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MAGAZINE

Following the Leader

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When Life Throws You Off Track

How to turn a derailment into a destination

LETTING GOD WORK

Christ can use you wherever you are



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*Raising Your
Palms On
Sunday*
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There is no rock like our God

There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. -1 Sam 2:2

When we look for stability, we often begin with our own abilities and then move on to those around us rather than to seek God. We rush to find acceptance in our friends and reassurance in our family, when it is with the Lord that our true foundation lies. Why is it so much easier to rely on ourselves rather than the Creator of the Universe? Because our culture (at least my American one) has trained me since birth to “go out and make something of myself” and that has become my first instinct. Through my relationship with Christ, he is molding me into a new shape and retraining my approach to success and stability. It is difficult, but so much more rewarding when I don't have to carry the burden of success or failure.

This kind of perspective is countercultural to our tendency for self-sufficiency, and the idea that we can figure things out ourselves. It is definitely good to seek advice and wisdom from others, but not as a primary source of solution. The Lord should be our security and hope above all others. In this issue Sarah Donawerth shares candidly about her struggle to give up her own plans for God's in *When Life Throws You Off Track*, and Stephanie Baker talks about being content with where God has you and the life stage you are in in *Two Lefts Don't Make It Right*. Lindsey Frederick discusses what it means to honor her parents when she is now an adult herself, and they disagree or are separated by great distance in *Parental Pardon*. All of these articles show what happens when we look to the Lord for stability and guidance above the wisdom and ways of the world. The Lord has been here since eternity, while our own wisdom and knowledge has been here just mere years. Who would you rather put your trust in?

With the Lord great things can happen,

Cailin

CAILIN BRIODY HENSON
Editor-in-Chief

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Light The Window Prayer Calendar

Can you conceive of not knowing Jesus? Can you imagine having never heard of the Bible? Can you picture never seeing a Christmas? The people groups across the globe between the 10 and 40 degrees latitude represent those who live this way, with little or no understanding of Jesus. Imagine 2.7 billion people not knowing even an inkling about the Gospel. According to researchers they speak 4,000 languages and live in thousands of tribes and peoples. The Light the Window Prayer Calendar is designed to encourage Christians to pray for a different specific people group each day, in hopes the Lord will bring the Gospel to them in some form. You can download the calendar for free at www.ltw2020.org

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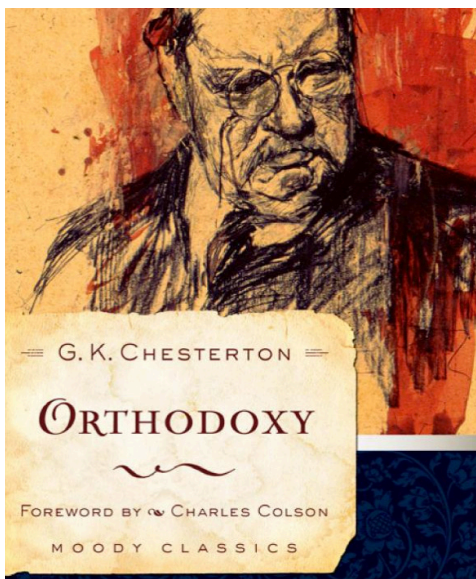


The Bible is Big in the Movie Business

You may have heard a new Jesus biopic film was released in theaters February 28th called Son of God produced by The Bible: The Epic Miniseries TV producers Mark Burnett and Roma Downey. You may have also have heard of the film Noah starring Russell Crowe and Jennifer Connelly, which will be coming to theaters March 28th. Even later this year director Ridley Scott will release his film Exodus that includes a cast of Christian Bale as Moses and Aaron Paul as Joshua. Why the sudden interest of Hollywood in Biblical events? We're not exactly sure. As always with any Bible-inspired films there is controversy and strong opinions, but we're hoping above all else the films encourage us to glorify God more in our culture and allow us to talk about our faith in everyday settings. Are you going to be seeing the films Son of God, Noah or Exodus? Why or why not?

Orthodoxy by G. K. Chesterton

Looking for a good book to read that explains more about Christianity? Look no further than G. K. Chesterton's Orthodoxy. Chesterton was a 20th century English author who wrote novels as well as books on exploring Christian beliefs and influenced many well-known writers, such as C. S. Lewis. Orthodoxy explains how Chesterton came to believe that Christianity was true. He looks at other philosophies, showing how they fall short, and he proves why the Christian faith makes sense, all the while never shying away from the mystery and wonder that surrounds the faith. You can find this book free for Kindle and other eReaders on Amazon.com



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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.

Tip

Referencing The Bible:

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

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WHEN LIFE THROWS YOU OFF TRACK

*How to turn a derailment
into a destination*

by SARAH DONAWERTH

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n high school, I missed sixty days in one semester because of illness. Previously an ‘A’ student, I was flunking out of high school and was threatened with repeating my junior year. I was transferred to an independent study program where I graduated with a class of four other people: a teen mom, a recovering addict, someone who had an organ transplant mid-year, and a girl with leukemia. I then registered for college because I thought I was supposed to and began flunking out of college, spending finals week in the hospital. If that wasn’t enough, I dropped out of college and got a job, but lost the job when sickness interfered again. By this point in my life, I was crushed. I felt like the blackest sheep in the world. I stood out as the one person who couldn’t “get it together” and I felt like a failure. Nothing had gone according to plan.

However, God had stopped me from the trajectory I was on by showing me that I was imperfect and human. I had thought I was self-sufficient and felt that I didn’t need God’s guidance or strength to get my goals accomplished. I had wandered away from the relationship I needed to have with my Savior. After everything came apart at the seams, God made it infinitely clear that I needed him in all aspects of my life and that I needed to rely on his plans in order to have the life he wanted for me. God leads us to grow in many ways, and he works to strengthen us as Christians, giving us the gift of a closer relationship with him. Now I realize that very few people get the chance to reconstruct their lives this way. I was putting my life back on track and completely starting over, so that this new way of life I was given better aligned with God’s plan.

Now, I’ve graduated from Biola University and feel more equipped to serve Christ and participate in God’s work in the world. I have Christian friends and mentors to help continually steer me in the right direction. I had to seek out these new people in my life and ask them to give me the cold hard truth when I am not doing what I need to. Most importantly, I understand the necessity of having God as the driving force in my life. Every derailment that I experienced was a way for God to reach out to me and set me on the right path again. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (ESV). This trust is not something that happens naturally for me. I have to be reminded that his plans are best for me. The more I rely on God for these decisions, the more I realize there is so much I



don't know and God can guide me much better than I ever could.

In establishing God's will for our lives, we must abide in him. Abiding in him is not simply resting while he does the work, as I previously thought; instead, abiding in him is acting according to his will and actively trying to know him. Reading his word and communicating with him are the first steps to reaching for that active relationship with him. When we strive to have a personal relationship with God, our priorities will align with his and we will be better prepared to discern what he wants for our lives. John 15:1-27 illustrates this through the metaphor of a vine, saying:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does not bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 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... (ESV).

EVERYTHING GOD
DIRECTS US TO DO
IS LEADING TOWARD
THAT PROMISE OF LOVE
AND FAMILY FOR ALL
ETERNITY.



The metaphor shows us that productivity and usefulness are found in our role as part of the body of Christ. We “bear fruit” from our labor in a way that is not possible when we are apart from God. This is because we are no longer working towards our own goals, but rather towards God's plan, which is always good. Romans 8:28 reminds us that “...for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (ESV). His purpose is to bring us into a relationship with him so



that we can share eternity with him as his children. In this, we have the ultimate good that God intends for us. Therefore, everything he directs us to do is leading toward that promise of love and family for all eternity. However, in the immediate situation, do we realize God's intentions are good as he guides us through life? I don't. I cling to what I imagined my life would be and I work to accomplish it at all costs. Letting go takes practice. Even as I applied for colleges, I went in the opposite direction of where God wanted me to go. God closed the doors to the other colleges so I would rely on his guidance. I was heartbroken when I learned that I hadn't gotten into my top choice and devastated when I realized that my second choice wouldn't work out either. God put me at Biola so that I could develop as a person, not just get a degree. He pushed me out of my comfort zone and out of my own desires so that he could show me something better. His path for me included lifelong friends, professors who cared about me, and ministries that let me use my talents for the glory of God. I was disappointed for a long time that I couldn't have my way, but God brought so many good things out of that disappointment of not being able to go to a particular school. The path I had chosen for myself paled in comparison to what God accomplished. My path simply didn't lead to the bounty that God had planned for me.

Derailments and change are a part of life. We cannot avoid them. "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance..." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4, ESV). Life has seasons that we cannot avoid. When decisions need to be made, we must look to God to provide the path that we should take. He will provide an answer, even if it is not the answer that we wanted.

The reward for abiding in Christ and relying on God for directing our paths is peace. In Psalm 37, the psalmist tells the reader to trust in the Lord and do good by committing ourselves to the Lord. We are not to worry, but instead to wait on the Lord and to hope in him. The psalmist goes on to say that "the Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand" (Psalm 37:23-24). The Lord will provide us with the comfort of having him to rely on. In this psalm the word peace comes from the Hebrew word "shalom." Although the literal translation is peace, the word also encompasses ultimate fulfillment that can be found in the Lord. If we align ourselves

ABIDING IN CHRIST IS ACTING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL AND ACTIVELY TRYING TO KNOW HIM.

with God through a personal and deep relationship, we will find the peace and calm that will help us to make future decisions, even when things are not going according to our plans.

So even when life tosses surprises and disappointments at us, we can be confident that God is guiding us because his plan is so much better for us than our own. God is strengthening His relationship with each and every one of us by guiding our lives. In giving up control of our own lives, we are gaining a peace and fulfillment by knowing that we are achieving God's purposes and that we are doing the absolute best things we could be doing. It's difficult to give up this control and to give up the path we thought we would be on, but God's plan for us is so much better. Rely on his infinite wisdom and embrace the changes he brings to our lives.

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" Jeremiah 29:11, (ESV). 🎧



SARAH DONAWERTH

Sarah Donawerth is a published author and currently studying writing at Chapman University. In her spare time, she plays Disney songs on the ukulele and reads Jane Austen.

CALLING

by RAMON MAYO

Many Christians talk about being called. Whether it's to this ministry or to that particular church, many use the word "calling" to state their certainty in making decisions. In fact, it no longer is a decision when someone says they have been "called" to something. It means that something or someone external to them has summoned them to make a decision. In some ways it can be used to justify irrational and unwise choices. Some have stated they were called to be a missionary in another country when they haven't lead anyone to know Christ in their home country. Others use their "calling" as a way to justify verbally assaulting and bullying others under the guise of their prophetic calling. After all, it can't be wrong if God called you to it. But God never calls us to violate scripture, the wisdom of the community, and his character. Violating any one of those things should give us reason to pause and if we violate all of them we can be sure that it is not God. What does it mean to be called? Who is doing the calling? Is it an audible voice that is heard or is it an internal feeling?


