God in focus. World in scope.

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ENGAGING WITH GOD

Connecting with the Creator in our fast-paced society

HOW DARE YOU JUDGE ME!

Rethinking Matthew 7:1 and 1 Corinthians 4:5

FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

Lessons from India

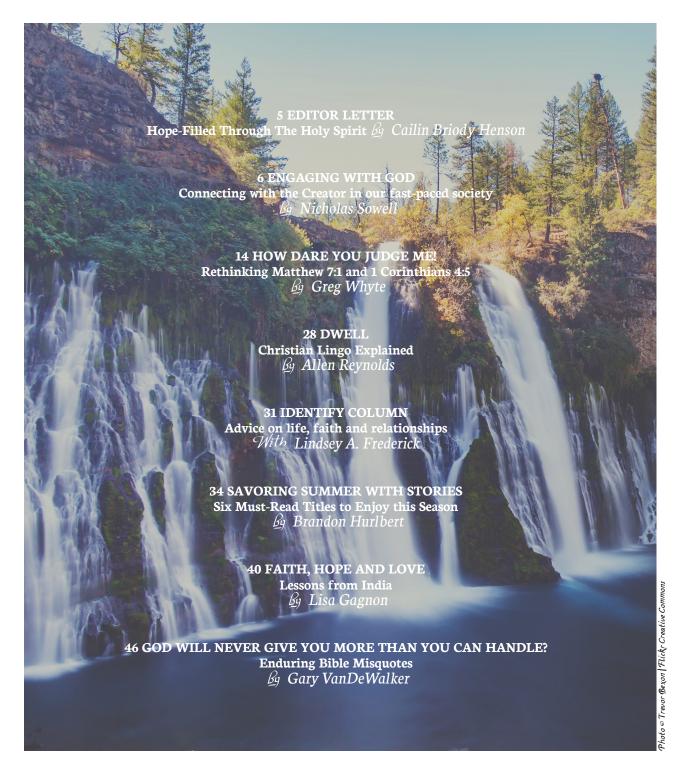
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Six Must-Read Titles to Enjoy this Season



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

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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.

Live

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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"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." -Romans 15:13 ESV

For Christians, Pentecost is a time to celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, who was first given to believers in Acts 2. The last several years I've really wanted to do something special for Pentecost, to commemorate this historic and beautiful event. Last year we threw our first "Pentecost Picnic" and this past weekend we did the same by inviting the community groups that attend our church to join us on our front lawn with picnic baskets in tow.

Leading up to our afternoon on the grass, I'd been having a busy, anxiety-filled week. Our gathering together (different generations, different walk of life) to celebrate Pentecost really helped me to reset. I was reminded (by the Holy Spirit) while we read Romans 15:13 at our picnic that the Holy Spirit trades our enslavement to sin for empowerment to hope. The scripture above actually uses the word "abound."

What does it mean to abound in hope? It means to overflow with hope, to be packed to the brim with hope. And when something is overflowing or packed to the brim, there is no more room for anything else. When we abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit, there's no space to also include doubt, fear, pessimism, or anger. Can you imagine only feeling hope at any given moment? To have hope be the singular thought that you have, perspective that you see, or emotion that you feel? That sounds amazing to me and totally possible through the Holy Spirit. Our community and the people around us are often used by the Holy Spirit to remind us of this hope that is accessible through Jesus.

Our writers continuously remind me and help me reset as well. With their thoughtful look at Scripture and careful communication to our readers, I'm encouraged by their love of the greater church and desire for spiritual growth and understanding. In this issue we feature a wide range of articles, from private interaction with God in "Engaging With God: Connecting With the Creator In Our Fast-Paced Society", to interpersonal interaction with God's people in "How Dare You Judge Me!: Rethinking Matthew 7:1 and 1 Corinthians 4:5," to outward interaction with the global church in "Faith, Hope, Love: Lessons from India." I hope these articles and the many more contained in this issue help you to be reminded of God's love for you. As believers, the Holy Spirit lives within us and can fill us to the brim with hope — we just have to be willing to make room.

Cailin



ENGAGING With GOD

CONNECTING WITH THE CREATOR IN OUR FAST-PACED SOCIETY

By NICHOLAS SOWELL



ith our busy get-up-and-go lifestyles, it might seem more difficult than ever to find time for God or where we can fully make time for the essential aspects of the Christian life like prayer and Bible reading. Yes, like working out or eating healthy, it comes down to the priority and importance of those things in our lives and whether or not they're important enough to us. At the end of the day we will make time for the things that are most important to us in our lives. Though God is not a "thing" to be fit into our schedules, I believe it's more than possible to make a place and priority in our lives for connection with him.

As we create space and make time to meet with God, we find our connection to him increasing and our intimacy and relationship with him growing. It's in the word of God contained in the Bible and in prayer that we not only sharpen our senses to hear him better, but also feed our souls in a way nothing else can. I have yet to meet a person who has told me, "I've been spending time with God... and it did nothing for me." Time with God allows us to renew our minds, strengthen our spirits, and fill up with more of God's love and divine perspective when life tends to drain us. Understanding the need to be refreshed, maintain connection, and learn to hear what God is speaking to us is incredibly important. The two most prominent ways we hear God is through prayer and reading the Bible. Knowing that these two are so essential to

As we create SPACE and make time to meet with God, we find our connection to him increasing and our INTIMACY and relationship with him growing.

the Christian life, it begs the question: "How do you maintain relationship, connection, and intimacy with God despite your busy life?"

There's a fine line between putting God into our schedule and just doing "Christian stuff" in order to feel like we've checked a to-do box and feel more righteous, holy or have done our duty. I believe that fine line is a heart posture. Only we ourselves know if we're doing something out of guilt or performance

rather than truly desiring to make time for God. I'm talking about an ongoing, honest, real conversation with the only living God. Do you find it difficult to "just talk" with God regularly? Does prayer feel more like a task on your to-do list than a comfortable, open conversation? When I talk about Bible reading, I'm talking about reading a book that the Bible calls "alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow" (Hebrews 4:12). This means that when you read, God's word changes and impacts you and his words are not just letters printed on a piece of paper.

One pastor I spoke to about what it looks like to incorporate God into his day said he does several things: the first being what he calls "shower time," meaning that while he gets ready for work in the morning he uses his time in the shower to speak with God, he even has a waterproof Bible he keeps in there! Secondly, he makes it a point to keep the radio off on the way to work and instead uses that time to pray. Furthermore, he and his wife even make sure to stay connected with each other by finding at least 15-20 minutes out of the week that are dedicated to just touching base with one another and praying together. Another person I asked about incorporating God into their day told me they're absolutely an evening person because they're more awake and therefore can hear God better when spending time with him. But despite their preference for evening, find that

There are many WAYS to pray and read the Bible, you've got to just find the best way that works for you in your SEASON of life.

with a family of four, they have to make it a priority in the morning or they just won't get time at all. And yet another person who spoke about their time with God, maintained they have to get creatively intentional as they travel a lot and are on the road often. Reading the Bible on an iPad because they make time while flying, or listening to Scripture in their car through the Bible App on the way to a meeting. A full time student I asked about incorporating prayer into her day said her rhythm looks like reading the devotional Jesus Calling around 12 at night, but also has a notification on her phone that goes off at 11:45 pm to remind her to read her Bible app. As far as praying, she takes time to do that while driving in her car. Lastly, I asked a stay-at-home parent how they



make time for God in their life. Though they admitted it was the hardest season to try and find time to do that, they felt there was grace despite the lack of time. It looked like putting on worship while folding laundry, or choosing to know that they could change diapers or give baths while maintaining an awareness of God's presence. And if you've ever raised two kids under the age of three, you know you can't do it without prayer. As you can tell, there are many ways to pray and read the Bible, you've got to just find the best way that works for you in your season of life.

