

new identity

God in focus. World in scope.

MAGAZINE

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

THE TRINITY

INNOVATION, IPHONES AND IDENTITY

PEOPLE PLEASING

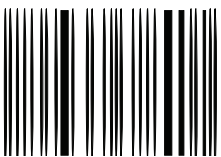
LEARNING HOW TO FIND OUR
ACCEPTANCE IN GOD, RATHER THAN
PEOPLE

HEART FOR
AFRICA

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*9 Ways To
Make Easter
More
Meaningful*

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I DON'T HAVE A TELEVISION IN MY HOUSE, BUT THAT DOESN'T

totally stop me from watching TV shows. Hulu is my friend. I'm very selective in what I watch though. Not in the self-righteous sort of way, but in the way my heart gets pulled in by similar storylines and show formulas. It seems like across the board I love shows where the characters are in pursuit of truth, destiny or purpose. During high school I liked *The X-Files*, not for it's fantastical (even somewhat creepy) sci-fi aspects, but for the relationship between the two main characters and the drive of one particular agent to find out the truth about his world and his place in it. In college I was drawn to *Smallville* and Clark Kent's ultimate destiny to become Superman, all the while making good-intended-yet-flawed decisions (so human), and missteps along the way. Over the last few years, both CTV's *The Listener* and BBC's *Merlin* have caught my imagination over both main character's humble hearts to use their unusual gifts (telepathy and magic respectively) for good. To help people in need gives them purpose and meaning in their lives.

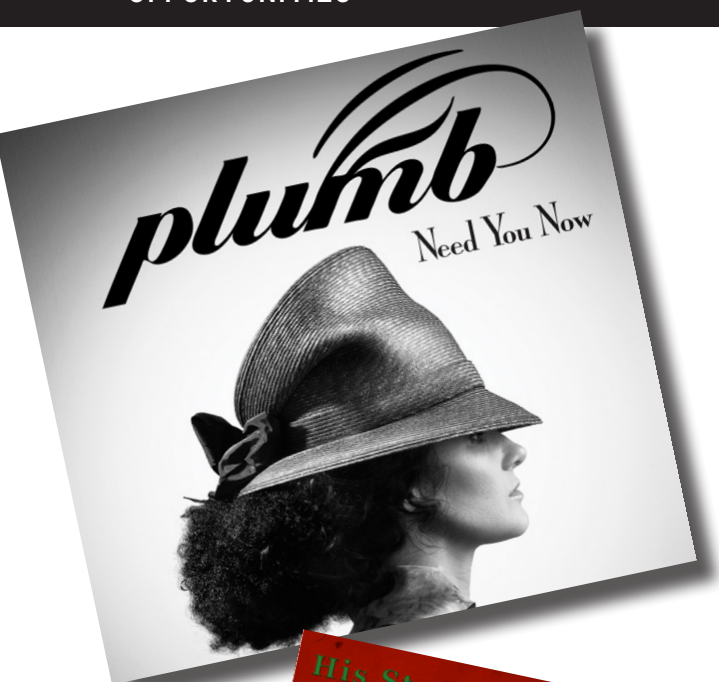
Reflecting on my favorite TV shows of the past, not only do I think it's interesting that they're all non-reality based (i.e. sci-fi or fantasy—I think I'm too sensitive for the life-like crime/drama shows and like to dissociate), but there is an aspect of my own pursuit within all of them. I am in pursuit of God. And truth, destiny and purpose? He is all of these. *Truth* is a savior named Jesus, *destiny* is that believers will one day be a part of a new heaven and new earth and *purpose* is to love God and others well and share God's redemptive story while here on earth.

It is in God that all of the yearnings of my heart are fulfilled, not just the ones present in the shows I've liked. We have a greater and real-life story of truth, destiny and purpose in Christ – not a make-believe one. And we must pursue God in such a way that he changes us. In this issue Sally Blotzer discusses the pressures of people pleasing and how God can change our focus to his loving acceptance instead. Matthew Hamilton talks about how God can change the way we live with or without wealth. Kelli Ward shares how God can change our perspective on material blessings and teach us to store greater treasures in heaven. I'm in pursuit of God—changes such as these. I hope you are too. Remember that we must pursue God above all if we ever hope to find any truth, purpose or destiny in our lives.

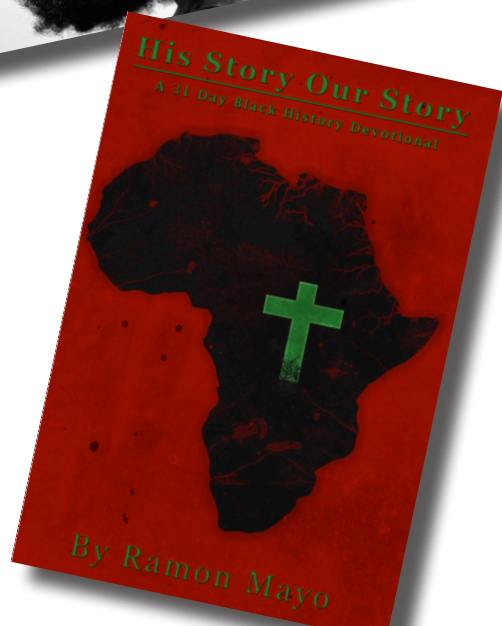
Cailin

CAILIN BRIODY HENSON
Editor-in-Chief





Musical artist Plumb's new album *Need You Now* is a delightfully soulful and pop-playful collection of songs that cry out to God and give glory to him. There are also love songs about family, relationships and great joy. Lead singer Tiffany Arbuckle Lee's beautiful voice is heartfelt and genuine in this wonderful collections of songs. Check out the new album on Amazon.com and iTunes.



One of our own, Board of Director and writer, Ramon Mayo has recently published his first book called *His Story Our Story: A 31 Day Black History Devotional* that highlights some of the African American faith heroes of the past. His inspiration for writing the book was to shed light onto African American culture and celebrate the rich legacy and the largely Christian faith of African Americans. You can buy it in print or a Kindle version on Amazon.com.



The Bible Miniseries by husband and wife team Mark Burnett and Roma Downey, airing on the History Channel, is a five-week, 10-hour television show that premieres on March 3rd. With a musical score by Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerard, Gladiator-like visual effects, and breathtaking exotic locations, the creators hope to bring the Bible to life from Genesis to Revelation for a new generation. The final installment will air on Easter Sunday with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

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Publisher/Editor-in-Chief Cailin Briody Henson

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

Copy Editor Jerine Griffith, Monisha Belgarde
Fact Checker Crystal Lassegard


Layout & Design Cailin Briody Henson

Contributing Writers Kelli Ward, Nicholas Sowell, Delbert Teachout, Erica Mongé-Greer, Eric Lee, Sara Napier, Lindsey A. Frederick, Wendy Van Eyck, Lara Tovmassian, Sarah Donawerth, Sally Blotzer, Ramon Mayo, Nathan Rutan, Matthew Hamilton

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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.



Plastic surgery

*An look at what Christians and the
Bible say about plastic surgery.*

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.



I remember a day during the Summer of 2011. I was at Wal-Mart picking up a few items and enjoying the company of a good friend. She headed to the aisle over from me because she had to grab something. As I stood in the hygiene and beauty aisle, I browsed the selection of hair products to see if there was anything that I felt I “couldn’t live without.”

As I scanned the shelves of products, I met eyes with another woman that was turning the corner. I smiled and gave her a nod when she stopped and came back towards me. I figured she probably forgot something so I continued minding my business when she said “Hey you know, you’re very pretty” I thanked her and let her know I appreciated the compliment.

“You’re welcome,” she said “If you would just do something about your nose, I think you would probably look perfect”

I stepped back in disbelief, I was sure I could not have have heard another person say something so mean. She must have noticed my shock because she followed with “Don’t get me wrong, I just think your facial features would be perfect if you considered getting some work done on your nose” she added that she had some work done the previous year and told me that it changed her life.

I did all I could to remain composed, not just because I was offended but because it was ironic. You see, plastic surgery — specifically a nose job — did

change my life. If anyone could tell you that, it would be me.

When I was fourteen, I was standing in front of my bathroom mirror getting ready for the day. That morning I was very tired and felt sick. My nose was stuffed up and I still had a headache that had lasted over a week. There was constant pain from the time I woke up until I fell asleep each night. It had gone on this way for so long, I had gotten used to it but that morning I felt worse than usual.

I had already been to doctors and they prescribed me with allergy medicine, telling me that I was just getting sinus headaches because of the change of seasons. That morning I went to blow my nose and out came a small greyish piece of what looked like flesh followed by a terrible nosebleed. I called my mother into the bathroom and she decided that it was time to see another doctor.

We eventually learned that I had a very serious case of nasal polyps and that there was a high chance that they were not all benign. Because of the severity and the size of the growths, the next few months became an indistinguishable string of tests and procedures. They all lead up to the end result which was the reconstructive surgery that not only changed my

life but saved it.

It wasn’t until years later that I even thought about the plastic surgery aspect of my procedure. My main focus if I ever spoke about it was to let people know the medical reasons behind it.

When I was 20 I was helping with my church’s youth group and one service my brother told some of the students about the fake parts of my nose. As the flood of questions and comments came in, I humored all of their jokes and entertained their curiosity but one of the questions caught me off guard.

One of the students pulled me aside to ask if I thought plastic surgery was okay. The student was thinking about getting a procedure done as a graduation present from her parents. She had always

“Plastic surgery — specifically a nose job — changed my life.”

been insecure about the shape of her nose and wanted to know if there was anything wrong with changing it. This was the first time I could recall that I had ever seriously thought about my views on plastic surgery.

After taking a moment to think about it, I told the student that I did not feel it was right to be so insecure about physical appearances that going under the knife was an option. I expected that to hold her over until I had more time to figure out my own beliefs but she quickly replied, saying “but you’ve had work done, so what’s the difference if it was a medical thing or not? A part of your body was one way before and now it is different.”

I let the student know that I could not give her an answer that favored or discouraged the idea. I asked her to give me some time to think about it more seriously and if we could both be praying about it. She said that she would wait for our next conversation before agreeing to anything.

In Romans 5:8 the Bible says “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” He loves us completely and many feel that if the Lord could love us enough to send his son Jesus Christ to die for our sins, then surely he could love us no matter our appearance. As I began to use that as my argument for why it is probably wrong to get cosmetic surgery, I began to think about how the same idea applied to why plastic surgery might be okay.

I needed to figure out exactly what I believed about this idea. At the time, I was leading a lot of discussions about beauty, identity and self-worth with the ladies in the youth group. We had tackled all of the

big subjects of beauty from how makeup makes women feel to what the Bible says about dressing suggestively. We had discussed so many things in detail but this was the first time I had ever thought about cosmetic procedures.

What about the people considering surgery like the student that questioned me? I wondered if cosmetic surgery was a sin or if the Lord looked at it as something done to take better care of our bodies. What was the real difference between necessary surgery and cosmetic?

Some feel that those that get cosmetic surgery struggle and according to Joseph Edwards, a pastor of a young adults ministry “they just have low self esteem. [Sometimes people] hate themselves so they think looking good will change that.” This can be true and that is one of the reasons it is so important to pray about and discuss the reason behind the procedure with those who care about us the most. When we look to verses like John 15:9, we are reminded that Christ loves us despite any flaws we may see, whether in the mirror or otherwise.

Some would also argue that those who go under the knife actually love themselves

more than those who won’t. Katie, a 26-year-old mother of two opted for an augmentation procedure and says that “I got [the procedure] done because I love myself and my family enough to be happy. When I look good, I feel good... if I think I need surgery as I get older, I don’t think there’s a thing wrong with it here and there”

My greatest issue with it was trying to figure out if it was a sin. I’ve always liked the definition that sin is anything we think, say or do that goes against God’s

I’ve always liked the definition that sin is anything we think, say or do that goes against God’s commandments. In my heart, I knew why I didn’t think plastic surgery was necessary but I also couldn’t see where God would be displeased with cosmetic surgery any more than he would be displeased with someone wearing lipstick or buying a pretty dress.

commandments. In my heart, I knew why I didn't think plastic surgery was necessary but I also couldn't see where God would be displeased with cosmetic surgery any more than he would be displeased with someone wearing lipstick or buying a pretty dress. To me, it seemed like it was more of a matter of the frame of mind.

