If you can see the effects of these things coming from the spirit realm, chances are you've been affected by things in the spirit realm negatively as well.

I believe "unseen doesn't mean unreal," and our words carry more weight than we may ever know. We are divine humans that carry both a supernatural spirit and a humanly body. We are joint citizens of both heaven and earth that God partners with to release his will on earth as it "is in heaven." If we believe in heaven (the ultimate unseen reality), believing it here on earth should be a piece of cake.



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THE 4TH commandment

Remember the sabbath day, for it is holy.

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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.

At the age of fifteen, I received a work permit and began applying for various part-time jobs in the small city where I lived. With every potential opportunity, I could taste freedom. There was one section, however, on each job application that seemed to mock me. “Are you available on weekends?” the form asked. Since I had grown up with a strong sense of commitment to church as a part of my Christian faith, I had a hard time reconciling a job that would schedule me to work on Sunday, the day I set aside to attend church with my family. Although I was flat out turned down from some

opportunities for that reason alone, I made a decision that day to take the fourth commandment seriously and apply it to my life the best way I could.

Remember the sabbath day, for it is holy. The laws that Moses brought down the mountain in Exodus chapter 20, offered a collection of commandments that promised the people of Israel, a newly formed nation, a prosperous and sound future. The fourth commandment describes a way of living life. The verses following the direct command read *six days you will serve, and do all your work. But the seventh day is the sabbath for Yahweh, your God; you will not do any work, you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the stranger who is within your gates. For in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested the seventh day; and so Yahweh blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.* The sabbath day was a celebration of rest, of appreciation. A day is not a long time to stop and admire the work of the week, but it is sufficient as a regular practice to recognize your work and thank your friends and family for serving to provide for your community. And, after all, if God stopped to reflect on work completed, shouldn't God's people also follow?

The ancient people who were traveling in the desert with Moses, knew what it was to work. They had been slaves to a great power who considered himself a supreme god, the Pharaoh of Egypt. Now they were traversing across the desert, following Moses, who was following the God who had saved them. The nation of Israel knew only one kind of life, to labor under a greater power. But the commandments presented to them offered a new way of life that prioritized a thriving community. Every seventh day, the people would put aside all their work, for themselves and for others, so that they would rest. In this time, they would not have, as we often do, remained in secluded homes, flipping on the television or curling up with a good book. A day of rest meant another day outside the family tent, the sun shining brightly and multiple generations of family and friends crowded around. On the sabbath day, when no


one worked, the people would have to interact socially. And, as they followed God's instruction for their life, they would create a sense of community in their interactions. They would play and tell stories and enjoy the leisure of the day with each other. Then, on the next day, they would work hard, toiling again for six days until the sabbath day came and gave them the opportunity to interact and rest with their family and friends.

In today's world, we understand the importance of rest and leisure. We know that cultures who have made time for leisure have advanced technologically and socially. There are movements to slow down the daily grind of full time work and call on people

to rest. The need for rest is not a new or modern development. Ancient traditions have long preached the dangers of slaving all hours of all days, and this is not news to Christians.

Fifty years ago, you might have walked into a small town on Sunday and found no business open, except a church where Christians gathered to celebrate the sabbath day. The scene: quiet streets, very few cars, perhaps sounds of laughter and camaraderie coming from a backyard or a church patio. Now Christians have many more options: one may participate in a 'sabbath day' ceremony simply by putting on a pair of headphones and downloading a sermon from iTunes. Gigantic churches stream sermons via Internet to cover large distances. You can send offerings online and squeeze a 'sabbath' into your work week. But this misses the intention of God's commandment and compromises the benefit. Instead, we should practice community. To celebrate the sabbath day is more than obliging oneself to fit in a Christian activity. To celebrate the sabbath day is to stop—pause and take inventory of what we have accomplished, of what we

have created, and to notice the people around us.

I urge you to find a church that is committed to leisure, restful communion with others who believe like you. It is a difficult task, when towns no longer shut down for a sabbath day. But, enhance the community of believers by encouraging this kind of sabbath day, a time of rest together. 

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JARGON COUNTING THE COST

Dictionary of Christian Jargon for the Ordinary Person

While in a church context you may hear people use the phrase “count the cost.” It is usually said as counsel before someone is making a decision. It is usually applied to a major undertaking such as a business opportunity or even marriage. When Jesus used it he was actually referring to a major undertaking: a life of following him. Living a life of discipleship. Counting the cost does not solely refer to counting the monetary cost. Jesus was speaking of a different kind of cost.

When I hear the phrase “count the cost” I always think I have to give up something and that does not appeal to me. Not at all. While it does mean that I have to assess what I have to give up, it also means that I must assess what I have to gain. Counting the cost means assessing what I am willing to give up in order to gain everything a life with Christ has to offer. Jesus pointed to this in his parables of the pearl of great price and the treasure in the field. The worker bought the land just so he could get the treasure in the field (Matthew 13:44). The connoisseur of fine pearls who found a pearl of great value and sold all that he had in order to buy it (Matthew 13:45-46).

Counting the cost is not just about giving up this vice or that comfort. Counting the cost when it refers to a life of discipleship with Jesus, means assessing whether giving away your whole life in order to follow Jesus is worth it. It is long term thinking concerning whether you are willing to give up everything you have to make Jesus the leader and absolute authority in your life. What Jesus is admonishing in the passage about counting the cost may seem like a stern warning but when you think about it, counting the cost is actually a no-brainer invitation. It is a no-brainer to give away everything you have for a newly discovered treasure. It is a no-brainer to sell everything you have for a pearl worth far more than everything you have. Jesus lets us know it is not easy just like building a tower or going to war. It's not easy but when you compare the cost of following Christ to the rewards of a life following him....it's a no-brainer. —*Ramon Mayo*

Nature vs. Nurture

*Eric Lee tackles the age old debate from a
Biblical perspective.*



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-wwwericleeblog.blogspot.com or email him at elee64@gmail.com.



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Nature versus nurture It's one of the oldest debates in history. Are we just born with a set personality, intelligence, and tendencies or does our environment around us and the way we are raised shape all of that?

In the Genes?

For example, do we inherit most of our personality, intelligence, and disposition from our parents' genes? If so, that would mean that we can do little to change who we are for the most part.

To some, that is not an appealing idea. Especially when you end up with traits you don't like.

There are certain things like your type of hair (straight or curly), eye color, nose shape, etc. that are definitely genetic.

According to psychologist David Meyers, "The environment shared by a family's children has no discernible impact on their personalities."

At the same time, Meyers states that, "There are few things that are not so strongly tied to genetics. Among those are "attitudes, values, manners, faith, and politics."

One prime example that may support the nature idea is

the Minnesota Twin Study. This study, started in 1983, is conducted by the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities. The purpose of the study was to compile a registry of all twins born in Minnesota from 1936-1955 for psychological observation. Just recently, the registry added the years 1961-1964. One case involved a pair of twins (both named Jim) who were separated at four weeks and then reunited at age 39. It was found that both smoked the same brand of cigarettes, vacationed in the same area, and both named their dogs Toy.

