

new identity

God in focus. World in scope.

MAGAZINE

BRIMSTONE & BEDTIME STORIES

*Exploring God's
Just Judgement*

THE TEMPLE THAT IS MY BODY

*Rethinking
1 Corinthians 3:16*

Hearing from God for Others

*Understanding the
spiritual gift of prophecy*



Does God Help Those Who Help Themselves?

*A new series on enduring
Bible misquotes*

CHOOSING SPRING

*Celebrating the gospel
in light of the seasons*



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

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Grow

Education of different Christian perspectives, building foundation, understanding Christian concepts, jargon, practical application of Scripture and more.

Connect

Encouragement through testimonies, articles about relationships, fellowship, church, community, discussions and expressions of faith.

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Participating in the world as a Christian, with stories of people actively pursuing God through their passions, organizations and resources. How to apply ones gifts, talents and desires to serve God and others, sharing the love of Christ in everyday arenas.

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SPRING HAS SPRUNG

"In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" -Luke 24:6-7 ESV

I ran errands last week, and though it's only March, the stores were filled with swimsuits, beach toys and grilling equipment. Apparently, once the calendar turns from February to March, we've jumped from winter to summer.

I get it. I get the eagerness for warm days and bright sunshine, but are we too hasty? It still snows in March where I live, so it seems premature to think about summer coming when it hasn't even turned into spring yet.

But, we are all eager for summer. We can't help it. And so was Jesus. He was so eager to turn our darkness into light, and our death into life that, as it says in the book of Luke, he delivered himself over to the hands of sinners, surrendered to brutal crucifixion and on the third day rose again – alive! Jesus made the transition from winter to summer in just three days.

In this issue we have several wonderful articles that speak to these themes of change and transition, old life and new, refreshment and resurrection, and more. Bethany Wagner talks about celebrating the gospel in light of the seasons (pg. 6), Luke Geraty talks about the gift of prophecy and hearing from God for others (pg. 36), and Brandon Hurlbert talks about God's just judgment and why Jesus had to die (pg. 20), and these are just some of the featured inspiring articles for the season we're in.

The women who visited Jesus' tomb after his crucifixion were looking for the body of a dead man, but they found a resurrected Savior! They were looking for winter, but they found spring! Happy Easter!

Cailin

LIVE





Choosing Spring

CELEBRATING THE GOSPEL IN LIGHT OF THE SEASONS

by BETHANY WAGNER

It was a sharp and cold yet bright winter day on my grandparents' farm outside Salem, Oregon; a glorious Christmas morning. My grandpa's dog Bo followed me as I walked down the driveway, past the barn, and turned onto the path leading to the orchard.

My family had just said goodbye to my grandpa. His story on earth had ended. As I walked through the orchard, the apple, pear, plum, and cherry trees were bare and silent, in the peaceful, sleeping way of trees in the winter. Their time of harvest and work had finished—now they were resting, anticipating spring, the season of awakening.

Where the trees cast shadows, the grass glistened with frost and crunched beneath my boots. Yet where the sun's rays reached between the shadows, the grass shone green and damp, clean and fresh. In the dead of winter, a sign of spring. Of new life still to come.

Life ends, but as we see in the image of springtime emerging from winter, life does come again, renewed. Our world goes through a series of endings and beginnings—a constant cycle of winter and spring, death and new life. This is a gradual process, and some winters seem unwilling to let go. But each year, our Creator proves faithful and spring comes yet again. You lose a job and start another. You move

Life ENDS, but as we
see in the image of
springtime emerging
from winter, life does
come again,
RENEWED.



from one place and begin a new life somewhere else. This winter, I lost my grandpa, and my cousin gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Beginning, end, beginning, end.

The cycle of spring offers a vibrant picture that can deepen our understanding of Jesus' death and resurrection—the defining moment of human history and the main event talked about throughout the Bible. Jesus came into our world as a human—and not only as a human, but as an innocent newborn baby, the epitome of new life and hope for the future. He lived a holy life of love and faithfulness to God. His disciples had hope that this man was the one who would bring peace to the world, but then—he died! At that

moment the world was plunged into darkness, and the disciples gave up all hope.

But wait! The story did not end here—just as the long nights of winter don't last forever. Three days later, Jesus' followers discovered the entrance to his tomb was open, and it was empty: Jesus was alive. Death could not hold him. With this burst of life, our future changed forever. Our rejection of God's loving authority in our lives had separated us from God, but because Jesus took our punishment, God no longer sees our mistakes when he looks at us. Instead, he sees the sacrifice Jesus made and looks upon us as his children. Our sin has been wiped away, so we can have life again. As Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:3 NIV, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Jesus himself says, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (John 11:25-26 NIV). With this, we see that the greatest promise the Bible gives us is the promise of spring: that life will ultimately overcome death.

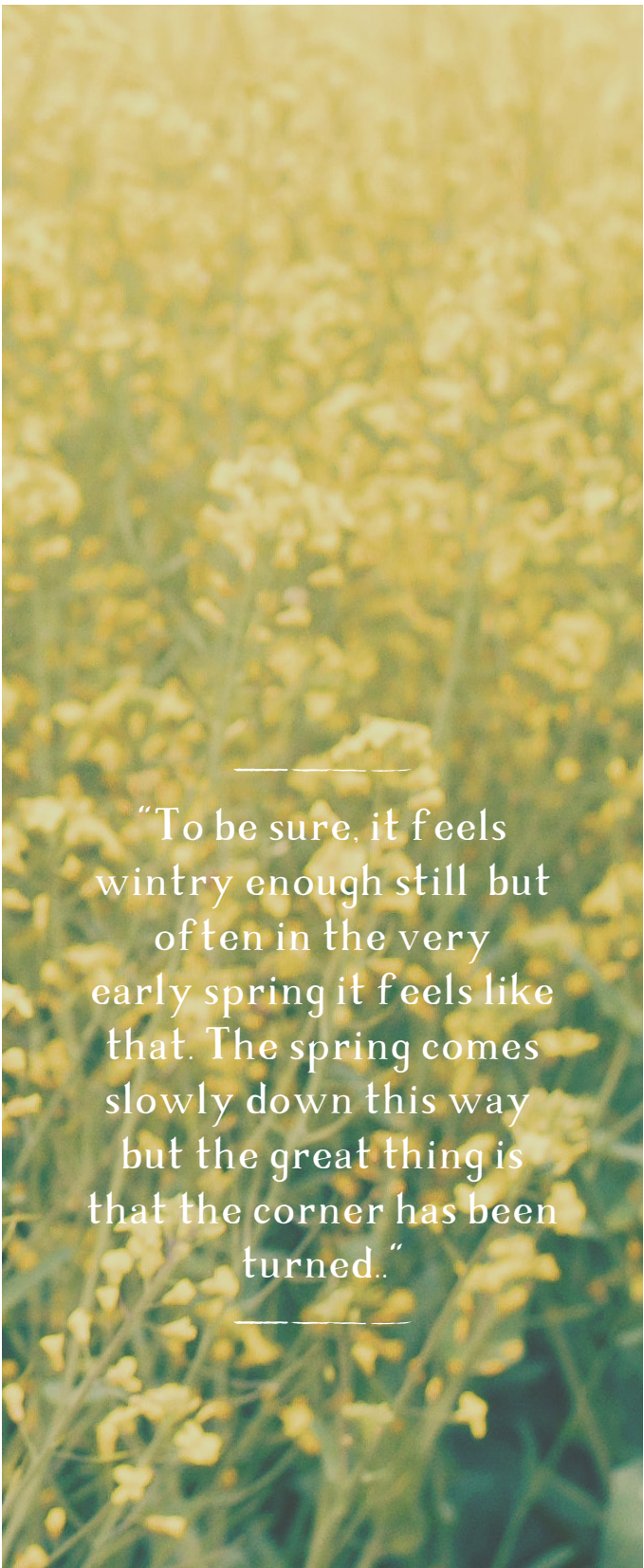
God's resurrection power—bringing life from death, good from bad—didn't end with Jesus' resurrection. It is constantly at work today, as God works to bring us out of the winters of our old lives into the spring of a

life lived following him. This is a process of renewal. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV reads, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" God's resurrection power was not available to only Jesus, but also to those who believe in Jesus, as he daily helps us to throw off our old selfish, prideful selves.