Many of the people talked about in the Bible underwent transformations. Though few of them were physical, one that stands out is that of Queen Esther. Esther was a young Jewish woman that was being considered for the king's wife. He was to choose from a group of specially selected women that were supposed to be the most beautiful and interesting of the kingdom.

In Esther 2:12 the Bible says "Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women." This tells us that even though there was no surgery involved in their process of getting ready for the king, there was a "beautifying" period over the course of a year. A lot of this process was cosmetic and though there are no major details given about it, in those days this may have been their version of what we could consider a light cosmetic procedure.

We can take this biblical example and look at how God gave Esther favor in such a process. However, this doesn't mean that the Lord was in favor of the

procedure she had to go through. The beautification process was a requirement of King Ahasuerus' kingdom, not God's requirement for her. Esther was an Israelite, one of God's chosen people, and she was made to change herself according to the king's rules in order to appeal to him. The beautification process was a

requirement, not a choice and it seemed to be more social than righteous.

A few summers ago I was traveling with my band and one night we met a young woman named Anita* who wore sunglasses even at night and indoors. She had a long hairstyle that hid her forehead and drew attention from her face. She avoided bright areas and even though she had an outgoing personality, it was clear she was feeling embarrassed about something.

We later learned that Anita had been in a car accident. In addition to other injuries, a pole had gone through her skull and half of the skin on her face had been damaged. She was embarrassed by the condition of her skin

and would try to hide behind hairstyles and accessories.

She and I hit it off so we kept in touch through social media. We would check in every month or so to pray for each other and she would come to our concerts near her area. Two years ago, Anita decided she was going to start having plastic surgery for the reconstruction of her face. Everyone was excited for her when she began writing a blog about it so people could follow her journey. Every time she posted, she got hundreds of comments from other Christians that told her they were happy and praying for her.

The Bible talks about the love that God has for us. Even in the commandments that the Lord gave us, we can see that he is only looking out for the best interest of humankind. While there are no verses that specifically say "don't get plastic surgery", there is still a guide for us to gauge the appropriateness of it.

To date, Anita has undergone 10+ surgeries that have included skin grafts, rhinoplasty and brow lifts. She says “plastic surgery changed my life. I’ll never look the same as I did before... but now I don’t feel like I have to hide. I don’t worry that people will be afraid of me anymore.”

At a conference I met a charismatic couple, they were friendly and passionate about God. They pastored a church together and often speak at conferences and other events. Years before, the wife had decided to have a permanent cosmetics procedure and word spread quickly about it. Soon she was receiving hate mail and being told to her face that she was vain and couldn’t really love God because she was so obsessed with her appearance.

The church was supportive of Anita’s surgery even though she underwent some of the most intense plastic surgery procedures and documented it through the internet. Yet, something as simple and discreet as permanent makeup was considered wrong.

Some argued that because the pastor’s wife was in such a public ministry, she should be held to a higher level of accountability. Though by default, it is also saying that Christians who do not appear in front of large crowds or a camera should be able to do whatever they please. With so many conflicting opinions, without scripture it is impossible to say if plastic surgery is sinful or even morally wrong.

The Bible talks about the love that God has for us. Even in the commandments that the Lord gave us, we can see that he is only looking out for the best interest of humankind. While there are no verses that specifically say “don’t get plastic surgery”, there is still a guide for us to gauge the appropriateness of it.

The Lord created us to be as we are. The Bible says in Matthew 10:30 “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” To constantly feel bad just because our nose seems a little too big or our shirts don’t fit the way we want them to is not what God intended for us. Our differences are part of what make us individuals so to worry that we are not beautiful or desirable in any way is the opposite of what the Lord wants for us.

This may be why it is a popular view in the church that only health-related procedures are acceptable. These ideas convince us that if someone feels


so bad about their physical features that it keeps them from being happy, it seems that it is a matter of pride, insecurity and maybe a lack of gratefulness that would make them want the surgery. However, if someone were to have the same type of cosmetic surgery because they were in pain or ran the risk of health problems, their surgery could be considered a blessing.

With that in mind, perhaps the nature of sin in cosmetic surgery is more about the reasoning behind it than the actual procedure. The taboo may come from the societal pressures of what real beauty looks like. Since there have not been healthy alternative examples explored in the church, some may assume that things like plastic surgery tie Christians to the vanity of the world.

We can look to the two commandments that Jesus called the greatest, in Matthew 22:36-40 (ESV):

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Jesus spoke about loving God and loving others as the most important commandments. Jesus reminds us here that we are called to love God with everything we are and understand that his love for us is unconditional. He loves us wholly and completely as we are, just as he proves in verses like John 15:9 which says “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.”

Above all, I feel it is safe to say that if the recipient has clarity and a substantial reason for doing it, a cosmetic procedure could improve a person’s life. Though just like every major life decision, one should take time to be sure they are considering God’s best for their life. With prayerful consideration and a healthy frame of mind about it, cosmetic surgery may not be a bad thing afterall. 

*names changed to protect identity

TATTOOS & FAITH | EGYPTIAN COPTIC CHRISTIANS | WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP
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MAGAZINE

A La Carte Faith

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

GROW
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FINDING THE BEST BIBLE
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Famous Last Words

On the Importance of Baptism

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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

I buried my ninety-seven-year-old grandmother this week. I didn't get to say goodbye while she was still living. As she lay in her casket, the struggle finally out of her body, I placed my hand on hers and told her, one last time, I loved her. Her last words to me, to her family, to friends, were read in her testimony and favorite poem at her funeral service. The gist of her message was simple yet profound, and it characterized her life: love Jesus, love others, and teach them to do the same.

Last words hold weight. The power of a loved one's goodbye causes us to clutch and preserve their words. Jesus knew this when he saved his most important instruction as his farewell message to his followers before he departed for heaven. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," he said. "Therefore go and make *disciples* of all nations, *baptizing them* in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching them to obey* everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-19, emphasis mine).

So what importance streams under these words? If you're already a Christian, you presumably understand about loving Jesus. But even if you aren't, you understand love isn't enough if it doesn't compel you to do something for another: to devote yourself, to pledge loyalty, to make a promise, a vow, commit. And you probably also know commitment doesn't mean much if you never make it known. In John 14:15, Jesus told his followers, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." And in his final words, one way Jesus teaches—actually commands—his followers to highlight their love and devotion to him, is through baptism. Whether you're new to faith, a faith veteran, or standing on the fringe of contemplation, this topic raises numerous questions. *What does it mean? Is baptism necessary to my salvation?* and *Why should I do it?*

What Is Baptism?

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.—Romans 6:3

The word baptism means "to immerse," or "to dip in water." And this is literally what transpires: a person is dipped under a pool or body of water and raised to the surface. Seem simple? It is. But its symbolism drips with meaning and color and life. ClarifyingChristianity.com paints a vivid picture: "... 'baptize' is a transliteration of the original Greek word (baptizo) ... [which] comes from the root word (bapto), a term used in the first century for immersing a garment first into bleach and then into dye, both cleansing and changing the color of the cloth."

Like the washing and dying of the cloth, baptism depicts a person's sin-cleansing, life-coloring choice to turn away from sin and turn to Jesus. Although the cloth is fundamentally the same, it is now also fundamentally changed. A closer look at the picture reveals even more: water immersion is a symbol of Jesus's death and burial for our sins. As one breaks through the water's surface, he reveals the final stroke of God's masterwork: the reality of a God so powerful even death cannot defeat him. Eugene Peterson describes this picture in The Message translation of Romans 6:3b-6,

When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace—a new life in a new land! When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country. Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the Cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life—no longer at sin's every beck and call!

If I Don't Get Baptized,

Does that Mean I'm Not Saved?

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.—Ephesians 2:8

The short answer is, “No.” Baptism cannot and does not make you a Christian. Only Jesus can do that. Kondo Simfuke, pastor of Mission Point Community Church in Warsaw, Indiana, parallels the symbolism of baptism to a wedding certificate or a diploma. He illustrates that both are symbols of what you’ve *already* accomplished. Just as a wedding certificate doesn’t make you married and a diploma doesn’t make you educated, baptism does not make you forgiven of your sin and rescued from death. Your forgiveness and salvation were made possible when Jesus died on the cross.

However, the long answer is a little more complicated. First century Christians might have had a hard time imagining a person being “Christian” apart from baptism, as it was intricately entwined in the conversion process. Jesus said to “make disciples and baptize them,” which followers took literally as a packaged instruction. To risk equating it in simple, modern terms, it might be like turning on a lamp without a light bulb: it doesn’t make much sense. Additionally, a majority of Christians may view baptism as more than symbolic. Many hold it as a literal initiation into the body of Christ; a spiritual soul-dye. We’ll uncover more of the “long answer” in the following sections.

If I Don't Need to Get Baptized to be Saved, Why Should I Do It?

Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles. Some of us are slaves, and others are free. But God's Spirit baptized each of us and made us part of the body of Christ. —1 Corinthians 12:13a, CEV

I met Jesus on my backyard swing set when I was three, but I wrestled through 23 years of questions before I was baptized. I knew I was forgiven and free, and I knew my salvation wasn't dependent on baptism. I used this and my aversion to public attention to rationalize away the need for ceremony. But it was as

if I had fallen in love with a man I promised to spend the rest of my life with, and never arranged the public marriage ceremony. I never invited witnesses to stand beside me and promise to hold me accountable in my relationship. I'd never welcomed anyone to my after-party celebration. I was in a serious relationship with Jesus, but I'd never actually committed to take on his name, which identified me as a part of his family.

Following Jesus can be tough. Profile the lives of the men and women in the Bible and discover their common bond: trouble, pain, questions. You'll also discover the common thread of a God who is always present and always makes good on his promises. Part of the support he provides is through our Christian communities. We need people to buoy us through turbulent waters by praying for us, reminding us of what God has done in our past, and pointing us toward grace and truth. Likewise, what good is joy and progress if it isn't shared? We need people to help us throw a really good party, and according to Luke 15:10, baptism is a reason for even the angels to party: “There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Most importantly, we should be baptized because God commands it.

Can I be Baptized More than Once?

Baptism is traditionally a one-time event. Discussion surrounding second baptisms is highly debated, as one's position on the matter can have serious theological implications. Some denominations outwardly reject second baptisms because they may question the validity of the first baptism. For instance, if one was baptized into the Baptist church and later in the Catholic Church, the rebaptism may suggest that the first wasn't legitimate. Others take issue with infant baptism versus adult baptism, claiming an infant's inability to make a conscious choice to follow and obey God delegitimizes the rite. And these are just a few of the disputes. Regardless, there are still many reasons—from rededication to symbolism to meaning-seeking—that people choose to double dip.

Infant Baptism

Some denominations practice infant baptism, or “christening.” This is a much-debated topic in the Christian community, because the Bible doesn’t specifically chronicle a case of infant baptism, nor does it explicitly ban its practice. If you were baptized as an infant, how you interpret what the Bible details about baptism might determine whether you feel re-baptism is appropriate.

Erica was baptized as an infant. Now in her twenties, she says she doesn’t feel the need to be re-baptized. “Infant baptism is symbolic of the fact that we are completely helpless, and yet still receive grace.” Ruth feels similarly, “Once baptized, always baptized,” she says. “Just because I do not remember it, doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. I was sealed as God’s own. I can always claim my baptism and rededicate my life to God without another baptism.”

Melanie flips Ruth’s scenario, describing her own infant baptism as more of a “baby dedication” and her high school baptism as “a physical symbol of my affirmation of faith; a symbol that my sins were buried with Christ and I was raised to walk in newness of life.”

Many great men and women of faith stand on both sides of this debate and are still used effectively by God.

Symbolism and Rededication

Many people choose re-baptism when they more fully comprehend the symbolism behind baptism and/or when they become more intentional about their commitment to God.