For followers of Christ, the concept of calling is rooted in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets. These ancient spokesmen for God endured all kinds of



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opposition because they were called by God to be his mouthpieces. They had an encounter with God and left that encounter with a task to be completed. In the New Testament this same process can be seen in the life of the twelve apostles. Jesus called these twelve, while they were occupied in their various life's activities, to be with him and to learn from him. This also happened in the life of the apostle Paul. Paul was on his way to persecute followers of Christ, but Jesus stopped him on the road and told him to preach the good news about Jesus. Later on, Paul says in Ephesians 4 that all followers of Christ have a calling from God. What is this calling?

While hearing an audible voice could be possible since we are dealing with God, our calling is usually not as detailed and leaves open a wide range of possibilities. As followers of Jesus, we have been called to an apprentice relationship with him. This relationship is one of submission to his authority and imitation of who he is and what he did while here on earth. Before Paul received his calling to preach, he first was called into relationship with Jesus who had been pursuing him all along. This is the true meaning of being called. We are all called to accept the love of God. We are called to love him back. We are called to follow the footsteps of Jesus. Whether we hear an audible voice or get an internal feeling is not the point. The point is that

God is calling us to him. The word that we often use in terms of career is vocation. This word has its roots in this calling to relationship that all followers of Christ share. In other words our job or vocation is to be loved by God and to love him with all our heart, soul, and mind. Wherever that takes us is secondary to being in relationship with God and following Jesus. Any idea or decision that leads us away from living our life the way Jesus did takes us away from this calling. It is not about the idea or decision but the person of Christ. This calling to relationship with him can take us to the streets of the inner city or to the jungles of Thailand. It can summon us to become married with children or to be single. Being called means diving into intimacy with Jesus and following him wherever he leads you. Relationship with God is our ultimate calling. 



RAMON MAYO

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FOLLOWING THE LEADER

A look at what the Bible says about gender roles and family leadership

by DÉLICE WILLIAMS



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Whether we celebrate it, run from it, long for it, or seek to reconfigure it entirely, most of us would agree that the family is a crucial shaping force in our lives. In family life a whole host of concerns—psychological, political, economic, emotional and religious—converge in powerful ways that affect us directly. Family life can be both filled with joy and fraught with risk. Questions of gender and gender roles are inseparable from all of this, as the family is where most people begin to associate masculinity and femininity with particular social roles. No wonder, then, that as societies have wrestled with competing ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman, the family has been a prominent topic of discussion.

In Christian communities those discussions necessarily include references to Biblical models and mandates for families and for men and women within family structures. What the Bible says about gender and family is often the subject of fierce debate. This article in our Spotlight series takes a look at the Christian family and the role of gender. Specifically, we'll examine the question of family leadership. We'll consider some of the most common perspectives on this issue in the modern Christian community, and we'll cite passages from the Bible along the way to help you begin thinking about this complex and crucial topic.

The Ideal of Eden

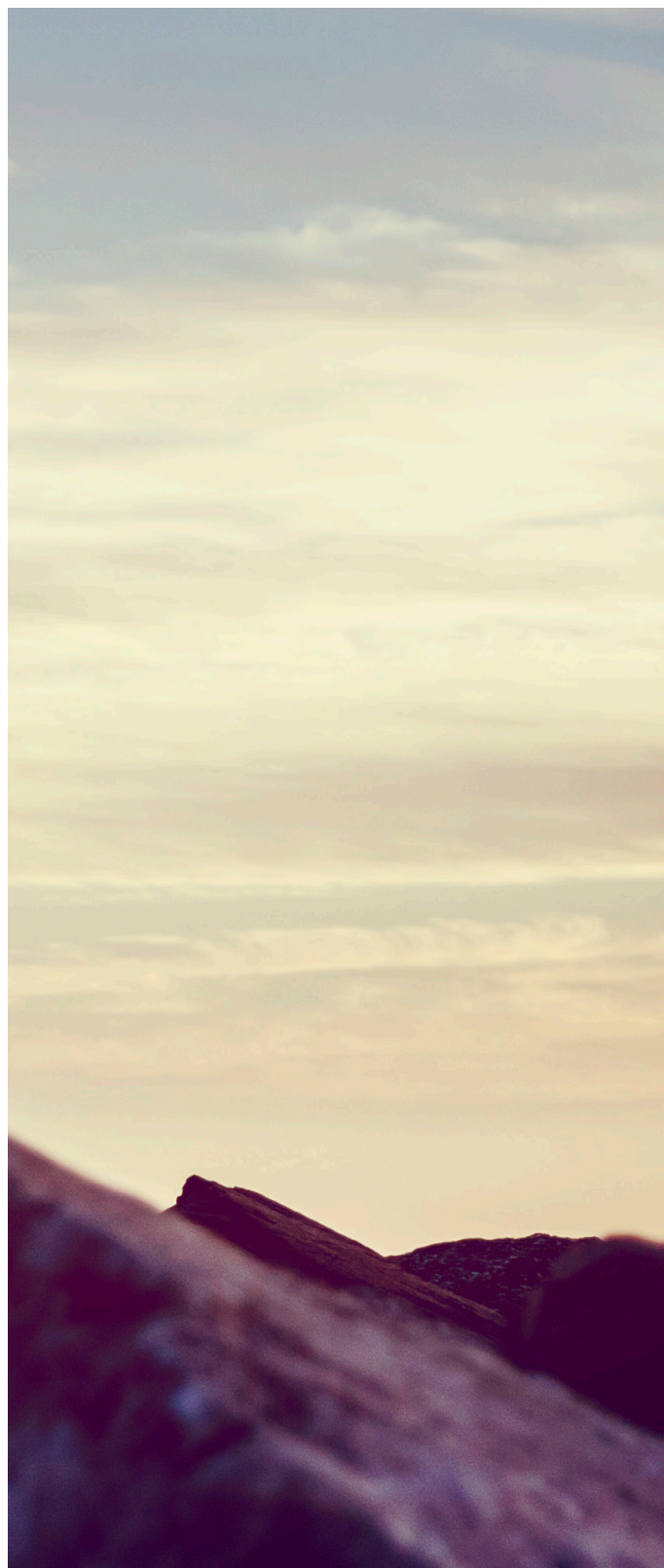
The book of Genesis teaches that the world we inhabit today is not the one God originally designed for human beings. The world God intended for us—before it was tainted by sin—was perfect in every sense, including in human relationships. Adam and Eve in the garden lived in perfect love and harmony with each other, a fact suggested by Adam's reaction to Eve after he first sees her. In that moment, Adam declares, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man" (Genesis 2:23, NIV). The verse immediately following Adam's statement indicates that the relationship he describes is the model for marriage: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, ESV). The Genesis account gives no detail of life in the garden before the Fall, but the language of oneness would seem to indicate both closeness and harmony: the first pair are inextricably tied to each other in a union untainted by conflict. The issue of power or hierarchy in their prelapsarian relationship is not explicitly addressed in Genesis. We are told that God gives humans—male and female—rule over the earth and animals (Genesis 1:28), but before sin there is no direct statement in this account that Adam ruled or had some special authority over Eve. However, scholars and lay people alike often point to two things—the fact that Adam is formed first, and the fact that he names Eve—as indicative of a power differential

between the two. Some have argued this is a sign that man's authority over woman is part of God's original design. Others believe that line of reasoning is an intentionally sexist misinterpretation of a detail in the text. They point to the "one flesh" passage, which is often quoted at weddings, as the clearer and more accurate indication of God's intent for men and women in marriage: loving communion without domination or subordination by husband or wife.

Legacies of the Fall

There is no disagreement, however, about one fact: sin changes everything for the worse. Adam and Eve's disobedience brings immediate and lasting damage to their relationship, and the meaning of God's specific punishment for each of them is a subject of considerable dispute. Adam's punishment is hard labor and eventual death: "Cursed is the ground because of you," God tells him. "Through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground" (Genesis 3:17-19, NIV). Part of Eve's punishment is that her "toil in childbearing will be multiplied; in pain [she will] bring forth children"; the other part is this: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16, ESV). There has been much scrutiny over the meaning of the word translated as "desire" in this passage, but there is a good deal of scholarly consensus that it means desire for rule/dominance rather than sexual or erotic desire. (Scholars who hold this position cite another passage in which the same word is used when God tells Cain, Adam & Eve's son, "If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:7, ESV).) In this reading, Eve is punished by being placed in a conflict for dominance over Adam. The loving harmony of one flesh becomes warped into the proverbial "battle of the sexes."

History and personal experience bear witness to the fact that the troubles Adam and Eve brought on themselves are part of human reality: having to work against nature in order to secure food, experiencing



pain in childbirth, and facing conflict and even violence within the family have all been part of our collective life on earth. In most cultures throughout human history—although to different degrees and in different ways—women as a group have held less social, political, and economic power than men. But what are we to make of the consequences of sin described in Genesis, and the way these patterns pervade human experience throughout history? Is there indeed a direct line from Genesis 3:16 to the subordination and even the oppression of women in family structures? Does this verse constitute a mandate for all relations between men and women inside the family? Simplistic answers or knee-jerk reactions don't take us very far, and one of the goals of this piece is to seek what is often termed “the whole counsel of Scripture”—in other words, other statements from the Bible that might have a bearing on these same questions—before moving toward conclusions. Genesis 3:16 is neither God's first nor final word in the Bible about men and women in family life. Indeed, there is more offered to us in terms of examples and specific instructions.

The question of hierarchy

One strain of Christian teaching holds that a gendered hierarchy within the home, with men holding primary authority, is God-ordained, both by the order of creation (Adam was formed first) and by the punishment for sin (Genesis 3:16, discussed above). Chapter 5 of the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus is also cited as endorsement for such a position. In that passage Paul instructs wives to “submit to [their] own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church” (Ephesians 5:22-23). In its most extreme form, the line of interpretation I outline here places men in positions of absolute and final authority within their own homes: Men make decisions about money, children, sex, and just about everything else. If couples disagree, his opinion carries. For most American Christians in mainline denominations, this smacks of the Stone Age; the position seems absurd and even dangerous, especially because unquestioned absolute authority so often creates conditions that breed emotional and physical abuse. We would be hard

THE WORLD GOD INTENDED FOR US—BEFORE IT WAS TAINTED BY SIN—WAS PERFECT IN EVERY SENSE, INCLUDING IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS.

pressed to find mainline churches advocating absolute male authority within the home in these terms, not only because it offends most modern sensibilities, but also because autocratic patriarchy seems misaligned with the character and actions of Jesus.