With this enthusiasm for spring, it might surprise you to know that winter is actually my favorite season. There are many reasons for this—I love snow and Christmas, and my birthday is in December. I love skiing and scarves and clear winter nights. Nothing makes me feel alive quite like the first sharp prick of chilly winter air.

But perhaps most of all, I love the quiet, breathless anticipation that comes with winter. Sometimes on a cold winter night, standing outside in a hushed snowy world, it seems as if Creation is just waiting. Waiting to wake up from hibernation, for its Creator to return, and to begin new life in a glorious rush of greenery and bright color.

In *The Lion, the Witch, and The Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, a young girl named Lucy discovers the magical land of Narnia. However, all is not right in this land. The evil White Witch has frozen Narnia in constant winter for 100 years. But the creatures of Narnia do have hope, in the form of a prophecy: "Wrong will be



—————
 “To be sure, it feels
 wintry enough still but
 often in the very
 early spring it feels like
 that. The spring comes
 slowly down this way
 but the great thing is
 that the corner has been
 turned..”
 —————

right, when Aslan comes in sight / At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more / When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death / And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.” When the lion Aslan—who represents Jesus—does at last return to Narnia, the land awakens. The snows melt, the rivers flow, and the trees blossom.

In a larger sense, like the creatures of Narnia, we are all in a perpetual winter. It seems day by day, we are continuously reminded of just how fallen our world is. Sobering reports roll in on a daily basis of violence and injustice, dishonesty and pride. If Jesus had never come to earth, we would have no hope beyond this darkness. But just like the frosts and darkness of winter give way each year to the new life and colors of spring, so one day our entire world will be made new because Jesus overcame death. In *God in the Dock*, Lewis writes, “To be sure, it feels wintry enough still: but often in the very early spring it feels like that. The spring comes slowly down this way; but the great thing is that the corner has been turned.”

The corner has been turned—we are on our way to eternal spring.

In the book of Revelation, the disciple John has a vision in which God shows him the new heaven and earth, where God’s followers will be with him forever. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,”

What wintry landscapes exist in your LIFE that require the WARMTH of God's resurrection power?



writes John in Rev 21:1 NIV. God tells him, “Behold I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5 ESV).

This new heaven and earth will be one of continual life and worldwide peace; a place where “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den” (Isaiah 11:6-8 ESV).

Someday, our whole world will be renewed in this “final spring.” In the months to come, I encourage you to spend some time thinking about the changing of

the seasons. What wintry landscapes exist in your life that require the warmth of God’s resurrection power? Maybe it’s a relationship you thought broken beyond repair. Maybe it’s a temptation or addiction you can’t seem to overcome on your own. Or maybe it’s discouragement or fear of the future. Whatever the case, take heart in the fact that by believing in Jesus’ resurrection and accepting God’s forgiving grace, we can pass into a new season of life: a season of spring.

As we enter springtime and look forward to Easter Sunday, let’s rejoice in and give thanks for the glorious resurrection of which springtime reminds us. Jesus’ resurrection is not just ancient history; it is played out day by day in Creation and in our very lives. When we see cherry trees blossoming, crocuses and tulips sprouting from the ground, and birds beginning to sing again, we can choose to face the future with joy because we know these beautiful sights are just dim reflections of the renewed world to come.



Bethany Wagner

Bethany Wagner has a passion for listening to stories and telling them. A graduate of Azusa Pacific University in English and theology, she now works as a freelance writer and editor based in the Pacific Northwest. She loves reading old books, drinking exorbitant amounts of tea, and rediscovering the beauty and magic of the ordinary. She writes at thestoriedway.com.

GROW



DOES *God* HELP THOSE WHO *help* THEMSELVES?

ENDURING BIBLE MISQUOTES

by GARY VANDEWALKER

Along the busy streets of Burbank, comedian and talk show host Jay Leno, once approached random people on the sidewalk with a biblical question. People were asked to name one of the Ten Commandments. With no close second, the number one response was “God helps those who help themselves.” This is a strange response, in light of the fact, there is no such commandment or even verse in the Bible. Another survey of America indicates 82 percent of the population is sure this is a Bible verse. Benjamin Franklin introduced the saying into American culture in *Poor Richard’s Almanack* in 1736. Since then it has been mistaken for scripture, a Bible misquote.

Most people would call this type of short and concise phrase a proverb. Proverbs are short, pithy sayings meant to convey a jewel of wisdom. This particular saying is popular because it promotes a work ethic, something considered wise and valuable, especially to our Western culture. While this misquote is attributed to the Bible, it is worth asking if there is some biblical truth to what it says.

The Bible book of Proverbs contains thirty chapters of wise sayings. The majority of these were written by King Solomon, who asked God to give him wisdom (1 Kings 3:9). Unlike the many proverbs which you might hear people quote, this book of Proverbs (with a capital P) comes to Solomon from the inspiration of

God. Sometimes insight into conventional wisdom, sometimes a new revelation about how to do life, each Proverb is a piece of wisdom dispensed by God through this ancient king’s pen.

In regards to the topic of work, Solomon writes in Proverbs 6:10-11 “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber and want like an armed man.” This idea of being diligent in work reappears in Proverbs 12:11, “Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.” This idea of working continues on to the New Testament in I Timothy 5:8, “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

These three passages each emphasize the need to be a dedicated worker. However, do they really equal the idea of God helping those who help themselves? Each verse stresses the reality that work brings forth results. But each lacks the central theme of the misquote itself. None of these verses, or countless others about work in the Bible, indicate work will earn the help of God. The misquote tries to tie a cause and effect to itself: work well and you will receive God’s help. None of the stated verses speak of God’s help at all. The saying in question makes God’s help conditional. If you endeavor to help yourself, then God will

help you. Therein lies the problem with the saying and its relationship to the Bible.

Jesus walked the earth in a culture which connected work with God's favor. If one worked hard enough, they believed God would intervene and reward. Jesus' teachings ran contrary to these notions. Luke records a parable where Jesus makes this point.

"He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, stand-

ing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14 ESV).

We live in a world similar to the parable. Like the Pharisee, we have a flawed nature and way of thinking. The pharisee stands by himself, representing his self-reliance and achievements. Our culture respects and honors such people. The self-made person is lifted up as the ideal. We perceive reliance on each other as a weakness. The better person figures out his own problems, creates his own resources, and is entitled to the good things in life which come his way. Like this pious man, we are proud when we can say we are

Jesus walked the earth in a culture which connected work with God's favor.

“not like other men.” We compare our lives to others, sometimes despising those who have had more help in their achievements than ours. We want to be seen as standing alone, in need of nothing. Any help that does arrive comes as a reward to our individual efforts, proving “God helps those who help themselves.”

In contrast there is the tax collector. He stands far off because he feels unworthy. He is despised by most. He understands his shortcomings. When is the last time you’ve seen a powerful person take this stance? Our world is often one of perceptions. Humility, needing others, and asking for grace or mercy are signs of weakness. This thinking is bent and broken. We do fall short. We do have sins and weaknesses. We were not created to walk alone but with God, understanding our need for him. It is rare to find people who stand far off with the tax collector. Think of the last time you heard someone ask for mercy. It does happen, but it is rare and often seen as a bother.

Which man does Jesus say is justified, helped by God? The tax collector. Shocked? The people who listened to Jesus often were. People in Jesus’ time labelled some people as holy. They believed this holiness bought them favor with God. Jesus transforms this value by placing the tax collector above the Pharisee. The biblical concept is quite the opposite. God helps those who cannot help themselves.

JESUS is
challenging that
work and
self-sufficiency
are NOT means
to gain the
favor of God.

Jesus presents a new way of thinking. He is not destroying the need to work or for one to be contentious in their work. He is, however, challenging that work and self-sufficiency are not means to gain the favor of God. They just won’t do it. They will not grab God’s attention. Work may put food on the table. It may bring in a wage to pay your bills. Work may bring a deep satisfaction of accomplishment. But work will never earn you a righteous standing with God. Your work is never a means of being forgiven and accepted by God.