Patrick was baptized as an infant, but chose re-baptism later in life as his faith matured and he felt the dramatic impact of a God-surrendered heart. “When I really gave myself to following Christ (as a young man),” says Patrick, “I decided to be baptized anew.”

Jeff, baptized at age 3, chose re-baptism this summer, years after what he considers his official conversion at age 20. “This was the first time I was submerged. The first time I understood the symbolism behind the act. The first time I understood what being a follower of Christ meant. And the first time it was in front of a church family who cheered me on when I

came up [out of the water]. . . . The first two times, in my mind, might as well have never happened.”

Anna was baptized when she was 8-years-old. Now 27, she says she would consider another baptism to reaffirm her covenant with God, “I think it’s a neat symbol to share with brothers and sisters.”

Amber was also baptized at a young age and didn’t feel the need to have a new ceremony, but later changed her mind. “I . . . swore I would never get baptized again,” she said at her recent adult baptism service. In her painful, but beautiful testimony of abuse and abandon, she told the congregation, “I’m *in love* with Jesus and I want to serve him and share him with others.”

Meaning

Others, like Sharon, might seek a more meaningful experience. Sharon was baptized as a teenager, but she says, “I had always wanted to be baptized in the open water as Jesus did. I was baptized a second time, in the open water, at a revival.”

In our desire for symbolism and meaning, it’s important to not romanticize our expectations of what our experience should feel like. While there is nothing magical about being baptized, many believe God’s grace is, in a sense, bodily passed on to us through the act. Some people report feeling “new” and “clean” or even “tingly and excited” after the act, while others say they felt “normal.” After my baptism, I felt like the same old me, only soggy, colder, and humbled. However, I had peace knowing I had taken a huge step of obedience toward God.

Sharon claims her experience as a rededication and adds a very important point about our motivation behind baptism, “God knows our hearts,” she says. If you’re considering re-baptism, reflect on why you were baptized in the first place. Was it out of your obedience and a desire to please God, or did someone—your parents, your friends, your church—pressure you into it? Obedience should be driven by love, not obligation. And remember, as much as baptism seems like it is about you, ultimately it’s about what God did for you. Focusing on this phenomenon can turn what feels like a public dunk tank into something very powerful and meaningful. Pure

motivations honor God more than our methods.

I'm a New Christian, When Should I Get Baptized?

Philip told him the Good News about Jesus. As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?" He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. — Acts 8:35b-38, NLT

Jesus's teachings marry salvation with baptism. A quick flip through the book of Acts, which is an account of the first Christians and the rapid expansion of the church, displays numerous accounts of salvation followed immediately by baptism. One of the most striking illustrations is of the Ethiopian eunuch:

After Jesus rose to heaven, he sent his spirit to help his followers carry out his final instructions (Acts 2:1-4). The spirit guided them—sometimes giving specific instructions—as they told others about Jesus. In Acts 8, the spirit instructs Philip, one of Jesus's 12 disciples to "Go south, down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza" (26). There he meets a powerful eunuch, the treasurer of Ethiopia, who is returning from a trip to Jerusalem.

As the eunuch travels in his carriage, Philip hears him read aloud a prophecy from the book of Isaiah, which describes the death of Jesus. Philip asks the eunuch, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (30). The eunuch asks, "Was Isaiah talking about himself or someone else?" (34b). Philip explains the passage to him and shares God's message of forgiveness and redemption. As they continue down the road, the eunuch spots some water and asks, "Why can't I be baptized?" and they go down to the water where Philip baptizes him on the spot (26-38).

The eunuch never saw Philip after that because he was whisked away by the Holy Spirit to share God's message in other places. But I imagine Philip's last words to him echoed Jesus's and my grandmother's: Love God, love others, and teach them to do the same.



NATHAN RUTAN

Nathan Rutan is a recent graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. In his spare time Nathan enjoys keeping up on technology, spending time with his family, exercising and working on a math-less theory of gravitation which he developed on a napkin many years ago.

THE TRINITY

Innovation, iPhones and identity

Photo © ~Brenda-Starr~ | Flickr (CC)

If you're anything like me, when you hear the word "Trinity" you probably can't help imagining the opening scene from the Matrix (1999) when actress Carrie-Ann Moss a.k.a. "Trinity" dodges agent Smith in a physics-defying scene, leaping between rooftops, flying through the air like a missile and then disappearing in a phone booth just as it's being smashed by a dump truck. Of course, if you haven't seen the movie, you might want to stick it in your Netflix queue this weekend, as it's an

interesting film with lots of action (warning: this film also contains a fair amount of violence) and many philosophical overtones. But despite the movie and the potential similarities with our topic, I'm wondering what else might come to your mind when you hear the word "Trinity?"

Apart from the scene above, the word "Trinity," for me, evokes a sense of mystery, strange geometric configurations consisting of overlapping rings, places like

Stonehenge, or just flat-out befuddlement. And while this may not be your particular experience, there are a good many people out there that find the Christian teaching on the “Trinity” or the “three-in-one-ness” of God difficult to grasp, if not downright non-sensical. But even if the idea of God the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Son Jesus existing in an eternal unity of three parts seems rather strange or even outdated, you might find it interesting that this concept was one of the most innovative ideas of the ancient Greek world, and even now continues to exert its effects on our society. In fact, just like some of the most market-disrupting apps and technologies today, the Trinity disrupted some very deeply held ideas about the nature of the world during its time. In the sense of disrupting commonly held ideas, you could think of the Trinity as the iPhone of the ancient Greek world. The iPhone forever changed the way the world looks at the particular idea of the “smartphone” and so as an analogy, the early Church’s explanation of the Trinity turned the ancient Greek world’s understanding of certain key concepts on their head. Okay, so a little backstory is necessary to lay the stage for what we’re talking about.

A Christian theologian named Stanley Grenz says that “of the various aspects of our Christian understanding of God, perhaps none is as difficult to grasp as the concept of God as triune. At the same time, no dimension of the Christian confession is closer to the heart of the mystery of the God we have come to know.” But if this concept is so central to the core of our Christianity, you’d think we could just pop open the Bible and learn what we need to know straight from the scriptures themselves, right? Of course, that’s the real catch here. The reason why the concept of “tri-unity”, or “three-in-one-ness” of God is rather slippery is that it’s not really found in the Bible anywhere in *explicit* form.

Although there is one passage that appears to reference the triunity of God, 1 John 5:7 and part of 5:8 (“For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.” NKJV), it’s been almost completely agreed upon by most biblical scholars that the earliest manuscripts did not contain this text and that it only showed up in later Latin versions. This is in fact noted in the margins in many bible versions, including the New King James Version, although as we shall see later, this isn’t the whole story.

So where does that leave us? Well, let’s take a little stroll down history lane and get a quick sweeping view of how the doctrine of the Trinity came about. This will help us work our way toward understanding why the Trinity was so innovative in its time, and why it’s still important now. You may be surprised to know that the term “Trinity” wasn’t even used until the third century AD, somewhere in the early 200s. It first showed up in a document called “*Adversus Praxean*,” written by the Latin theologian Tertullian. Actually, Tertullian was called the “Father of the Latin Church”, or basically the Romain Catholic side of the church, as there were two main branches, the

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STANLEY GRENZ

“Eastern” and the “Western” church. The churches that made up the Western church generally wrote in Latin, and the Eastern churches wrote in Greek. They also had different ways of looking at basic theological issues. The Western side could be thought of as a little more analytical, while the Eastern leaned toward a more mystical, Platonic (meaning the philosophy of Plato) view of the world.

Stick with me here, what we need to do is look back and get a quick understanding of how and why trinitarian thought came about. This will help us move toward understanding why the concept of the Trinity was so innovative in its time.

The first Christians were mostly Jews, and

therefore probably the main thought pattern they brought with them into Christianity was “monotheism,” or the belief in one God as opposed to many Gods—which is called “polytheism.” One of the foundational scriptures for the Jewish community was Deuteronomy 6:4, or what is called the *Shema*. This verse reads “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (NKJV) The next verse is the famous verse used by Jesus when asked what was the greatest commandment of all. It says “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” The Jews were instructed in the following verses of Deuteronomy to teach this to their children, to meditate on these scriptures everywhere they went, and basically keep them in sight at all times. So, this particular scripture, and the idea that God is one God was central to the people that became the first Christians.

With this in mind, how did the first Christians view Jesus? In some ways Jesus presented a theological problem, because to give him divine status as God some of the early Jewish Christians believed was a threat to their monotheism. They basically thought that belief in Jesus as God made them “bi-theists”, and this was a major problem. But not only did they have to deal with the rather thorny problem of Jesus being on the same level with God, indeed being God himself, there was the issue of the Holy Spirit as well. The early Christians had experience with the Holy Spirit, especially after the “Pentecost” event that we read about in Acts chapter 2, where the disciples began speaking in various “tongues” as the Holy Spirit moved in them. This added another dimension to the problem of Jewish monotheism, as adding in a third figure on equal footing with God amounted to what some thought to be a “tri-theism”, or a belief in three distinct Gods. Now, at this point it would almost seem like the early Christians were breaking radically from their inherited Jewish monotheism and becoming rather polytheistic, as it would appear that they now had multiple Gods—something that was a

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major problem for Jews and was one of the main ways they distinguished themselves from the surrounding ethnic groups and their multiple gods.

During this early period there were a number of Christian thinkers that sought to more fully explain Christian belief in relation to the surrounding culture. A group of theologians referred to as the “apologists,” tried to use the resources of the prevailing Greek philosophical thought of the day. They used the idea of “*logos*” which was the Greek conception of order and reason in the universe. The apologists came and put forth what is commonly called “*logos Christology*”, or basically, what became the theological ideas behind the idea of Jesus as the “*Word*”, since in Greek *logos* loosely correlates with our English term “*word*.” The apologists taught that Jesus was the ordering principle of the universe and that he was preexistent (he existed before creation) with God and that through this “*word*” (ordering principle) God spoke the universe into existence. Of course they were following closely the Gospel of John 1:1 -- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (NKJV).

Still with me? It’s important that we work through just a few more ideas and we’ll get to the reason why the Trinity was so innovative for its time, and why its still very much important today.

Okay, so there were some that didn’t agree with this theological view of Jesus as preexistent and on equal footing with God. They believed that, as stated before, this created a situation of “bi-theism” or a belief in two distinct Gods. So, some of these early Christians put forth a proposal that is now called “monarchianism”. Basically they thought that Jesus should be subordinated to God the father in at least some way, allowing God the Father’s status as the one and only true God to be preserved. And, as time went on, there were many different forms of monarchianism, such as “Sabellianism” which proposed that the Father, Son and Spirit were sequential revelations of God for different time periods—

each of these ideas came forward as the answer to the same basic problem. All of these ideas were eventually rejected by the Church, but one that made a particularly large impact is called “Arianism”.

Arianism was a form of monarchianism (the idea that God the Father should have priority) that was proposed by a deacon from the church of Alexandria in Northern Africa. Arius agreed with a contemporary theologian named Origen (who is considered a “Father” of the church--due to the impact of his writings) that Jesus was “begotten” or “generated” by the Father, but disagreed that this generation was eternal as Origen proposed. And so Arius put forth the idea that Jesus was essentially “begotten” by God, or that he was truly a creation of God’s, in the same way that a real son is begotten by an earthly father. Now this was a major theological error in the eyes of the early Church (and rightly so) as this basically stripped Jesus of his divine and eternal status. Another theologian of the time named Athanasius argued that if Jesus wasn’t truly God, then the salvation he offers us isn’t really worth much. And it wasn’t long after this particular theological struggle that the Ecumenical Council of Nicea took place.

The Nicean Council happened in the year 325 AD, and they basically laid down the first official Church position on the nature of Jesus and his relationship to God. This is where we get our formula, speaking of the Son, that states he is “begotten of the Father, of the substance of the Father, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father.” And it was a few decades later that the Second Council of Constantinople declared the full divinity of the Spirit. So the Church was beginning to form it’s official position on the Trinity. But the debate didn’t stop there. This is where it gets really interesting.