In the Minnesota study, twins reared apart were analyzed to determine how similar they really were. Traits such as health, cognition, personality, happiness, career, politics, religion, and sex were measured. Some of the traits were almost identical such as height, disposition, and traditionalism (beliefs, morals, or political views passed on from generation to generation).

Other factors were more controversial, such as intelligence. For example, the intelligence of the twins were almost identical. This flies in the face of those professionals that would say that practice helps determine intelligence more than genes.

Are We Chameleons?

I have some friends that believe that the environment their child grows up in is every bit as influential as nature in determining how their child will turn out.

My friend Nancy says,

"Nature, for me, is more about personality, giftings, etc...things that God has already ordained for each of us. Nurture is about our relational development based on our environment. Nurturing results in how children perceive the world, themselves, people, and God. And especially when we are infants, our environment is 100% controlled by our parents. I believe that the way I respond to my son Sawyer will greatly affect how he perceives himself, others, and God.

"For example, when Sawyer is crying because he wants attention...do I make an angry face and scold? Do I walk away and let him cry it out and self-soothe? Do I respond to his need and pick him up? The first response will most likely result in him subconsciously perceiving that it is not good to have needs, and that he will be punished if he has needs...a cause of deep shame. The second response can result in him perceiving that relationships are not the solution to pain. Studies have shown that one of the greatest reasons for addictions is because it is an individual's way of self-soothing...that they are unable to turn to real life people and relationships to meet valid needs. And lastly, the last response is that from which the attachment theory stems...that when children's needs are validated and responded to in a healthy, unshameful

manner, kids grow up to be secure and healthy independent and able to trust people, and ultimately, trust God. Of course, we all respond differently to our kids at different times. But if we respond a certain way hundreds of times, that specific message becomes ingrained in our kids. For me, I feel the weight of responsibility from God to steward this gift of being a parent. It is my responsibility to nurture him, ie. to respond to him in a way that would increase his chances of knowing and trusting God. Nature is his personality, things that trigger or give him joy, his strengths and weaknesses, things that I cannot control."

My other friend Hogan says that it's not so much whether its nature or nurture but if we raise our kids to follow God's commands such as obeying parents, loving others, and serving each other. That way, even if you disagree with your spouse's parenting style whether it be attachment or not, you at least have the foundation there.

Another friend of mine, Linda, has two boys ages ten and three. She also believes, as Nancy does, that it's a combination of nature and nurture. Linda also thinks that the environment plays a big part in how her boys, Ethan and Oli, turned out. She seems to think that her sons' true nature (i.e. personalities) came out as a result of her and her husband's nurturing. When her oldest boy, Ethan, was growing up, she gave him baby dolls to play with because she heard that it makes kids less violent if they nurture something. Ethan is a very sensitive and gentle boy. Oli, on the other hand, who has not played with dolls, is more aggressive and loud. Linda admits that she still thinks that their personalities come from her and her husband's genes but that their personalities manifested because of the nurturing home environment that they grew up in.

Sam, a father of a one and a half year old, says,

"My perspective is that it's both. I believe people are born with natural talents and gifts (i.e. - singing, leadership or athleticism), but it takes nurture to really develop those talents and gifts to the maximum potential. Even on the negative side, I've often heard it said people might be born with natural tendencies for anger, alcoholism, etc. but with proper nurture I think a lot of that can be controlled or neutralized. I believe the same about temperament. Biblically, God's intent was that we would be born with a perfect nature, yet due to Adam and Eve's original sin (see Genesis 3) we are predisposed to a sinful nature. God's intent was that we would be nurtured in perfect love, but human nurture, even one from good parents is imperfect because we are all sinners."

Another friend of mine, Stacy, truly has faith that people can change despite nature. She believes that transformation is possible with the nurturing of the Holy Spirit. Stacy says that she

"I believe people are born with natural talents and gifts, but it takes nurture to really develop those talents and gifts to the maximum potential."

was never a driven, go-getter type until she realized that God had a purpose for her.

She uses her oldest son Jacob as an example. Jacob is naturally competitive, but lacks drive, motivation and discipline. Stacy thinks it is both her and her husband's job to nurture those traits through discipline.

As far as herself, she is naturally outgoing and performance driven. Although for part of her younger life, she was left to guide herself. She went with the flow instead of being more goal oriented. Not until later, did she discover her identity in Christ and purpose and more of who God is, did she change and become more driven.

Joshua, a father of a four year-old boy and a three year-old girl, believes that nature does play a part in who we ultimately turn out to be. At the same time, things like manners and discipline are part of nurture.

What Does the Bible Say?

One Bible verse that seems to point towards nature is Psalm 139:13. It says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." This suggests that we are already "made" a certain way before we enter this world. Or is this just our physical bodies?

The Sin Factor

Originally, God created us to be without sin or to be inherently good (Genesis 1:26-31). That changed when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Since then, all of humankind has fallen short of God's standards.

What about the story of Abraham in Genesis 12? Abraham lies about Sarah being his wife. Later on, his son Isaac does the same thing regarding his wife Rebekah. In both cases, they lied and said that their wives were their sisters. Does this point to a common character flaw in both father and son? Maybe.

The Great Compromise

I think our job as Christians is to keep an open mind about the theory of nurture shaping who we become as much as nature does. If we aren't, then how can we truly believe in the message that Jesus came to save us and give us another way? If we don't accept nurture as part of the process of what makes us, then what hope is there for a world of people who are destined to sin?

Spitting Image

Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created him; male and female he created them." We are all made in God's image. What does this really mean though?

Some could argue that there are different aspects of this. Not just one aspect like physically, mentally, or spiritually.

Mentally we were made to be able to be rational and to be able to make choices. So by creating things ourselves, writing a book, or making mathematical calculations we are demonstrating that we are made in God's image.

Morally speaking, we were made to be morally perfect and innocent. Whenever we as people uphold the law, write new laws, or encourage those that display good behavior, we also affirm our likeness to God morality.

Socially, God created us to be in relationship with others. He even made woman so man wouldn't be alone. The next time you make a friend, hug someone, or go to church, you confirm yet another aspect of your likeness to God's image.

Teach Your Children Well

For example, Deuteronomy 6:4-7 says, "Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

A Good Mixture

I think when it comes down to it. We need to admit that it's both nature and nurture that makes us who we are. It's like asking, "What makes our country great?" or "What makes a party one to remember?" It's not just one thing. I like to think of it as a garden analogy. A seed can be planted but unless it is watered and gets good sunlight, it will not be a healthy, thriving tree or plant. Without water and light, it will just be a plant that grew up and then wilted and died.



A New Song

International violinist Gert Kumi shares how he transformed from a sickly oppressed boy to a man of God.

Gert Kumi performing a recital in Clifton, New Jersey.

LINDSEY A. FREDERICK

Lindsey A. Frederick is an editor in the Washington DC area and writes frequently about life, art and faith. You can follow her on Twitter @la_frederick or visit her online: www.wix.com/lindseyfrederick/writes

Hardship was a familiar song for Gert Kumi. The rasping, discordant tune spilled daily from the lips of his people. From 1944 to 1991 Albanians bowed under the weight of oppression.