I personally incorporate time with God in many different ways. Most often I start my day with a Bible plan I'm currently reading through in my Bible app. It keeps me on board with a theme, like something I'm dealing with in that particular season. I might follow that up with worship music on my way to work, often singing truth and words in the music straight from Scripture. Many times I'm praying before I step into meetings, praying with those I'm meeting with, or even praying with my two boys at home when I put them down for bed. Other times it's just a cry for help, a simple prayer of thanksgiving, or a prayer of protection if I'm sensing fear or feeling afraid. Sometimes it's reading Scripture with my wife before we go to bed, or praying together before we go to sleep. Often I'll look and see what the "scripture of the day" is in the Bible app and use the themes of that verse to focus on throughout the day when I pray. For example, today's selected scripture is Isaiah 53:5, "But he

was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." I'll take that piece and focus on Jesus's sacrifice for our sins. I let that scripture be at the center of my prayer.

I also take one day a month I call a "solitude day" centered around the idea of Jesus in Matthew 26:36 and Matthew 6:6, "Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, 'Sit here while I go and pray over there." "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

Jesus often withdrew from even the disciples to get time alone with God, the Father. It's in that space you're able to rest in his presence, push the world out and be refreshed by him. In a life that finds most of us constantly pouring out, it's this intentional time that leaves me sane and with something to give. My solitude days look like incorporating different kinds of prayer and allows me to focus my heart and mind on many aspects of God's character in new ways. Like the writer of Psalms says in chapter 77 verse 12, "I will also meditate on all your work, And talk of your deeds." Some of the types of prayer I focus on are prayers of thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6, Luke 18:43, John 11:41), intercession (Ephesians 1:15-18,

Sometimes I don't realize it until LATER, but when praying for something, God has often ALREADY revealed it in the piece of scripture I'm reading.

John 17:15, II Thessalonians 1:11), protection (Ephesians 6:10-18), and petition (Matthew 18:19-20).

Sometimes I don't realize it until later, but when praying for something, God has often already revealed it in the scripture I'm reading! Sometimes when I'm talking (praying) with God, it's a prayer of contemplation about what lies ahead, prayer about commitments in my life and what I'm giving my time to, or simply asking God what he's doing and partnering with him in prayer for that. Lastly, and in my opin-

ion most powerfully, is corporate prayer. Gathering with my life group in my home and praying together or with others at my church carries immense power, perhaps creating a far reaching outcome we may not even be aware of. When we pray for something together, there's strength in that. When we pray for each other, there's often strength and healing in that.

In Luke 18:1 it says, "Then he spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart." There's something about learning to pray consistently and often that results in us being able to persevere despite what life throws at us. The learning how to "pray consistently and often" part becomes the biggest challenge for us. Author and Life Coach Michael Warden gives his advice on how to let prayer stick consistently. He says that our daily habits we've already created are a great place to start. When life coaching and getting people to incorporate new habits, the best way is to start by attaching them to an already existing one. For example, if you get up and make coffee every morning, make your coffee time a time that you pray or read the Bible. If you do laundry every day, or go for a walk, or sit on the toilet (I'm kidding, but not really), or any daily activity you do, you can find a way to incorporate God into that. After all, 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." I believe it's in the intentional thought and connection that we do anything which can be used as a

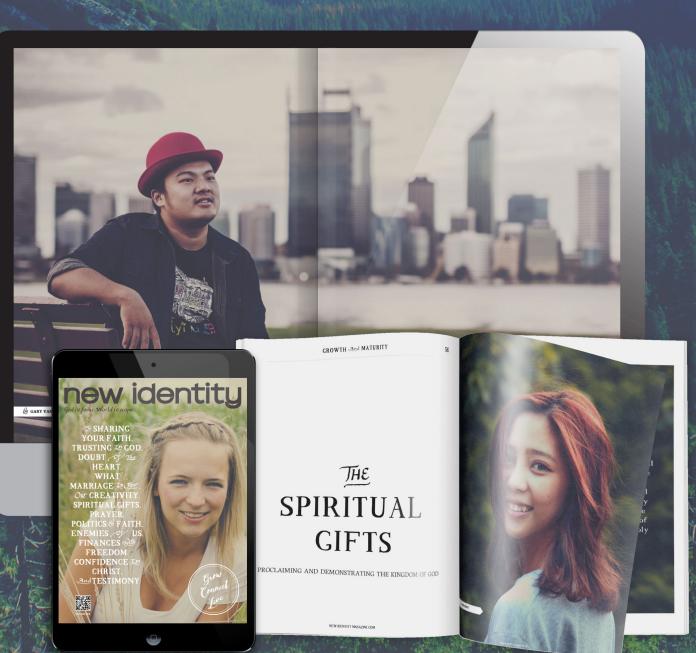
prayer or time with God. So give it a shot, what have you got to lose?! I can confidently say that any time invested into our relationship with God, is time best spent. It's like a river that runs through all aspects of your life, refreshing and nourishing to every facet. Prayer and the Bible are two things that the Holy Spirit uses to transform us, and he can quite literally change us for the better.

Phillipians 1:3-4: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you with all joy."



Nicholas Sowell

Nicholas has been involved in full time ministry since age 16. He has served in various roles within ministry and is now serving as an Associate Grow Pastor at Gateway Church. Nicholas has used his love for writing to inspire, educate, and most importantly: further the kingdom of God. Now living in Austin, Texas with his wife and two boys.



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HOW DARE YOU JUDGE ME!

RETHINKING MATTHEW 7:1 AND 1 CORINTHIANS 4:5

By GREG WHYTE

t was the year between when I finished my undergraduate degree and was about to begin my Master's degree. The students around me were in the midst of writing their final papers and preparing for final exams. Or, at least that's what one would expect.

However, on this particular day, I noticed everyone talking about a certain blog post that one of the students had written about something that had happened the weekend prior. Specifically, this student had noticed some of his fellow students scantily clad and dancing provocatively at a certain night club in downtown Toronto. His blog post was somewhat scathing, to say the least, and people were even starting blog accounts, just so they could comment on what he said (or on the discussion that he had started). Several of the responses, because everyone involved attended a Christian university, agreed with him (though maybe not with his somewhat colorful language, or the fact that his presence at said nightclub brought his integrity into question). But many others, coming to the defense of those young women (and some young men), made the writer of that post out to be the bigger sinner (for being "judgmental"), and quoted one of these verses at him:

VERSES

Judge not, and you will not be judged. (Matthew 7:1 ESV)

And

We struggle between saying SOMETHING and appearing judgmental, or not saying ANYTHING and allowing whatever it is to continue.

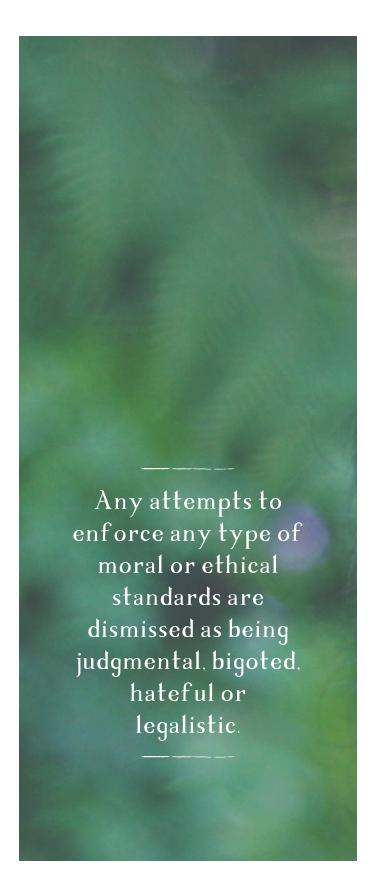
Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the LORD comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness, and will disclose the purposes of the heart. (1 Corinthians 4:5 ESV)

OUT OF CONTEXT MEANING

Of course, we can all think of situations like this, where because we are expected to be "nice" and "tolerant" and to not "rock the boat" (Trust me — as a Canadian, we are *known* for having those as our prime cultural values), but we also see people who are doing things that are wrong, we struggle between saying something and appearing "judgmental," or not saying anything and allowing whatever it is to continue.