It wasn’t until a little later that the Church had a

group of three theologians, named the “Cappadocians” to thank for our classic understanding of the Trinity. No, these weren’t like the theological version of the Three Amigos, these guys were super innovative for their time, although I’m sure they looked as if they were doing a rendition of “My Little Buttercup” to the official philosophers of their day (search Three Amigos “My Little Buttercup” on Youtube). The classic formula they are responsible for is the statement that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are of one essence but three distinct realities. The Greek terms used in this statement were “*ousia* (essence) and *hypostasis* (‘center of consciousness’ or ‘independent reality’).” (*Theology for the Community*

of God by Stanley Grenz, p. 60) The Cappadocians took the theological work of previous theologians and put the smack down on some of the main Greek philosophical ideas of the time. In fact, their work was responsible for changing the very idea of what it means to be a “person” in the ancient world. By expanding their ideas into a sophisticated philosophical statement on the Trinity, they basically laid down what became the de facto standard in Trinitarian theology as

well as the de facto standard for what it meant to be a person right up into the modern era.

An Eastern Orthodox theologian named John Zizioulas explains it this way: “The concept of the person with its absolute and ontological content was born historically from the endeavor of the Church to give ontological expression to its faith in the Triune God (*Being as Communion* p. 36).” If that’s not totally clear, let me translate. Basically what he’s saying is that our very idea of being a “person” was defined by the work of the Church. In the ancient Greek world (and to a certain degree the Roman world), a human being was previously thought to be largely a prisoner of

Previously it was thought that if you achieved some form of personhood it was simply something added to the underlying substance that was truly you. The same went for God according to the ancient world. The problem was how to understand the persons in the Trinity if personhood was simply added to the underlying “real” substance like a mask over the “real” face.

Fate. In fact, it was in the Greek theatre that we could see the actors working against forces outside of their control, the “gods” and “fate,” to achieve freedom and become a “person,” if only for a brief time. But they tragically sank back into the futility of accepting that they were nothing but a slave to these outside forces. Alas, they were simply wearing a theatrical mask that would eventually be taken off, signifying that they could only temporarily taste the freedom of becoming a real “person.”

Now stick with me here, you may start to feel like your head is spinning, but this is really cool if you can get your mind around it. What the Cappadocians did was take these ideas and turn them upside down. Previously it was thought that if you achieved some form of personhood it was simply something added to the underlying substance that was truly you. The same went for God according to the ancient world. The problem was how to understand the persons in the Trinity if personhood was simply added to the underlying “real” substance like a mask over the “real” face.

But the Cappadocians had a better description of the whole situation. They reckoned that it was the person that came first, and that the substance of the being was second. This meant that, stay with me here, the person of the Father in the Trinity for example, was not just a mask added to the “real” underlying being of God, but that the real being of God *is* the person of the Father (along with the Spirit and the Son). This was a radical idea! This meant that the concept of person wasn’t temporary and fleeting, something put on and then taken off, but that it came first, and was what sustained everything else—if there was an underlying “substance” of being, it was sustained by the persons of the Trinity, not the other way around. Make sense? You may have to read that over a few times until it sinks in, but when it does, I hope you’ll see that this was a revolutionary idea.

Here’s the real shocker—essentially this means that God can’t be understood as anything apart from the Trinity. You heard that right folks. According to Zizioulas and his reading of the innovative ideas of Cappadocians, God can’t be understood in any sense outside of the idea of the Trinity. What this means is that community is essential to the underlying structure of

the universe. Stop and read that sentence again. It also means that we can’t truly be real “persons” unless we are in community. To be a person is to be related and in relationship. Existing outside of community essentially covers up our personhood and demotes us to nothing more than another individual in the masses, but not necessarily a true person with a personality. Note: the difference between human personhood and the persons of the Trinity can’t be explained here, but the difference boils down to the fact that humans are created, and God isn’t, so that changes things a bit. But we don’t have time to go that direction right now. Maybe another time.

Well, that was a lot to chew on! As we come to the close of this article, I wonder if you feel somewhat like the Trinity character in the Matrix—jumping from rooftop to rooftop, dodging a few bullets and then going into a protective tuck and roll from a superman dive off a building?

Or, perhaps you feel a little more or less like a real person, depending on your involvement in community. Hopefully you caught a sense of the innovative quality of the Cappadocian explanation of the Trinity. Who said that ancient stuff wasn’t progressive? In many ways we think we’ve got the idea of innovation cornered, but here we see that a trio of theologians from the fourth century were rocking some ideas that still impact our world today. We owe them some props for our belief that being a person is more than just accepting our fate, although in some ways it seems as if our idea of personhood is under attack as we are subsumed more and more into the collective hive that is social media and the Internet. That’s another article as well.

In the end, I hope you can grab your Netflix copy of the Matrix, some popcorn and perhaps your Bible and let yourself get lost for a bit in the complexity of the universe and God’s plan of salvation. You may just find yourself noticing the difference between those that are stuck in the Matrix and those that have escaped...and wonder about their status as persons.



The 3rd Commandment

You should not lift up the name of Yahweh, your God, in vain. For Yahweh will not acquit anyone who lifts up his name in vain.



ERICA MONGÉ-GREER

Erica Mongé-Greer is an adjunct professor of Old Testament and Ancient Culture at Asuza Pacific University, Life Pacific College and Vanguard University. She holds two Masters degrees in Ancient Near Eastern Language & Literature and Biblical Studies/Theology. Erica lives in Southern California with her husband, Joshua, and two children: Caleb and Emma. www.ericamonge.com.



he first three commandments in Exodus 20 set the stage for the latter seven. The first three commandments communicate expectations for how God should be treated and the following commandments (covered in earlier articles) establish expectations for how people should treat one another. This series has looked closely at the commandments in Exodus 20, starting with the tenth commandment, exploring values of community and justice as God intended for

those who would follow. Now, as the series moves into the first three commandments, another value emerges to confirm to the people how they are to worship God.

The third commandment reads *You should not lift up the name of Yahweh, your God, in vain. For Yahweh will not acquit anyone who lifts up his name in vain.* This commandment emphasizes an appeal to authenticity. God desires to be called upon earnestly, by those who would seek authentic communication with God. The commandment comes with a warning—anyone who calls upon the name of God should do so carefully and with conviction.

What's in a name?

Across centuries, it has been believed that knowing the real name of someone powerful can in itself invoke power. Stories and fairytales often include this kind of name-magic. Think of *Rumpelstiltskin*. In the end, the only way for the queen to save her firstborn child was to learn and say the name of the magical little man who made her devil's bargain in the first place. The New Testament tells of miracles performed in the name of the Lord Jesus, and because of this some young men thought they would get in on the action, motivated by their pursuit of personal fame. They pronounced the name of Jesus in attempt to drive out evil spirits, but the name was called upon in vain. The scripture tells that the evil spirit left upon them and overpowered them, sending them running out of the building. (Acts 19:11-20) This story demonstrates the danger of calling upon God insincerely.

The name of God, often translated into English as *Yahweh* or *LORD*, is a collection of four Hebrew symbols that are without pronunciation; the letters are a functional symbol for the name of God. Jewish tradition held that the name of God could not be spoken, because God is considered so far above humanity. Scribes could not even write the name of God without great attention to cleansing procedures.

Calling upon the name of God remains a mystical practice even today. Different denominations and church movements call upon God in different ways. Some maintain a great sense of awe and reverence

when God's name is used. Others invite the name of God into common conversation. One thing that this commandment makes clear is that however the name of God is invoked, God must be approached with humility and sincerity.

Vanity, Vanity! All is Vanity (Eccl. 1:2)

In the third commandment, the word vain signifies worthless. It also carries a connotation related to magic or a magic spell. It is as if this commandment rebukes the use of magic as worthless while also setting a standard in that God's name should not be called upon to invoke power. The Israelites, having come out of Egypt, were familiar with the use of magic to invoke power from the gods. Was it conceivable that the God who performed amazing wonders in leading them out from Egypt did not wish to be called upon for power? In time, followers of God would continue to call upon God for acts of power.

Joy Davidman, known best perhaps as the wife of C.S. Lewis, wrote: *today, with two thousand years of additional practice, we have invented many new ways of breaking the Third Commandment. We still misuse God's power and we still despise it; we call upon God to justify our sins; we commit the ultimate blasphemy of not calling upon God at all. Many churchgoers think of the Third Commandment as meant primarily to forbid casual profanity. Yet casual profanity is perhaps the least of our offences against it. It is true that we often speak of God too lightly, making an empty noise out of the most real and profound of human experiences, substituting a meaningless verbal habit for a serious concept of the Almighty.* (1954)

Davidman appeals to those who wish to live faithful lives to call upon God carefully and assuredly. Over and over throughout the Bible, God reminds people of one thing—God is in all and over all. To obey God is absolute authentic devotion. To call upon the name of God is a gift. Our response should encompass an attitude of reverence and of sincere devotion to God who saves, redeems and performs miracles in all of creation.



Should We Question God?

Growing Deeper in Our Faith



Photo by Sean McCabe



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

We may have heard that we should not question God because questioning may cause our faith to weaken. I have heard someone say we should never end a prayer with words something like, "If it be your will," because those words imply we don't believe we will get what we ask. As new believers what do we do with these kinds of ideas? Should we believe everything we hear? Should we question what we hear and read? Should we question what we hear

and read about Jesus? Will questioning weaken our faith? Let me share what I have learned during a half century of being a Christian.

Questions and doubts are not all bad. The Bible gives many examples of people who questioned or doubted God. One person was even one of Jesus' original disciples. Let's look at a few other people too. In Acts chapter ten we read the story of Peter who questioned a voice in a trance about whether he should eat unclean animals. The meaning of the vision in the trance was that Peter should share the gospel with people who were not Jews. Through the vision in the trance and asking three times whether he should eat the unclean animals, Peter became convinced he should share the gospel with Cornelius, a Roman centurion and the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles. These concepts were new to Peter and I think in his case he was questioning to clarify what he heard. Since I am a Gentile, I am thankful for Peter's questioning.

Apostle Paul faced a time of questioning. He believed a person was saved by faith and not by keeping the law. He was persecuted and challenged in every town he entered because of his teaching but he never wavered, writing most of the New Testament sharing how Jesus saves us through God's grace and our faith in him. The result is that people in the thousands have been saved because of Paul's letters. I am thankful for his letters because I know I never could have kept the law.

The Corinthian church was a young church and had many questions on many topics so they sent Paul a letter. What we call 1st Corinthians is an attempt to answer some of their many questions. Because of their questions we better understand communion, marriage relationships, gifts of the spirit, and love. Were they wrong to question their faith? I do not think so.

These three examples are of people who

questioned doctrinal or spiritual issues and they went to an authority to find the answer. Their answers changed history. What do we do when the question is an issue of personal faith? Many years ago I had an experience where I questioned God. I found myself underemployed and over obligated financially. Routine activities ceased—such as going to the post office to get the mail and answering phone calls—for fear of hearing from a bill collector. My credit score plummeted. I couldn't even get credit to buy fuel for my furnace in the winter. My depression hit the ceiling. I barely had enough emotional strength to go from my bed to my couch and back to bed again.

For seven years I suffered, asking God why, what have I done? My house was in a town of about two hundred people, two houses to my east were a corn field and then country. I frequently went for walks in the country begging, praying, bargaining, and scolding God

over my employment condition. God never told me the reason but after seven years I got a job. Looking back at that experience I realize God did not abandon me; we always had food and clothing and we made the house

payment. Because of my deep, emotional soul searching and questioning whether God could or would provide for me I learned some important lessons. Even though I questioned I never stopped believing. Now I have faith to believe God can get me through anything. I do not worry about the economy because I know I am included in God's economy.


My situation reminded me of 1 Kings 17:7 "Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land." My savings were gone, my credit was ruined, my brook dried up because I had no employment. Eventually God restored the rain, refilled the brook, and took care of my problems. I questioned him but I grew. I left a legacy to my children that even when times are tough and we question God, he is still with us teaching us and helping us to grow.

Even though I questioned I never stopped believing. Now I have faith to believe God can get me through anything.

Another important lesson I learned is when I reached my rock bottom, Jesus was my rock on the bottom. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12 NIV). “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6 NIV). I believe Jesus wants everyone to learn about him and will take us through whatever it takes for us to learn.