There is, however, a more prominent strain of interpretation that rejects the extreme autocratic model without abandoning the concept of hierarchy altogether. This perspective, sometimes labeled “complementarian,” looks to the same chapter of Ephesians as a model for Christian home life, often citing verse 25: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her” (NKJV). Another section from the same passage also informs this point of view, and it is Paul's reference to the Genesis “one flesh” idea: “Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church” (Ephesians 5: 28-29). In this same chapter Paul goes on to cite Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31). Paul calls for both the submission of the wife to her husband, and the sacrificial love of the husband for his wife: he instructs husbands to die to their own needs and desires as Christ suffered and died to save us. Rev. Robert P. Merki, a pastor in the Church of the Nazarene, notes that the call on the husband in this passage seems far more demanding than the call on the wife. Selfless sacrificial love is, after all, no small order, and respect for such love would seem to be warranted. Moreover, as Merki and many

complementarian believers would be quick to note, sacrificial love cannot be harsh or demeaning. The famous passage on love—1 Corinthians 13—gives a clear description of what such love looks like. As the passage says, love is patient and kind, and seeks the good of others before the self. Moreover, Christ's death on the cross offers us the most vivid, concrete example of sacrificial love.

According to this second line of thought, then, husbands do hold positions of authority and primary responsibility within the family, but that authority manifests itself mainly in sacrificial love. Wives are called to “respect” their husbands in that role (Ephesians 5:33). Hierarchy and love in this model are not incompatible, nor is the husband's authority a license to abuse or demean the wife. From this perspective, Ephesians 5 teaches us that Christ's example (in his death on the cross for the sins of others) changes the husband-wife contest for power, which is described as a punishment for sin in Genesis 3:16, by transforming the exercise of a man's authority within the context of family from a curse that causes distress and resentment into an act of love whose ultimate purpose is to draw all members of a family closer to God. Believers in the complementarian model hold that these different roles (husband as primary decision-maker and final authority; wives as essential and important helpers who inform but ultimately defer to that authority) are God-ordained from before the Fall, and that they have implications for life in and outside the family. For example, the complementarian Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), an American Christian organization (not a church), affirms in their “core beliefs,” that “in the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation,” but they maintain that, “Male headship [of the family and other institutions] is restored in the Christian community as men and women endeavor to express their common humanity according to God's originally created and good hierarchical design.” Wives, according to their complementarian view, are called to offer “intelligent and willing submission” to their husband's authority. The word “intelligent” emphasizes the CBMW's position that women have God-given minds, talents and gifts, and that wives are not simply robots or

slaves who shouldn't make any decisions at all. In terms of the family specifically, the organization holds that “husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership.” In support of their complementarian position, the CBMW cites several passages of scripture, including 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, and 1 Timothy 2:11-15. The Corinthians passage has to do with behavior in churches, but verse 3 states, “But there is one thing I want you to know: The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (NLT). The passage in 1 Timothy 2:12 also speaks of a woman not being allowed to “have authority over a man” (NLT). Both of these passages are from the letters of the Apostle Paul. They also cite Colossians 3:18-19 and Titus 2:3-5. The verses in Colossians state, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” (NIV). Titus 2:3-5 exhorts older women in the church to “be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled” (ESV). Another passage cited by CBMW, 1 Peter 3:1-7, calls wives to “be submissive to [their] own husbands,” and husbands to “dwell with [their wives] with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3: 1,7).

Complementarians, like those who are part of the CBMW, often emphasize that although they believe men ought to be authorities within the home, the difference in roles does not imply a difference in value, whether social or spiritual. That is to say, most complementarians do not believe women should be subordinate because women are lesser beings who are somehow not spiritual enough or gifted enough to make decisions or serve God and others. Indeed, one of the ideas behind the concept of “complementary” roles is that the different spouses perform functions that are each necessary to the overall well-being of the



family. The difference in roles is simply God's design, and therefore both necessary and good, according to this view.

The matter of equality

For many Christians, both the stark authoritarian model and the loving but still hierarchical complementarian model of family relationships are problematic because the concept of hierarchy itself is problematic. Those who share this belief—often labeled egalitarian—reject the notion that gender roles within the family and in society generally are fixed, and that men alone have been designated to teach and govern. Egalitarians often cite Galatians 3:26–28 as affirmation of their perspective. Those verses read, “For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (NLT). In an opinion piece originally published in *Christianity Today*, Dr. Sarah Sumner, former dean of AW Tozer Theological Seminary, who identifies herself with this egalitarian perspective, sums up this position in her statement, “I believe that God calls both men and women to serve as pastors, preachers, and leaders of the full congregation. I also believe that Christ, not the husband, should be the leader of every marriage, since Jesus Christ alone is Lord and Savior.” (Non-egalitarians object that the Galatians 3 passage

is speaking about salvation—i.e., all can be saved through faith in Christ, not only those who inhabit socially superior positions—not about roles in earthly society.)

Egalitarians like Sumner and author Rachel Held Evans also point to Genesis 2 in support of their position. Evans writes, “To be ‘created in the image of God’ carries significant leadership implications as well. In the ancient Near Eastern world, kings were considered divine image-bearers, appointed representatives of God on earth. Kings would often place images of themselves, usually statues, in distant parts of their kingdoms to remind their subjects of their sovereignty over the land.” Thus, in Evans’ opinion, “for man and woman to be God’s image-bearers in this context, means that God has entrusted both men and women with ruling the world on God’s behalf.”

“Let us make human beings in our image,” God says, “after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish,...birds, cattle,...all the wild animals...every creeping thing” (Genesis 1:26, ESV). This dominion, Evans maintains, is shared by male and female humans, and there is no fixed call for males to hold authority over females in the context of marriage. Evans and many other egalitarians maintain that although there are some obvious and consistent differences between men and women in terms of biology, those differences do not imply an inevitable hierarchy in terms of essence or roles within the family and society. Moreover, like

many other egalitarians, Evans uses Genesis 3:16 as evidence for her position that “it is within the context of judgment, not creation, that hierarchy and subjugation enter the Bible’s story of man and woman. Where there was once mutuality, there is subjugation. Where there was once harmony, there is a power-struggle.” Egalitarians seek to recover this mutuality in the context of Christian marriage, family, & society, and for many egalitarians, any kind of hierarchy of gender roles is problematic. Most egalitarians would maintain that decision-making within the family is to be accomplished by negotiation and discussion between husbands and wives who are equal in status.

It is important to note, however, that the egalitarian position outlined here in very broad terms does not simply assert that no one should submit to anyone else for any reason. Rather, many egalitarians embrace the position of passages like Ephesians 5:21 (“Submit to one another in the fear of God”) and 1 Peter 5:5 (“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’”) (ESV). They believe submission and humility are part of the call on all Christians to show kindness, be generous, defend the weak and vulnerable, and serve other people out of love for God and for one another. For them, servant leadership is something both men and women can offer each other.

The Question of Culture & Change

As 21st-century people, new Christians today can sometimes have a difficult time deciding what examples and instructions apply to the particular cultural and historical context of ancient Israel or ancient Rome, and what applies to all people across time and despite cultural heritage or setting. This is no less true about questions involving gender roles. The worlds in which the Bible writers lived were invariably patriarchal: men as a group (and often as individuals) held authority over women politically, legally and socially, and this manifested itself in family life as well. Although there were clear differences between the cultures of ancient Israel and 2nd-century Greece or Rome, it is quite safe to say that women were subordinate beings in all of these societies. In contrast,

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many cultures in our modern world are consciously abandoning the patriarchal structures of authority within the family, condemning those configurations as inherently oppressive to women and children (and, some have argued, to men as well). American Christians live in such a culture, so it would be easy in this setting to think, “equality=good,” “hierarchy=bad,” ergo anything that smacks of hierarchy must be rejected.

But culture is not our final authority; God is. The Bible does not endorse a wholesale rejection of all authority in the name of equality (or anything else, for that matter). Indeed, Colossians 3 and 1 Peter 2 and 5 give specific instructions about respecting law, government, and even those who are our elders. Ephesians 6, a continuation of the same Ephesians 5 passage discussed earlier, gives instructions for children in families, servants, and masters. Both the Old and New Testaments show that authority structures are part of God’s loving and protective design (God being the final authority who judges both rulers and ruled

when they choose to do wrong - see 1 Samuel 24:5-6 and Romans 13:1). In the context of this discussion on gender and family, one cannot simply dismiss passages on family authority (Ephesians 5, Colossians 3:18-22) on the grounds that they are of another time and culture. Part of our responsibility as Christians is to seek out the truths revealed in God's word and to pray for the Holy Spirit to give us the discernment and wise counsel we need to make decisions, including decisions about family life and structures of authority.

What does all of this look like?

In an absolute authoritarian model, husbands make all decisions about larger concerns: church membership and attendance, finances, sex and contraception, and the discipline of children. Even smaller concerns have to be filtered and approved, and there is no room at all for discussion or negotiation between the spouses as equal parties. To most of us that sounds like a throwback to what we imagine life was like centuries ago: wives had to receive "permission" for every action; husbands' words were law. This model of Christian family leadership is quite difficult to find among mainline Christians today. (It was probably hard to find even centuries ago.) That's not to say that it doesn't exist at all, only to emphasize that in both the larger culture and in Christian communities, families who strictly follow that model are a tiny minority. There are, no doubt, Biblical and secular reasons for this pattern: On the secular level, society has been transformed so much by our understanding of individual autonomy, women's equality, and human rights, that a family dynamic that does not treat women as adults, and refuses wives any say in decision-making strikes nearly everyone as deeply offensive and even morally wrong. From a Biblical standpoint, mainline Christians from both the complementarian and egalitarian perspectives would argue that a husband who treats his wife as a child or slave violates clear scriptural teachings on men and women both being made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27); on love being self-sacrificing and kind (1 Corinthians 13); and on husbands loving their wives as they love themselves (Ephesians 5:28; Colossians 3:19). Thus, fully authoritarian family structures based on a gendered hierarchy represent a distortion of scriptural

teaching that often proves harmful to the family. Complementarian marriage, on the other hand, is more common than many Christians might think, even though that model includes a decision-making structure that gives husbands final say. Mandy Meyers, a college-educated Christian wife, mom of three, and educational activist from the Midwest, describes her loving marriage to her husband Ben in complementarian terms: "I do feel like Ben, under Christ's leadership, is ultimately the head of our household, and that's become more important for me to verbalize and make clear in my actions since we've had children. That doesn't mean that he's always right," Meyers says. But because of the couple's convictions and "to provide their family stability," they have agreed to follow Ben's leadership. They both consciously decided on a complementarian model, which they learned about and discussed both informally and through premarital counseling. Meyers is quick to point out that their marriage "probably looks very different from what a new Christian would imagine it to be. The stereotypes would be that the male dominates, and the good Christian wife submits without question or thought and has to ask permission for everything. I think that is the world's misconception of what a godly or Christ-centered family is." Instead, she describes her complementarian marriage of 15 years as "not an oppressive relationship," but rather "a choice that I make out of love because that's what's best for all of us, not because it's forced. Our relationship is not about dominance or control, but about consideration for one another." Describing their daily life, Meyers says, "As far things that happen in our house, I don't think either one of us would make a major decision without consulting the other. We do that out of deference to one another and because things work better that way." Meyers also notes that she handles the family finances, including taxes and investments, "not because Ben is incapable," but "because I like doing it, and I'm comfortable with it. Ben has no problem with it." Ben works outside the home as a college professor, and he remains committed to embodying loving servant-leadership for his wife and family. He praises his wife for her talents and gifts, as well as her daily nurturing of their three elementary-aged children. Reflecting on their family life and on the question of family leadership Meyers says, "If we're doing things right, it's driven out

of service to each other. I hope that our relationship is the healthiest and most accurate portrayal of a godly family life. That's what we would strive for."