This is tremendously freeing in our spiritual walk. Life is not a pursuit of how I can please God through my accomplishments. Rather, life is to be lived by faith, trusting God to do what is necessary to bring us to himself. He has done this through the Cross. God is pleased with the tax collector because he understands his need for God. The Pharisee is unable to see his need for God's help and believes he can rely on himself alone. He is trying to please God by showing God he has no need for him, because the Pharisee believes he has accomplished everything needed to have a holy life. God is pleased when we work, but it is when we understand we fall short in our own efforts, that we cannot achieve a full life on our own, that God steps in and brings the reward. In Hebrews 11:6 it says, "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

Our own sinfulness keeps us from seeing our need for God. Like the Pharisee, we keep our own spiritual score. We are proud that we have rules and we can follow them. However, what we don't see is that we don't keep our own rules. We are not really able to keep ourselves holy. We say that we believe people should love one another, but when an unlovable person steps inside our lives, we justify our rejection of them by giving ourselves new rules of why we are not required to love them. We become spiritually

blind to God's truths. Our value becomes the pride of saving ourselves. We give an acknowledgement of God's help, but really trust in our own strength and see our power as a great value. We steal from the glory of God and give the glory to ourselves, boasting in our sufficiency rather than understanding God's mercy and grace.

The Apostle Paul drives this point home in Ephesians 2:4-5 ESV: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved." It is God's mercy and God's love which makes us alive, and its given by grace. Grace appears apart from our work. Paul continues in verses 8 and 9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

If the misquote is true, that God helps those who help themselves, then people could boast of their goodness, of the strength of what their works have earned. We want God to help us when we help ourselves, so we might be in control and receive the credit for our salvation. This is why the misquote is powerful, it appeals to our pride. But the truth is, on our own, we are unable to be good enough, work hard enough, and earn the grace God has to give. Grace is not withheld from us, it is simply out of our price

range and our ability to obtain it on our own.

Suppose you and Michael Phelps, the Olympic gold medalist in swimming, both received free vacations to Hawaii. The only condition of your free vacation is in your own effort, you must begin on the coast of California and swim to the islands. Once you have achieved this work, Hawaii and whatever you want is yours for free. You begin to swim. You get 5 miles, then you sink. Michael goes 20 miles, then he is gone beneath the waves. No matter how good of a swimmer you are, the goal is not achievable. No matter how good your works are, they will never equal the goodness God requires for you to receive heaven and citizenship in his kingdom. Therefore, Jesus does the work, and gives you the reward by grace. God helps those who cannot help themselves.

Our own works render us helpless when they are tied to gaining God's favor. Scripture speaks of our inability to do work which saves us from sin and gains us heaven. Therefore, Romans 5:6 tells us, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." Jesus lived the life, did the works, including the Cross and accomplished what God required. Now he gives it away.

This doesn't mean our works never elicit a positive response from God. Grace doesn't prevent us from doing good works. Our faith in God's provision

Works are never apart from grace.

should result in works. "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26 ESV). Our faith, in God's grace, brings work to its proper place. While our work cannot add to or obtain salvation, we have been made to do good works in Christ. Ephesians 2:10 ESV says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." But even these works are full of God's grace. They have been given by his grace and they succeed by his grace. We enter a divine partnership in which we help ourselves and others, through the power of God. In this we fully become his workmanship. Our focus is that of a partnership of grace. Works are never apart from grace. My gifting, the resources, and my being are given to me by God.

We walk hand in hand with Christ.

Thus, there is a sense in which God helps those who help themselves. However, the work cannot be approached as a solo act or earning salvation. There always is a part of us in the equation, we are not meaningless. We are also not able to succeed apart from him. In John 15: 5, Jesus reminds us, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." So we walk hand in hand with Christ. His grace saves us. Our works join with his grace, and we rest in the promise of Joshua 1:9: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

God's eyes are not seeking out our work in order to see if we merit his help. He knows we fall short and yet he freely give us what we need. This is a curious and unusual truth. It speaks of how we are worth a

great deal to God. We are worth the life of his Son. Grace may be free, but it is never cheap. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who lost his life serving Christ in World War II speaks by these elegant words in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*:

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: 'Ye were bought at a price', and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.



Gary VanDeWalker

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

CONNECT



BRIMSTONE *And* BEDTIME STORIES

EXPLORING GOD'S JUST JUDGEMENT

by BRANDON HURLBERT

Imagine a children's storybook filled with images of chaotic carnage, of bodies strewn across the damp hills and burning cities crumbling under the weight of molten brimstone. Imagine tucking a child into bed after recounting these gruesome stories and then simply telling them that God loves them. With no further explanation than moral directives, the child is left with a nightmarish fear of divine retribution. The thought is horrifying.

A reciprocally horrifying thought is reading to that same child a storybook filled with evil villains who constantly escape punishment and are praised by society. A story where a sexual assailant is released from prison only three months after conviction; another story where a genocidal maniac is worshipped as a god and savior of a nation. Still yet another story where the bad guy cheats the system and vindictively tramples down upon the innocent, forcing them into poverty, imprisonment, and slavery. Imagine tucking that child into bed simply telling them that God loves them and not to worry about the lurking evil. The thought is equally horrifying.

We might thank the publishers for redirecting the focus of the story of Noah from the drowned bodies that floated past the ark on its voyage to salvation, to all the cute little animals that were saved. However, we wouldn't thank them for gleefully celebrating the plot of Jezebel and Ahab in seizing their neighbor's

land and the lack of divine involvement. To be sure, God's judgement is terrifying, but the lack of God's judgement is more so.

Hell and the idea of God's judgement is a complicated and hotly debated topic among scholars with a few major viewpoints. While I can't take the time to cover the different perspectives and interpretations, I do want to focus on God's judgment as it is seen through the eyes of our culture and explore what it means for followers of Christ.

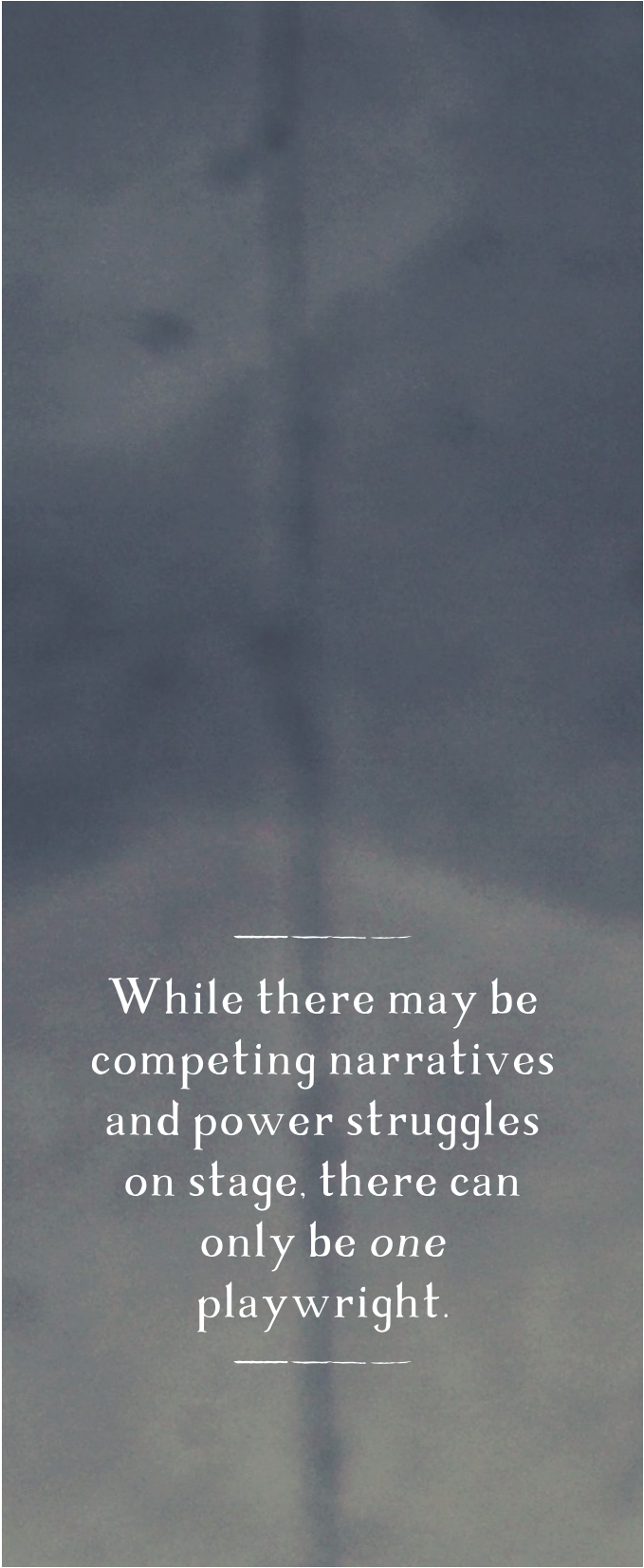
God's judgment is taboo in today's current cultural climate, and for good reason. The very concept of hell or divine wrath is so repulsive to most people, that many have discarded the doctrine altogether. Yet, their alternative either faces the same problems of a traditional understanding of Hell, or in the name of tolerance, unrepentant pedophiles may go free. Sure-



To be sure, God's
judgement is
terrifying, but the
LACK of God's
judgement is
MORE so.

ly, there must be a better way. Why is it that when we ask for such unobstructed tolerance, we are shocked with the result? Why are we so immediately repentant of our wish when we discover that the sexual assailant only gets a slap on the wrist? What did we expect? This is why I suspect that our problem with God's judgement is not with the concept itself, but with the context it is used in.