Communism muted the peaceful, spirited refrains of liberty and justice. When religion was declared unconstitutional in 1967, Albania became the first and only Atheist country. But Gert shared something else with his people: the will to overcome.

In a small house in Albania's capital, Tirana, Gert lived with a huddle of immediate and extended family; nine in all. At age two he was diagnosed with sickle cell anemia. For several years daily blood transfusions were his only savior. By age five, doctors said he would not live. The following year, surgeons removed his disproportionately large spleen, saving his life and making his illness manageable. But Gert was still frail and restricted from many normal childhood activities. Among his favorite was making music.

As a boy, Gert liked to whistle the soundtrack of his favorite Indian hero movie, but his mother often shushed him. She feared his whistling would get them in trouble with the government. Listening to music and watching movies that were not Albanian were crimes worthy of severe punishment. Yet Gert could not be contained. Fascinated with his older sister's violin, Gert says he "would go into her room, lock the door, and start making incredible noises on her instrument. She would run to my mom and complain about me."

At just 8-years-old, Gert's musical aptitude proved undeniable. His school held a nationwide music audition, in which a relative at the school entered him, without his parent's knowledge. It didn't matter that Gert didn't have an instrument. He hummed, whistled, and clapped through the audition, surpassing 200 music students for first place entrance into the best music school in Albania. "That's how I started playing violin," says Gert. And he knew he would never stop.

By age 12, Gert won four consecutive national music competitions and played the most difficult violin concertos. He was 14 when he toured Europe as the concertmaster of his school chamber orchestra. "It fed my ego to have so much attention all over Europe," says Gert. His talent privileged him as one of the few Albanians allowed to leave the country. "Our passports belonged to the government because they were afraid of defectors," says Gert. Only country representatives traveled abroad, including government officials and the best athletes and musicians.

After several more trips under the supervision of Albanian security officers, Gert recognized the freedoms other countries enjoyed. Something within him began to shift. "Albania was poor, with a poor infrastructure," Gert says. "It was isolated with a very oppressive regime. That was enough difficulty to move." He entertained thoughts of defecting, but the punishment was too severe. Families of defectors often served 10 to 20 years in a labor camp.

In 1989 after a trip to Austria, Gert felt a deeper, soulful craving. "I discovered a hunger in me to learn more about God," he says. The only religion Gert knew was the remnant of his parent's Muslim traditions. "I didn't know how to fill the hunger,

so I got the Quran and read it hoping for answers." Every night he and his sister recited Arabic prayers before bed. "I had no clue what I was praying, but I felt very religious," says Gert. When he fell asleep before finishing his prayers, guilt nudged him awake the next morning to finish. When the Quran did not satisfy his strange hunger, he devoured every religious document available to him. But the questions, the curiosity, and the craving remained.

The year 1991 was important for Albania, politically and religiously. The fall of communism brought every kind of religious organization through its newly opened doors. "I remember walking home from school one day," says Gert. "In the city center was this huge banner." He stopped mid-stride at its message: God Loves Albania. This was big news to Gert. He says, "I grew up hearing God was dead. Religion was forbidden in Albania, so no one dared to do or say anything religious in public."

That summer, Christian missionaries held an evangelistic crusade in Tirana. And on a rainy afternoon in a soccer stadium, Gert heard the Gospel for the first time. He recalls, "It started raining and people started leaving. A guy with us prayed, 'Lord I want you to stop this rain so the people will stay and hear your message.'" Two minutes later the rain stopped. "That meant something to me," says Gert. He went home excited to read his

very own Albanian translation of the New Testament. He didn't know what he had been searching for until he found it in the Gospels. Several days later, without discussion or doubt, he accepted its message, and Christ as his Savior.

Over the next three years Gert felt a new stirring. He joined Tirana's first ever evangelical church and became a member of the worship team. "The Lord started to change my heart about using my music for his glory," says Gert. In 1998 he saw himself in a vision playing in front of medium-

sized crowds where people experienced physical and emotional restoration. For a musician used to Europe's prestigious concert halls and the adoration of the media and large crowds, this was stunning and humbling. He says, "I didn't know what to do with the vision, so I said, 'OK Lord, you're going to have to show me.'"

Twelve years, a full scholarship to the Juilliard School of Music, and many divine encounters later, Gert is living the vision. He has played in some of the most esteemed venues around the world, as well as classical music festivals, local churches, and private worship gatherings. Through his performances, God has orchestrated his own restorative symphonies.

In 2002, Gert visited Albanian acquaintances in Colorado Springs when they invited over friends from their church for a home worship session. "They turned to me and said, 'Play!'," says Gert, "Play what?" I asked. "Lead us in worship!" Gert played for the next hour and a half, during which he was drawn to play for one woman,

As a boy, Gert liked to whistle the soundtrack of his favorite Indian hero movie, but his mother often shushed him. Listening to music and watching movies that were not Albanian were crimes worthy of severe punishment.



*Gert Kumi. Photo by
Fadil Berisha.*

in particular, whom he'd never met. "She came to me afterward and said she was from Denver and the Lord told her to come to the meeting." The woman suffered from severe, chronic arthritis and reported relief from the pain while Gert played. Not knowing how to process this information, Gert stepped back and thanked her for sharing her story.

Gert had a similar encounter three years later. While living in Staten Island, New York, Gert played his violin for a mid-week worship mingle called "Lunch with the Lord." Every Wednesday at noon, people drifted in and out as their lunch hours permitted. "The prayer coordinator at the church had just been diagnosed with shingles," says Gert. Her doctor gave her medication along with a six month healing prognosis. In her desperation she came to "Lunch with the Lord," where Gert was directed, by the music minister, to play over her. Shortly afterward the woman reported her doctor gave her a clean bill of health. "She attributed the healing to the worship session and gave a public testimony," says Gert. "It was the first time the healing had been verified by a doctor."

Gert says he has seen the Lord use his music in other meaningful ways, not just when he plays in a worship context. He believes the Lord uses the sounds of his violin to reach deep into the hearts and minds of his listeners. And the many stories of relief and restoration as a result of his playing have testified to this. "I believe my violin is an instrument of praise and worship," says Gert.

From a sickly oppressed boy to a man of God, Gert is humbled and grateful for the work the Lord has done in his own life. "Here I am," he says, "this guy in the most isolated and oppressed communist country on the face of the earth. Yet God brought down an entire system so that I could know him and dedicate my violin to him. Isn't that amazing?"

Gert believes he has seen only a fraction of what God has in store for him. He lives every day to see lives transformed through his story and to share his new song, a sweet melody of redemption.



Ecclesia Hollywood meets in Los Angeles' historic Hollywood Pacific Theatre.



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.

where we gather

New sanctuaries in a modern age that challenge common convention.

Movie theaters. Bars. Night Clubs. Not exactly the venues that most would have in mind when considering where to hold a church service, but these locations have become increasingly popular worship places for modern day believers.