There seems to be this attitude in North American Christianity where we are not allowed to correct anybody, or to hold offensive opinions that might hurt another person's feelings, because we are told that the ideal for Christians is that we be seen as "nice," or we have this notion that being "loving" means the same as being "tolerant." Any attempts to enforce any type of moral or ethical standards are dismissed as being judgmental, bigoted, hateful or legalistic. All of this is because we are supposedly told in the Bible that it is wrong for us to judge another person, because we don't know where the other person is coming from.

To be fair, though, in many ways this insistence on "tolerance" is very much a reaction to those who have taken the texts speaking of God as a judge and took it to the other extreme – such as protesting funerals and standing on street corners holding signs declaring, "God hates (insert hated people group here)", and spewing hateful words at anybody who doesn't belong to their particular brand of Christianity. Those on that extreme would be perfectly happy if verses like those quoted above would be completely removed from the biblical canon. Such an attitude is wrong, and needs to be corrected; however, the problem with "reactions" is that they can often over-correct and end up falling into the other extreme. To be precise, there are several texts within the Bible that do speak of God



as judge, several of which can seem quite extreme to our offense-sensitive eyes (The Great Flood, or Sodom and Gomorrah, or the seemingly commanded genocide of entire people groups, such as the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15, or the destruction of Jericho in Joshua 6, not to mention much of the imagery in the book of Revelation). And there are also texts, including much of the book of Joshua that, when mixed with the history of thinking of Canada and the USA as historically "Christian" nations and the unfortunate idolatry that comes when politics are mixed in with our faith, make it perfectly understandable why there would be such groups that would see themselves as the champions of "Christian culture," all the time continuing many of the abuses and injustices done in the name of Christianity; which in turn also makes it understandable why there is such a backlash against it, not only in our wider culture, but also among Christians who would shy away from the image of God as an angry judge, just waiting to strike us down at the slightest mistake, and who very much want to make our faith more palatable to a more pluralistic society.

These two verses quoted above are only two of several verses that seem to say that we shouldn't judge other people, but for the sake of space, we'll only be looking at those two.

DANGERS OF READING OUT OF CONTEXT

One obvious danger, of course, is that we are confusing terminology. On the side of those telling us we should not judge, every bit of correction or exhortation to change as we pursue holiness is also included with what was probably meant by Jesus in the Matthew passage, which means that our Christian faith becomes a free-for-all, where nobody can hold anybody else to a higher level of accountability, in fear that we might come across as being too judgmental. So out of this, we become afraid to say anything or to correct those around us, even if the path that the person is on will eventually lead to destruction. Just for an example, if you were to read Paul's letter to the Galatians, his tone is very scathing in that letter. He also mentions in that letter a certain encounter he had with Peter and Barnabas, two respected leaders in the church. Paul was not too coy to rebuke them publicly. "Bad Paul," we are tempted to say. "Quit being such a judgmental, closed-minded bigot!"

In a way, it's also unfortunate that the attitudes expressed in calling for an end to all judgmentalism actually reflect more the attitudes of our decadent North American value system than they do the value system put forward by the Bible. By pushing tolerance at all costs, we are basically saying "I want to do what I want, when I want, with whomever I want,

If CORRECTION and rebuke are not allowed, false teaching, immorality, and false worship (referred to through scripture as idolatry) would not be far BEHIND.

and there is nothing you or anybody else can say or do to stop me. I am above the law!" Forgive me if I seem out of line by saying this, but that certainly doesn't sound like Jesus, or the values that he taught, at all. Now, to be the one who must struggle between rebuking someone who has such an attitude, despite claiming to follow Jesus, and to simply "tolerate" this can be difficult. I mean, tolerance could be seen as ignoring the offense or going our own separate ways and letting everyone do their own thing. The question we are forced to ask ourselves is, how does this cheap thing we call "tolerance" resemble the love that we are called to, which actually challenges us to engage

with one another and to actively be involved in what Jesus wants us to be doing (representing his interests to the world as salt and light)?

Or here is another example, which unfortunately brings in even worse dangers. In the book of Revelation, there are seven letters to some historical churches. Leaving any interpretive issues aside, if we were to look at the fourth of these, you would see a letter to the church of Thyatira. The one complaint that Jesus had against this church was that they tolerated a certain false prophetess who is given the name Jezebel. See, if correction and rebuke are not allowed, false teaching, immorality, and false worship (referred to through Scripture as idolatry) would not be far behind. To have tolerance as our primary virtue, while it might mean the boat is never rocked and we are seen as accepting of everyone and every idea around us, it also means that we will accept all things, even the destructive; and truth be told, that actually flies in the face of this new life that Jesus has given us.

THE ORIGINAL CONTEXT

Regarding 1 Corinthians 4:5, it's actually not talking about judging in the sense of correcting other people's' behavior or thinking (even though it is in itself a rebuke, of a sort). Among other issues, the primary subject throughout this first letter to the Corinthians is addressing divisions in the church. Read in its orig-

inal context this verse is actually talking about how we should not be comparing or judging the value of various leaders within the church, which has actually been the topic of what Paul's been talking about for the entire first four chapters of the letter. There is a later point in the letter where Paul does address the question of moral and ethical judgment (which is what we are talking about in this article), in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. However, even there, what it actually says may surprise us:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you." (1 Corinthians 5:9-13 NIV)

Curiously, this is one passage that is never really thrown around by the "You shouldn't judge!" crowds, and the "hate everyone who is not with us" crowd would probably squirm when reading it as well. As we can see, Paul instructs the church in Corinth not to have anything to do with a so-called believer who is living an immoral life (which sounds pretty judgmental to our offense-sensitive ears, does it not?). He even goes so far as to say that the church is called to judge and to correct the fellow believer; even to expel them if they prove unrepentant (v. 13). This, of course, is in hopes that they would repent and would stop living in such a compromised way (which Paul addresses in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, which was a follow-up letter to this one). But, if we follow the argument of this passage, we are not to separate ourselves from the world, and can even expect that those outside of the Christian faith would lead lessthan-holy lives. In other words, according to Paul, it is not our place as Christians to attack the morality or to act as holy judge over the beliefs or practices of those who make no claim to following Christ. We are to be salt and light, yes, influencing culture as we represent Jesus to the world, but if you'd notice what Paul was talking about, that doesn't mean attacking them or avoiding them for not believing as we do (which, we shouldn't expect them to. If they did, then they would probably be classified as believer). This would be a corrective to many of our more crusading brothers and sisters, or at least those among us who would close the doors of the church and condemn the rest of the world to Hell.

But this is also a corrective for the other side as well, and a sobering one at that. In this very passage, Paul is saying that if a person claims to be a Christian, but then denies their faith by the way they live and refuses to listen to correction or rebuke, the other Christians are to have nothing to do with them, which is to say that we are to even consider them as if they were an unbeliever. It's as if there is a higher moral or ethical standard for those who claim to follow Jesus, as strange as it might sound to many of us who have heard in sermons (or even preached sermons) which say that we are saved by grace, not by the things we do (or don't do). There is a biblical precedent for leaders to be judged at a higher standard (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9; James 3:1), which should also cause our leaders and our teachers to pause and consider. But is there such a different standard for the average believer, when compared to the outside world?