Within the context of scripture, we find a compelling drama, where the author allows his characters to rebel and commit theatrical mutiny as they attempt to tell their own fledgling story. All efforts to derail or improve the author's show reveal a flaw within the character's reasoning: that their stories do not make sense apart from their author's. Although these characters are able to understand their position, they delude themselves with visions of grandeur, and they strive to become a self-cast star. Instead of abandoning his work, the author writes himself into the story as the main protagonist. In doing so, he reveals how the part is truly to be played and he invites his characters to rejoin the original production, freely offering the characters their own parts as supporting roles in a larger story. While many characters accept this gift, others choose to continue to disrupt the play. These members are eventually dismissed and cast out of the drama just before the final curtain.



While there may be
competing narratives
and power struggles
on stage, there can
only be *one*
playwright.



JESUS
allowed
himself
to *Be*
REJECTED
so *That* he could
provide a way
out *Of* sin,
rebellion,
corruption,
And even
death.

Surely, this example may find some faults of comparison, yet I believe most will find the author's actions an appropriate response to the rebellion. Here, the context determines the appropriateness of God's judgement. While there may be competing narratives and power struggles on stage, there can only be one playwright. And while he may tolerate a certain level of rebellion amongst his cast, he will not do so forever; the show must go on.

What happens when the context is shifted from history to our story? Our problem with God's judgement and with Hell is that many of us feel like we haven't done anything to deserve it. Often, we compare ourselves with those we find inferior, and use their actions to justify ourselves: "well at least I am not as bad as them." These comparisons might be atoning if we simply had to be better than another person, or if the contest was only about observable outward actions. Therein lies the problem with our response to God's judgement; we are just wrong.

First, the basis of receiving judgement is not based solely upon outward actions, but also upon the entire world located inside your mind and heart. All of your thoughts, motives, emotional responses, ideas, hopes, and deepest desires are weighed before a God who "searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought" (1 Chronicles 28:9). Like an iceberg, our actions are merely symptoms for much deeper issues

lurking beneath the surface. Second, the proper standard of comparison is not our neighbor, but God himself. The minimum requirements for being found outside of God's judgement is that you must perfectly reflect God. "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15-16). On both accounts, we fall short. Not only are we worse off than we think, but our standard itself is not remotely high enough. This "falling short" is our way of subtly admitting that we aren't perfect. To borrow Paul's words, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Before we begin picturing a medieval god of maniacal anger, capricious in thought, and greedily planning destruction for his creation, we must check our ideas with what God himself has communicated in scripture. What does God care about? David, one of Israel's greatest kings, had this to say about God, "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a parched land" (Psalms 68:5-6). Here, God is presented as one who cares deeply about the marginalized and the oppressed, and who actively works on their behalf. Hear what the prophet Isaiah says about the mission of the Messiah (anointed one of God), "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the bro-



While God makes whole what is broken, he will not tolerate the SYSTEMS, the people, and the ideas that made this BROKENNESS.

kenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61:1-2 ESV). This passage speaks both of healing and judgement. While God makes whole what is broken, he will not tolerate the systems, the people, and the ideas that made this brokenness.

Interestingly enough, in the 1st century Jesus gave a sermon on this very passage in Isaiah. He simply read the passage, sat down, and said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Throughout the gospels, Jesus demonstrates that he is this same messiah that Isaiah described, and is the perfect picture of who God is (John 1:18, Colossians 1:15-20, Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 1:1-3). So what does Jesus reveal about God?

There is a particular story that has always struck readers in an odd way. It is a week before Jesus' death

and he enters the temple wherein an oppressive economic system has taken over. Every year, worshippers would come up to the temple to offer sacrifices using a variety of unblemished animals. Many times, people would not want to travel with these animals, and would buy them at the temple. However, due to supply and demand, these sellers would jack up the price for a larger profit. Yet, to purchase anything at the temple, you had to use a particular currency so as to not dishonor God. The money changers would also fix the exchange rates in their favor. All of this corruption was taking place in the court of the Gentiles, essentially communicating Jewish ethnocentrism and that Israel's God does not care about the foreigner. When Jesus surveys all of this injustice he does not sit idle. Instead, he flips the tables of corruption and drives out the money changers, the salesman, and even the animals. It's possible that in this moment he is symbolically declaring himself the temple, revealing that the presence of God could be with the people without having to suffer this unjust and oppressive system. In Jesus, the fullness of God dwells.

All of this happens days before Jesus willingly takes on the greatest injustice of the cross. He truly reveals the righteousness of God by dying on behalf of sinners. Like the author who enters into his own story, so Jesus enters into his own creation, coming to his own people only to be rejected and murdered. Yet, this is God's story. He would allow himself to be

rejected so that he could provide a way out of sin, rebellion, corruption, and even death.

When we think about God's wrath and justice we must let our thoughts be formed by God's example. At the end of the day, there will be those who continually reject Jesus. Not only have they, like all of us, not perfectly reflected the character of God in our thoughts and actions, but they have also rejected the free grace of God. We must be assured that God's judgment is just, and that Hell, although terrifying in itself, is an appropriate response. Eternal punishment and death is an appropriate response because this rebellion is not against a human author or playwright, but against the Creator who made all things. The riotous mutiny has wreaked havoc upon this world and there has been mass casualties in the name of prideful autonomy. Hell is God's reciprocal response to injustice. They have not simply rejected God in the abstract, but God in the flesh. They have rejected Jesus willfully. C.S. Lewis explains it this way, "The damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; the doors of hell are locked on the inside. . . . They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved" (*The Problem of Pain*, 130). By this, Lewis explains that those who reject God do not simply do it one time haphazardly; they do it constantly and continually forever.

We must understand that the justice of God is ultimately displayed in Jesus. God has provided a path of redemption that is open to all. God has suffered injustice both at our hands and on our behalf. He does so to redeem us from our own sin and brokenness. Ultimately, he does so so that we don't get what we deserve, which is the wrath of God. He has made a way for rebels to rejoin their king in Jesus.

There are many things that can be said about Hell, and all of them are terrifying. However, God cares too much about his world and his people to let evil go unchecked. He shows us how far he is willing to go to save us in that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The end of the gospel story is not about heaven; the point of salvation is not that we don't go to Hell. The whole goal of Jesus's sacrificial death, is that we are able to be with our creator again. Through faith in Christ, we are reconciled to God as we experience the fullness of his loving kindness and forgiveness.



Brandon Hurlbert

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GROW



IN PURSUIT *of* INTIMACY

Corporate Worship

CULTIVATING OUR RELATIONSHIP
WITH GOD THROUGH WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

by HANNAH HELMS

Prior to having children, I had not considered that participating in a faith community could be an act of spiritual discipline. I have learned over the past three years that the 10 minutes, and sometimes 3 hours, before church on any given Sunday tend to be the most unholy minutes or hours of the week. They are prime-time for marital discord, toddler meltdowns, projectile bodily fluids, and disappearing shoes. By the time we roll into a church service I am spent, generally disengaged, and have a hard time remembering the sermon.

I lamented this to my sister, a more seasoned parent than myself, earlier this year. After listening to my frustrations, she commented that she has faced the same issue and that rather than become discouraged by how hard things are, she has begun to think of the simple act of getting to church as being enough. She knows it will not always be this hard, but while it is, she knows that getting into the habit of showing up to attend church with her family and faith community is enough.