Questioning is a good way to learn any subject. When we find the answer we have a much better understanding of the subject. When our doubts concern God we need to be careful not to let the questions destroy our faith. During those seven years I continued to attend church, continued in my leadership roles in the church, and continued my regular financial support of the church. I grew into a much stronger believer than I ever could have become by reading or listening to a teacher. Like Job, I knew *about* God, but having gone through a time of testing, I believe I *knew* God.

Jesus taught by asking questions. Good teachers imitate him. Good learners question their teachers until they understand the material. As believers, we need to cling to the truth that Jesus alone can save us, and then we can question or doubt everything else until our understanding becomes a part of who we are. Once our questions are answered, we never forget them. When we find the answer we are seeking, the history of our lives is changed forever as we grow deeper in our faith. We may also find an answer for which we were not seeking.

I was seeking a job and never learned why it took so long to find one. I learned how much God cares because he never left us destitute. I know that no matter what may happen in my future I can trust, and will trust God. Despite having advanced degrees and many years as a Christian, those seven years taught me more than I ever learned at any other time. 

JARGON RIGHTEOUS

Dictionary of Christian Jargon for the Ordinary Person

Righteous is a word you don't really hear anymore. It sounds very archaic and conjures up images of a Puritan in stockings and a wig. To others it reminds them of outdated slang flowing from the mouth of a long haired hippie in the Haight Ashbury area of San Francisco in the late 1960's. The word makes us think of someone who is goody two shoes and anal at best. The reason why this word provokes these things is because for the most part it is an old and outdated concept. Something that is ancient and out of step with contemporary times. Which means it may need some updating. Before we can do that we need to dig deeper into the ancient meaning for righteous.

In the ancient Near Eastern world the word righteous meant to be “in the right” because you “do what is right”. It was a term bestowed on a person who had a just cause and lived a just life before God. This person would be vindicated by God and shown justice in this life and in the afterlife. This is what it meant to be righteous in the ancient world. The only thing is that this produced two dilemmas. The first dilemma is that because of our brokenness and weakness as humans we don't “do what is right” or even know how to “do what is right” all the time. The second dilemma is that if we don't “do what is right” how can we be “in the right” and be vindicated by God.

Let's fast forward to the 21st century. Being righteous is about being the kind of person who does the right things for the right reasons at the right times. It is about alignment with all the relationships in your life. Doing what is right by God and by others. This seems simple but just like the ancients struggled with “doing what is right” we also face the same struggle. The good news is there was this guy named Jesus who not only showed us how to “do what is right” but has promised to empower us to “do what is right”. And in the event that we fail he can make us right through transferring his righteousness to us. That's the only way we can be “in the right” and live the life we are supposed to live with him forever. —Ramon Mayo

Discipline & the Bible

How should Christians should discipline their children?

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

In a poll taken on ChristiNet.com, the largest Christian portal, 85% of those believed it was in their rights to spank their children. Most quoted the “spare the rod, spoil the child” (Proverbs 13:24) verse as support for their stance. Many of those also said that spanking is okay “as long as it is done in moderation and without anger.” Others stated that they formed their opinions based on how they were disciplined as a child. Ten percent said they were against spanking. A lot of people in

this group thought that spanking was not so much a form of discipline as it was physical harm. Their reasons were that it would encourage violence. One person commented that a timeout or other form of discipline made more sense. Five percent in the poll were unsure on the subject. Many of the unsure group were spanked as kids. There were mixed feelings about it. Sometimes those spanked felt they didn't deserve it. Other comments made by this group were, "only as a last resort" or "it depends on what they did."

What does the Bible say about discipline?

One of the most cited examples from the Bible regarding spanking is Proverbs 13:24. It reads, "Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them." (NIV)

In *Parenting By The Book* by John K. Rosemond, M.S., he says that there is a misunderstanding when it comes to the passages in the Bible about discipline. He quotes two specific passages that mention "the rod of discipline."

Proverbs 22:15 — "Foolishness is bound in the heart of the child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him."

Proverbs 23:13 — "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die."

Rosemond says that we must pay particular attention to the article (a or the) used in scripture. Also the context it is used is very important. The difference is literal versus metaphorical. According to Rosemond, usually when the phrase "a rod" is used, it is referring to an actual instrument such as a measuring stick, scepter, or shepherd's staff. For example, Exodus 21:20 it says, "If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies as a direct result he must be punished..." In this case, "a rod" is referring to an actual rod. However, usually when the Bible says "the rod" it actually means God's righteousness. In Proverbs 23:13 it reads, "Do not withhold discipline from a child, if you punish him with the rod he will not die." So in this case, the rod is more of a

correction done verbally because God gives us authority as in Exodus 20:12 (Honor your father and mother).

However, the problem comes when people get these two types of rods mixed up. Even then the issue is not black and white. As far as what the Bible says about actual examples of discipline, it really doesn't give specific examples disciplining children. So how are we as Christian parents to decide a discipline strategy?

Chip Ingram (from Focus On The Family and one who believes it is okay to spank) gives some ideas in his seven-step process:

Clear warning – the first interaction in discipline should always be verbal

Establish responsibility – Don't ask why your child did something. Ask what he or she did wrong.

Avoid embarrassment - No yanking out of a restaurant booth or yelling at them in front of friends. Instead go to a private place.

Communicate grief – Show your child that you are sad that he or she disobeyed you.

Flick your wrist – The spanking should be to sting; not to injure.

Sincere repentance – Give your child some time to think about what he or she did wrong and then ask if your child wants to talk about it. Then ask with whom he or she need to make things right.

Unconditional love – After the spanking, hug your child and let him/her know that you forgive him/her.

Seeing both sides

We cannot look past other verses in the Bible that instruct us in how to act towards our children. Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle word turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

1 Corinthians 13:4 says, "Love is patient. Love is kind..."

Grace to You at gty.org points out that we should not exasperate our children (Colossians 3:22) or they may lose heart. One of the ways we exasperate our children is by disciplining them in ways that are abusing them physically, mentally, or verbally. For example being sarcastic, cruel, or resentful.

Not so black and white

Why are there differing opinions on spanking in the Christian community? I believe that part of it is how we were raised. I did not grow up in a Christian home, but my mom definitely spanked us. Because of this, I have no problem doing it to my child. She did so with more than her hand too. Other people like my friend Cesar did not grow up being spanked so that may have affected his earlier attitudes toward it. Some Christian parents use a “Three Strikes Rule.” That means that there are two warnings and then a swat on the behind comes.

I believe if there is a plan such as the “Three Strikes Rule” it is a good idea. Also, spanking in anger is not a proper approach to take because it sends the wrong message to children.

Spanking vs. other discipline

I had a further discussion with a couple at church, Cesar and Shelly, about their experiences and views on spanking.

Cesar said that he believes it is useful. He said that sometimes the timeout isn't enough.

Cesar did not grow up being spanked as a child.

Shelly said that she believes that spanking works but only as a last resort. She would always spank on the butt. When I asked her if she believed spanking was Biblical, she said she wouldn't say that.

Also she would always use her hand and not another instrument such as a ruler, yardstick, or wooden spoon. Shelly also thinks that spanking should be used more today because kids often disrespect their parents with little regard to timeouts or other forms of discipline.

My friends Linda and Evan have differing opinions on the subject. Linda does not believe in spanking. She did say that her dad would hit her and her brother with

a Chinese feather duster on their legs. Her mom would slap her in the face. Linda thinks there are better ways to discipline besides physical discipline. She prefers giving and taking away privileges from her older son and using time outs for her younger one. Her husband Evan does believe in spanking. He experienced physical discipline as a child as well.

Another friend of mine Winston, an expectant father, recalls his discipline as a child.

“I am not in favor of spanking. I was ‘spanked’ with those bamboo back scratchers as a kid. They hurt like hell, and I suppose it worked on me. But I can say I would not do that to my own children. When I got hit, I knew it was because I caused trouble or did something wrong, but it was never explained to me. I think discipline is more about communication and showing grace, especially to children. To me, disciplining with the ‘reed’ so-to-speak, or using pain, is like bullying. Plus it seems more like a convenient thing to spank vs. spend the time to talk it out and try to help the child reason it out, and help them integrate the cognitive and emotional aspect of what they did wrong. Of course, firmness in tone and minimal anger are important, but the use of some kind of physical force strays further from teaching a child the true nature of discipline, and just mirrors the violence we all end up seeing on tv, video games, etc. I believe parents have full right to discipline as they see fit, as long as it is not abusive. In my household, there will be no spanking.”

My friend Karen, a mother of three, is also against spanking. She takes a more scientific approach on it. She said, “Cortisol is released when you spank a kid according to UCLA study. Cortisol also kills brain cells, based on new book interview on NPR last year. I think the book is called *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. I also believe in time outs, positive enforcements, take away rewards for older children.”

There are also hundreds of peer reviewed journals that show that spanking has negative effects for children such as antisocial behavior, mental illness like depression, acting more aggressively, having a less close relationship with parents, and abuse.

Another friend of mine, Wendy, says, “I do spank my kids at the same time I explain to them why I spank

them. I also do time out and take away privileges. None of the three really prevent them from repeating their wrongdoing. So depending of the situation and the personality of my kids, I use all or one of the disciplinary methods on them.”

Jennifer, a mother of three, had this to say, “Against popular belief, I believe there is strong biblical evidence supporting the truth that there are times where correction should be accompanied by the rod, and that it should be applied. God’s Word instructs us to apply and not withhold physical discipline from a child. Not in the form of abuse of course, but a light spank on the butt or hand will drive foolishness away and teach wisdom to your child, says Proverbs (the book of wisdom) over and over again. One specific example is Proverbs 23:13 “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.”

Final analysis

I find myself really re-thinking my original position on this topic. My first thoughts are to follow the example of my parents: to spank. However, as I read the positions of my friends, I am reminded there needs to be some reasoning and explanation that goes along with any form of discipline. For example, when you give a time out to a child, he or she needs to know what they did wrong. In the case of spanking, warnings need to be given. There also needs to be some forgiveness and understanding when our children do something we don’t deem appropriate. After a time out, I always hug my son Elijah and tell him that I love him. I also agree that as a parent, I need to catch myself when I’m about to do or say something in the heat of the moment. A lot of it is letting the little things go and letting my son do things that aren’t necessarily really bad. Some examples are things like playing with ropes in line at Disneyland, touching things in the store, or running back and forth around the house. I need to pick my battles so to speak. For me, it just all comes down to having a game plan and being consistent with it. In closing, I realize that children are different and some things work with one that don’t necessarily work with another. Ultimately, the discipline style is up to each of us as parents. 🎧

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A TESTIMONY OF LOVE

The Story of Esther Perumalla

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SARAH DONAWERTH

Sarah Donawerth is a published poet and currently studying English at Biola University. In her spare time, she plays Disney songs on the ukulele and reads the works of Jane Austen.

Esther's testimony actually begins with the work of her great-great-grandfather. He was a servant to English missionaries in India at the beginning of the movement for Indian self-rule. The missionaries soon decided to relocate to South Africa and they took Esther's great-great-grandfather with them. When the missionaries finally returned to England, he stayed in South Africa to earn the money for a return trip to India for him and his family. He built a Christian school for the Zulu children while working on a return

trip to India. Since then, it had been tradition for all of the children in her family to go to the school. Esther's father had gone to the school, and Esther moved from New York to South Africa at the age of 5 to attend the school that her great-great-grandfather had started.

Esther lived in a South African village of about 250 people, mostly white people of Dutch descent. Apartheid had ended in 1994, but there was still a lot of racial tension where she lived. Esther was raised by her nanny, a black South African whose family had worked for Esther's for many generations. Esther got a call from her parents every night while she was in South Africa. She had exciting adventures and remembered being chased by a rhinoceros and having a chimpanzee throw rocks at her and her nanny while they were covering a neighbor's house in large leaves (the South African equivalent of toilet-papering).