In recent months, I have attended various church services at such locations, including Ecclesia Hollywood, Mosaic Hollywood, and South Hills. Ecclesia Hollywood meets in Los Angeles' historic Hollywood Pacific Theatre. Until this last year, Mosaic Hollywood met in a bar in West Hollywood, but they are now meeting in a



The entrance to Ecclesia Hollywood.

A satellite campus of South Hills meets in Marquee 15, a small nightclub in Corona.



warehouse. A satellite campus of South Hills meets in Marquee 15, a small nightclub in Corona. All three churches are "churches with no walls," meaning that people of all religious affiliations and personal convictions are invited and welcomed. My experience at each church was very different, unique in its own way.

Entering Ecclesia for a Sunday morning service, I was immediately struck by the ornate interior of the historic theatre and the friendly greeters. This non-denominational church holds a traditional Sunday morning service of musical worship, prayer, Bible study, offering, and benediction, or final blessing. The morning I attended, the pastor spoke about trials and suffering, focusing on 1 Samuel 1:1-10 and describing Hannah's endurance in the face of infertility. The message was honest, as the pastor refused to shy away from the hard realities of God's truth that we so often try to overlook. Much of the musical worship consisted of contemporary hymns. Overall, this was a traditional church service; the only uncommon element was the location.

The obvious fact that this structure was not built specifically for religious purposes seems insignificant in light of the positive nourishment that it is enabling for God's kingdom. The believing members within the walls of this theatre have devoted their lives to being followers of Christ and being a light in downtown Los Angeles. The theatre is steeped in historical significance and, rather than being a source of theological debate, should be appreciated as adding to the beauty of the worship service.

My experience at Mosaic Hollywood was unique as well. The service was held in a warehouse and was primarily attended by people in their teens through thirties. The Sunday I attended here, they did not follow their usual order of worship; instead, they held a documentary screening followed by a question and answer session. The documentary explored questions of purpose and meaning, making the congregation consider what it means to be human. It invited them to explore the nature of humanity and ask questions that could eventually lead them to Jesus. This seemed like a good way to get nonbelievers thinking.

Nicole Taher, a young believer who attended Mosaic Hollywood, commented "There's so much that Mosaic can do for a new believer." The contemporary worship music combines with the relaxed environment to make for a comfortable and inviting worship experience. "As somebody who did not grow up in the church, Mosaic made sense," Taher explained. "If I had a nonbeliever friend, I would take him there to get him acquainted with church. It is a great transition into church." Based on the comments I have received from those who have attended Mosaic, it is a good place for those people who are starting to ask questions about faith and purpose. This church gets a necessary conversation started, but instead of explicitly proclaiming the cure to depravity, it encourages members to search and find the answer for themselves.

The third church I visited was a South Hills satellite campus, which meets at a night club in Corona called Marquee 15. When I attended, they were continuing through a series called *The Happily Never After*, which focused on manhood, womanhood, and romantic relationships. In this unorthodox blending of booze and

believers, brothers and sisters in the faith gathered for their daily bread on a Sunday morning. Upon arriving, I noticed bright chandeliers in every corner, shining on the many circular booths and tables that the congregation members were gathered around. From hanging bicycles to old band photos, I could barely decide where to look first. Finally, my eyes settled on the central stage, where worship was winding down and

Many Christians assert that holding church services in unconventional venues undermines and disrespects the early church model in Acts, while others argue that Jesus himself would be ministering in these places if he were walking on earth today.

church atmosphere. In order to fairly weigh out these claims, we must look closely at the Book of Acts and pursue an accurate understanding of the model it offers us.

At the beginning of Acts, Luke proclaims the unity of all believers. He writes “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had



Inside Mosaic Hollywood's warehouse location.

the pastor was preparing to give his message. A friend and I found our seats at a long table, where we were immediately greeted by the woman from whom we were sitting across. Pastor Adam Smith began his sermon on 1 Peter 3:1-4, followed by a powerful time of prayer and worship.

After the service, I was able to speak with Smith about the vision and purpose for the church. Regarding the location, he commented “We are here because it doesn’t feel churchy. Our goal is to reach people who are unchurched and encourage them to have an experience with God that is real and genuine.”

Many Christians assert that holding church services in unconventional venues undermines and disrespects the early church model that is presented throughout the Book of Acts, while others argue that Jesus himself would be ministering in these places if he were walking on earth today. Some traditional believers are uncomfortable with how casual church has become, while new believers are often drawn to this comfortable and less intimidating

everything in common” (Acts 4:32). With this passage, we know that a church is more than four walls and a roof; a church is its people, united in relationship to each other and to God.

In many instances throughout Acts, Paul ministers in temples and synagogues which are considered traditional places of worship in Scripture. In addition, there are also moments in which he simply “gather[s] the church together” and proclaims the Good News (Acts 14:27). Gathering in synagogues and temples is formal and gathering in the streets is much more casual, but the early church met in both contexts. Is there an appropriate context for each type of gathering, or is there little significance to a church’s physical meeting place? When Paul refers to “the church” throughout Acts, he is often describing the church universal (the unity of all believers in the world as one body) rather than a single tangible place of worship. Acts 9:31 begins “So the church throughout all Judea...”; this common phrasing indicates that Paul is not talking about a building, but rather he is referring to all believers

in all of Judea. On many occasions, Paul describes the church *meeting* in synagogues and temples, but he does not describe the church itself as *being* a synagogue or temple. A sanctuary is a physical place, but we worship an eternal and omnipresent God who “does not live in temples made by man” (Acts 17:24).

Our God is forever worthy of the most ornate and breathtaking sanctuary. There is no denying this. Even so, if every sanctuary on earth matched the Sistine Chapel in beauty and splendor, the full extent of God's wonder would even still cease to be captured. God cautions us against becoming overly concerned with the outward appearance of our worship. Through the prophet Isaiah, he proclaims “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, or what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isaiah 66:1-2). God appreciates beauty; He defines and embodies it. So much so that he is able to see it in places where it may seem hard to find. He sees beyond the stereotypes of a specific location and finds beauty in the transformed hearts of those who meet there.

Whether by disciples or pharisees, Jesus' actions and motives during his ministry were constantly questioned. “Jesus, why are you going to *those* places? Why are you healing *those* people?” Most were baffled by his eagerness to interact with drunkards, prostitutes, and tax collectors. And what was his response to this questioning? In the book of Matthew, he responds to such questioning by saying “Those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but the sinners” (Matthew 9:12). He is displeased with those who imply that his kingdom is only meant for the moral and righteous when we know that the kingdom of heaven will be inherited by the poor in spirit.

Church looks different for different people. Believers around the world have countless churching methods, each with their own triumphs and pitfalls. Regardless of unique practices or unorthodox meeting places, the fundamental truth guiding any church must be the redemptive Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whether we gather in a rundown restaurant or the Westminster Abbey, the Gospel must be preached boldly. Ultimately, the church is made up of people, not buildings. A struggling church will not find its weakness in its physical structure; a church's theology is ultimately defined and given substance by the words preached and the work done within its walls. 🙏

Fruit of the Spirit

Embracing the expressions of the Holy Spirit in our lives.