Rev. Betsy Carmody Gonzalez, an Episcopal priest, wife, mom, and school chaplain in suburban Maryland, describes her 13-year marriage to her husband Eddie as an egalitarian one in which neither she nor her husband is a designated leader. Gonzalez notes, "There's a division of labor in any relationship, and ours has fallen in our strength zones and interest zones." As an example she cites the handling of the couple's finances: "My eyes glaze over when it comes to money. I can handle it, but it's not my thing. Money and budgets and spreadsheets—he really likes those things, and that appeals to him." She adds that much of the care for their daughter falls to her, in part because her daughter attends the same school where she serves as chaplain. She describes one of her jobs as "keeping Ruby's routine intact. It's natural that I'm the person who picks her up and drops her off and watches the clock. [I'm the one who says,] I think it's time to take a bath or go to bed." Although the couple's different areas of responsibility in their family life feel more traditional, Gonzalez notes, "It's really hard for us to buy one another greeting cards because there are many things about us where we don't follow gender stereotypes. You know how the man is always the messy one. Well, he's not the messy one, and he loves to cook too."

Reflecting on the benefits and challenges of an egalitarian relationship, Gonzalez says, "This model is dynamic, so there can be change and growth inside the relationship and over periods of time. That can be positive if that's something you're looking for. At the same time," she adds, "If you're not regularly checking in with each other on things, then that dynamic nature can create a problem. Since rules don't feel hard and fast, you have to check in more often. It's more maintenance." Of her own marriage, Gonzalez says, "Sometimes we're good about that, and sometimes we're not." Another potential challenge Gonzalez sees is that, "Expectations aren't always as clear. There are more negotiations, and they are kind of daily," she says. "People can also be kind of 'score-keep,'" she adds. "I did this, so you have to do that; or that's your thing,

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and this is my thing." Gonzalez, who counsels couples considering marriage, also adds that couples have to be thoughtful about their own family backgrounds. "I do think that there are pieces of who we are as men and women, there are still those messages that we've been receiving since we were very young about who men are and who women are, in terms of who does what: who handles the money, who does the cooking, and who does the cleaning. There are sometimes assumptions that come out of our family background, and we have to know what those assumptions are. Gonzalez emphasizes that in her own marriage and in her reflections on the egalitarian model, she has found that "It's a 'growing thing' to be able to say,


‘Whatever you choose, I’m OK.’ That’s another piece of the egalitarian relationship that can be difficult. If everything’s a negotiation, you have to really mean what you say.” For her, two key questions for couples pursuing an egalitarian relationship are: “How do we give and take without keeping score?” and “How do you really mean what you say?”

Dr. Zandra Jordan, a college professor and preacher from Atlanta, Georgia, embraces a more egalitarian model of family leadership. Jordan maintains that “Ephesians 5:25 (‘Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her.’) must be read in the context of verse 21 (submitting to one another in the fear of God).” She believes strongly that “Christ is the head of the family, and women and men are to serve each other. In the historical context, women were like property. Contemporarily, we know better...or we ought to know better. In Christ, there is no male or female, slave or free...” Describing the model she would strive for in family life, Jordan says, “I’m for allowing the Spirit to govern our dispositions in every context, including the home. If you’re stronger with finances, lead baby! If I am, thank God for blessing you with a wife who’s strong where you are not.” Jordan believes talents, gifts, and inclinations, not pre-ordained structure, should influence which spouse fulfills what role in family life. In practical terms this means discussion and negotiation lead to a decision, and neither husband nor wife has the “final say” in decision-making. Summing up her position, Jordan says, “I’m for mutual respect that allows spouses, regardless of gender, to exercise their strengths as they both follow Christ. I’m for both spouses striving to out-serve the other.” From Jordan’s perspective, then, there is no single “leader” in a marriage. Rather, each spouse takes on tasks or areas of responsibility as they believe the Holy Spirit and their own obvious gifts dictate.

Since decisions about marriage and family are crucial ones, it is important for us to make them thoughtfully and prayerfully. For Christians, that means not just thinking about what we like or what suits our personalities or backgrounds, but about how God wants us to treat each other. Christians have the benefit of God’s written word, which contains teaching about God’s designs for human families. Searching

MARRIAGE IS ABOUT MANY THINGS, BUT AT ITS CORE IS LOVE, THE ROMANTIC EARTHLY KIND, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES, THE GODLY KIND.

Scripture, and praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us to sound conclusions as we do so, is a crucial part of making right choices about family life. It might also help to ask other Christians, particularly those in healthy marriages, for their wisdom about how to approach these issues. God has not left us without guidance.

Finally, we need to remind ourselves that marriage is about many things, but at its core is love, the romantic earthly kind, but more importantly for Christian marriages, the Godly kind. The Bible speaks to us clearly and often about love for God and love for each other. In fact, Jesus says that the two most important commandments in all of scripture are: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:36, 39 NKJV). Everything we do, inside or outside of the family, has to be measured in light of these two kinds of love. As we seek Godly models of family life and leadership, we must keep that truth before us. 



DÉLICE WILLIAMS

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Two Lefts Don't Make It Right

When the pace of life leaves you feeling left out or left behind

by **STEPHANIE BAKER**

Every now and then, as I scroll through my Facebook homepage, I discover another friend that I went to high school with or know from college who is married and has children, and I feel that familiar pang of jealousy – the one that tells me that I'm the same age as that person, so why am I not married with kids? I look through the cute pictures, and my desire for a family of my own is brought to the forefront of my mind. Being married and having a family are good things, so why am I still single when my friends aren't? Why does my life seem to be moving so slowly?

Chances are, you've asked yourself a similar question at some point in your life. Life stages have no age-limit surrounding them; people move in and out of the different stages in no certain pattern. It makes it easy for someone to feel left behind or even far ahead of everyone else. Watching your close friends enjoy their lives while you feel stuck in your own can make you feel dissatisfied with the life that God has given you and could lead to discontentment or depression. So what do you do when you can't help but wish you were at a different life stage because you always feel like the outsider?

Though it may not feel like it, your life is unique, and God's timing will never be the same for two different

Life stages have no age-limit surrounding them; people move in and out of the different stages in no certain pattern. It makes it easy for someone to feel left behind or even far ahead of everyone else.

people. It's important to not live your life always waiting for the next thing to come. That's not living, and you will miss out on many opportunities because you're afraid of missing that next stage. Your life might not even follow any predetermined stages! Learning to be content with your life no matter where you are is the best way to live to the fullest. Life never moves slowly; if you can be happy in your present stage of life, soon enough the next one will come. Trust God with your life's direction, and be grateful for the blessings you do have in your current stage.

Trusting God and being content with life are two things that are easier said than done. Here are some practical ideas on how to still feel a part of a group of friends that are all in a different stage of life than you are:

Find your common interests.

Just because your friend has moved on to the next stage of life does not mean that you no longer have anything in common. You still have things in common with these friends! Maybe it's the love for a certain television show or you all like going hiking or you like to do crafts together. There was a reason you became friends in the first place; don't assume that that camaraderie is gone because she has kids and you

don't. Some things may be different now, but those similar interests can still bring you together.

If you find yourself the third wheel (or fifth or seventh) in a hangout, try not to feel awkward.

You can try to avoid these types of situations but sometimes they just happen. You can make things less awkward by not isolating yourself and not insisting that the couples sit together if they choose to sit by you instead. You can also ease any tension felt by making light of the matter; shrug it off as comical instead of letting it hang over everyone as the elephant in the room. If the couples do seem to be ignoring you and clearly want alone time, don't make them ask you to leave (even if they are being rude by their actions). Instead, bow out gracefully and find something else to do, whether that be doing some much-needed housework or volunteering your extra time at a charity.

Initiate the hangouts.

This way you won't feel like you're crashing someone else's party when you feel like the outsider. Use those common interests you still have to plan a fun day or evening with your friend. Maybe even hire a babysitter for her, if she's the ones with kids. If you are still investing in the friendship, then she will probably respond by doing what she can to make you still feel welcome and not like the outsider. Plus, if you're the one always getting the group together, they will all feel grateful to you for planning the hangouts, and you will still have a purpose in the group.

Don't act bitter toward your friends or drop contact with them.

It's not their fault that their life has progressed differently than yours so don't treat them like it is. It's not anyone's fault. Acting bitter and/or dropping contact will only make you feel more like an outsider. The more you blame them, the more they will pull away from you. Even though your lives look different now, you can still be friends.

Life does not move slowly, so grasp each opportunity and moment that comes your way, instead of waiting for the next stage of your life to begin.

If you notice a friend who is not in the same life stage as everyone else, here are some tips for how to not alienate that person:

Keep inviting him to things!

Don't assume that he won't want to come just because his life has not moved like everyone else's in the group. If you don't invite him, he will never feel like he belongs. Make him feel as welcome as possible in the group by planning activities that he will enjoy, as well as everyone else. If he has kids, make sure and plan something the kids can do while you hang out.

If she is the third wheel (or fifth or seventh) in a hangout, don't act "couplely."

Make sure and include her in the conversation, and maybe even break up the couples when sitting around a table or playing a game. This will help her to not feel awkward, and she will be more inclined to come to events even if she is the odd one out. Also, be aware of the conversation. If she is the only one without children, try not to continually be talking about what your children have done. She can't participate in these conversations besides the occasional "That's so cute/funny" comment. Avoid alienating conversations by covering a variety of topics. Be sure to not ignore her or give any hints that you want to be alone with your significant other. You can have alone time later. For now, you should give your time to your friend.

Be invested in his life by asking him about it.

Don't always be talking about your problems or your successes, your boyfriend or your kids. Make sure you know what is happening in his life and be interested in it. Try to never be too busy when he has a crisis and needs a listening ear. Even if your schedule seems so much busier than his, if he invites you to something, try to go! By claiming that you are too busy, you are implying that your life is more important than his, and he will only feel more isolated around you. You still have to invest in the friendship as much as he does. Make sure birthdays or other special events are written down so that you do not forget them. Keep those common interests alive by remaining interested and contributing time to your friend. Maybe you can't hangout as much as you used to, but your friend will be more understanding if you at least show an effort to still be invested in the friendship.