I believe there is. As well as the passages I've already mentioned, this call to correct the errant believer is also echoed in other places as well (Ezekiel 33:7-12; Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4; Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Titus 3:10-11; James 5:19-20). On the flip side of this, if we as believers are actively pursuing Christ and godly character (meaning that we actually truly want to follow and belong to Jesus as his people), then we should in fact welcome this correction, and not reject all guidance or correction as being "judgmental garbage." The truth is, we all have blind spots. We all have areas where we are broken, or where we are weak to temptation. For some, it may be

an addiction to something; for another, it might be a thought pattern, where we have internalized the lies of Satan and it has paralyzed us from doing what we know we should be doing; for yet others, it is a flaw specifically related to character (such as a destructive temper or laziness and procrastination). Truth be told, we probably all have weaknesses in each of these areas, and if the gospel calls us to freedom from these weaknesses (which I believe it does), then don't you think it is actually a good thing when God brings other people into our lives who reveal to us our rough spots?

If we are called to correct one another, as these passages cited above indicate, then that means that as Christians, we should be pursuing a higher standard of morality — which, curiously enough, was part of the reason why Christianity was so popular in its early years, which we will look at more closely below.

But there is still that other verse — the one in Matthew 7:1, which more explicitly seems to be saying "don't judge." But is it really saying what we think it is saying? Here is the verse again, this time in its original context:

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and



pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." (Matthew 7:1-6, NIV)

Despite what we may think about this as being a blanket statement against judging another person, which seems to include correcting or rebuking other people for that which we believe to be wrong, what it's actually saying is that the standard we use for others will also be used for us, so it is a warning that before we make those judgments on somebody else, we need to make sure that we, ourselves, are not guilty of a similar problem, or possibly even of a worse problem. Jesus is not saying merely to 'tolerate' one another, but that we need to deal with our own issues (which, in a rather tongue-in-cheek way, he seems to be implying that sometimes our own issues behind the original beef might be bigger than the actual offense that we see the other person doing). In other words, if I were to preach on the importance of men loving their wives and taking care of their needs, what do you think it would do to my message if I went home and abused my own wife, or visited a prostitute right after giving such a talk? It would kill

my integrity, and any authority I might have thought I had to even speak about such a topic.

When Jesus was first saying this, likely he had in mind several of the religious of his day, who condemned those who acted out many of the same sins that they kept hidden. And even when he would come into confrontations with them, many times their arrogance would come to the surface – and sometimes even their murderous zeal, which was an even worse offence. On one occasion, in John 8, these leaders brought to Jesus a woman caught in adultery. They were willing to kill her on the spot; but more than this, they were hoping to trap Jesus. One might ask, if she was caught in adultery, where was the man? Jesus' response is similar to his challenge in Matthew 7: Let the one without sin (the one who has removed the log from his own eye) be the first to throw a stone. One by one, they all left. Then he spoke to the woman. (To those who shout "You shouldn't judge!", you need to keep reading here.) Instead of simply saying "You're free to go! Enjoy your life!" he tells her what he tells many whom he forgives and heals: "Go, and don't sin anymore." In other words, while he sets her free from the condemnation from the crowds, he doesn't simply allow for her to continue to do what is wrong. He tells her to stop doing that which is wrong... which means that he knows that she was doing wrong, and he told her to change her ways, but in a way that brought life and hope. And when we are correcting someone else, that is what we also should be doing — not condemning for the sake of looking down on the other person in order to make us appear better than we really are, but also not simply winking at the wrong-doing and saying, "It's okay. God loves you just the way you are!" No, holiness demands that we work to restore life and hope in the other person, which means that we engage with them in hopes of bringing change.

And then, if you would notice right after Jesus says to remove the log before addressing the speck, there is that statement about giving sacred things to dogs and pearls to pigs. This is similar to Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 5. The unbelieving world (those who make no claims to following Jesus) won't respect what you are saying if you appeal to the Bible (because they don't follow the Bible, and in many cases, don't respect what it says). Like what Paul said, it is not our place to judge those outside the church. As for those inside the church, while we might find those who might claim to be Christians who also don't respect the Bible and who insist on fighting back after any and all correction (which, these individuals are referred to in the Bible as either wicked or foolish), it seems that we are still called to correct even these, which might even involve church discipline (which the passage in 1 Corinthians hints at by telling the church to stop associating with the offending individual unless they change). Even in those situations, even if it might feel like you are "judging" them, God might still be calling you to correct them and bring them back to a place where they are doing what is right.

But let's be honest: most Christians we come in contact with aren't really like that. We all make mistakes, yes, and we all have areas where we might be blind to the fact that what we're doing might not be the wisest or the best picture of what a follower of Christ would do, but a true believer and follower of Christ, at least one who is spiritually mature, would actually welcome correction, if the concern is legitimate.

HOW CAN WE REALLY APPLY THESE VERSES?

As we've seen throughout this meditation, the Bible actually has a lot to say about correcting our fellow Christians whenever we do make mistakes or make poor decisions in life.

For the 1 Corinthians 4:5 verse, although it is not actually related to the question of rebuking or correcting our brothers and sisters in the faith, it does offer a powerful corrective if we think of our tendency to compare our leaders and to worship the celebrities among us. It's like choosing whether or not to attend an event based on whether or not you like the main speaker, or buying every book ever written by a cer-

tain author and looking down on those who happen to prefer a different writer's style. I actually know certain people who not only own every book by a certain author and attend every one of her events, but even go to the point of changing their look to match their idol, all the time looking down on everyone who is not as enamored by this teacher. Or it's like the crowds that would flock to a certain mega-church because of the personality of the senior pastor, but then dissipate like the mist when a flaw is discovered in that pastor or he moves away and is replaced by someone else who is not as famous or well-known. As we saw above, this was exactly what was happening in Corinth (but for different reasons). Just goes to show that we are still blind in many ways.

In a way this is related to our main topic because by our "judging" these servants of Christ, we are placing ourselves in positions of authority over them, or considering them as favorite mascots for our personal preferences, or we begin to assume that this person speaks for God, or possibly even is like a god for us, and so we worship everything about them, while spurning those who are not that favored teacher of ours (which is something that we'd need to grow out of eventually as we mature in the faith). There is something that could be said about ability, character and worthiness of those teachers, but the truth of the matter is this: first, that teacher is answerable to God for whatever he or she does or teaches, and it is God

who gave that person the ability to do what he or she does. It is not our place to rate them or to sit in judgment over them.

Curiously enough, the Christians were also considered closed-minded in the early years of the faith. They didn't participate in the pagan festivals or sacred orgies, and they didn't burn incense to the Emperor as if he were a god, partly because they insisted on only one God, but also because their faith in this one God was such that this God called them to a higher standard of morality and ethics (which actually is what the prophets of the Old Testament were also continually calling the Jewish people to – something which, curiously enough, was unique to the Hebrew prophets among their contemporaries, by the way). And I think it's important to reiterate that as Christians, we should want to honor God in this way. It's not rule-keeping, list-checking behavior to stay on his good side, but it's out of respect and honor for the God we love so deeply that we do or don't do the things we do. Viewing it like a checklist or boasting in the things that we do is like a mug demanding praise or favor from its potter because it can hold water, even though the purpose of that mug was to hold water. The potter made it to hold the water. If it can do what it was meant for, who deserves the praise? The mug? No, the potter who made it. It's the same with us; the expectations laid out in the scriptures are a picture of the kind of life which God designed us

The expectations laid out in the scriptures are a PICTURE of the kind of life which God DESIGNED us for — what God intended for his humans and for the rest of the Creation.

for — what God intended for his humans and for the rest of the Creation. The fact that things are broken and that it seems more "natural" to do things which go against the original design means that it often takes more effort to do what is right. But that's where the Holy Spirit comes in: as Christians, we have faith that because of the power given to us by the Spirit, and because of the new chance at life that we have been given because of the gospel, we can now be empowered to begin living the way that we were meant to from the beginning. That's why we are not saved by what we do or don't do. However, if the Cross of Jesus means anything to us, if we are those who bear

his name, and if we are grateful for the new chance at life that he has given us, don't you think we would want to live lives that bring him honor and pleasure?