My sister's advice came to mind as I began to contemplate the spiritual discipline of corporate worship, or rather, worshipping God in community. I do not often think of worship as a spiritual discipline. As someone who grew up going to Catholic mass with my parents and an Evangelical youth group with my friends, I've always considered worship to simply be the part of



WORSHIP is experiencing the reality of God, both for WHO God is and what God has done.

a church service or faith event that involves singing and prayer. Over the years, this has required little effort from me — all I had to do was pay attention to the lyrics and try to sing on key. I still get stuck in this mindset from time to time.

In his book *The Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster proposes a very different concept of worship. He notes that the form — style of church service, prayer, music, etc. — is unimportant. Rather, he identifies worship as experiencing the reality of God, both for who God is and what God has done. In this way, worship becomes about the way that we approach God, and requires us to consider our attitude and disposition when encountering him. However, this is more than just a guideline or suggestion for the way that we interact with God. The Bible indicates that the worship of God is a command. In Matthew 4:10 Jesus

refers to God's directives in Exodus 20, stating, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

From this perspective, it can seem that worship is a solitary endeavor, much like meditation or prayer. And yet, it is also something that can be shared amongst a group of Christians. In fact, many people equate the idea of worship as only involving large groups of Christians gathered together during church services. Scripture actually directs Christians to gather together in this manner as well, and Hebrews 10:24-25 states, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Though we can worship God alone, there is something uniquely special in worshipping God with a community of believers.

Practicing Corporate Worship

Foster suggests that in order to engage in the discipline of worship on a communal level, individuals must first cultivate a personal attitude of worship and suggests that "while living out the demands of our day, we are filled with inward worship and adoration." It is also possible that even if our own individual attitudes towards worship are not fully developed, the Holy Spirit can stir our hearts to a place of worship

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Dallas Willard

as we participate with other Christians. Worshipping God in community can then both be something we can cultivate, as well as something God can enable us to engage in. Dallas Willard builds on this idea of worship in his book *The Spiritual Disciplines*, noting that, “in worship we engage ourselves with, dwell upon, and express the greatness, duty, and goodness of God through thought and the use of words, rituals, and symbols.” He notes that this is both an individual task, as well as one that can be done with the company of other Christians.

Before you worship together with other Christians, find ways to foster an attitude of adoration toward

God in your own life. The spiritual disciplines previously mentioned in this series, such as Meditation and Prayer, may be helpful in this. You could meditate on the greatness of God, what he has done, or aspects of God’s character. Or, you could pray that God would help you cultivate a worshipful attitude in your daily life.

It can be really helpful to identify a couple of people within your church who can also commit to doing this with you. It is one thing to arrive at a church or worship service with in an internal state of worship, but the crux of worshipping communally is doing it with other people who are of the same heart and mind. If you are actively involved in and know people in a church, consider approaching one or two individuals about attending church with an intentional attitude of worship. Maybe you don’t have close connections at your church, but you are part of a bible study or have a couple of Christian friends. Consider asking them to join you in this endeavor, and find a place where you can be around other Christians while worshipping together.



Hannah Helms

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



Identify

Advice On Life, Faith &
Relationships

With **LINDSEY A. FREDERICK**



Dear Lindsey,

I recently started going to church regularly and now consider myself a Christian. I keep hearing how important it is to tell others about Jesus, but I'm wondering if I can do that in a world that seems so hostile toward Christianity?

—*Afraid to Come Out*

Dear Afraid,

The fact that you even asked this question tells me two things: you're braver than you feel right now, and you're sensitive to God's mission to show love to the world around you.


I can understand your anxiety. Many Christians are afraid that if they speak up, they'll be labeled anything from "ignorant" to "extremist." It seems the

critics have become more vocal recently, and news about helping the homeless and discovering hope doesn't sell quite as well as stories about hate and abuse. But as with many issues, a few angry, vocal anti-Christians can make enough noise to seem like a multitude. Most who don't believe in God often don't care enough to launch verbal attacks.

You're also in a tender time of your faith where it can be difficult to discern God's voice from the shouts of instruction all around you. You may feel pressure from culture telling you to stay hushed, while your Christian community may be telling you to go big and loud. It's confusing.

I can only imagine Jesus's disciples also felt a little confused. And like you, maybe even a little scared. In the Book of Matthew, as they're standing together on the top of a mountain, Jesus basically says to them, "Tell everyone about me and teach them everything I have taught you." And then he leaves them with this final word, "I am always with you" (28:19–20). Story over. Perhaps they thought "Great, Jesus. That's cool. But, like, how should we do that?"

So, let's start small. Begin with your circle of influence—your friends, your family, your coworkers. While the world may seem hostile, the people in your life with whom you've built trusted relationships are not. These people probably notice you're a little dif-



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ferent now, and they might be curious why. No, you don't have to go all Christianese-Blood-of-the-Lamb on them. Just be yourself.

A few years ago, I wrote an article titled *Coming Out Christian*, which talked about the various ways celebrities and average Joes share their faith. I'll skip to the conclusion: Sharing your faith—much like living it—is not a one-size-fits-all experience. It is as unique as you are.

Speak simply and honestly. Allow yourself to be a little vulnerable. Saying, “I struggle with anxiety and I've found praying to Jesus gives me peace,” or “I've been really angry at my dad for leaving when I was a kid and the Gospels are teaching me how to let go of my anger and forgive him” are often more effective than shouting about Hell from a street corner. And, sure, you can talk about Hell too—but maybe save the shouting.

I'll also say one thing about the whisper of fear holding you back: Don't ignore it. Fear tries to sneak around, throwing paralyzing shame darts. Coward. Wuss. Chicken. Just say hello and view it as an invitation to start a conversation with God. “Hey God, did you hear what that guy said about me? The truth is I'm starting to believe it, and I need you to remind me what's really true.”

Because this faith thing is still relatively new to you, learning how to connect with people about it takes time. And practice. You can share about yourself and your decision to live like Jesus in unique ways, the ways God created within you. Maybe you're a great writer or lyricists. Or maybe you're really good at listening. Live in a way that supports Scripture—walk humbly, seek justice, love mercy (Micah 6:8), be patient and kind, and speak truth (1 Corinthians 13:4–7)—and you may just find that people are drawn to your light.

It's safe to come out now, my friend.

Ask Lindsey!

Do you have a question about life, faith, or relationships? Email Lindsey at identifycolumn@newidentitymag.com, submit your questions online at newidentitymagazine.com, or leave a comment with the hashtag #identifyquestion on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.



Lindsey A. Frederick

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

GROW



A person is seen from the back, wearing a dark t-shirt with 'V.E.' printed on it. They are looking towards a sunlit forest with a bokeh effect. The background is a mix of green and yellow light filtering through trees.

Spiritual Gifts Series

HEARING *From* GOD *For* OTHERS

UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF PROPHECY

By LUKE GERATY

I'm an equal-opportunity coffee drinker and pretty much enjoy all things coffee, so I'm often found working in coffee shops. I love the culture found in coffee shops. There always seems to be a nice buzz, and you can easily watch people if that happens to be one of your hobbies. And yes, that does include me, but don't tell anyone.

I was once sitting in a coffee shop when another customer noticed that I had my Bible with me and asked what I was doing. "I'm actually preparing for a sermon," I replied. After he asked a bit more about the Vineyard church I served as a pastor for and his excitement grew, and he made sure to introduce himself. "Well my name is Steve, and I'm a prophet." Of course, in a coffee shop there's no such thing as "private conversation," so I noticed three or four of the people around raise their eyebrows in curiosity and shock!

When you hear the word "prophet" or "prophecy," what comes to mind? Do you imagine someone standing on the corner with a bullhorn shouting at people? Perhaps you think of John the Baptist? Or do you automatically assume that prophets and prophecy are concerned with foretelling the future? In my experience, people have a lot of opinions and assumptions about what those words mean, but the natural question for a follower of Jesus is this: *what does Scripture have to say about that topic?* So just what does the Bible

provide us regarding prophets and prophecy?

THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET

In the Old Testament, prophets were used by God to communicate to Israel and other nations. The greatest prophet in the Old Testament was Moses, as Deuteronomy 34:10 states, "There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face." Other well-known prophets in the Old Testament were Abraham, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and a host of others.

These prophets spoke the words of God to both Israel and other nations as representatives of God's kingdom. They informed people about what God wanted and reminded people of what God had already done. In the Book of Exodus, we read about how God spoke through Moses to the Pharaoh of Egypt in order to free the Jewish people from slavery (cf. Exodus 3-12). We also read about the commandments that God gave to Israel *through* the prophet Moses (cf. Exodus 19-24). 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, and 1 & 2 Chronicles all tell of the stories and relationships between Israel and her kings, priests, and *prophets*, the three "offices" of Israel's leadership.