One night, Esther and her nanny had already gone to bed when they heard three sharp raps on the door. Her nanny told her to stay in bed as she began to open the door. The door was thrown open the rest of the way and five white men stormed the house armed with guns and torches. They dragged Esther from her bed and tied her to one of the pillars in her house. One man looked her straight in the eye and told her that she was ugly and didn't have the right to even exist. The men, belonging to a white supremacy group, had attacked the house because they thought that Esther was the illegitimate child of her black nanny and a white man. Esther, being Indian in appearance, knew that the attacks were senseless and fueled by hatred and racism. The men dragged her nanny to the other room, where they attacked and raped her.

Esther could hear her nanny screaming "Have faith, Esther, God loves you!" over and over again from the other room. Even while her nanny was suffering, Esther remembers that her nanny only wanted to ensure that Esther was okay and that she knew that she was protected by God. Her nanny spoke in Telugu, an Indian language that Esther's father had taught her, which only made the men hit her more and yell for her to be quiet because they couldn't understand what she was saying. The men began to light the house on fire when the gardener returned to the house to reclaim some tools

that he had left there that afternoon. Seeing the men, he shot his rifle in the air and they scattered. Esther realizes now that it was a miracle from God that sent the gardener to their house in the middle of the night. The gardener untied Esther and was able to get both Esther and her nanny to safety.

After three days, they were able to get ahold of Esther's father. There had been a bad earthquake in California and her parents had been unable to call as they usually did. Esther's father flew out to South Africa immediately. All five men were arrested because it was commonly known in such a small village who was responsible. Esther's father was given permission by the judge to punish the men and had even suggested that he turn the men over to the Zulu tribe to be tortured and killed. The Zulu tribe in the area knew her father from his work with the school and would have gladly dealt with the attackers of his little girl. Knowing that this could be their fate, three of the men killed themselves in prison. Esther's father took the remaining two out to tea.

As nearly everyone in the village waited outside, Esther's father explained that they had acted out of evil and that they were no better than animals. In fact, he had once killed a lion with only a stone and he could easily do that to the people who had hurt his little girl. He said that if they had killed Esther, they would have killed a piece of him as well. He had brought his rifle and laid it on the table. The men were sheet-white and Esther's nanny could not make eye contact with them. Esther couldn't look away.

Her father explained that he had only seen a small window of the wickedness that these men had committed. However, he was completely privy to all the wickedness in his own heart. He explained that if anyone deserved to die today, then it was him. With this, he took the safety off the gun and slid it across the table. He explained that Christ had died to cover his sins and that they could also share in Christ's sacrifice to be cleansed of their sins. Esther's father spared her attackers, set them free, and watched as they accepted Christ as their savior.

Esther didn't understand this action. She was angry that no one had asked what she and her nanny wanted. After all, they were the victims. She was angry

that her father hadn't been there for her during and after the attacks. She felt that he shouldn't have been allowed to pardon them. She returned to the United States and continued in school. Her father tried to get her involved in the community, but she was still very angry about what had happened. She says that she didn't respect white men and that she saw them as cut from the same cloth as her attackers. She was only 13 and had already seen so much hatred and racism. Esther's father pulled her aside one day to discuss how she was treating people. He explained that sparing those men was the hardest thing that he had ever done, but that he wasn't the one who could judge their souls. He hated to see the toll that it was taking on her and he asked her to give it over to God. Esther's father went into his study and locked the door, then cried for over two hours. Esther remembers that it was the first time she realized just how much the experience had affected him and that he was crying because he wanted her to be right with God.

It was at 16 years old that Esther began to walk with Christ. She had been raised with Christian beliefs, but hadn't embraced Christ as her savior until she realized the significance of her experience. She realized God's hand in the experience: the gardener who returned that night, the two men who were saved, her father sparing their lives. Through her experience, she was able to gain a closer walk with God.

Esther now sees God's image in other people and knows that God is looking out for her. She is attending Biola University (Bible Institute of Los Angeles) and says that she wouldn't be there without everything that God has taught her about loving others. Her father still keeps in contact with the two men in South Africa, one is now a pastor. Esther's nanny is married and living in the Netherlands. Esther's experiences have enabled her to understand God's grace for her and brought her into a close walk with God.



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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.

If you're in credit card debt, please raise your hand...

I am right along there with you. When I look at my credit card spending report and see the things that I bought, I always regret making such purchases that have only added to my debt and not to the benefit of my life. Things that I had to have right then: a cashmere sweater, a foodie meal at an expensive pop-up, or a facial at a deluxe spa. Why'd I buy that cashmere sweater? Because I wanted something that would make me feel pretty. Why the expensive meal? Because I wanted to savor something delicious that would create a food memory. Why the facial? Because I needed to be pampered. So here I am, instantly gratified, but with mounds of debt and nothing to show for it.

I've heard the term microwave generation which is defined as describing our fascination with instant gratification: cellphones, text messages, and email. Instant gratification is a problem. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 16:25). My aforementioned expenditures seemed right at the time but now my credit is slowly dying. I didn't use my credit cards to cover financial hardships like medical bills, auto repairs, and other necessities but I spent for the sake of spending. We often think that we need material things to satisfy us, but that's a lie, we don't because these are only temporal. I realize that in the overspending on my credit card, I was trying to fill voids that only Jesus can. I simply got tired of waiting.

The Bible has many patriarchs that waited on God to fulfill his promises to them. Moses waited on God to save his people. Joshua waited on God to appoint

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him leader. Jacob waited on God to deliver him from jail. Sarah was barren and tried to solve the issue by giving her handmaiden, Hagar, to Abraham. She birthed Ishmael. Sarah was impatient, tired of waiting on God, and wanted to see some results, but what she really lacked at that time was faith. Later, she would still see the promise of God come to pass in the birth of her son, Isaac. When God makes a promise, he doesn't take it away; we just have to catch up to the promise. As the Bible states, "God is not a man, that he should lie" (Numbers 23:19). In the time where Sarah and Abraham were waiting on God, he was growing their faith and trust in him only to prepare Abraham for the next step in faith as a great example for his people.

In the birth of Isaac, Abraham came alive.

Imagine wanting something so badly and when it manifests (and even before it does) just smiling and thanking God every day for it. Isaac was valuable like a precious stone in Abraham's eyes, but God had bigger plans. He called Abraham to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice to him on Mount Moriah. Now imagine your miracle being slain by your own hand. Abraham walked with Isaac to the mountain and as he was about to sacrifice him, an angel of the Lord stopped him and a ram was sacrificed instead. On the other side of this great step of faith and obedience was the opening of another promise by God to Abraham: for him to have many descendants and abundant prosperity for all. In waiting and obeying the command of God, Abraham not only got to have a healthy son, but also a promise of that same health and wealth for generations to come.

It could be a test. Think about Jesus. He suffered such agony that even while he was praying his tears became blood. Nevertheless, he had to wait until the appointed time to conquer death, hell, and the grave. It may be a test to grow your faith. But thank God, it's an open-book test. The answers, the hope, and the strength to keep going come through prayer and reading the Bible which are both faith-growers. "But

without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

As children of God and believers in Christ, we are in Christ's army and his soldiers must have unshakeable and exercised faith. But to get there doesn't always feel good. Faith grows in adversity. It's truly in the valleys, tears, and the storms where we come to know the power of God, experience him, and lean on his promises. Has God made a promise to you that you're waiting on? Yes. They're all in his written word: we're the head and not the tail and we're blessed and not cursed (Deuteronomy 28).

Sometimes it seems to us that waiting and

obeying when we don't have much does not make sense. God, I've been faithfully tithing but I only have \$70 left over to make it through the next two weeks until pay day. I need you to show me your best, I need to see change and know it's you right now. Can I testify? This has happened to me twice in the last two months. I can tell you that my rent was paid and all my bills, but I had very little left over to eat. See, God wants

us to hold him at his word. He wants to show us what he can do. I asked him to show up in urgency in this situation and he did. Each time there was about \$80 of extra monies in my hand. Where did it come from? God. Who got me through fed and satisfied? God. The Bible states in Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Storing your treasures in heaven is giving your total self to God and inviting him into every area in your life. Complete surrender. There are so many times in our lives as Christians where it seems like we are missing out or losing out. With tithing, there is not a lot of money

"Remember, living in the will of God is the safest place on earth."

left over for me to hang out with friends, go out to dinner, and for me to enjoy the spoils of this world. But then I think of heaven and all that is awaiting me. It's almost like having stocks. We may put into them and not see the return always but as it builds and builds and we give and give soon there will be a heap – and that heap is all ours. It's worth the present sacrifice for the future reaping.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3: 5-6). What I've come to realize by trying to find satisfaction in things outside of God, is that it always leaves me broke and tired and dissatisfied. He's given me a responsibility within my finances to give to him. I do, but I end up giving more to Chase Bank along the way. Until I can get a handle on my finances and be trusted by God to manage them, he won't get me where he's got to get me. Is it possible that I'm stalling my journey to his promises? Could I have been at the promise and bought a pair of shiny patent leather pumps that pushed me miles back from that promise that was yards away? Yes. Okay, so what now? How do I reach that promise?

We know that we have a divine mission in this world to worship God, do the will of God, for him to use us for his glory, and to let our light shine. If you want something in particular, ask God for it and wait. Don't try to find a substitute or something to bide time in its stead. He says that we have not because we ask not (James 4:2). So ask! And believe! If it's in his will for your life, he will do it. God's blessings are delightful and much better than anything we could ever conjure up for ourselves out of our human abilities. “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who

love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). Also, be encouraged that “those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

I've cut up the credit cards and am leaning on the Lord. I've found my credit card to be a metaphor for me as a Christian not wanting to wait on God and the end result thereof is what happens when we try to take matters into our own hands. What's your credit card? Through this entire financial experience I've learned that all I can do is rely on the word of God. That's it. All I can do is trust in Jesus, pray for patience, and do my

part of being responsible. Remember in the gospel of John where Jesus calls Lazarus to come forth from death to life? A preacher once said that he has to use Lazarus's name because if Jesus just said come forth, everything that was dead would come to life because there is so much power within him. The preacher went on to say we too have that power because Christ lives in us. He said, debt free come forth, new home

come forth, new job with higher pay come forth. We can speak over these things that are holding us back from those nearby promises and clear the path so that we no longer stumble over our own laces. In everything, the Christian has hope for God's divine will to be done on earth also at it is in heaven. As much as we focus on our God given goals, here it's important to remember that we are all living for the riches of glory in Christ Jesus. When we store our true treasure and desires and faith in heaven we know that they will take root as God promises and never decay, depreciate, get stolen, or rust. Yes ask. Yes speak over. Yes claim. But yes, Lord, above all else your will be done.

“So I refuse to give up because I know God will never let me down” (Isaiah 50:7). 

We know that we have a divine mission in this world to worship God, do the will of God, for him to use us for his glory, and to let our light shine. If you want something in particular, ask God for it and wait.



PEOPLE PLEASING

*Learning how to find our acceptance
in God, rather than people*

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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 imagine with me for a minute...I know, we are all mature adults here, but humor me, please? Imagine with me a first date. You are raiding your closet one, two, three times, in hopes of something magically appearing the next time you check...Like the shopping elf dropped a present into your wardrobe in the amount of time it took you to close and open your closet door. You settle with an outfit, spend some good time singing in the shower, fix your hair nice, makeup set or mustache neatly trimmed, double check hair, great. Everything looks great. Your stomach is curdling. It's always the moments before that first encounter that get you. You rehearse, Hi, how are you tonight? Crap; you forgot cologne/perfume. *Spritz.* Rehearse again, *Hi! It's so great to finally meet you—I've heard so much about you!"*

In any given first-impression situation, the pressure exists to present your best. Someone interesting, charming, funny, beautiful, stylish, intellectual...we are all looking to be labeled with something that makes us stand out and worth peoples' time. There is nothing wrong with wanting to smell nice for a first (or second, or third...) date, and there is nothing wrong with practicing your first handshake for an interview. None of these things are bad; in fact, they are good. I want a prospective employee to have a great handshake, and I don't want a prospective boyfriend to show up smelling like dirty socks. But where is the happy medium between good impressions and people pleasing?