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.



Photo © WarzauWynn | Flickr (CC)

Lately I've been praying to see people the way God sees them and to treat them as such. God sees us without blemish. Lovingly. Just as we are. He's kind, merciful, and giving towards us. But I've been struggling with this for some time as I just want to love all people no matter how they treat me in return. It's in this that I realized just how much I am still not like the Father.

I remember crying out to God, why can't I just be like you? Why do I do and think things still that I know are un-like you, Lord? I was sitting in the massage chair at the nail salon getting a

manicure and a pedicure with two women working on me at the same time as tears began to run down my cheeks. I was thinking about the goodness of God and my inferiority. (Job 42: 5-6) Why am I not more like him? And is that even possible, to be like God? Wiping away these tears I noticed that no one in the overflowing salon seemed to see them running down my cheeks. This was just a moment between my God and me. Then I thought about the Fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23). God said that I can have these qualities as the Holy Spirit moves in me, so was I resisting his making me

over on the inside? Could I have five and not four of the fruit or fruits?

In Matthew 7: 16-20, Jesus says, "By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them." Notice in the above scripture that Jesus referred to fruit in the singular tense, as a whole and not as parts. Also, one's character is revealed by the words that come out of their mouth and their actions. Jesus commands us in John 15, saying that when we bear much fruit we are his disciples. When one's a disciple of Jesus Christ, we become Christ-like. This means we walk, talk, and think like him. Here the heart (Jesus Christ) is the root and the fruit is the language whether body or verbal. See also Mark 7:19-23. Ok, so one either has the fruit in full or none at all according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Phew.

There are many references to fruit in the Bible. This fruit spoken of is the same nine fruit qualities detailed in Galatians 5:22-23. I liken it to a Russian nesting doll where the root is the tiniest doll. As we all know, Russian nesting dolls build and build upon each other forming many layers. They're beautiful, intricately created, meticulously painted and detailed, and cool to look at and play with. Let's say the Russian nesting doll is a Christian in its former state with layers and layers of baggage of hurt and pain from the past, stains from the world, sadness, regret, anger, disappointment, and disbelief. After we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, he peels these layers off and brings us down to the smallest, whole Russian nesting doll and then begins through the moving of the Holy Spirit to put on the layers again. These new layers are what make up the whole fruit. He adds onto the smallest doll a layer of love, then next a layer of joy, then peace, then forbearance, and so on until we are built back up again, made over, whole, delivered, and set free.

In the beginning of one's walk with Christ, it is evident that we have changed ("You are already clean because of the

"We are sinful by nature and if the Lord gave us everything we asked for in one big helping, we would surely falter and squander it away in one fell swoop and not appreciate it – this includes the Fruit of the Spirit."

word I have spoken to you" John 15: 3), but the deeper we get into our walk, the deeper he takes us in these new layers and truly kneads them into us through times when he allows us to experience him. It's now in this ripening that we can go out into the world for him as he commands. It's in this state that we can be an example to unbelievers as to the saving power of Christ; we can help people out of grace, and do a plethora of good works for the kingdom of God. Fruit in our everyday lives looks like Christ, and his character and actions in sincerity. It's being nice to someone who's just been nasty to you, it's giving when you don't have much to give, and it's asking someone how they are when you know the smile on your face is the only thing keeping you from crying. It's not easy in our own human strength, which is dust upon dust, but with the moving of the Holy Spirit, by his fruit, we have not only these nine qualities but his power along with it. This is the good tree that Christ refers to in the aforementioned quote that's rooted in fertile soil (foundation is Christ Jesus), watered (with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit), and blooming (allowing the Spirit to work in us) with much fruit (nine qualities) of superior quality. This fruit that we now embody as made-over believers can then be given away to fill another person. To feed them with the Word of God, to encourage


them, and bring them to salvation, but this fruit can also help the one it inhabits to truly be a faithful, healed, powerful Christian, and an effective witness on the battlefield for God.

We now know that fruit comes from the inside and manifests itself outwardly. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). God is Jehovah-Jireh which means the Lord our provider. It's in his character to provide for his children. This is why he has given us the Holy Spirit as he would never send his children out into the world unequipped. To receive the Holy Spirit, we must ask God for him to dwell in us. But in order for the Holy Spirit to get to work, we have to let him. In reference to Galatians 5: 22-23, Elder Richard Brooks, the Director of WESTA's School of Practical Christian Living

says, "Fruit of the Spirit is produced by the Spirit of God working in us. You don't just automatically have it. If you do not cooperate by yielding to the leading of the Spirit, no fruit can be produced." So, if I am impatient, have I kneeled before the Lord in prayer and asked for patience? ("You do not have because you do not ask God" James 4:2) Do I practice patience? Remember, any effort that we put forth will be honored by God.

We are sinful by nature and if the Lord gave us everything we asked for in one big helping, we would surely falter and squander it away in one fell swoop and not appreciate it. This "having the Fruit of the Spirit" comes gradually. Think about Peter, one of Jesus' favorite disciples: "Just like us, Peter was hot-hearted and hot-headed. Didn't think before he spoke, told people exactly what he thought without thinking about it. He didn't understand that even though he was hanging out with Jesus, he wasn't holding on to Jesus. Just like us, Peter was impetuous. Just like us, Peter was impatient. Just like us, Peter doubted. Just like us, Peter denied. Just like us, Peter got another chance. Every encounter with Jesus is another opportunity to allow the Spirit of God to work from the inside out." (Dr. Marvin Moss's devotional, *From the Inside Out*) Jesus' redeeming power is so plentiful and mighty that he doesn't just give us first chances, but second and third and fourth and thirteenth chances as well.

There's something that I heard Bishop Charles E. Blake say once in his sermon, titled Solomon's Wishes, which will stick with me forever. Solomon, David's son with Bathsheba, was asked by God what he wanted as far as a gift from God. Solomon asked for wisdom. Bishop Blake said that Solomon asked for the wrong thing. Instead of asking for wisdom, he should have asked for God. An intimate relationship with God. Because in God comes wisdom, joy, peace, prosperity, protection, provision, healing, right-thinking, and many other awesome gifts. In Solomon's just asking for wisdom, he missed out on so many other treasures that God gives to his children through his kindness and loving nature, but in Solomon's asking for wisdom, God being so good, also granted him wealth, honor, and long life (1 Kings 3: 13-14). What's truly amazing is that we are always in the presence of God. So if we ask for only wisdom, he is always there to give us so much more and just what we need right when we need it.

Nearing the end of my manicure and pedicure as I discreetly wiped my tears away, a breath of hope came upon me as I thought about what the Lord had revealed to me just a few months earlier around my 30th birthday. He showed me just how much he's changed me in the five short years since I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I was reminded of this scripture: "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). God's word is the truth. As his children, we are made in his image. It is possible to walk and talk like Jesus, but in this earthly world it is impossible to be perfect. But thank God we don't have to be perfect because he is. Jesus will get you there; remember this journey with Jesus Christ, in barbecuing terminology, is low and slow and not fast and hot. Pray, ask, and believe, and he will do the rest. 