Your life may not look the way you imagined it and maybe you've suffered one too many disappointments or hardships, but God can bring about good no matter what life stage you're in, or even if you're not in a stage at all. You don't have to follow any predetermined steps to glorify God, but if you live your life waiting for those steps to appear so you can follow them, you'll never be able to go anywhere. Life does not move slowly, so grasp each opportunity and moment that comes your way, instead of waiting for the next stage of your life to begin. If you are enjoying your life and living content where God has placed you, you probably won't even notice when the next stage of your life does begin. 🏠



STEPHANIE BAKER

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Parental Pardon

When children become adults and parents become people

by LINDSEY A. FREDERICK

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LESSON 1: HONOR GOD

I sat alone in my room one night blaming God for my clueless, loveless, career-less state. “What did I do wrong? Why are you punishing me?” I asked. A whisper replied, *A punisher—is that how you see me? Where did you learn that?* “Good question, God. Let me get back to you.”

I recognized I built an image of God that looked more like an earthly parent than a heavenly father. It was no wonder I had heavenly-daddy issues. I also realized I held my parent’s counsel above God’s, which is why I got frustrated when I didn’t agree with them. Thirty-two year old Amanda recalls a similar struggle: “As I became an adult, it was a challenge to recognize I did not have to obey my parents. At 23, 24, 25, 31, I still struggle to recognize that every word out of my [parents’] mouth is not the gospel truth . . .”

My desire to honor and obey my parents overshadowed the need to honor and obey God, and life felt wobbly. God addressed this very thing in the first of his Ten Commandments to the Israelite nation. “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). And again in the second command, “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” (Exodus 20:4). God wants the place of greatest honor—put anything but him at the center and life is going to feel off balance. Our central desire should be for God, only then can we properly honor the things that surround.

LESSON 2: HONORING DOESN'T MEAN PLEASING

A woman called into New Life Live, a radio show that addresses mental, emotional, and relational issues. She wanted to know how to honor her elderly parents. “What do you mean?” asked guest host, psychologist Dr. John Townsend. “My parents tell me I’m a horrible person, and am not honoring them when they call needing groceries and I can’t drop everything . . . when they ask.” The woman confused pleasing with honoring, and so did her parents. While the outcome

One of the most shocking revelations I ever had about my parents was that they’re real people. When I entered adulthood, I realized they don’t know everything. When I took on more adult responsibilities, I realized I didn’t either. As my world shifted, the questions rained: Did this mean my parents really knew what was best for me? Were their judgments, life choices, and advice truly applicable to my life? The Bible says, “Honor your father and mother” (Exodus 20:12), but as an adult, no longer subject to household rules and obedience, what does it look like to honor my parents now?

Now, according to biblical scholars, is just the time this command applies. The Ten Commandments were originally written for a Jewish audience whose culture highly valued respect, honor, community and elders. This command was an address to adult children to care for the needs of their aging parents—honor and community were hospice. We might not yet be at that lifestage, but anyone transitioning from child/parent to adult/parent relationships may wrestle with the above questions. Some of us might even spend our whole adult lives trying to answer them. I certainly don’t have all the answers, but I have learned a few lessons. Here are four:

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and obey my parents
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honor and obey God,
and life felt wobbly.*

of pleasing seems selfless, it's rooted in a fearful and insecure desire to be liked and accepted. Pleasing can be easily coerced. Honor, however, takes the focus off of self and places it on another. It doesn't bend to pressure because it's a choice to love and respect that is rooted in confidence and sincerity.

As a chronic people pleaser, this is one of the most difficult things for me to learn and relearn. As we grow into adulthood and learn to critically evaluate, we may draw our parents' own beliefs and ideas into question. Disagreements range from school or career choices, body art and piercings, whom and how to date, whom to marry, and how to raise children. And that's OK, as long as we disagree respectfully. But since these are intensely personal subjects, an unheated debate is easier said than done. First, it's helpful to remember our growing independence is difficult for our parents too. They must grieve the loss of our dependence and adapt to our adulthood.

When Amanda realized her parents were the only people she fought with, she began to approach them as she would any normal Joe. "I've quit arguing with my parents when I disagree . . ." she says, "Those arguments were futile and unnecessary and drove wedges between us." In her disagreements with friends or her husband, she solves differences through rational conversation or a simple "thanks for your thoughts."

Another respectful approach is to gain understanding. Ask your parents what experience led them to a particularly strong opinion, then, if it's appropriate, share what shaped yours.



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Twenty-eight year old Anna was considering a tattoo. Although her mom was opposed to body art, Anna was interested in her latest thoughts and called her up before committing. They still disagreed, but Anna had a hinge moment. “I was mad at her, because I felt like she should be more supportive in our relationship, in respecting me as an adult,” says Anna. “But . . . I tried to think unselfishly. . . .” Anna says the biblical command to honor our parents is a calling as much as an admonition: While we’re free to live as we please, we’re also called to not consciously disrespect our parents. Anna recalls a rebellious streak, remorseful of her teenage disrespect for her parents. As an adult she better understands and appreciates the sacrifices and choices her parents made for her. “It became more important to me in that moment for [my mom] to know I want to honor her, even if it means sacrificing something I really want.”

Shared understanding softens hearts and strengthens bonds. This can help you come to a conclusion based out of love and selflessness—which might lead to pleasing your parents after all.

But what if it doesn't? Many adult children will make

Honor, however, takes the focus off of self and places it on another. It doesn't bend to pressure because it's a choice to love and respect that is rooted in confidence and sincerity.

choices that go against their parents' wishes. These choices may not be wrong or sinful, but the question about honor remains. I know several couples who married despite their parents' strong objections and even attempts to sabotage their dating relationships. The couples first sought God, then asked themselves if their choice to remain together would honor him. Saying “yes” to this question meant saying “no” to pleasing their parents and accepting the painful consequences that followed. Together, they traveled the bumpy road of respectfully disagreeing with their parents—choosing understanding over criticism, love over fear, and kindness over bitterness. This may be difficult to accept, but whether or not your parents recognize your actions as honor doesn't always bear weight on reality. To choose otherwise under the pressure of their disapproval, is to confuse pleasing with honoring.

This radical behavior requires a solid support system. If you find yourself in this situation, sandwich your interactions with your parents between visits or chats with close friends who know your situation, the counsel of a trusted pastor or therapist, and a lot of prayer.

LESSON 3: HONOR WHAT IS HONORABLE

Some of us have parents who, frankly, don't deserve honor or respect. God tells us to honor them anyway. This is probably the most universally difficult part of this command (see Exodus 20:12). How do you honor someone who has left a hole in your family and a scar on your heart? How do you honor a parent who has turned his or her back on you, abused you, manipulated you? I know too many people wrestling in this reality. Dr. John Townsend offers great advice in this situation, “Honor what is honorable.” Guilt, control, and manipulation are not honorable.

Twenty-five year old Joanna, whose dad left his wife and four kids after twenty-some years of marriage, gives a beautiful picture of the tension in honoring what is honorable:

“By leaving, [my dad] gave up his responsibilities as a

father—his responsibility to protect, provide for, teach, and guide . . . he gave up the right to be honored or respected by his children. [But] there are ways I still honor him, even though we don't have any contact. I honor him by choosing not to let anger take root in my heart (sometimes with more success than others). . . I honor him by praying for his safety and praying he accepts God's gift of grace. I honor him by hoping, one day, he will be healed and restored, covered by God's grace and forgiveness . . ."

Joanna is intimately aware of her father's dishonorable actions and chooses to love him the best she knows how—by daily practicing grace and forgiveness, by hoping and praying for his best, and by recognizing the parts of him that are worthy of honor. Sometimes that's all we can do.

LESSON 4: HONOR WITH WORDS AND DEEDS

Merriem-webster.com defines honor as "something given in recognition of achievement." Honoring our parents is a practical endeavor, including both words and deeds. How can you recognize your parents' sacrifices and lifetime of love? The following are a few ideas:

Speak highly. When you actively and publicly acknowledge your parents' strengths, character, and accomplishments, your own appreciation for them grows. If you cannot speak highly of them, resist the urge to share your grudges with acquaintances and strangers—work your issues out with a counselor, pastor, or close friend.

Ask advice. Even if you don't take it. Asking advice demonstrates deference, plus our parents have learned a thing or two in their lifetime—they might just surprise you.

Pick up the phone. Talk-time is important, especially if you live far away. Make it a priority to call home at least once a week.

Send gifts. Send a note, flowers, or something that says "thinking of you." You'll make their day—I promise!

Accept them. "Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves together with peace" (Ephesians 4:2-3). My relationship with anyone is more enjoyable when I stop expecting them to change their minds or their ways, and accept them unconditionally. Isn't this what we all want?

Take a trip. If you live far away, schedule regular trips home even if it's only once or twice a year. Better yet, travel together! Is there a place your parents have always talked about going? Is there a place particularly meaningful to them? Trips together can produce profound bonding and lasting memories.

Maintain good boundaries. Boundaries are crucial to protecting any relationship and maintaining a healthy, balanced life. As Christians focused on loving unselfishly, we may forget our limits and sacrifice our boundaries, which leads to burnout and bitterness.

Pray. This is the best and most accessible thing you can do for your parents, no matter the state of your relationship.

Honoring our parents is a conscious, sometimes hard choice. It means giving respect, valuing opinions, seeking wisdom, appreciating sacrifices, and, above all, loving selflessly. 🏠



LINDSEY A. FREDERICK

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Raising Your Palms on Sunday

Holding on to the meaning of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem

by SARAH MARIANO

Palm leaves sway above the dusty streets of Jerusalem. The city, anxious with celebration, teems with the hope of a people undaunted by adversity—a nation of survivors promised abundance and freedom by a faithful, loving God. The people roar to a crescendo as a humble procession moves through the streets. These people, who were promised an everlasting kingdom, believe that their great warrior king is before them, riding into the city on a donkey, ready to defeat the Romans and make them a great nation. Days later, these same people who threw down their cloaks and waved palm branches in honor of Jesus would condemn him to a bloody crucifixion at the hands of the Romans. Death could not hold Jesus in the grave, and from this came the most glorious event in all of history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the biggest event in the church calendar. Yet the days leading up to the Easter celebration are important to the church as well. Christians celebrate Palm Sunday each year a week before Easter Sunday, even though it marks a day when God's people revealed their misguided expectations of Jesus and praised him for things he never intended to bring in his first coming to earth.