Choosing not to people-please is hard. It is hard to choose an opinion, belief, or way of life that may cause others to look at you strangely, maybe even speak against you.

How do we get carried away with wanting to be liked?

I would say that I am an expert in people-pleasing. Let me rephrase that...I am an expert at wrapping my mind and life around trying to make other people happy. It really doesn't sound all that bad when I put it that way. As Christians, aren't we called to place others' needs above our own? And seek out another's well-being over pursuing our own dreams and desires? What on earth would Jesus do? How would he handle the tension of pouring out our lives for others and turning away from people pleasing?

Hmm. Jesus. This may be the answer: look at Jesus. Look to Jesus. His life was full of world-view smashing dichotomies. Somehow, Jesus attracted large crowds with his messages full of challenge and new ways of thinking. Jesus' teachings throughout the New Testament turned the law abiding Jews' lives completely upside down. He redirected them to the root and meaning of the Law: to love God above all, and with all, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus gave himself away time after time after time—even in times where he was going to seek rest, we see him healing the blind and sick, giving himself fully to the people in his path in need of his touch and hope. However, never do we once see Jesus compromising his message to fit the likeness of the listener.

Jesus did not taint the true message of salvation to be audience friendly—he knew the gospel to be too important to fit any other mold. And, for centuries, we see men and women in the Bible and men and women through history, even some today, who have given their lives, refusing to taint this message to please others. They see it too precious to fit any other mold.

Have we lost this passion? Did we ever have it?

I want to so passionately love and believe the message of grace through Jesus that I see it my call to preserve the authenticity of the story. In a moment of threat, however, will I adjust it to fit someone else's liking, just to protect my own behind? I want to stand firm with Jesus, trusting his promises, and obeying his commands to speak the message

of hope he alone can give. And I want to speak it boldly, not neglecting the truth, no matter the consequence.

Choosing not to people-please is hard. *It is hard* to choose an opinion, belief, or way of life that may cause others to look at you strangely, maybe even speak against you. We see churches across America compromising because of this fear of not meeting peoples' wants. And, from the outside, their churches are expansive and growing—they seem successful (please note: I am not speaking out against all big or “mega” churches. I know of many who are living out the gospel powerfully and making a difference in the world in immense ways). But stories of compromise of theology, truth, even personal morals are all too frequent for the church. They are lacking the challenge that Christ presents in his messages time after time after time.

Let's go back to the first date image. In that moment of meeting, each person has a choice: be yourself or be what you think the other person wants. That's it. Be you or don't. Either way there will be jitters involved, but you have the choice to be fully yourself and honest with the other person. Those forks in the road also appear when talking to people about Jesus. Everyone loves hearing of heaven, of God's love and grace, of Jesus being born in a manger...but then there hits a point in the conversation where topics like hell come up. *You mean, if I don't accept Jesus, I am going to hell? But I am a good person...* And in these controversial, difficult truths, we must embrace and share with compassion. We hold fast to Jesus' words when he says that he is the only way; and now it is our turn to speak those words of truth and life to others. Will we?



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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.



Heart For Africa

The heart everyone needs.

When I was sixteen years old, I felt God speak my destiny over my life in which I knew God wanted me to serve him and be a voice to the church. I knew for the first time, beyond the shadow of a doubt, what I was truly meant to do. I thought to myself, “I want to be a pastor, yeah! That’s what I’m called to do.” Let me preface this with explaining so you understand I was unaware there was much else to ministry other than pastoral ministry or overseas mission work.

At the time I felt completely called to preach behind a pulpit but would let it be known I was NOT called to missions. I had not felt called, nor was I interested. In fact, nothing about mission work interested me at all. I had some great experiences behind a pulpit, even from a young age. This positive experience only proved that, in my mind, what I knew to be true: preaching is my arena. It seems a dangerous, yet funny game sometimes, when we say, “I won’t do this,” or

"I know I'm not called to that." It seems God works through the verbal and mental noes we put in front of him. Fast forward to the summer of my senior year in college, where I had learned there were MANY different aspects to ministry and only six years after I'd made these limiting declarations, already served in varying aspects of ministry including Christian radio and youth ministry. That summer began a fork in the road that I never saw coming...

Growing up in Southern California found me surfing regularly with a passion to ride waves and someday, even see the world while surfing at the same time. It was summer of my senior year I found out there was such a thing as a "surf missionary," a literal organization that brought in surfers

to do overseas mission work to bring aid, donations, clothes, and reach the natives as well as surfers with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, though I had no conviction or desire previously for nations, college left me with a curiosity of the world, and an excitement to surf all the more. I applied for Surfing the Nations, was accepted, and a week after graduating college, left for Hawaii. Shortly after that, I spent the rest of the summer doing mission work in Indonesia. For the first time I was able to see poverty in person: children begging along the streets for money, fourteen and fifteen year old girls trying to sell their bodies to support their families, and the maimed and homeless strewn everywhere. For the first time I was able to see what hunger looked like on the face of a child. For the first time I was able to see a gaping need in third world countries that I wasn't even aware existed. You see, it's one thing to just want to do missions, it's another when you become aware that the world around you, isn't the only one out there. When the mind shifts from our daily wants of clothes, treats, feasts of food, and gadgets to an awareness of hunger, wide-spread diseases, or everyday fatalities, the heart follows suit. I never had a heart for mission work. Why? Because I had no exposure to what was going on across the world. I had no awareness of what other humans battled against

I hope that you will run past the proverbial "dangling surfboard" to understand that there is a burning need for us who are capable to help those in need.

every day of their lives. And now, here I was, in the midst of a people group in need. I believe the truth remains, that when most people see a need, it is within them to want to help. They need only to experience the need, and this is where my passion for missions began.

My mission work and passion for surfing took me from Hawaii, to Indonesia, to Nicaragua, and to South Africa. And eventually God no longer needed to dangle a surfboard in front of me to get me to bite. I had been in the trenches with these people, I saw their hurt and their lack. My passion was no longer surfing with bringing aid to third world people as a bonus on the side. No, the people became the passion. Those natives will forever leave a mark on my heart for what I choose

to do, what I choose to write, and how I even choose to spend my money. I hope that by simply understanding the process the Lord took me through, that you will run past the proverbial "dangling surfboard" to understand that there is a burning need for us who are capable to help those in need.

Having done surf missions in South Africa, I didn't expect to begin caring for the country or continent. I really wanted a heart for the people, but truth be told I was just as excited about crossing off "going on a safari" on my bucket list as I was worrying about what the people really needed. Sure I had sermons to share that sounded good, and clothes to give away, but something astounded me: it wasn't my things the people cared about, even in their poverty, it was simply me they were interested in. This not only caught me off guard, but truly seemed mind-boggling. In the various countries I've visited around the world, it's in the poverty stricken areas of a community you see begging, swindling and bartering at its best. But I had never been to a place with visible poverty that didn't have the familiar symptoms of it. These people still seemed happy and joyful. They wanted to know me and wanted to know love. I could only think to myself, "if these people are happy even in their lack, what could a world of provision and education look like for them?" Furthermore, how could something like this be

accomplished?

Highlight: Heart For Africa, a non-profit organization that is seeking to help the dangerously, rapidly growing problems facing the nation of Swaziland, Africa. Swaziland borders South Africa on its north, south, and west borders; and meets Mozambique on its east border. It's a small country, no larger than New Jersey in size, but boasts some of the worst statistics on the planet. For starters, there are over 200,000 orphans in this country, 15,000 of whom are without parents and head their own household. As Heart for Africa (HFA) puts it,

"In this orphan headed household there are no funds to pay school fees, so the children stay home and are not educated. They cannot work and have no money for food and so the cycle of poverty and AIDS continues as they sell themselves to men to survive."

But the most shocking of the stats: a 42% HIV/AIDS rate that has left the nation with an average life expectancy of 29 years old. If nothing is done to stop the widespread AIDS and living standards, professionals have projected there to be no adults in the country by 2020 if something is not done.

Malnutrition also plays a huge role in the mortality rate of the developing world, threatening to also shorten the lives of children and adults alike. It is no joke to say that there are three year old children that get their food every day from the local dump, sifting through garbage for hours for a single meal.

HFA has tried to focus on four main areas including hunger, orphans, poverty, and education. The plan is to connect to the children through the churches. While Swaziland is over 80% Christian and there are over 6,000 churches there, the organization believes that by partnering and joining with the churches, it will become easier to help the kids and allow them to reach the 200,000 orphans with support from us in the United States and Canada. It takes human effort and solutions. But if we can instill hope in the young ones, we can begin to build a generation that will turn the tide on fatal problems currently facing the country. Anything that Heart for Africa has implemented, has had a sustainable aspect to it, including employment and large scale farming to break the cycle of poverty. Though HFA is aware they can't solve all of Swaziland's problems,

their intent is to join alongside the people of Swaziland in helping as much as possible. One aspect they have started is called "Project Canaan," in which they have sought to create a self-sustaining entity that can support all of the orphanages in Swaziland. It includes farmland (to help feed those in need,) a chapel, a baby home (for abandoned babies,) a toddler home, a dam to cultivate clean water, an artisan school, learning center and medical center.

HFA has set up a plethora of opportunities to partner with them in their vision. Some of these include marathons, speaking engagements, "Celebrate Hope" events, golf marathons, or even sponsoring a child. HFA hosts an annual "golf marathon" every year in Milton, GA where people donate to play against others to profit the organization, the golf marathon also offers fun competitions such as putting, longest drive, and "closest to the pin" contests. They offer partnerships for anyone who wants to run to raise support and awareness for any of the projects that HFA has going. Let's say there's a local marathon your city or neighboring city is hosting, you could enter the marathon and then raise money for the proceeds to go directly towards HFA. Another fundraising project is called "Coins 4 Kids." In this project they encourage people to support them by saving their loose change. This project focuses on two areas of support for the El Roi Baby Home. HFA's "Coins 4 Kids" project uses the coins you collect to pay for goats at the Baby Home for providing milk and meat, which means provision for the needy orphans and vulnerable children that Heart for Africa serves. The goats help to generate employment, income, and food in Swaziland. They also offer trips to Swaziland as well to invite you to personally come and help in their efforts. Travel to Swaziland and help in the different areas they have to serve. There are few things in my life I've experienced more fulfilling and rewarding than having had the opportunity to help those in need. You have the time, you have the resources, you need only to care enough. Bringing help to those in need, feeding the hungry, clothing the have-nots, and praying with the broken will change your life, and, if you let it... will change the native's lives of Swaziland as well. 

You can find out more at www.heartforafrica.org

Joy Revolution

Music meets ministry.



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.

Music and ministry have rarely come together so seamlessly as in the case of Benjamin Dunn and the Animal Orchestra. This band, formed and led by Benjamin Dunn, travels the nation performing shows and raising money to maintain an orphanage for children who have been living in garbage dumps and leper colonies in Hyderabad, India.

The biography of this band and ministry is a testimony to the greatness, faithfulness and power of our God. Benjamin and his wife, Stephanie, did not grow up in church. After graduating high school, they traveled around the country through their early twenties with no intention of abandoning their exciting and adventurous lifestyles. Throughout this time of wandering, they brought a Bible with them everywhere they went, but were not seeking out any spiritual experience or direction.

They hoped to simply figure things out on their own. One day during their travels, they were sitting on the beach and a man invited them to go church.

"We said 'Hey, we'll try anything once'" Dunn said.

They followed this man to a Pentecostal church, where Dunn and his now wife felt the presence of the Lord for the first time. This is the day when they became believers, committing themselves to lives of service to God. Referring to this day, Dunn expressed, "We have

never felt without God's presence ever since that day."


Three short years after this convicting encounter with God in the year 2000, Benjamin and Stephanie began their ministry, Joy Revolution. Joy Revolution is a non-profit organization that aims at sustaining an orphanage for children from the garbage dumps and leper colonies in India. The orphanage was officially opened in Hyderabad, India in 2012 and is called The Joy House.

When asked why Joy Revolution's efforts are specifically for the nation of India, Dunn responds, "We felt favor on the place that we had landed. We had visited this garbage dump for several years and we felt burdened for it."