Some of the Old Testament prophets spent time telling Israel what to do while others tell Israel what they *shouldn't* do. Some of those prophets spent their

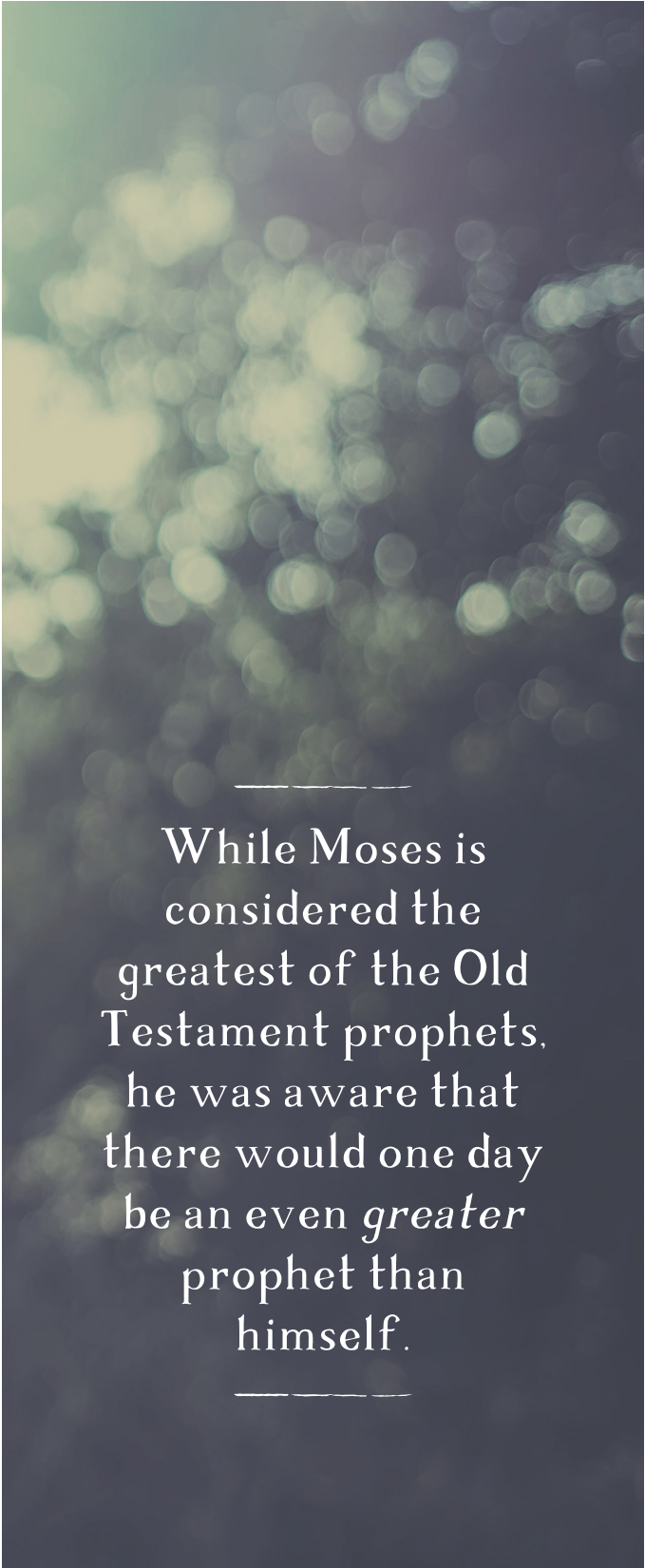
lives speaking of how God would one day deliver and restore God's people, and others reminded Israel that God was a just God who would not overlook their sin. The ministry of the prophets was complex and multifaceted, but it's safe to say that those Old Testament prophets were *unique* and that not *everyone* who was part of God's people were prophets. To be a prophet in the Old Testament times was to be called by God to represent *him* and to speak his very words. To reject an Old Testament prophet was to reject God. When the prophets spoke, they often said, "Thus says the Lord," in order to contrast their words with the words of prophets of false gods.

And while Moses is considered the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, he was aware that there would one day be an even *greater* prophet than himself. He told Israel:

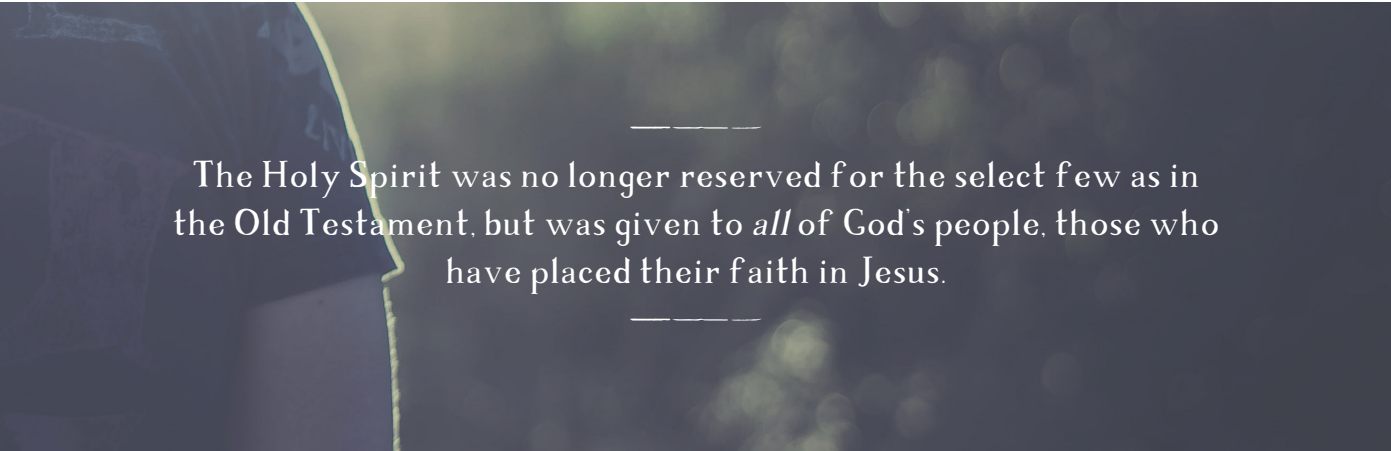
"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him..." (Deuteronomy 18:15 NLT)

In the New Testament, we actually find out just *who* this great prophet is — Jesus! As the author of Hebrews writes:

"But Jesus deserves far more glory than Moses, just as a person who builds a house deserves more praise than the house itself. For every house has



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a builder, but the one who built everything is God. Moses was certainly faithful in God's house as a servant. His work was an illustration of the truths God would reveal later. But Christ, as the Son, is in charge of God's entire house..." (Hebrews 3:3-6 NLT)

With the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, something changed between the Old Testament's context of having only a handful of God's people serving as prophets to something breathtakingly different – *the coming of the Holy Spirit!*

**YOUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS WILL
ALL BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT**

One of the things I love most about the community of churches that I serve in is the emphasis that "everyone gets to play." Rather than encouraging only a *select few* to share the words and works of Jesus, we believe that *everyone* can participate in what God's doing around us.

But *why* do we believe this? Because in the New Testament we read that after Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit would be poured out on *all* people, including men and women as well as the young and the old (Acts 2:17-18). The Holy Spirit was no longer reserved for the select few as in the Old Testament, but was given to *all* of God's people, those who have placed their faith in Jesus. God's Spirit no longer simply dwelled *with* his people, as with Israel in the Old

I think A LOT of us, both those who follow Jesus and those who are not yet disciples, might be WEIRDED out by “prophecy” because we have a lot of misinformation or have had some really weird experiences.

Testament, but could now dwell *within* God’s people, both Jews and non-Jews who now collectively make up the Body of Christ, the Church! All of God’s people have now been baptized into God’s community by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) and have the Spirit living in them (Romans 8:9).

This is why I regularly hear stories within our community about how regular people get to share in what God is doing around them. I hear of stories where stay-at-home moms offer to pray for people who are sick, and those people are healed. People tell me of teenagers having opportunities to study the Bible with their friends and help them experience God’s

love as the Holy Spirit works. It’s because we *all* who call Jesus Lord have Jesus’ Spirit in us and with us!