Because of this desire to please God with their lives, the early Christians had a reputation of living a higher standard than the laws of society dictated (meaning that their lives were examples of righteousness, even in pagan eyes), and they were known for their love and sacrifice, not just for one another, but for those whom the rest of society would have neglected or ostracized. It was actually this love for not only each other but for others who were abandoned in society and their sobriety and holy lives that led to Christianity becoming an attractive option to the self-centered decadence that was typical of the Greco-Roman world at the time. Of course, a caveat must be mentioned here, as not all of the attention given to the early church was particularly positive. Their visible difference (belief in only one god, displayed acts of charity toward the "least" of society, and refusal to participate in the pagan festivals or morally questionable actions of their contemporaries) gave them the reputation that they were traitors to the empire, closed-minded bigots who hated their fellow citizens (sound familiar?), and a strange cult that needed to be eliminated.

And, truth be told, this is still very much true to-

day. It may not always be obvious, and it may seem sometimes like the Christians are just as bad as those around them, but if you were to look at the front lines of those selflessly giving of themselves to relieve the suffering of the world, whether it is giving social assistance in the inner city, or assisting in recovery from natural disasters or refugee situations, a large proportion of those are Christians. Plus, many of the benefits that we take for granted today (public schooling, addiction recovery programs, public healthcare, social services, the abolition of slavery, the preservation of languages, elderly care homes, orphanages, etc.), much of that was actually because of Christians who felt convicted by God to do something about the suffering they saw around them.

Perhaps this might be a powerful prophetic rebuke to us Christians, on whichever side of the fence that we sit on, whether we are those who are quick to look upon the world with haughty eyes of judgment, or if we are those who let wickedness seep into our midst in the name of being "tolerant" and "open-minded." As Christians, we are called to live lives that point toward a better way of being human. That much is a fact. Even those who don't belong to the Christian church know this, even though it may not be in the terms I've just outlined. Mahatma Gandhi, a famous Indian activist, once remarked: "I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." Or for a more personal reason,

one of the main reasons my family stays away from Christianity (and why it took a direct encounter with God for me to consider joining any church, let alone become someone who works with the Christian church professionally) is that they know Christians are meant to be better, but the examples around haven't been very inspiring. In fact, I've even had to do some damage control with my family because of some of the negative encounters they have had with "Christians." Which is why one of the biggest barriers to Christian faith still remains Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, but deny him by their lifestyles.

Maybe tolerance is not all it's cracked up to be, especially since the love that we are called to pursue actually challenges us to engage with injustice, and to correct those who do wrong. But how do we balance that? How do we love well? To be honest, I am still trying to figure this out. Do we keep flip-flopping our standards between a staunch legalism that would build a wall keeping those out who don't fit our exacting criteria, or a tolerance which refuses to fight against anything that is wrong in the world (and especially that which is wrong in the church, who should be representing God's interests), out of fear of looking like a killjoy? I think we flip-flop or go to the extremes so much is because it is easier to keep our thinking about moral ideas or how to deal with people in tidy boxes. To stay on the road and out of

the ditches on either side, that is the challenge, and truth be told, it can be difficult sometimes to navigate. But that's where prayer comes in, and specifically a type of prayer where we also listen to God, trusting that the Holy Spirit will help to guide us on what we should say when we do speak, and also during times when it would be wisest to remain silent and listen, or even, as the scriptures we've explored above state, to first remind us of areas where we might be guilty, which needs to be addressed before we approach the other person. No, it isn't easy, but we are in this together, and that is a comforting thought, at least.

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JARGON 28



DWELL

CHRISTIAN LINGO EXPLAINED

By ALLEN REYNOLDS

o dwell is to be fully present in a place or with a person. God has dwelled among his people throughout the Bible, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation. Dwell can also mean to "settle in" or "engage with" someone other than oneself. Christians usually use this word to describe two situations. God "dwelling" with his people and his people "dwelling" with God. What is the difference you might ask? Let me explain it to you.

When we dwell with God, we are conscious of his presence in our lives. This consciousness can be a feeling of closeness or contentment with God, but it can also be an awareness of God's greatness, power, wisdom or love. We feel most at home in God's presence, but we don't always dwell there. We get easily distracted by busyness, pride, and own measures of time well spent. When we aren't fully present with God, we miss out on our unique relationship with him. God offers us a safe place to settle into, but we have to be intent on being there because our sin gets in the way.

When God dwells with people, his presence is made known despite our shortcomings. In the Old Testament, God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8) until their sin separated their imperfect humanity from God's perfect presence. From that point forward, God would take many different forms to connect with his creation. For

example, he dwelled with the Israelites as pillars of cloud and fire. "By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night" (Exodus 13:21). Later God desired a closer relationship with his chosen people but knew they couldn't handle the fullness of his power and glory in person. So God chose to dwell among them in a portable tent (the tabernacle) because the Israelites were still wandering in the desert after being rescued out of Egypt. "I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God" (Exodus 29:45-46). Though God gave humanity the opportunity to be in his presence again, human sin continued to be an obstacle.

Later, Solomon erected a permanent tabernacle in Jerusalem. After Solomon prayed and dedicated the finished temple to the Lord, God answered his prayer: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

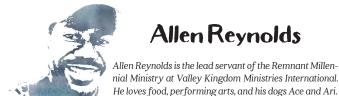
Instead of just spending time with creation, God chooses creation as the PLACE he likes to hang out and helps creation to appreciate his PRESENCE, to give him the glory for such a gift and to learn to love people well.

Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time" (2 Chronicles 7:12-16). Unfortunately, people kept taking God's presence for granted and mistreated each other, so God stopped dwelling with them (Ezekiel 10).

Finally, because God's love never stops pursuing his creation, he wanted that creation to have access to him and be with him anytime, anywhere, and without the obstacle of sin. So God went a step further to dwell within and among his people through Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Son of God, who became human,

lived without sin, sacrificed himself for sin so humanity could dwell with God eternally. Those who accept Jesus as the Lord, the one who did this great act of love and mercy, also receives the presence of God—the Holy Spirit. He takes up residence in and among humanity. No more cloud, tent, or temple. Instead of just spending time with creation, God chooses creation as the place he likes to hang out and helps creation to appreciate his presence, to give him the glory for such a gift and to learn to love people well. God does a miracle and makes humanity able to be good hosts for God's presence and power. God accomplishes this through the Holy Spirit.

Though God is everywhere, always present, God's presence can feel concentrated in a place when we "humble ourselves, and pray and seek his face and turn from our wicked ways" as mentioned in 2 Chronicles 7 above. Water is all throughout the air, but when it is condensed, it can form a pool. When we dwell with God, it is an invitation to come into that pool. A deep, warm, reinvigorating, grace-filled pool.







With LINDSEY A. FREDERICK

Relationships

Dear Lindsey,

Several friends recently asked me to be in their weddings. I'm in my mid-20s and I'm trying to be financially responsible, but I don't want to turn any of them down or hurt their feelings. I'm starting to feel the stress of school loans, car insurance, rent, and life in general. How do I be there for my friends and not go broke?

-Broke Best Friend

Dear Best Friend,

I understand this can be a stressful part of life as you learn to balance your time, finances, and relationships. Adulting is hard. But you sound like a really good friend—you care about people's feelings, you're responsible, and you want to do the right thing. These qualities will take you far in life, and they're likely why you're in such high demand this wedding season. Yet, if you're caring nature and sense of responsibility aren't safeguarded with healthy limits, they can persuade you to make decisions out of guilt. And what I hear in your question is a subtle, guilt-induced belief that you cannot be both a good friend and a good steward. So let's call this out for what it is: a big fat lie.