I can remember being dropped off to my Sunday school class in a new yellow dress, picking up a plastic palm branch, and being ushered into the main service where smiling adults clapped and cheered on our little pastel processional of children. The worship band played energetic music, and some of the children were given tambourines to clang about the aisles. Our noisy parade was a celebration of the grace that brought Christ to earth, to people undeserving of his presence, let alone his sacrifice on a cross in order to bring those who believe the chance to be reconciled to God. Many churches celebrate Palm Sunday in a similar way, with children or adults parading before the congregation in a union of young and old to celebrate this great moment in history. At some celebrations, the story of the triumphal entry—Jesus riding in to Jerusalem on a donkey before throngs of rejoicing Israelites—is read before the church. There is no biblical command to celebrate this day of the church calendar, which is why some denominations choose not to observe the celebration; however, Palm Sunday provides a wonderful opportunity for the church to come together and recognize the life of Christ on earth and the promises for salvation and redemption set in motion by his coming.

Why does Palm Sunday hold so much significance? The people of the day were celebrating a political power, their triumphant king coming in. Christ was their victorious king, just as scripture promised, but he was also a suffering servant who would overthrow death itself. Of his life, Jesus said, "And whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:27-28 ESV). Jesus was the promised Messiah, the savior of the Jewish people, but he was ushering in a spiritual kingdom, not a physical political kingdom as many of the Jews expected. This is not to say that there were not physical results of Christ's first coming. He healed the sick, cast out demons, raised people from the dead, and physically fed thousands. Jesus even affected the political and social climate of his day as well, preaching things that contradicted Jewish leaders and led to suspicion and ultimately death under the Roman government. Further, his followers eventually changed the entire world through the spread of Christianity and the gospel. However, all these things were still only a taste of what Christ has promised to bring in his second coming. This spiritual kingdom is revealed in scripture to be the rule of Christ in the hearts of believers and the presence of the Holy Spirit within individuals and the Church. Through his first coming, Christ paid the penalty for the sins of the world so that those who believe in his name may have everlasting life with him (John 3:16-17). This first coming brought about redemption for all those who have sinned, which precedes the eternal kingdom that Christ will establish at his second coming (Rev. 11:15). To the Pharisees who doubted his deity as the Son of God, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20-21). This is not to say that Jesus will not bring a powerful political kingdom as well, for the Bible makes it clear that at his second coming, Jesus will establish an eternal kingdom that will never fade away. However, Jesus came to Israel in his first coming to "seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

Those who believed Jesus was coming to bring about a dominant, political powerhouse had the wrong idea about Jesus as he rode before them on a donkey. And

Our noisy parade was a celebration of the grace that brought Christ to earth, to people undeserving of his presence, let alone his sacrifice on a cross in order to bring those who believe the chance to be reconciled to God.

because of their disappointment when they realized Jesus was not going to fulfill their expectations in the way they wanted, they allowed the Pharisees and other political leaders to hand Jesus over to Pontius Pilate for death after only days before rejoicing at his triumphal entry. Centuries later, the same danger exists for believers. Yet though Christ is not physically with us right now, we know that he sent his Spirit to guide us to all truth (John 16:13).

As Christians today, we have the opportunity to celebrate Palm Sunday as a way to remember Jesus' suffering on earth at the hands of those he loved, but our reasons go beyond even that. It is a celebration of Old Testament prophecy that was fulfilled. Zechariah 9:9 prophesies, "Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The celebration of Palm Sunday is also a way of remembering Jesus' life and ministry and of helping us to experience the theological truth of his life by acting it out, waving the branches and singing the praises just as the Jews would have done throughout Jerusalem

that day.

In her book *In the Company of Christ* on holy celebrations, Benedicta Ward notes that during the years of the early church, the individual events of the week leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection were less important to the church because they focused on the message of the event as a whole. Yet in the fourth century, as Christianity gained acceptance, the individual events grew in significance. "There was a need to tell a story, to walk to a place, to stand under in order to understand" (Ward 21). We need to tell the story to understand what Christ did for the world. He came to a people who rejected him and gave his life up so that they could be saved. That is love greater than anything we deserve or can fathom.

The story of Palm Sunday has spiritual relevance for us as well. We often expect things from Jesus, things that he did not promise to bring, because we have an inaccurate view of who he is. We stray far from truth because we do not devote ourselves to the study of truth, which allows sin to move us further from what God desires for us. Palm Sunday is a great reminder of our need to really know Jesus. Our intentions may be to love and serve God, but if we do not know who he is and what he asks of us, then we will be doing little but serving a false god of our own invention. As Christians go through the celebration of Palm Sunday, it should stir us to a study of who Jesus said he is in scripture so that we can rightly think about our Savior in a way that pleases him.

"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).



SARAH MARIANO

Sarah Mariano is an English major at Biola University. She seeks to glorify God by communicating his truths through writing. She also leads worship and works in junior high ministries, hoping to let the Spirit work through her to create disciples. Her interests include baking, tea, good books, and spending time with her family.

JESUS IS

A reflection on the themes of John
by Delbert Teachout

My paraphrase of the beginning of John says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was light and came into the darkness but the darkness rejected the light."

In the early chapters of John, I believe the author lays down a foundation of three major themes to give them emphasis: light, belief, and new birth. These themes are separate, but they all refer to the life of Jesus and what he has done for us. We see the idea of light is introduced in John 1:4: "The life was the light of men." John shows us from the beginning of his gospel that Jesus is God's Son and Jesus is the light who came into the darkness. The second theme of belief is found in verse 1:12: "But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name." Those who believe that Jesus is God, leave the darkness of the world and come into the light that is Christ. Lastly, in chapter two when the water is turned into wine, this is about new birth. After believing and receiving Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live in us and give us new life a part of the Kingdom of God.

UNSTEADY STEPS

One man's search for the meaning of life

by NICHOLAS SOWELL

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His name is Darryl. He was born in Nashville, Tennessee, and is the child of two parents who divorced when he was two years of age. His father had a serious drug problem and his mother left him to be raised by his grandmother. Though he was raised at an early age without parents, his grandmother took him in as her own and raised him. She was his rock, a strong Baptist Sunday school teacher filled with the heart of God, and the greatest example of God and unconditional love he had ever been shown. At age five, his estranged mother came back for him and moved him to Austin, Texas with a new boyfriend she had recently acquired. Being ripped from everything he'd known, he now found himself with his mother and a strange man. He flew back to Nashville every Christmas and summer. Happy to see his grandmother, there was still a catch in going back to what used to be his home: his father. He had to also see his father during every visit, but his father was an abusive man mentally, physically, and sexually. All the while, his father positioned himself between his ex-wife and son, degrading her to his son in order to convince his son to come live with him so he wouldn't have to pay child support.

When he was thirteen, the pain of abuse, neglect, and turmoil between his parents fighting over him became too much. Filled with anger and resentment towards his father, he needed a way to cope. He wanted to find a way out of the pain, so he began experimenting and trying marijuana. Eventually this led to an evening where he and his friends took some marijuana to a party and were busted for possession; afterwards all of his friends' parents forbid their kids from hanging

out with him, and he then lost his friends. The next group of friends he stumbled on were even worse to him. His best friend in high school was the son of two drug traffickers. He would often be hanging out with him at his house and find bricks of marijuana in their closet. The drugs continued to come. The first time he drank alcohol, he drank so much that he blacked out. The cycle started to exacerbate as he drank more and more, and before he knew it, he was taking Xanax, an anxiety and panic disorder prescription pill, and then his moms' painkillers, and then tripping on acid by the age of fifteen before he could even drive a car. He recalls a memory of having to call his parents from a hospital after an acid trip. His drug use continued as he was arrested for the first time at age eighteen. His remedy to the arrest and drug use was to move away from his mother and her boyfriend, thinking that Austin must be the problem, and telling himself it had to be the environment causing him to delve into the world of drugs. So he moved back to Tennessee where his father was. His sobriety lasted three months. He quickly became aware of what he calls "a prescription painkiller epidemic" in the Tennessee/Kentucky region. So he started going to doctors, manipulating, inventing problems, and faking injuries to get prescription painkillers.

By nineteen he got hooked on Vicodin and gradually progressed into deeper levels of desperation to fill his addiction. He would call into Walgreens pretending to be a doctor with DEA numbers to call in his own prescriptions, and he attended fifteen different doctors' offices and clinics. From the outside, his family looked normal as no one was aware of his father's abuse, but there was incredible turmoil within. By nineteen he couldn't kick the drugs and found himself in his first rehab treatment center. He didn't finish, and instead moved back to Austin. He began working for a large, national corporation whom we will leave unnamed. He then had the idea while working for this national company, to steal company information and then open accounts at Dell, purchasing dozens of laptops. The company he stole information from wound up being run by the United States Department of Energy. He

never received the laptops, and instead was traced by the U.S. government to his home computer, as the FBI came looking for him. He received a piece of paper that read “The United States Government vs. Darryl Stevens.”

Because of his family situation, they dropped a portion of the charges down from a felony to a misdemeanor. He was put on a one-year probation by the U.S. government for all of his committed crimes. Darryl pauses to reflect on what he’s sharing with me, only to confirm that if he had not experienced all of these occurrences personally, he would not believe it himself. Darryl did not complete his year of probation, mostly due to the fact that he could not stop using drugs. His violation required he be in another rehabilitation center which he eventually left and did not finish. He was then arrested for his misdemeanor and taken into federal prison, transported in what Darryl refers to as an “all white Con-Air airplane.” Upon getting out of prison, the cycle again continued to repeat itself: getting back on drugs, attempting to get clean, and getting back on drugs over and over again. From the period of thirteen to twenty-four he was actively using drugs. He always referred to himself as a “safe drug user,” meaning he would buy a pill on the street, but, still Google it to see what it was. His golden rule was that he would never cross the line into heroin. But after continuing down the path of taking prescription drugs, and then snorting them, he eventually found himself using a needle in his arm and shooting up heroin. When he thought it couldn’t get any deeper, he was then involved in thirteen car accidents within that one year. Darryl again pauses to reiterate how aware he is that it’s a complete miracle he’s even sitting down right now and retelling his story. For the last year and a half of his drug using, he was a full-blown IV heroin addict. He was a walking zombie of himself.

He stops to let me know that throughout this journey, he would have moments where his heart would long for the Lord. The seed his grandmother planted left a lasting impression, one that would echo into the dark, empty tomb of his drug life. He recalls a memory of a Christmas where he was high and almost passing out, but he still begged his mother to take him to church, only to pass out in the church. He shares with

me that in the midst of his drug use, he would go to church and long for just a touch of God, yearn for just an encounter with God’s love. Though he longed for more from God, he couldn’t break through the walls he’d built up around himself. He continued down the path he had known since he was thirteen. Those paths lead him to a drug dealer’s house, where he overdosed on Xanax and heroin, losing consciousness. The drug dealer put him into his car, drove him to an abandoned parking lot, and called for an ambulance while performing CPR on him. Upon arriving at the scene, the paramedics shot him with two shots of adrenaline, which moved his body, but did not revive him. Hours later, he woke up in the hospital with his mother standing over him. He found himself at the end of his rope and had to make a choice: accept some form of spiritual help or die.