The funds to sustain The Joy House are brought in by Dunn's band, Benjamin Dunn and the Animal Orchestra. They are coming to the end of a tour for their new album *Fable*, which is inspired by the works of C.S. Lewis. They travel around the United States to

perform shows, the proceeds of which go towards Joy Revolution's efforts in India. *Fable* uses characters from Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia to tell the story of salvation and consider the journey finding the heavenly country.

"The last record, *Fable*, was inspired by the writings of CS Lewis. In the last 2 years of my life I've read all of Lewis' books more than twice and a lot of it came out in song. Sometimes when you get seasoned to church, you can get dulled to the intensities of being a believer. *Fable* brings out how real that is," said Dunn.

Performing in various states including California, Texas, Florida, Virginia, and Washington, the band has been able to spread the message of love to many thirsty souls in the United States while simultaneously raising awareness and support for the needs in Hyderabad, India. The Joy House is currently housing twenty children and the goal is to continue expanding the scope of the ministry as resources permit. To find out more about Joy Revolution and how you may contribute to their work in India, visit www.joyrevolution.com. 

"The last record, Fable, was inspired by the writings of CS Lewis. Sometimes when you get seasoned to church, you can get dulled to the intensities of being a believer. Fable brings out how real that is."

Counter Culture

Christians & Wealth

Honoring God in how we deal with money.

MATTHEW HAMILTON



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

When one is contemplating a relationship with Jesus Christ, there are many questions to consider. How will my friends and family react? How will it change my daily life and all its responsibilities? Are there things that I should be giving up or doing differently? It's important to know that each person's experience in getting to know God is as unique as the individual. The one thing that stays the same is Jesus.

One of the most notable areas that may be confusing for new Christians is the issue of wealth. It is hard to reconcile at times how those with wealth could express a need for God. The pressing question would be, If you have all of your financial needs fulfilled here on earth, do you even have a need for God? The issue of wealth can also be a source of concern for those of lesser means as well. It may cause one to wonder, if someone is in severe poverty and they obviously need help, why hasn't that help arrived already?

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then

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come, follow me."

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. -Mark 10:17-22 (NIV)

It is first important to realize that there are devout, sincere believers in all socioeconomic classes. This may be hard to understand at times even for long time believers, let alone those that are new to the faith. How can it be that a CEO of a national company be just as sincere about his faith as say a nun in the Order of the Little Sisters of the Poor? There is one common factor: Giving.

A clear example as to what Jesus thought about giving and how much we should be willing to part with came with his example in Luke 21:1-4: "As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a

poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 'Truly I tell you,' he said, 'this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.'"

By using this example, Jesus made the answer to the question "How much should we give?" – Give as much as we can. Our need for what God can provide spiritually is the same regardless of our vocation. Our ability to give back should not be tied to our income or means either. This is put most simply by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:7 "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

One way to know if your priorities are in the right place, is to start each day with one simple question, "What can I give today?" It doesn't really matter if you have one dollar or a million, if your focus is on giving rather than receiving, then you will be less obsessed about the newest car, computer or \$500 jacket. So, is it possible to live a faithful life, a life of

devotion while still being considered, by most standards, wealthy? Sure, but it seems that devotion to God may come in spite of wealth, not because of it.

When one strives for what the world considers success: independent wealth, vacations abroad, even shoes that cost more than most televisions, to the outside observer it would appear that a person is making the most of an opportunity. Becoming a Christian brings a different perspective to success. It is still making the most of an opportunity, but the rewards are shown more internally and eternally. You will find that spending your time, as opposed to money, is more likely to result in spiritual growth, and for lack of a better word, success.

One of most famous quotes in scripture is also

one of the most taken out of context. Most people have heard of the phrase "Money is the root of all evil" from 1st Timothy 6:10. What is often left out are the three words that actually proceed it: "The love of..." It is a fact that money is necessary and actually can do significant good, mainly by helping those that suffer from the lack of it. It's when the pursuit of it takes over any good that we may accomplish is where we often lose sight of what matters. The Message translation does a good job

putting this statement back into context, giving actual food for thought: "But if it's only money these leaders are after, they'll self-destruct in no time. Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after."

"One way to know if your priorities are in the right place, is to start each day with one simple question, "What can I give today?" It doesn't really matter if you have one dollar or a million, if your focus is on giving rather than receiving, then you will be less obsessed about the newest car, computer or \$500 jacket."



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9 Ways To Make Easier More Meaningful

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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.



The crux of the Christian faith is found in Easter. It is the story of a man called Jesus, who was killed by being hung on a cross, and then three days later rose from the dead.

The Bible says in John 3:16 that because of this act of love, those who believe it will be given eternal life.

Easter is a holiday celebrated in many shops and restaurants as being all about colourful bunnies, chicks, eggs and lots of chocolate and candy. But for those who look a little deeper it is laden with symbolism that can help you focus on what Easter is really all about: thanking Jesus for changing our lives forever.

Christians traditionally celebrate this event on Easter Weekend. This year the holiday falls from the 29th of March to the 1st of April but for many Christian denominations the holiday starts much earlier. For many Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans and Methodists the Easter season begins six weeks earlier with the practice of lent or through sacrificing something daily to remind themselves of the sacrifice Jesus made for them. Other denominations begin focusing on Easter the Sunday before Easter. Traditionally Catholics call this the Holy Week with Palm Sunday beginning the week, followed by Holy Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

Whether this the first Easter you're celebrating as a Christian, or if you've been celebrating Christ rising from the dead for years, here are a few ideas to make the days leading up to Easter more meaningful this year.

1. Crack some resurrection eggs

Similar to the concept of an Advent calendar, Resurrection Eggs, serve as a countdown to Easter. The

contents of these eggs help you to tell the story of Easter using biblical references and symbolic symbols for each part of the lead up to the crucifixion. You can either buy a box or make your own as per the attached box.

2. Light some Lenton candles

Buy seven candles and use them as table centerpiece for the week leading up to Easter. Begin by lighting all the candles and then blow one out each night until on Good Friday you snuff out the last candle. On Saturday all is dark but then on Sunday you light all the candles again as a symbol of Jesus' resurrection. This simple visual reminder not only prods you to remember why Easter is special but could spark some interesting dinner party conversation about what Jesus did for us.

3. Create a repentance box

The story of Easter reminds us that the ultimate price was paid for our sins and that our sinful pasts have been wiped clean and we are truly free. A great visual reminder of this is to get a box, decorate it, perhaps with a nail and some twine and a print out of Romans 6:8-11. Provide a stack of paper and then each day take a moment to write out sins and confessions of sin. It doesn't matter whether the sins written on the cards are big or small because Jesus promised to wipe all sins away. Then on the Easter weekend take the box with all the cards inside and burn it as a visual reminder that Jesus has paid for our sins.

4. Plant an Easter Garden

In the first few chapters of Genesis in the Bible we read how the first people sinned and as punishment for that sin God introduced death. Then in Matthew 28 we read of a new beginning in a garden when the stone was rolled away from Jesus' tomb to reveal that he was alive. To celebrate this story and the life God gave us why not plant an Easter Garden. It doesn't need to be big, you could plant it in an old pot or plastic container. Include some plants and a tomb (you could create this by using a potato if you can't find a tomb like rock). If you have children why not replace all the plants the

night before Easter with flowers and use this as visual reminder of how through Christ dying on the cross we have been given a new life.

5. Keep the Supper of the Lamb

In many ways the story of Easter is really a coming to pass of the Passover story found in the Old Testament story of Exodus. This meal does take a bit of preparation but is sure to create interesting memories and opportunities for conversation. You can find resources, printables and information on how to hold your own Passover meal on Ann Voskamps' site aholyexperience.com

6. Bake some resurrection cookies

A simple way to remember and share the Easter story is by gathering your children or friends kids for a sleepover and baking a simple batch of meringues. The cooking process happens over night but in the morning you can discover the empty-tomb like meringues and talk about Jesus' resurrection. Find the recipe in the block.

7. Share the Jelly Bean Prayer

If you want an easy way to share the story of Easter why not buy a couple of small bags of Jelly Beans and attach the following prayer and then give these as gifts on Easter Sunday or to colleagues before the holiday begins.

Red is for the blood He gave,
Green is for the grass He made,
Yellow is for the sun so bright,
Orange is for the edge of night.
Black is for the Sin we made
White is for the Grace He Gave
Purple is for the hour of sorrow,
Pink is for the new tomorrow.
A bag full of Jelly Beans...Colorful and sweet!
It's a Prayer...It's a promise...
It's a yummy Easter Treat!

8. Have a sunrise service

On Easter morning either attend a sunrise service as a family or hold your own service at your house ideally outside. Give each a family member a part in the service. Assign one person to share the Easter message, another to read Easter scriptures, print out songs to sing and so on.

9. Fly a kite

The Easter story doesn't end with Jesus rising from the dead. In Matthew 28:20 Jesus says that he will be with us always which leads to the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. A fun way to remember this occurrence is to get outside and fly kite to celebrate the wind of the Holy Spirit. 🪁

Resurrection Cookies Recipe

INGREDIENTS

1 cup whole pecans
1 tsp. vinegar
3 egg whites
Pinch of salt
1 cup sugar
Zipper bag
Wooden spoon
tape
Bible

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 300°F (this is important to do before you start the mixing)

Place pecans in zipper bag and let children beat them with the wooden spoon till they are in small pieces. Explain that after Jesus was arrested, He was beaten by the Romans soldiers. Read John 19:1-3.

Let each child smell the vinegar. Put 1 tsp. vinegar into mixing bowl. Explain that when Jesus was thirsty

on the cross, He was given vinegar to drink. Read John 19:28-30.

Add egg whites to vinegar. Eggs represent life. Explain that Jesus gave his life to give us life. Read John 10:10-11.

Sprinkle a little salt into each child's hand. Let them taste it and brush the rest into the bowl. Explain that this represents the salty tears shed by Jesus' followers, and the bitterness of our own sin. Read Luke 23:27.

So far, the ingredients are not very appetizing. Add 1 cup sugar. Explain that the sweetest part of the story is that Jesus died because he loves us. He wants us to know and belong to him. Read Ps. 34:8 and John 3:16.

Beat with a mixer on high speed or by hand for 12 to 15 minutes until stiff peaks are formed. Explain that the color white represents the purity in God's eyes of those whose sins have been cleansed by Jesus. Read Isa. 1:18 and John 3:1-3.

Fold in broken nuts. Drop by teaspoons onto wax paper covered cookie sheet. Explain that each mound represents the rocky tomb where Jesus' body was laid. Read Matt. 27:57-60.

Put the cookie sheet in the oven, close the door and turn the oven OFF. Give each child a piece of tape and seal the oven door. Explain that Jesus' tomb was sealed. Read Matt. 27:65-66.

GO TO BED! Explain that they may feel sad to leave the cookies in the oven overnight. Jesus' followers were in despair when the tomb was sealed. Read John 16:20 and 22.

On Easter morning, open the oven and give everyone a cookie. The cookies are hollow! On the first Easter, Jesus' followers were amazed to find the tomb open and empty. Read Matt. 28:1-9.



DIY Resurrection Eggs

SUPPLIES:

- 12 plastic eggs
- an egg carton
- a small leaf to represent a palm branch at Jesus' triumphal entry
- 3 coins to represent the 30 pieces of silver that Judas Iscariot received
- a thimble to represent a cup at the Last Supper
- a tiny piece of paper rolled into a scroll to represent Jesus' prayer in the garden
- a piece of leather or thick fabric to represent the soldier's whipping Jesus
- a tiny crown made from grass or a flower stem to represent the crown of thorns
- 2 nails to represent the nails and the cross
- a die to represent the soldier's casting lots for Jesus' clothes
- a toothpick with one end broken off to represent the spear piercing Jesus' side
- a piece of cheesecloth or thin fabric to represent Joseph wrapping Jesus in clean linen cloth
- a rock to represent the stone rolled in front of the tomb

DIRECTIONS:

Put one item in each egg, following the order and Bible verse references you'll find on the website: 1plus1plus1equals1.com/Resurrection_Eggs.pdf.

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