Here's what I want you to remember: Being in a wedding is an honor, not an obligation. So kick that

guilt to the curb. Go ahead. Give it a big, swift karate kick—bye-ya!

Now that the pressure is off, you can ground the problem in a place I like to call The Realm of Realistic Possibilities. It's a wonderful dimension where—free of guilt, shame, or blame—you acknowledge what you realistically can and cannot do, and then discover various possible solutions.

So, what can you do?

I suggest you make a budget. List all wedding-related expenses and compare them to your monthly living expenses. My favorite financial expert, Dave Ramsey, would tell you to make sure you have the "four walls of your house" in place before you allocate money to anything else. That means shelter and utilities, food, clothing necessities, and transportation. Next, you should probably pay on any outstanding debts. Once those are covered, determine if the money left over is enough to save for your friends' weddings.

Now before you get busy with those numbers, I want you to ask yourself a question: What do you believe about your money? Do you believe it's yours or Gods? Psalm 24:1 tells us "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him" (NLT). I believe this includes money, and that how we handle our money hints at where we put our trust. Do



you trust God with your current situation—whether that means being in your friends weddings to having to sit out a few?

If, after you crunch your numbers, you still come up short, it's OK. I've been there, and I can tell you everything turned out just fine—friendships and finances intact. There are other ways you can be a part of your friends' big days. Get creative and think of skills or services you can offer. Do you rock a uke? Have you been told you have a velvety poetry-reading voice? Can you turn a barn into a ballroom with a roll of tulle and some twinkle lights?

Next, talk to your friends. Make them a compliment sandwich, and bring it to the conversation like this:

Deliver a compliment: Tell your friend you're so excited for their upcoming wedding and you are flattered they asked you to stand up with them.

Now, the tough news: Say something like, "So, I've been looking over my budget, and things are really tight this year. This is how much I can afford. I understand if that doesn't work for your wedding vision, and I won't be offended if you ask someone else to stand in my place."

Now more good news: "I value our friendship so much, and would still love be a part of your wedding in any way I can that fits within my budget. I'm great at making floral arrangements!"

Your friends might be disappointed at first, but Proverbs has some wise things to say about this kind of hurt: "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses" (27:6). All that means is because you've invested in building solid, trusted relationships with your friends, you've paved a path that makes it highly likely your friends will be understanding. And they may still find a way to make you part of their original vision.

Best wishes, Best Friend!

Ask Lindsey!

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



Lindsey A. Frederick

Lindsey A. Frederick is a marketing & communications manager in the Washington DC area and writes frequently about life, art, and faith.

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SIX MUST-READ TITLES TO ENJOY THIS SEASON

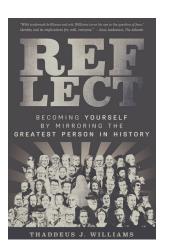
By BRANDON HURLBERT

Summer is here and I cannot wait to partake in one of my favorite personal traditions. For the past six years, on the first day of summer after I get out of classes, I go to a quiet park and read *The Great Gatsby*. I know, what kind of person rewards himself for finishing a rough semester by reading a book? Well, the kind of person that finds joy in stories.

Albert Camus, a famous twentieth century philosopher and fiction writer, once said that "Fiction is the lie in which we tell the truth." This truth is made evident as Camus decided to record his philosophical musings in story form with such works as *The Stranger and The Fall*.

Even in the Bible, we find real historical events described in heart-pounding, dramatic, surprising narratives. In Scripture, there are no boring, fact-by-fact recountings of events like you would find in your long discarded high school history book. Instead, readers encounter gripping stories intermixed with stunning poetry and heartfelt laments. For life's toughest questions, Scripture doesn't give us the pat and simple answers we want to hear in propositional form. It gives complex and messy stories that reveals our hearts; the Bible tells us what we need to hear, not just what we want to hear.

Stories are also how we connect with one another. They are our social currency that we freely trade amongst our closest friends and complete strangers. It is through stories that we describe ourselves. I am not just a list of physical traits, but a person, complete with my own story. Ultimately, stories help us understand the world around us and help us connect with others in it. Yet, if we want to understand these things, we must dive deep into stories, especially fictional stories, that can help us learn to empathize through imaginary characters in imaginary worlds and discover new ways that their stories may reflect our own. The following stories are a great place to start this summer.



REFLECT: Becoming Yourself by Mirroring the Greatest Person in History - Thaddeus J. Williams

This book has fundamentally changed how I see the world and myself by painting a vivid portrait of Jesus. Through creative stories, humorous anecdotes, and top-notch biblical exegesis, Williams

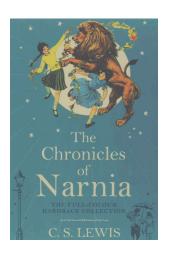
describes how we can only find our story by locating it with the story of Jesus. By reflecting Jesus wholistically, we ourselves become more whole-more who we are supposed to be.



Harry Potter
- J.K. Rowling

This series needs no introduction, nor recommendation. I will say that this is certainly a literary masterpiece of our day. Whether you have read them before, watched the movies, or have never picked them up, it's never too late to start. This pop-

ular series explores concepts like death, friendship, what it means to love and sacrifice.

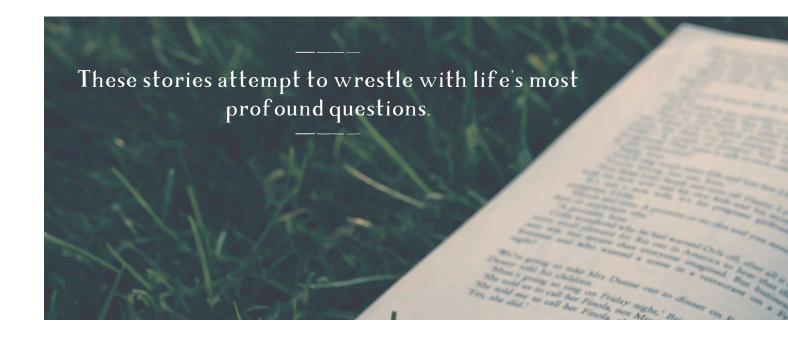


Chronicles of Narnia - C.S. Lewis

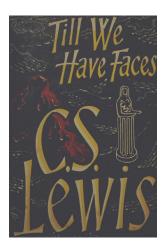
Lewis dedicates the first novel to his granddaughter with these words, "I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales...
But some day you will be

old enough to start reading fairy tales again. You can



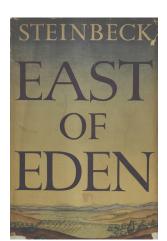


then take it down from some upper shelf, dust it, and tell me what you think of it." Children's stories, especially fairy tales, can be some of the most enchanting and enlightening stories in existence. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* is another literary masterpiece weaving together ancient sacred truths in memorable fairytale moments.



Till We have Faces
- C.S. Lewis

One of Lewis' more unknown novels, *Till We Have* Faces is one of my favorites. The myth of Cupid and Psyche is expertly reimagined and retold in Lewis' classic style. This book wrestles with the voice of God and hearing from him in the silence. If you want to get an idea of Lewis' talent without committing to an entire series, this would be a good one!



East of Eden
- John Steinbeck

Perhaps one of the longer books I've read, but by far one of my favorites. I had little appreciation for Steinbeck, but this book turned that around for me. One story unfolding over three generations details the legacies of sinfulness, righteousness, and whether redemption is

possible. Perhaps a narrative commentary on Genesis 4, Steinbeck captures a moment in American history



and almost forces you to entertain his ideas in this context.