Something happened to him after that incident causing him to change his mindset and heart to pursue changing his life for good. He realized he had hit rock bottom and had nowhere left to go but up if he didn’t want to die. He was put in a 12-step program similar to Alcoholics Anonymous and heard for the first time testimonies of others who were also on drugs and gravely addicted but were now clean and free from drug use. These testimonies created a glimpse of hope within him and spurred him on to do whatever it took to get clean. He then became willing to look at every piece of pain he had, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, problems with each parent, and childhood traumas. He worked through them by processing them, mourning over those memories and moments, and sought the Lord’s face. While in the treatment center, they would take Darryl and other patients to church. He remembered one of the staff members of his treatment center accepting Jesus one night when they were attending a service. As the staff member accepted Jesus, it touched and moved Darryl so much that he began to cry.

As soon as he completed the treatment center, he got out, received Jesus, and was baptized. He then began what he describes as a “crazy, three year spiritual journey.” While he was in the treatment center, one of the things he was told was to find a “spiritual god of your own understanding, a higher

THROUGHOUT THIS JOURNEY, DARRYL WOULD HAVE MOMENTS WHERE HIS HEART WOULD LONG FOR THE LORD.

power.” Darryl knew of Jesus and that he had been taught of him being “the truth, the light, and the way.” But he wanted to know about all religions and began looking for truth anywhere and in any area he could find it, hungry for the thing that would fulfill him and bring joy. So he began reading different “holy texts” from Islam, Buddhism, and different New Age ideas, all while attending a Christian church every week. Being far away from his grandmother, and not having any Christian friends, he had no one in his life to show him the way or give him answers. He was looking for “the fullness of the power” to stop using drugs for the rest of his life. He enjoyed different New Age ideas and practices, but never found what he was looking for. He remembers getting deep enough into it before he felt like the Lord was saying “that’s enough.” It came while attending an Indian medicine wheel ceremony, and he described it by saying, “There were spirits everywhere and it was dark and too much for me, that was when God ended my involvement with New Age.”

Though he was now living in Austin, he knew some people from a church in Houston who got him into worship music from Jesus Culture, and the music started to speak to his heart. His friend who attended the church was an overseas missionary and happened to be in town fundraising for his missions. While visiting with Darryl, he invited him to a screening of a movie called *Father of Lights* in Houston. Darryl immediately felt in his heart that he should go, and took his friend up on the offer. Going in with an open heart, he met God there radically. By the end of the movie and worship service, he came to the realization that this is what he’d been looking for his whole life, this was the “fullness” he’d longed for. Others came up around him and prayed for him; he met an amazing God. From that night forward Darryl has been a different man. His old man is dead, and he has been made a new creation. As Darryl describes it, it’s like 2 Corinthians 3:18, he’s been going from “glory to glory to glory to glory.” He responds to his story by reiterating that he knows he should be dead, leaving out countless other

stories that indicate by all accounts he should’ve passed away multiple times before. God spared Darryl’s life, looked at him, and told him, “You’re my son and I’m going to do a work with you.” God took Darryl, lifted him up, and cleaned him off, powerfully changing his life forever. All of the stuff he went through is gone, and he has become a man of purity and wholeness.

Darryl has continued to walk in wholeness ever since by remaining sober, becoming more spiritually, physically, and emotionally powerful, and shifting into the man God has called him to be. Now drug free for over four years and serving as a leader in his church, you can only comprehend the stories of this man by concluding that his “old man is dead and he is a new creation.” While continuing to not only grow successfully in his personal life, God also enabled him to grow in his career as well. Two years ago, God gave Darryl an idea to start a company while he was working a job for twelve dollars an hour. Shortly thereafter, Darryl started a computer company in which he taught himself how to do web design, creating a successful business that took off within the first year of opening. Today, that pure, clean, and passionate man for God takes the breakthroughs he’s had to bless others, bringing hope to those who are walking down the same road he had taken. He’s the first person you’ll see in church hungry to pray for others, that they may experience and know God as he has come to. Everything Darryl faced he got through by taking his life to Jesus and overcoming. Darryl concludes by saying, “Whatever you face or are facing, you can always overcome it by the cross.” 🙏



NICHOLAS SOWELL

Nicholas has been involved in full time ministry since age 16. He has served as a lay minister, youth pastor, Christian radio DJ, Christian music production company owner, surf missionary, and now young adults pastor. Nicholas has used his love for writing to inspire, educate, and most importantly: further the kingdom of God. Now married, he lives in Austin, Texas.



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ONE CUP PROJECT

With One Cup coffee can be more than just caffeine

by THAME FULLER

Every day in sub-Saharan Africa, one child in ten under the age of five dies of a preventable cause, and nearly every day in America eight in ten adults consume coffee. What do these numbers have to do with each other? A lot, according to the One Cup Project, which is using America's love for coffee to reduce the number of children dying in Africa by converting coffee profits into life-saving aid.

The One Cup Project started in 2010, when Christian Kar, the founder of an award-winning Seattle-based coffee company, partnered with the Christian humanitarian aid organization, World Vision. Initially, God used a mission trip to Kenya and Richard Stearns' book *The Hole in Our Gospel* to call Kar into action on behalf of those living in poverty. Since that time, the project has generated more than \$199,000 of aid to help hurting people.

Remarkably, every dollar spent on One Cup Coffee generates a dollar of aid for Africa. This sustainable dollar-for-dollar match is made possible by an innovative use of profits and grants. Profits taken from the sale of One Cup Coffee are multiplied by matching grants until they generate an amount of aid that equals the purchase price of the coffee. World Vision then puts these multiplied funds to good work in Africa. So far, project funds have been used in Zambia (Food Security, Agriculture and Nutrition, AIDS, and Economic Development) and the Horn of Africa region (Emergency Famine Relief). One Cup is unique and revolutionary. Never before has an everyday, high-consumption product been positioned to generate charity on a dollar-for-dollar basis—with no purchase limit.

There are many ways to get on board with The One Cup Project, particularly if you love great coffee.

1. First, you can help change the world for the better by simply changing the coffee in your pantry, and helping others do the same. You can easily purchase award-winning, aid-generating coffee online at www.onecup.org. Your freshly roasted order will be shipped directly to your doorstep and every dollar you spend will generate a dollar of aid for World Vision's work in Africa. To help you get started, when you order a month's supply (3 bags) of the coffee of your choice at www.onecup.org and enter the promotion code: NEW ID, you will receive a free bag of extraordinary Direct Trade Ethiopian Harrar, which also supports church planting. With an extra click, you can keep your coffee coming, and the aid it generates going. Simply choose an interval of every 1 to 8 weeks and your order will arrive like clockwork.

2. One Cup supplies organizations and businesses, particularly cafés, churches, and offices, with coffee at wholesale prices. Organizations' existing coffee budgets can be transformed into mission funds without increasing their overall expenses—simply by serving One Cup Coffee to their patrons, members, and staff. Now every dollar they invest in serving great coffee will generate a dollar of aid for our neighbors in need in Africa. If you know of an existing missions-minded church, business, or coffee shop, please encourage them to partner with One Cup.

3. Finally, various groups often have fund-raising campaigns for such things as sports teams, schools, ministry projects, youth camps, and mission trips. One Cup's 'Two-for-One' fundraising program makes it possible for groups to raise all the support they will need for their cause while continuing to generate aid for World Vision's work in Africa. Participants pre-sell bags of coffee to everyone they know, keeping \$4 per bag for the local ministry. The rest of the \$12 retail purchase price pays for the coffee and generates dollar-for-dollar aid. There are no upfront costs, and it's easy to run.

As a grassroots effort with minimal marketing expense, One Cup relies a great deal on partners to spread the word using whatever platforms God has given them. Buy some coffee, put up a post on your Facebook page, ask your church, local café, or workplace to change their coffee, or run a One Cup Fundraiser. In doing so, you just may help hurting people find healing, hope, and life. Change the world for the better, one cup at a time. ☕



THAME FULLER

Thame Fuller serves as pastor of ONE Church in Lynnwood, WA and as a partnership development agent for the One Cup Project. Thame has served in pastoral ministry since 1998, and is a graduate of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. He is blessed to be the husband of his lovely wife and ministry partner Suzi and the father of their three children, Rebecca, Ryan and Nicole.



Letting God Work

Christ can use you wherever you are

by STEVEN BUTWELL

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“All I do today is for Jesus” is my first thought as another mundane workday begins. The Bible says: “Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established” (Proverbs 16:3). I know this, but I don’t always do this. I wrestle with questions like: Am I content with my life? Do I give God thanks in all of life’s circumstances? What am I doing with what God has given me? How am I even impacting people in the workplace? If I were content, I would accept where Jesus has me working currently. Yet, I am rarely cheerful while ironing my uniform, and serving people at the restaurant I work proves tiresome. I am 29 now and have served on and off since age 17. I feel like I should move on to something else, but this job is my primary source of income, so I can’t. Instead, I work day after day, occasionally spilling ranch all over myself, continually informing people about our delicious desserts, and patiently enduring patrons leaving me questionable gratuity. One might think: “This is unacceptable.” That one would be me. It could be that I will refill a diet coke six times or explain something on the menu while the guest gazes directly at it. Some nights I am scheduled to close, which keeps me from seeing my wife that day. Nearly all shifts cover me with the stink of bread, sweat, and desserts. So much so that when I get home I am afraid I’ll stain the couch if I sit on it. At the end of the day I wonder: Is this really where God wants me or did I make a big mistake?

What does working for Jesus look like in the menial and monotonous everyday tasks that we undertake? I won’t downplay how obnoxious it is to awaken early in the AM or work graveyard shifts to scarcely provide for a family. I can sympathize; I have worked them. The dreadful hours, however, yielded valuable lessons of patience, endurance, and trust. God provided everything I needed each time whether I was carrying bags, dishwashing (and not the machine—I’m talking hardcore scrubbing), serving, helping construction, or even leading a group of rowdy middle school kids as a youth pastor. Isn’t this Jesus’ *modus operandi*, to teach and provide for us? As I look back in hindsight, I am actually quite grateful Jesus carried me through these “lowly” positions. God used my dishwashing job to teach me humility. In the same way, being a bellman taught me patience. And again, serving tables has helped me to become a better listener.