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What is the Good News?

*Unpacking the Biblical message in
everyday language.*

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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.

Often times, explaining the Gospel can be surprisingly difficult. When put on the spot for Christ, many of us become uncomfortable and cannot quite find the words to describe the faith that we have centered our lives around. Having personally encountered this unexpected reaction to the question "What is the Gospel?," I asked several people of various points in their Christian walk for their own answers. Here are just a few of the answers that I received.

"The power of sin is broken by Jesus' death and resurrection, making us pure in God the Father's sight, and enabling us to live as he intended through the power of the Holy Spirit"
Jessica Carter, Biola University, 21

"The gospel is the good news that a savior has come to save the world. In order to first understand the goodness of this message, it is important to understand why a savior is even needed in the first place. God created human beings to be in a relationship with him. When Adam and Eve, God's first created human beings, disobeyed him, that relationship was ruined because God is holy and cannot be around sin. The punishment of that sin was death. But here is the good news. God, being the loving God he is, still wanted to be in relationship with his people. So he sent his son Jesus to die in our place and restore our relationship with God. Jesus was perfect, never sinned, and did not deserve to die. He died for us and on the third day after his death, he rose from the grave. It is through his death and resurrection that we can have eternal life and a restored relationship with God. All that one needs to do is have faith in Jesus as both their Lord and savior" Sarah D'Amico, Biola University

"The Gospel narrates the story of redemption as Christ fulfills the Laws and prophecies of the Old Testament. God's chosen people (Israel - the Bride of Christ) were given the Levitical law and priesthood as a means of salvation. Literally, the blood of an innocent lamb was shed to cover the sins of the people. The Gospel brings the good news explaining that this is no longer required. The perfect, spotless lamb gave himself as the final sacrifice. His blood was shed, like every other lamb's before him, but never had a lamb come back to life. The resurrection of Christ is the hope in the Gospel. Any man can die for another, but only a God-man can die and be resurrected, bringing eternal life to all who have faith in his name and power" Natasha Cheeley, Biola University

"Realizing that we aren't perfect but knowing that we are still accepted through Christ's sacrifice" Lori Sahakian, graduate student, 27

"The Gospel is a story of imperfect people being reconciled to a holy God. Because God is perfect and humans are not, we were separated from him by a chasm too great to ever bridge on our own. Jesus died on the cross as the ultimate mediator in order to allow sinful people to have direct access to a blameless God. He then rose from the dead, proving himself even more powerful than life itself. His death provided a way for shattered humanity to become whole again and for sinners to have what we need most: forgiveness and the chance to live with him eternally" Rebekah Bell

"The Bible is a non-fiction book of many stories written by multiple authors but inspired by God. It tells us how God intended us to live our lives, and gives us the tools to be transformed into a follower of Christ. It warns us of hardships, tells us to repent, and prepares us for the life we are called to live. The Gospel teaches us there is only One God and that he sent his son Jesus to die on a

cross to wipe away our sins, and through his mercy we are saved. Anyone who accepts him is saved by his grace alone." Lorig Kalfayan

"The Good News is that God loves us where we are at and that we have the hope of salvation through Jesus. Salvation is bridging the gap between us and God that has been created by sin and overcome by Jesus. We gain salvation by making the choice to follow Jesus" - Parris Wentz, Biola University

"The good news is when you realize that weakness is not just something you feel, but the state that we are all in. We are in pain and we are all broken; Christ has saved us from that, because we can never come to a place to save ourselves" Mary Aslanian, Publications Coordinator, 26

"God has a plan to redeem us sinful humans from our wickedness, by restoring us through Christ, gifting us eternal life through the undeserved grace we received through His perfect Son, Jesus Christ. God sent Jesus to be born of a virgin, to live a sinless life and to receive an undeserved and sacrificial punishment on our behalf. It is only when we believe we can be saved from our sinfulness through Christ that we can have a relationship with God and live with him forever." Searan Kiledjian, Children's Ministries Director


While each person's definition of Christ's good news has unique elements, they all center on the fundamental truth of John 3:16-17, which reads "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."



Plant With Purpose

One organization that helps the rural poor by restoring a productive environment that they can profit from.

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Since 1984, Plant With Purpose has planted over 7.5 million trees. In seeking holistic solutions to poverty, Plant With Purpose helps the rural poor by restoring a productive environment that they can profit from. While working in the Dominican Republic with a Christian relief organization, Tom Woodward noticed that the poverty was cyclical because subsistence farmers could not support themselves off of the land due to deforestation and soil degradation. It was because of this experience that Woodward founded Plant With Purpose. The organization partners with the poor to empower them to protect the environment so that their farming is more productive and sustainable.

Plant With Purpose believes that they are sent by God to be “agents of encouragement and empowerment,” so they want to ensure that the poor that they are helping are actively involved in the process. Each country has full-time staff who are native to the country and help to determine the needs of the community and how best to fulfill them. By planting trees and restoring the environment, they are giving the rural poor the means for supporting themselves. The planted trees restore soil quality, protect the water supply, and yield a crop that can be sold or eaten. So far, Plant With Purpose has helped more than 48,000 people in nearly 250 villages, including villages in Haiti, Mexico, Thailand, Burundi, Tanzania, and the Dominican Republic.

In addition to planting trees, Plant With Purpose partners with villages to restore a sustainable economy. They achieve this through micro-credit loans, micro-enterprise, teaching business skills, and educating the people on agricultural programs that are good for the environment. They also encourage spiritual renewal while also helping to restore people economically, environmentally, and relationally. According to the Plant With Purpose website, their goals for the villages they help are 1) To improve the quality of life, 2) Restore relationships with the environment and with God, and 3) promote self-sufficiency.

To get involved, you can contribute financially to grow a village, or plant trees at only \$1 a tree! If you're passionate about women's empowerment, business and finance, ministry, conservation farming, caring for the environment, and social justice, there are specific suggestions that can be found on their website. Plant With Purpose also wants people willing to share the news about their organization through social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Flickr, and Tumblr. More information about their organization and how you can get involved can be found at: www.plantwithpurpose.org.

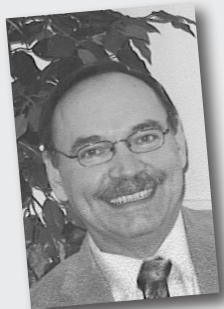


SARAH DONAWERTH

Sarah Donawerth is a published poet and currently studying English at Biola University. Her depression led her to become a writer so that her experiences could reach readers and glorify God. In her spare time, she plays Disney songs on the ukulele and reads the works of Jane Austen.

Unbroken & Unashamed

The amazing true story of Louis Zamperini.



DELBERT TEACHOUT

Delbert Teachout has been married for 37 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

Unbroken: *A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* by Laura Hillenbrand is a memorable story about a forgotten hero, Louis Zamperini. Many people, like me, may never have heard of Louis, but his story is unforgettable. Some say heroes are made not born, but in Louis' case I think a hero was born. His story reminds me that God has created each of us for a purpose.