WHAT’S UP WITH THE GIFT OF PROPHECY?

In the New Testament, the emphasis appears to move away from that of the (P)rophet to that of the *gift of prophecy*. The gift of prophecy is mentioned specifically in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Romans 12:6-8, and 1 Corinthians 14. One theologian defines the spiritual gift of prophecy as “the human report of a divine revelation” and another states that prophecy is “telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.” The Apostle Paul indicates that the “one who prophesies *strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them*” (1 Corinthians 14:3).

About seven years ago, as our church was singing songs of worship, I noticed two women I had never seen before. As I saw them, into my mind and heart popped a number of spontaneous ideas about them. I felt like God wanted them to know how much he loved them and how he was not overlooking them and knew *exactly* where they were. He knew their life situations and challenges and that he really wanted them to know how deeply he loved them. As I stood there trying to figure out if that was something I should share with them, I finally surrendered and walked over to the two ladies, Kathy and Darcy, to

LOVE should be the defining way that Christians LIVE and minister.

share with them what I sensed God was telling me. Since I had *never* seen them before, I was a little nervous and wasn't sure if they would think I was weird, causing them to get up and leave. Yet when I shared with them what I felt like God was wanting them to hear, they both started crying *and* laughing! That's kind of a weird combination, right? Well it turns out that on their drive to the church, they had been talking about this very topic and were wondering if God even knew they existed! Both became disciples of Jesus and have been following him ever since, actively involved in the kingdom of God!

I think this is an example of the gift of prophecy. The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians the following:

"But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you." (1 Corinthians 14:24-25 ESV)

It would seem that the "secrets" of Kathy and Darcy's heart were known by God and I was honored to be a part of his Spirit reaching them and drawing them to know Jesus. I can tell you of countless stories where God has worked in these amazing ways in my life and the lives of people around me.

YOU SHOULD SEEK THE GIFT OF PROPHECY... YES, YOU!

In 1 Corinthians 13:2 the Apostle Paul indicates that *love* should be the *defining* way that Christians live and minister when he says, "And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." Later he writes the following:

"Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives-- especially the ability to prophesy." (1 Corinthians 14:1 NLT)

I think a lot of us, both those who follow Jesus and those who are not yet disciples, might be weirded out by "prophecy" because we have a lot of misinformation or have had some really weird experiences. I think back to when I met "Prophet" Steve. Do we have to be so *awkward* in order to function with spiritual gifts? And what about all of the people who seem to "speak for God" who are clearly more concerned

with manipulating people and using God for personal gain? Is that how it's supposed to be?

I don't believe so.

If our desires for the gifts of the Spirit are grounded in love and our expressions of the spiritual gifts are framed by love, I think we'll avoid a lot of the nonsense that seems to surround some of these spiritual gifts. It's *because* of love that we should do all that we can to help disarm people and be open to the work of the Holy Spirit. So not only should we work hard to express things in loving ways, we need to ground our lives and activities and ways of *doing* things in solid biblical-theology. We do not need to *tell* people we are Prophets because *all* of God's people now have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and *can* function in the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit sovereignly determines to give us (1 Corinthians 12:11). Plus, we have a great grid to filter what we sense God wants us to share with people – it has to strengthen, encourage, and comfort!

Lastly, and something I believe we have a responsibility to always remind people of, we should always encourage people to discern whether what we *think* God wants them to hear is actually from God. We should push them to search Scripture to determine whether or not what we have shared is *biblical* or not. We should push them to Jesus in order to see if what we speak lines up with the character and qualities of

our Lord. And we should encourage them to consider whether what we share lines up with how Christians have acted over the course of church history.

I'm passionate about the work of the Holy Spirit because I believe that the *only* way that we'll be able to carry out Jesus' command of making disciples of all the nations is if we operate in the presence, power, and purposes of the Spirit. Therefore, I heartily pray "Come Holy Spirit" and hope that the gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy, begin to function in your life more and more!

For further study, I recommend Sam Storms' *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts and Practicing the Power* (entry level), Wayne Grudem's *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (intermediate level), Max Turner's *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* (advanced level), and D. A. Carson's *Showing the Spirit* (advanced level).



Luke Geraty

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

GROW

The
TEMPLE
That IS
MY BODY

RETHINKING 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16

by GREG WHYTE



As I write this, people are working on their New Year's resolutions – promises we make to ourselves in order to change the way we do things, in hopes that our lives will improve somehow. However, if we are really honest with ourselves, by the time you are reading this, many of these promises have been long forgotten.

As for myself, I have a collection of writing projects that I have been holding onto for what seems like forever. Every year, I plan to get at least some of these writing projects off the ground, but between writer's block or real-life concerns and my own laziness, lack of discipline or inspiration, I find that these projects are still sitting in a digital folder labeled "writing projects" on my computer. I also have a list of books that I hope to read. Every six months, I list all of these books in an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of my progress, with my goal being 1000 pages per month. Like with my other goal, some months are better than others.

I admit that my resolutions are probably different than most. Those I've heard are more related to health and diet (especially after coming off the Christmas season of indulgent feasting). To piggyback on this trend, publishing companies and health gurus usually come out with their latest diet fads around this same time of year, and in the case of those advertising to Christians, many of them would quote passages like this one:

VERSE

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, NKJV)

OUT OF CONTEXT MEANING


Of course, these healthy eating regimens make us all feel more than a little guilty, especially right after Christmas, a holiday known for its overindulgence, insisting that if we do not look a certain way or have a certain "optimal weight", then we are not really taking good enough care of "God's temple." Either that, or the more legalistic amongst us might use this verse to tell us why we shouldn't touch alcohol or drugs, watch certain movies, or why we shouldn't overeat and to stay away from certain foods and to get enough exercise. As if we needed more of a prod- ding toward self-obsession and narcissism from our culture - this time supposedly supported by the Bible.

Don't get me wrong – it is important for us to care for our bodies. They are the only ones we will get – at least until Jesus comes back. And there are some things that would probably do us more harm than good (such as the indulgence in certain drugs). There is much to be said about wise use of our resources in the Bible, and our bodies are some of those important

resources; and there is much that could be said about wise living and taking care of our bodies (Proverbs 17:22; 23:2; Daniel 1:8-15; Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 5:29;). While the Bible doesn't outlaw alcohol, it does warn against drunkenness (Proverbs 23:20-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:18; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:8), and as health experts will tell us, too much alcohol damages certain important organs in our bodies. Also, by eating too much fast food and sugary treats, not to mention the dangers of certain carbonated beverages or narcotics, we know that these put us at great risk for developing other health complications, which makes life all the more difficult. The Bible does talk about wise living and taking care of our bodies, as we could see from the examples cited above. But that's not what's actually being advised here.

DANGERS OF READING OUT OF CONTEXT

First of all, if you look at the actual verse itself, it doesn't even mention the word "body" anywhere, in any of the major translations. This is the case where those preaching or trying to sell us their health-products have poured their own meaning and assumptions into the text and we, the audience, take it for granted. These voices insist that this must be what this scripture verse is talking about, even though the word they want to put in doesn't even appear in the text itself. So, the first danger is that we could be led



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astray by listening to certain voices that tell us this must be what the verse means. There is another place later on in 1 Corinthians (chapter 6, verse 19 to be precise) where this link between the human body and God's temple are linked, and so the advertisers in question likely assumed that both are talking about the same thing. However, judging from the context of what these two passages are talking about... they're not. It's possible that the inserting of 'body' in our minds into these verses is just confusion between these two verses. But even if it is because of legitimate confusion on our parts, we are still making the text say something that it didn't originally intend.

But there is even more danger. By misreading this verse in the way described above, we buy into the aspect of our very individualistic culture in North America, which assumes that the self is the most important and central person in the world. It seems to be yet another example of our confusion between the singular "you" (referring to one person) and the plural "you" (referring to a group of people). This verse is yet another example of the plural "you", not the singular. We then become obsessed with ourselves and our personal image in how we compare to those around us, especially to the standards of beauty that we assume for ourselves. When we obsess over things like this, guess where our focus is most of the time. That's right — it's on 'me'. And, if we are harassed by guilt because we don't measure up to those standards, how do we feel? Exactly. Terrible.

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Not good enough. Less than. But once again, just as in other verses I have tackled so far: it's not about you!