Most recently, teaching middle schoolers about God taught me trust, because I don’t know if the kids are truly listening to what I teach, but I trust that when Jesus’ word is taught someone is impacted, even if only one. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). All of my humble beginnings in the workforce, and even today, teach me to surrender negative thoughts to Jesus. What I mean by surrendering negative thoughts is to remember God’s promises, such as: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). If you find yourself thinking: “I hate my job,” remember God’s word to us: “Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:16-17). Aren’t our jobs a gift of provision from God? Or if you find yourself worrying: “God won’t provide money to pay for food or bills this month,” remember God’s promise: “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew

6:31-33). (A Gentile in this context is someone having no existing relationship with Jesus.) We use God's word to combat the lies that haunt us. The day to day willful surrender of our work circumstance allows Jesus to cultivate in us an unwavering confidence in him. The doubtful, angry and weak times in our lives will come, and finding contentment in Jesus will deliver us through them all. A Christian's life work is not about money or position; our work is to show and tell everyone in our sphere of influence—whether the people whose tables we serve, dishes we wash, bags we carry, houses we build, or children we instruct—that Jesus is God and we are not. To have Jesus resonate through us (even in a small way) and bring a blessing to others in our “everyday” job, quickly adds significance to what we do. The surrender of “menial and monotonous” allows Jesus to shine through us. The impact of working with a heart completely surrendered to Christ is not common practice to the watching world, but it is for a disciple of Jesus. Though if it is his will, God can work through us even as we grumble, he would rather have us make a conscious decision of worship and to allow the routine and sometimes maddening tasks we undertake impact another person's life for his glory. What will you choose?

Discontentment leaves an impression. If I, a born again Christian, decline a thankful attitude, or reject contentment, am I choosing to live how Jesus would? No. In fact it places a negative connotation on Jesus, potentially closing a door to someone close to me hearing or experiencing the good news about Jesus. Can dissatisfaction indicate to the watching world a lack of trust in God? Can my attitude towards my present circumstances hinder a valuable opportunity for Christ? Of course! That's why God says, “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:18-19). If people know I represent Jesus, I should represent accordingly. I am the hands and feet of Jesus—an ambassador if you will. I trust that if Jesus needed me somewhere else, doing something different, then I would be there.

Have you ever expressed doubt towards God? I have. I've been disappointed, even angry with God. I've longed for a different job (even still do at times). For



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me, it's easier to see everything wrong with my current job, in turn, affecting others around me, making them as miserable as I am. In those moments, if I were on the outside looking in, I'd be inclined to think: "Steven hates his job. He must despise every moment there." And why not assume this about me? After all, the fallen human heart is set against God, hostile towards his ways, and conforming to the thought patterns of this world is inherent and common practice. It doesn't help that the fallen world spins a seductive tale that we can always have bigger and better, and always be happier. So it makes perfect sense that we are never truly happy with where we are or what we are doing. King Solomon touches a bit on the endeavors of the human heart and its depravity: "In the same way Death and Destruction are never satisfied, so human desire is never satisfied" (Proverbs 27:20). All of us labor to feed ourselves, yet our appetites are never satisfied. If we love money, there is never enough, because whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income (Ecclesiastes 5:10, 6:7). Is this true for you? I can relate.

It's true that up until the moment I met Jesus face-to-face, this was relevant. Even today this is still applicable. As disciples of Jesus we are a work in progress; our old ways are not immediately gone. We must constantly seek God everyday for the strength to choose what he would. Jesus swaps our priorities and fine-tunes our perspective of contentment, whether looking at work, people, money, etc. We look at the world now through the lens of Christ. He cleanses the heart of immoral corruption, because he himself is incorruptible. Yes, there are days when I want to and even do choose to be on the side of my old self. But he who began a good work in us will bring it to completion on either the day we go to be with the Lord or he returns. And in Jesus we are a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The most important decision you or I will ever make is our decision for or against Jesus. "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (John 6:27). The moment you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9), you are made new and the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your heart. Everything "normal and acceptable" before, now seems foreign, wrong, off. Why? Because our minds have been (and are currently being) transformed. We need to test all things to see whether they are from God, and we do this by knowing what the Bible says. Now, to the watching world of non-believers, fellow Christians, co-workers, and the like we are a city on a hill (Matthew 5:14), and the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). We work for Jesus not out of obligation but out of love for him saving our lives. Our lives are free from the love of money and the love of self, and instead are full of love for Christ. True contentment and peace only comes through knowing Jesus. In partnership with the Holy Spirit, our work is his work: sharing the good news and living a life that validates the truth of the gospel until we see him face-to-face.


The people in our lives aren't here by chance. People need to see Jesus in me, hear Jesus from me, be served, encouraged, prayed for, and ministered to by me! Try this perspective shift: where we work is our mission field. I now consider it an honor to work for Christ, even in a monotonous work environment. I don't work

for Jesus because I have to—I work for him because I want to. Because I know Jesus, I am constantly reminded that it's not about me. Before I knew Jesus it was all about me. What Jesus does is take the ideals of the world and flips them on their head, where they should be. Jesus saved us from certain death, therefore God makes an earnest appeal to us through the apostle Paul, "By the mercies of God, to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. And to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2). What does the world tell us about work and how do we transform our minds? Two fantastic questions with one answer: not conforming to this world is to partner with the one not of this world (John 8:23), Jesus.

Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The way of the world will always incline you to choose your own path, and make your own way. Our own way is not necessarily the way that Jesus would have us choose, because our physical and personal desires, as we know, are inherently set against God. I take great comfort in knowing that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life that God wants us to know. The way of God and to God, the truth of God, and the life God intends for each of us can all be found in the person of Jesus Christ.

If I gave God thanks in all situations, then I would never complain about my job. If I had contentment and thankfulness in my heart, then impacting people in my workplace would never be an issue because people would witness firsthand the joy I experience being content in Christ. Jesus has us where we work for a reason—to carry out his will, not ours. Our work at work is to share Jesus, his gospel, and to do what he would have done. You and I cannot be in multiple places at one time. Jesus can, and he works in and through people all over the world in different places to make himself known. Will we allow ourselves to be a part of his work? We can choose in our normal everyday life to have a thankful attitude. "Thank you Father that I have a way to pay rent." We can be content. "Thank you Lord that I have food and clothing

for this day; please give us each day our daily bread." Jesus is what makes us thankful. He provided a way for reconciliation with God—for this we are of utmost cheer! Knowing Jesus is what makes a person truly content. Nevertheless, Jesus cannot force us to choose him, and many will decline the gift.

If you and I can truly declare we have accepted Jesus as our Lord, then our life work is to him. Whatever we find ourselves doing, in any given situation, we share the truth: Jesus is God over all creation, the sovereign Lord of our lives, he was crucified, buried, and after three days was resurrected, paying the full penalty for our rebellion. He gave his life as a ransom for all of us: including you. Since, then, we know what it is to trust the Lord, we try to persuade others of this (2 Corinthians 5:11). We are always prepared to share the gospel of Jesus, because the gospel "is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). When we commit to Jesus and trust in him, he can act in us and through us. Whatever we do, we work heartily, not to get recognition from people, but from God and with sincerity of heart, as for Jesus and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive eternal life as your reward. We work for the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:23-24 paraphrased). So, in the end, whatever we do, we do it for Jesus. 



STEVEN BUTWELL

As a pastor and missionary, Steven is zealous to share the gospel of Jesus to anyone and everyone he sees or knows. Steven is a former atheist who encountered Jesus face to face at age 19 in a vision. Since meeting Jesus, Steven has devoted his life to serving him. Steven's passions include; being a husband to his lovely wife Jamie, reading the Bible, writing, traveling and public speaking.

One Unsung Hero

The selfless sacrifices of my mom

by MATTHEW HAMILTON

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When we speak of someone making an impression, we often notice things that a person displays not for the sake of appearing impressive, or for the purpose of drawing attention to themselves, but the simple actions that come naturally to them. For many people, one of the biggest influences in shaping who they are is their mother. Throughout childhood and into adulthood my mother oversaw my formation, provided health and safety, and prepared me to go into the world as a (hopefully) functional adult. It was only when I was on my own and self-sufficient that I could step back and realize what an inspiration my mother has been.

When explaining what makes my mother an inspiration, I should explain that I came along somewhat late in my mother's life. She was in her 40's and already a grandmother, so the fact that she decided to take on child raising one last time itself is inspirational because it was how I came to be. Before I was born, my mother survived living as a single mother of five, working, and making sure that my siblings were clothed, fed and sent to school. Most importantly, she knew that their spiritual development took highest importance and walked with them over a mile to church every Sunday. While she was there she also took responsibilities by teaching other children in Sunday school. When I ask her how she survived going through such adversity, she simply replies, "Paul says in Philippians that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Eventually she remarried and added me to the growing number of mouths to feed, but still saw the importance of teaching others continually even after I was born.

My mother worked as a bus driver and taught Sunday school for many years until tragedy struck. Within a span of a year, both my father and sister lost their lives to cancer. She says that dealing with losing both a husband and daughter helped her understand the "shadow of the valley of death" mentioned in Psalm 23. After some soul searching, she decided to start a new class in church for adults that were attending church services but not attending a Sunday school class at the time. This is an example of one of her most admirable

traits, recognizing a need and then filling it. Though it started as a small group of 5 adults, attendance eventually increased threefold. What made her class different was there was no set curriculum, simply her desire to share what she had learned by finally reading through the Bible from beginning to end. Tackling such a subject for even the most experienced theologian, the fact that she wanted to start learning with no prior training at the age of 65 is that much more impressive. She also was not afraid to ask for help, often asking my brother, a pastor, about the context of a certain passage or calling me late at night for help in pronouncing the name of an Old Testament king.

Recently, it appeared that she was slowing down a bit. Her health had caused some difficulties, her leg had been amputated because of cancer, and she was not able to attend church as frequently because she had to give up her drivers' license. But soon, as her health improved, she started to find ways that she could serve, whether it was stuffing envelopes for the church's mail or visiting those members that were no longer healthy enough to attend church on their own,

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a situation in which she could definitely empathize. In fact, it came as no surprise that, with her outgoing personality, she developed a relationship with another member of the church who had recently lost his wife. Their wedding was filled to capacity with many people celebrating her life so far and their life yet to come.

When her new husband unexpectedly grew ill and passed away this past year after just two years of marriage, our family did not know quite what to expect. Would she need more assistance than we could provide or lose her will to live after losing yet another person that she held so dear? She did go through the expected mourning, but her drive and initiative could not be stopped for long, as she took comfort in the fact that even at this stage of her life God has a plan for her, as she often mentions from Jeremiah 29:11. She quickly established a network of friends and family that not only provide her transportation but also the opportunity to continue her volunteer work as well. But even that does not seem to be enough. She is scheduled to take her driver's test to regain her license. I asked her if her condition with her leg ever gets her discouraged, and she replied, "I know I am going to heaven; it's just nice to know that a part of me will be waiting there for me." She is also starting a new bible studies class, this time geared towards those that are not attending church currently. Again, she is recognizing a need that deserves attention, and I can think of no better person to address it. I can't wait until I get another late night call asking how to pronounce Nebuchadnezzar. 🎧



MATTHEW HAMILTON

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

Cellist
Surfer
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Poet
Chef
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Who are you in Christ?

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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