If he was born a hero no one would ever have known it. At age two while suffering from pneumonia he climbed naked out his bedroom window and ran in the street. He started smoking discarded cigarettes at age five and began drinking at age eight. When bullied by older kids he refused to cry. Instead of running or crying he took the abuse, began lifting weights and using a punching bag, and began fighting back.

Over time his behavior worsened. The police often came to Louis' home. He was always fighting, stealing, rebelling, while opposed to and resisting authority. His father gave him forceful spankings. His mother was unable to change him. His behavior was so bad parents forbade their children from playing with him.

Louis idolized his brother Pete and only Pete could help him. Pete would graduate with ten varsity letters in high school but track was his favorite sport. He began training Louis who hated running because he felt running to be another restraint, but loved the applause he received.

One day he got into an argument with his father and ran away from Torrance, California to Los Angeles. He hopped a freight train north. The trip was so bad he went back home to surrender to his brother. God had used a running track to get Louis off his delinquency track.

On May 19, 1934 the best milers in Southern California assembled at the Los Angeles Coliseum. At the coliseum Louis finished in first place and broke the World's Interscholastic Mile record which held for eighteen years. Two weeks later he entered another race at the coliseum, a 1500 meter race, this time against college men. He won that race also beating the reigning champion

by twenty yards.

After his graduation Louis set his sights on the Olympics. Earning an invitation to the Olympic tryouts at Randalls Island, New York, He won the 1500 meter race and qualified for the Olympic team. He failed to win any medals at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin but did meet with Hitler and General Werner Von Fritsch, commander-in-chief of the German Army. Then he set his eyes on the 1940 Olympics in Tokyo.

In June 1938 Louis arrived in Minneapolis to compete in NCAA Championships. He expected to break the four minute mile and bragged to the other competitors about his training and his ability. Half way through the race several runners boxed him in deliberately stomping on his foot with spikes, kicking his shins and elbowing him in the chest until he received a broken rib. For a lap and a half he tried to break free from the cluster of men who boxed him in. Nearing the end of the race he found an opening and despite his pain won the race with a time of 4:08.3. That time was the fastest NCAA mile in history. His record stood for fifteen years. A few weeks later Japan withdrew from holding the Olympics so the games were transferred to Helsinki. During 1939 Louis won every race he entered.

In April 1940 Louis found out the Olympics were canceled due to war in Europe. In 1941 Louis joined the Army Air Corps. He washed out of the Air Corps but was later drafted. In November 1941 he was sent to Ellington Field in Houston, Texas for training as a bombardier. In December Japan attacked Hawaii.

From Ellington Field, Louis went on to graduate from Midland Army Flying School and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. Louis was assigned to a B-24 crew, sometimes called a flying coffin. Pilot and navigator error, mechanical failure, and bad luck were killing trainees before they ever saw combat. In the Army Air Force 14,903 personnel died in 52,651 accidents occurring stateside.

Some say heroes are made not born, but in Louis' case I think a hero was born.

Louis' crew and their plane, nicknamed Superman, found themselves stationed at Oahu's Hickam Field. Louis's crew had successful missions over Wake Island and Nauru. During a

mission to Nauru Superman had been shot 594 times but was still able to complete its mission and return, although some of the crew had severe injuries.

After the mission over Nauru Louis' crew was assigned to a B-24 called Green Hornet. On May 27, 1943 Green Hornet was ordered on a search and rescue mission for a plane that had disappeared the previous day. Ironically, while searching for a missing plane and crew, Green Hornet crashed at sea killing everyone on board except Louis, his pilot, and one crew member. During the crash Louis felt several wires wrap around his legs making it impossible to escape. He blacked out. Later when he recovered, the wires were off him and he was still alive. He never knew how he had been set free. Could God have intervened?

For days the three men floated on the Pacific Ocean, drifting westward. Search parties did not see them. Fighting


dehydration, sunburn, hunger, thirst, and sharks, the three men floated. On the thirty-third day the crew member died, leaving Louis and his pilot on the raft. They learned how to catch fish to eat and trap rain water to drink. They escaped sharks by hitting them with their oars. One time they saw a plane approaching and shot off a rescue flare. To their horror it was an enemy plane and it strafed them several times. Even though the raft had 48 holes in it, neither man was hit.

On their fortieth day of floating Louis heard singing. When he looked up he saw what looked like angels in the clouds. His pilot saw and heard nothing. A few days after he heard the singing Louis went through a typhoon. On the forty-seventh day they found an island. Before they could make it to the island they were taken prisoner by an enemy boat and crew. Louis was sent from one POW camp to another where he was starved, beaten, humiliated, and tortured day after day. Near death many times Louis somehow found the strength to continue to resist the enemy. Of 34,648 American POWs held by the Japanese, 12,935 died. When Japan surrendered in September 1945, Louis and the rest of the POWs were liberated.

Returning to the United States Louis was still a POW mentally. His guards would constantly invade his dreams. His behavior became violent as he resorted to drinking and brawling. One night he awoke finding himself strangling his wife but in his dream he was strangling one of his guards. His wife planned to leave him but in the second week of September 1949 she went to a Billy Graham tent meeting and gave her life to Jesus. She urged Louis to attend. Refusing at first, he finally agreed to go with her. Then he went with her a second night. As he was walking out of the meeting he heard Billy Graham say he could not leave yet. That night he gave his life to Jesus. He forgave the Japanese, quit drinking, and quit smoking. Suddenly the POW guards left him alone at night. He was free.

Beginning as an Olympic hero, and then becoming a war hero, Louis lived the rest of his life as God's hero. According to Louis we cannot convert anyone, all we can do is plant seeds and let God water them and get the harvest. He founded the non-profit Victory Boys' Camp to help boys who behaved as he did. In January 1998 for his 81st birthday, in the village where he had once been a POW, Louis received the Olympic torch and began running. In April and May 2011 he received Doctor of Humane Letters degrees from Azusa Pacific University and Bryant University respectively. He still makes public appearances, one time making twelve talks in one day. On June 7, 2012 Louis appeared on *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno*.

He teaches that we will never be anything in life unless we commit to a goal. He never quit finding new goals. Today, in his nineties, he is licensed, accomplished, or an expert in eighty-four fields including Scuba diving, skiing, lifeguarding, and flying.

I think we should begin using a new verb, "Zamp". It means to be prepared mentally, physically, and spiritually for whatever comes our way. Whether we win at the Olympics, survive forty-seven days in a life raft, two years as a POW, or live life, when we win, it will be no surprise. 

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Counter Culture

POWER

Using our influence for the good of others.

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SARA NAPIER

Sara is a full-time writer and sometime musician in Northern Arizona. The twenty-something enjoys working in ministry with Kingman Foursquare Church and celebrating Taco Tuesday with her friends. In her spare time she performs music, designs clothing and writes for various blogs, including her own KingdomJournalist. tumblr.com.

After the sun sets, we all face the same thing. When we go home at night, everyone has to walk into a space without any light. Stepping into the room, we stretch our arm along the wall until we find the right switch to flip and light welcomes us home.