The Brothers Karamazov - Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Considered to be one of the greatest novels ever written, Dostoyevsky's story engages the reader at every emotional level. Exploring ideas about morality, redemption, and who God is, Dostoyevsky's characters come to life within his world. It seems

daunting at first, but after getting through the first few chapters, I couldn't put it down. Definitely, a must read. These books along with others like J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, C.S. Lewis' Space Trilogy, Oscar Wilde's Picture of Dorian Gray, or even some short stories by Flannery O'Connor are fitting examples of lies that tell the truth. These stories attempt to wrestle with life's most profound questions. I believe that if you take the time to read (or listen to) some of these books you will find yourself to be a person with greater empathy for others, a better understanding of oneself, and a deeper relationship with God.



Brandon Hurlbert

Brandon has a B.A. in Biblical and Theological Studies from Biola University. He also has a minor in English Literature which means he enjoys reading the classics when he has the time. His passion and his heart i-s for the Church, with specific focus on integrating academic thought with church life. He also really, really likes coffee. He currently lives in southern California. Brandon can be reached at brandon.m.hurlbert@gmail.com.





A s the sun passed behind the Himalayan foothills around 3 in the afternoon, the air suddenly seemed to darken and chill. The villagers finished up their work and began preparing the evening meal of white rice, dahl, and meat. We shivered around the fire, and I gasped when I turned back around to look over the valley. Electric lights flicked on one by one across the jungle and terraced farms, looking exactly like an upside down version of the night sky, without its reflection in the clouds. I wish I had a photo, but there would have been no way to capture it fully.

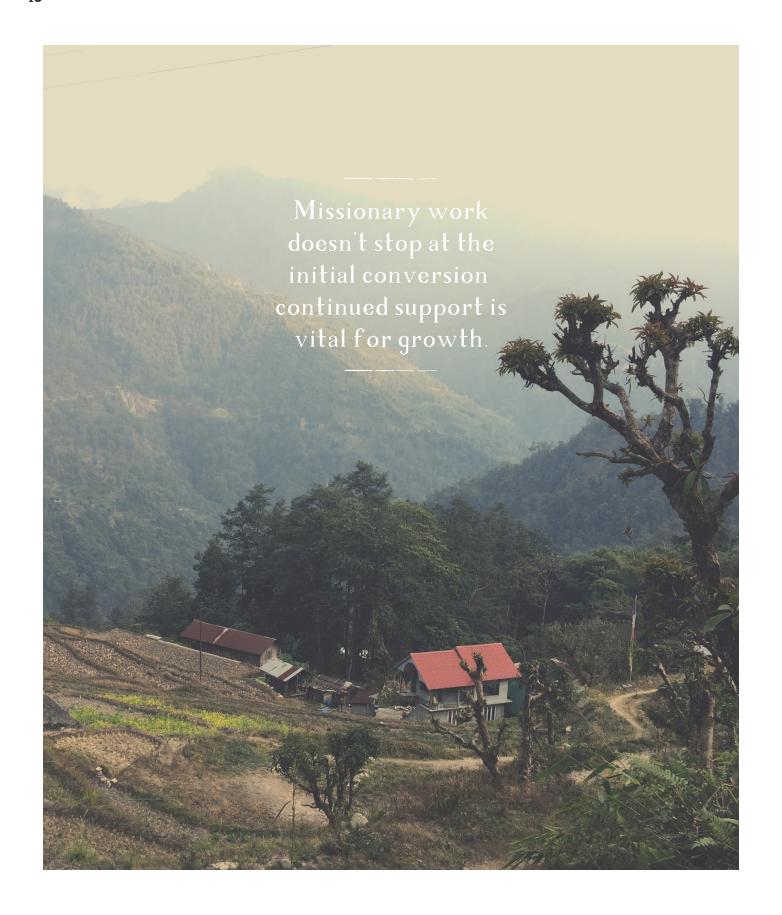
Here I was in India — a 22 year old college student who had never been outside of the United States except to Canada and a spring break mission trip to the Dominican Republic. During the two and a half weeks in India, I ate more rice and drank more tea than during the rest of my life combined. I rode a train for the first time, visited a leper colony, and watched cricket. Yet as different as everything was, the warmth of the people made me feel at home.

It wasn't your "typical" mission trip. We weren't a group of twenty people building an orphanage and handing out tracks on the streets. In many ways though, ministry in this part of the world felt closer to how the apostle Paul would have operated in the early days of the New Testament, after Jesus returned to Heaven and his followers were figuring out what to do next. Central to Paul's teachings, and our

work there, was faith, hope and love.

In the United States, when there are three churches down the street and your pastor is just a text away, it can be hard to understand the longing in Paul's letters to be close to the people to whom he is writing. Then I went to India, where physical distance and terrain makes visiting other Christian communities difficult. Trips like Paul's 2000 years ago, and ours today, are therefore even more important. If we added up all the hours of our time there, we probably spent more waking hours traveling by car, train or plane than actually staying in one place. Our car got stuck several times coming up from the valley of that mountain village. We found out later that ours was the first non four-wheel-drive vehicle to make it out, and that we wouldn't have made it at all in the rainy season.

This extreme physical isolation can be made even worse by spiritual isolation. We visited one pastor who was one of the only Christians in his village, and often socially persecuted by the Hindus and Buddhists around him. As we saw, missionary work doesn't stop at the initial conversion; continued support is vital for growth. Our mission work consisted of a lot of visiting churches, praying and encouraging Christians there, joining in evangelism, and pointing them back to the Scriptures as guides to combat false teachings. Often people will convert when they witness or experience a healing or other miracle, with-



I grew in HOPE by seeing and experiencing the LOVE of the people in India.

out really understanding the gospel at all.

One tool that we used to help them get the big picture was the Kingdom Story. Beginning with Genesis, the five-minute oral retelling covers the whole Bible - from creation, to the fall, to the promise of a savior, to Jesus' life, to his death, resurrection and appearances, to the church today, to the anticipation of Jesus coming back to bring the fullness of his kingdom. Throughout the two weeks, we had people draw a picture for each part of the story and even change the lyrics of familiar songs to tell the Kingdom Story. One of the best parts was seeing people of all ages grow in faith as they understood the Bible in a deeper and fuller way.

During the second week of the trip, our team held a two-day conference on faith, hope and love for young ministers studying at a Bible college. When I was asked to give a testimony about hope, I had a moment of panic. If I were being honest with myself, I had actually been experiencing a lack of hope back at home, both in the campus ministry I'm a part of and in the United States' political climate as a whole. It was hard to admit that, but in the end I decided to share about how seeing God at work in India had been incredibly encouraging and motivating as I headed back for my last semester of college. More specifically, I grew in hope by seeing and experiencing the love of the people in India.

I also learned that our "down time" is just as important as our "ministry time," and I believe our impact in India was greater than the sum of all the official things we did. While I might not remember the names and faces of those at the conference and Sunday services, I will never forget our hosts and translators and drivers, and the incredible generosity they showed and sacrifices they made for us during our trip. From our host parents in the mountain village giving up their hard wooden bed for us and sleeping on the kitchen floor, to our translator getting a call a few days before we arrived and dropping everything to join us, to the son of a pastor we worked with driving us around for hours without complaint — I felt incredibly humbled by the welcome we received.

We did our best to return this love during our "down time." Some of my favorite memories were the host daughter teaching us words for farm animals in her language in the quiet morning sunlight, and learning more about the Indian people's society, struggles and politics than I could ever find in a textbook during the long drives over bumpy roads. Our translator opened up about the persecution she faces for working with foreigners and Christians - even within her own family - and we got to pray with her, encourage her, give her hope and build a friendship even over that short amount of time.