For that reason, the biggest danger of reading this verse in this way (in its out of context meaning) is that we are missing the main point of what it's talking about, but if we read it in the way it was meant to be read, it is actually a much needed rebuke for the church at large, which we ignore to our harm.

THE ORIGINAL CONTEXT

This verse is a rhetorical question as part of the larger letter we know of as 1 Corinthians, which was most likely a second letter to the church in Corinth, Greece. The first letter (mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9) is now lost. As a letter, 1 Corinthians was written

by Paul, the apostle who had started that church several years before this letter. He was writing partly in response to a report that this church was struggling with several issues. The issue being addressed here, which is actually focussed on throughout his letter, is the issue of division within the church. In fact, in the first section of this amazing letter (which unfortunately is a letter often overlooked in favor of Paul's other letters, despite its incredible relevance to the concerns of the church today), which is where this verse is located, Paul is specifically addressing the very topic of divisions in the church, along with so-called "worldly wisdom". Because this first section is too long for the purposes of this chapter, we'll just quote the passage around it. And like in similar editions of New Identity, for the sake of our understanding, chapter and verse numbers have been removed:


"... He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for

the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3:8-23, ESV).

Just looking at this in its proper context gives us some clues as to what is really being talked about here. In the first paragraph, for example, Paul begins using a metaphor that compares the church community to a building, then he continues this metaphor into the second paragraph, even getting into this rather cryptic allusion to the Day of the Lord – which



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is a well-known phrase to the Jewish believers of that time because it speaks of God's final judgment on history: when all that is wrong with the world is finally done away with. We Christians usually associate this with the time when Jesus returns. Nowadays, we might refer to this as "end times" or "Armageddon". It's actually this reference to the fire, along with an obscure reference found in the Apocrypha (books written between the New Testament and the Old Testament that are included in the Catholic and Orthodox bibles, but not in the Protestant Bibles or the Jewish scriptures) where the Medieval church developed their idea of 'purgatory', which the Protestant reformers completely rejected. Just goes to show, we are not the only culture who takes the statements of scripture out of context, assuming they say things that were never intended.

But anyway, this article is actually focussed on verse 16 (the statement in bold). As we could see by following Paul's metaphor, this really wasn't talking about our individual bodies at all, but was actually addressed to the church as a collective group. The church, or *ecclesia* in the original Greek, was not so much the buildings or the programs or the institutions we associate with it today. Rather, it was the collection of people whose lives were transformed by the message of the gospel of Jesus and then gathered together with others who also chose to believe this gospel and follow this man they called Christ. An *ecclesia*, when used in its secular usage was like a town council or like a task force put together by a town, for the purpose of serving that town. In similar fashion, while being set apart as God's special and chosen people, the church community was to exist for the purposes of worshipping God and serving the world, applying the much needed healing balm that is the

gospel message it carried, to the hurt and brokenness of the world, as it looked forward to the day when God would heal and restore all which has been tarnished or lost. The people gathered were to function much like the temples of the time – places to pray and worship, to seek the will of God and wise council, and to remind us of and draw people into the reality of God and the majesty of this almighty Creator of all there is. This is what the church was *meant* to be.

HOW CAN WE REALLY APPLY THIS VERSE?

Unfortunately, this is not what we have become. As I mentioned before, this passage has a very sobering corrective and rebuke on the larger church that we ignore to our detriment. In fact, one of the reasons why many reject Christianity as being true is because of how divided we have become. Atheists would cite that there are over 30,000 different Christian denominations in the world. Granted, the majority of these are independent churches, and these critical sources don't account for the fact that many of these "denominations" are really regional or national branches of the same denominational groupings. But that being said, there is still unfortunate divisions that still occur, and quite often over seemingly trivial matters. I've been in churches where a group left the church simply because a guitar was introduced to the sanctuary, or where someone of a different ethnicity was asked to speak during worship, or where they

removed the old wooden pews for the sake of stackable chairs. I've also seen political maneuvering by certain associate pastors to eject their senior pastor for their own ambition to gain prominence in the church. And I've overheard attitudes – in seminars, in churches, and even while talking to individual Christians – where there would be mistrust, or sometimes even contempt, toward those belonging to a different denomination, or even of a different cultural expression within the same denomination, or toward one who might hold a different opinion on periphery matters.

What this verse really is (and the passage around it) is a wake-up call to the church to unite together.

In response to these concerns that might go through certain minds, I can say with certainty that the Kingdom of God is about more than just my individual church congregation, and it's also much bigger than just the denomination that my church just happens to belong to, or the unique cultural expression that my church brings to that denominational matrix (which, for those wondering, I am a Canadian pastor with mixed Western European background, and I am currently serving in a Chinese Canadian church). The Christian church around the world, despite its flaws and differences of flavor wherever you happen to go, is together described as a community, a body, a family, and, in the case of this verse and others like it, a temple. Imagine the travesty if that body, that fam-

ily, and even the elements of that temple, decided to reject each other or fight against one another, or puff itself up at the expense of the rest of the body. If this were our body, this would be called a 'disease'.

Right after our verse in question, we find the stern warning that if anyone destroys God's temple (which, as we've been exploring together, means the church), then God will destroy him. In other words, this passage utters a curse on any who would cause such to happen to the Church. Being someone in a position of church leadership, I see that as very sobering, especially when there are times when I have been tempted by personal pride in my own interpretation of what I see Scripture as saying, let alone the occasional times of ambition or fear and mistrust of the 'other'.

But on the flip side, I will leave you with two images, or two illustrations if you will, to ponder over. Both of them are experiences of mine that show the blessing and beauty of when that which is different comes together and forms a unified whole.

The first of these was in my previous church. Over the previous few years before I came, this church offered half-day day camps at the end of the summer, but they were burnt out when I came to them. It was difficult to find enough volunteers for this ministry. Actually, it was next to impossible. Meanwhile, there were three other churches in town, all with vastly different denominational loyalties, plus there was

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a Christian camp nearby. Before this point, each of these ministries looked at each other with mutual mistrust, and with some good reason. There were differences of belief and some bad history. When it was suggested that we ask the other churches if they would be willing to help, the first responses were a mixture of "it will never work" and "why do you want to ask *them* to be involved with a *Christian* ministry like this?" And yet, not only did they prove willing to help; there was mutual blessing for all involved. In fact, the capacity for ministry was increased, and during the week when that day camp would happen, it was as if Heaven had visited that town. Where mutual mistrust and negative feelings existed before, now deep friendships were formed across each of those ministries. In fact, the town even took notice and there were those not affiliated with any of those churches who showed up to help out. Bridges were formed with the community as they became aware

that there were churches in their town that actually cared for them and were willing to put aside their differences for a greater cause, and these people wanted to become a part of that. And as for the kids, whereas before it was mainly the kids belonging to the one church in previous years (12 – 15 kids), when all four churches came together, this became 60 kids from the community, several of whom had never even heard the name Jesus, except as a swear word – which is a huge feat, considering the small size of the town itself.

The other picture is actually a smaller version of the vision that John saw in Revelation 7:9-10, of a multitude from every nation, all singing praises to God. At the end of 2015, my wife and I had the opportunity to attend the Urbana conference in St. Louis, MO. It was actually at that conference that I first met the staff of New Identity. If you have the chance to attend that conference, which happens every 3 years, I highly recommend going.

Although it was not the only main theme of the conference, one of the things that was very apparent throughout the week was the insistence that we enter into the stories and experiences of the other cultural groups present. Part of the reason for this insistence at the conference was the recent racial tensions and violence that were tearing that part of the USA apart. And trust me – there are different expressions in the various cultures, even in the form of worship.

And yet, despite these differences, I noticed that as the week went by, groups that were separated by ethnicity at the beginning of the week soon began to embrace one another, and even began singing each other's songs. Granted, as Canadians, the issues of racism are not as prevalent or front and centre in our minds. That's not to say that we don't have these issues, or that our history is all that much different. The atrocities done to the First Nations peoples here in Canada are still matters of contention. But if you can imagine, a gospel that not only reconciles each individual person to God, but that also heals the rifts that we may feel toward each other. That is the gospel I believe the New Testament gives to us. And that is also the vision of what the church is meant to be, a temple where those of every tongue, tribe and nation, can go to, so they could find God, gain wisdom, receive blessing and see this new way of being human. And who knows? Perhaps by seeing this, they will recognize God's Holy Spirit as being among us, and they too will want to join in.



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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