This light gives us the confidence to walk into the room. Without it, we choose our steps more carefully in fear of tripping, running into something or slamming our foot against a piece of furniture. What gives us the courage to walk into a room without fear of falling is similar to the effect we hope to have on another

person's life.

It is the lamp that opens our eyes to the settings around us. That lamp keeps us from harming ourselves or feeling insecure about where our next step will land us. Which makes me think that our quest for purpose in this life is similar to the way a lamp gives off light.

The most interesting part about a lamp is that in a time of darkness, it is the first thing everyone wants. It is the first thing everyone sees but it does not shine light to anyone without also making itself easier to see. Even though a lamp is nothing without its source of power it is easy to forget about that when walking around in darkness.

Years ago, I worked at a department store. At the time I was in college studying retail management so it was the perfect job. I enjoyed the atmosphere, the customers and the way everything was constantly changing whether it was the layout or just the inventory.

My coworkers and I got along very well, there were a few personality clashes but there was one associate by the name of Candace* that everyone adored. Candace was kind and never complained. She was always positive even though she was in need of a big break. Her time came when she got a promotion to supervisor.

Everyone was happy about the promotion and we were ready to work under her supervision. It came as a surprise that during the first month with Candace in charge, she began to change. She seemed to like all of the perks that came with her new position and began to take advantage of them.

The people that she once considered friends did not feel like they could trust her anymore. When she was still an associate, she used to break little rules from the handbook like texting and making calls during her shift or bringing snacks to eat at her register. As a supervisor she began to write up the people that she once shared those snacks with and she was tough about the cell phone usage even proposing to the district manager that they should check the employees for cell phones before leaving the breakroom.

After a few months of working like this, she became more demanding. She wrote up a stockroom associate one day for eating a cough drop during his shift. She began criticizing the work everyone else was doing and asking people to complete unrealistic

tasks like re-arranging a crowded aisle in two hours or less. The same people that once loved her became afraid of her and the atmosphere changed from hopeful to depressing.

After months of complaints from the associates, the manager took disciplinary action against Candace and she was eventually demoted back to an associate with less hours than she had begun with. No one wanted to talk to her, if she entered the breakroom people would leave or mutter rude things under their breath. Candace's "big break" turned into the very thing that broke her.

We all want to be wanted, to know that we are useful and that we have the power to influence what happens around us. Like anything, this natural instinct can turn into something destructive. The desire for power can quickly become an obsession.

Power is not necessarily a bad thing but without wisdom and selflessness it will not be the productive attribute it was made to be. Having power without good intentions will always lead to someone getting hurt. A desire to be a positive influence on the world around us, rather than being someone with an unfocused sense of power, is an admirable goal and one that is possible.

Like the lamp in a room, we like it when people look our way. We want people to pay attention to us and we want to be seen. A lot of people want others to notice the good things that they do. There is nothing wrong with enjoying a little bit of attention or celebration over something we did right but when this becomes the only reason we do

anything, there is a problem.

One day I entered the breakroom to eat my lunch. I thought I was alone because of the silence in the room but as I opened my locker I began to hear someone sobbing. I turned the corner to see Candace sitting at the table in the corner. She was crying but when she saw me she quickly turned her head and tried to pretend like everything was okay. I brought her some tissues and sat down next to her.

We talked for my entire lunch break about everything going on with her and one of the things I will never forget is what she said about why she acted that way in the first place. She said "I just wanted people to respect me... I needed someone to think I mattered." She went on to say that after a while of abusing her

We like it when people look our way. We want people to pay attention to us and we want to be seen. A lot of people want others to notice the good things that they do. There is nothing wrong with enjoying a little bit of attention or celebration over something we did right but when this becomes the only reason we do anything, there is a problem.

position, she didn't feel like she was doing enough. She said she became obsessed with thinking of ways to assert her authority and that if she couldn't make someone afraid of her, she didn't feel like she was doing her job.

A constant desire to have attention, even if it is negative attention, could be a sign of pride issues and selfishness. It is healthy to take pride in something we do well but when that becomes the only thing that matters to us, we are setting up our lives for disaster. The Bible says in Proverbs 16:18 that "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (ESV)

A haughty attitude means that a person feels more important than most people and that others are not worthy of the same level of respect. When it is broken down like that, it becomes a little hard to believe that any of us could be this way to anyone. That is why we must stay aware of our intentions.

The problem with wanting more power than we are given is that we were never meant to handle it. We were made to be strong and influential but not by ourselves. It is in God's strength working through us that we can know true and meaningful power. Ephesians 6:10 says "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." (ESV) so we should never build ourselves up so far that we force our authority over other people.

Pastor John Piper said a thought-provoking thing about our power compared to God's. He said "It is about the greatness of God, not the significance of man. God made man small and the universe big to say something about himself."

Just as a lamp is nothing without the source, we are the same way. When the electricity goes out in a building, the same lamp that once saved the day becomes a useless item on a shelf. We have this struggle with God over power and purpose. We try to build ourselves up to be something great.

The Bible says that the Lord already thinks something special of us. In Isaiah 43:4-5 "Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you" (ESV)

The Lord already thinks wonderful things about us! He calls us precious in his sight and he says that he loves us. The Lord wants us to know that we are valuable and made with a great purpose. He doesn't ask us to get through life on our own, relying completely on our own abilities. When we understand that God has made us with a great purpose, we can better understand why there is such a problem when we let our pride, ego and hunger for power rule the way we live our lives.

Our struggle with power will end like any fight or struggle, the only way to make it stop is for one party to give up or be defeated. When you try to win a struggle with power, your options are not always going to give you the best possible outcome. Your

fight will either lead you to a point where you have to throw in the towel or worse, be defeated.

The Lord does not want us to live defeated lives. He is not happy to think about us crying alone in a breakroom at a job where everyone hates us. He wants us to be victorious in our battles over things that affect our character and lives. The Lord wants to help us in our fight with addictions, even addictions to power and control.

When we just let it go and be humble for God, the struggle begins to stop because we are no longer carrying a burden that is too large to hold by ourselves. In 1 Peter 5:6-7 it says "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you." The Lord will work through us to lay those issues to rest.

The same chapter goes on to say in verses 10-11 "But may the God of all grace, who called us to his eternal glory by Christ

Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

God does not leave us alone to pick up the pieces. He will establish us, strengthen us and settle our hearts. Eventually people began to forgive Candace. She even developed deeper friendships with the people she had wronged. She gave her heart to the Lord and she is now the manager of a store in Southern California where she met her husband.

When we give our struggles to the Lord, he can make us into the beautiful creation we were made to be. All the time we were trying to be the lamp in the highest point in a room or wanted to be the brightest lamp in the house, the Lord is waiting for us to humble ourselves so he can use us in ways that we never thought about before.

God is giving us the choice to bring his light to more people than we can even count or to remain the brightest light in one, single room. We can choose to give the power to the Lord and trust that he is in control or we can keep trying to rule everything on our own and live a life that is less than we were made for. The choice for our source is completely up to us.

**Names have been changed to protect identity*

*Power is not necessarily
a bad thing but without
wisdom and selflessness it
will not be the productive
attribute it was made to be.*



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