Coming back to the United States, I am reminded to use every moment of my day as an opportunity to spend time with those around me. I have been challenged to spend more time reading the Bible and be more open in talking about my faith here at home, because sharing what God has done in my life is not something I need to go across the world to do. On the first day of the spring semester, I bumped into a friend of mine who is an international student from China. After she asked a bunch of questions about my trip, I asked if she wanted to meet up for lunch again, and we began studying the Bible together.

Mostly, though, I've been learning about what it means to be generous. It's difficult for me to ask for money from people, and I was blown away by the response I got, both financially and through prayer, towards this trip. I realized that my own generosity was very limited, because I was always holding back to make sure I had a safety net for myself. As I grow in faith in God and hope that he will provide, generosity becomes an act of love, not obligation. I'm trying to look at every resource, whether my time, my car, or my money, as an opportunity to serve others.

As I go back and read through Paul's letters to people like the Colossians, I have a better sense of what he must have felt like. I plan to go back and visit all of the friends I made in India, but until then I will pray for them and thank God for the work he is doing there. I hope that we were able to help them understand the Bible and the gospel better, so they can stay strong through persecution and share it with their own family and neighbors as I share it with my friends here in the United States.

"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace" (Colossians 1:3 ESV).



Lisa Gagnon

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omfort is a commodity we always want to give people when we find them under the pain of suffering or an onerous task. When we stand beside someone who is laying in a hospital bed, we desire them to understand God's compassion. When a huge job is given someone and they are bending under its weight, we want to find the words which will lighten the burden. The phrase moving over our lips is often "God won't give us any more than we can handle." The only problem is that the saying is a Bible misquote. The phrase is an attempt to give comfort. Unfortunately, it is a misuse of a biblical truth.

The misquote is a mistaken interpretation of 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

In the misquote, temptation is used as synonymous with a heavy task or more often suffering. Though heavy tasks or suffering can be the result of sin or make us more prone to develop a temptation towards sin, Paul however is talking about the actual temptation alone: the desire to pursue a sin. The Apostle Paul is showing us that God provides the tools necessary to overcome the temptation and to make another choice through a godly alternative. We don't handle temptation we escape from it. We make a choice.

Suffering has no RESPECT for us as a person. Suffering can OVERCOME our physical condition, break us mentally, and send us in a wrong direction spiritually.

Often suffering and tasks come to us, and there is no choice which can take them away or lighten their weight.

If it is true God never gives us more than we can handle, then when God allows suffering into our lives, matching it to our abilities, there is a problem if the suffering surpasses what we can handle. The quote assumes I have the mental, physical, and spiritual fortitude within myself to handle whatever suffering

comes my way. If it is more than I can handle, then I'm doing something wrong, since God only allowed my suffering to come in measured portions. The problem with actual suffering is it doesn't come with measurements. It doesn't respect our abilities. Suffering doesn't give us a choice to handle our situation or not, it just exists. Suffering has no respect for us as a person. Suffering can overcome our physical condition, break us mentally, and send us in a wrong direction spiritually. The misquote assumes God allows into our lives pains which are measured by our own makeup. But suffering does overwhelm us at times and does damage we cannot handle. We become distraught, indifferent, or physically even die.

In the book of Job, Satan asks permission to bring suffering into Job's life.

And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life" (Job 2:3-6).

God KNOWS my limits, but my limits are NOT what suffering matches.

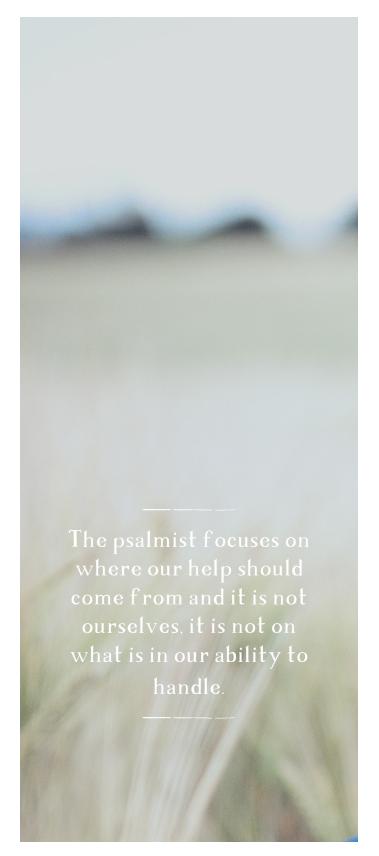
The passage raises many questions and directions, but focus on its relationship to the misquote. Satan asks for permission to make Job suffer. Job is unaware of this dynamic. God does set a limit, but it is not based upon Job's character or abilities. He sets the limit at taking Job's life. God, not Job, is the measure of what can be handled.

God knows my limits, but my limits are not what suffering matches. Nor is God the source of my suffering. The misquote puts the blame of all suffering on God and has him choosing the amount based on my strengths. God does not send suffering to Job, though he does allow it. God sets a limit for Job, but this isn't measured by Job. Suffering comes from many sources. Suffering doesn't ask about what we can handle, it takes from us without measuring. Suffering never considers the powers within us. It is impersonal and

takes what it will. When someone argues, "God will only give you what you can handle," we are pointing to our own abilities. God is left as only the source of suffering or an uncaring observer when neither are true. We interpret it as everything depending upon us or that everything in the suffering is about us and how we take on what is happening.

The same difficulties are seen when the misquote is given to the tasks in our lives. Moses is asked to lead the Israelites out of Egypt: "And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:9-10).

Moses, given a task, doesn't have the abilities to carry it out. He doesn't have the credentials: "But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). Moses argues he doesn't know enough about God to carry out this task: "Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (Exodus 3:13). Moses argues he is not persuasive enough: "Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you" (Exodus



"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 46:1

4:1). Moses argues he lacks words: "But Moses said to the Lord, 'Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue" (Exodus 4:10).

God counters, not by telling Moses how Moses can handle it, but rather by how God, himself will handle the mission. God tells Moses, he will be with him. God reveals his name to Moses. God says he will be with Moses' mouth. God will give Moses what is needed to make the people believe. The story of Moses shows the whole problem with the misquote. It's not that God won't give us more than we can handle, that's wishful thinking. Moses was not up to the task God gives him. God doesn't expect Moses to handle the task on his own. God expects Moses to measure the task by God's power.

The psalmist focuses on where our help should come from and it is not ourselves, it is not on what is in our ability to handle. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). This and the rest of Psalm 46 should replace the misquote when we see someone suffering or under the burden of heavy task. Our hearts need to be pointed to God rather than ourselves when we are overwhelmed.

We need to realize suffering and tasks are not here to test our resolve or push our abilities. They are, at times, tools of God's redemptive plan. However, suffering is often the result of the world, our flesh, or the devil. The world is broken, we are broken, the devil is an adversary. None of these can be handled by our abilities. "My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:2). Tasks do at times come from God, but they are also not a test. God also gives us tasks which are far beyond us, but in those tasks, "God is our refuge and strength." Through suffering, through burdens, God provides the resources which we do not have ourselves. We learn our dependence and need of God through our suffering and burdens. His help is not just future, but "a very present help." We don't need to be able to handle things which are beyond ourselves, we need a God who is bigger than whatever comes our way. Even if I must face death, God is my refuge and strength. He has walked the path of death before me and turns its defeat into the victory of my joining his kingdom. "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). This is not by our own ability to save ourselves, but the power of Christ's resurrection on Easter morning. Death is more than we can handle, so he has handled it for us. "Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling" (Psalm 46:2-3).

God wants his power to be available through our weaknesses. Paul speaks of this in a time of his own weakness: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

To say God won't give us more than we can handle is a cruel phrase, implying that if you aren't handling something, you aren't living up to your potential. It is far more of a comfort to know God walks us through what is difficult, aiding us, giving us his strength, than to think we must handle it on our own. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear..."



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new identitu

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