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God in focus. World in scope.

# new identity

MAGAZINE

Spring 2010

## The Pursuit Of Happiness

FAIRY TALE ENDINGS AND THE REALITY OF WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

## The Vibe At Easter

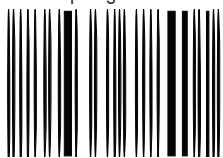
MORE THAN JUST FLORESCENT GREEN GRASS AND CANDY, EASTER IS THE DEFINING POINT OF CHRISTIANITY

## Plugging Into Faith And Community On Your College Campus

## Conquering Depression With Christ

ONE WOMAN SHARES HER STORY OF DEPRESSION AND RECOVERY IN HOPES OF ENCOURAGING OTHERS TO SEEK GOD IN THEIR DARKEST HOUR AND FIND RELIEF IN LOVE

Spring 2010



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# contents FEATURES



## 8The Pursuit of Happiness

Emily Chase-Ziolek talks about the fairy tale ending that we seek and the reality of working relationships.

## 28Marriage and Melanin

Relationships can be hard work no matter who is involved. Wendy Harbottle discusses multi-racial relationships and the additional obstacles that may rise to the surface when cultural differences emerge.

## 40The Vibe At Easter

More than just florescent green grass and candy, Easter is the defining point of Christianity, but at times it seems, well, underwhelming. Tom Koel talks about why we should buff up Easter from its lost luster.

## 49Spring Cleaning Our Homes And Lives

Spring cleaning and Lent? We talk about the value and method of both practices, and the clarity that comes from letting go and moving on.

Spring 2010

Photo by Alexa Wan

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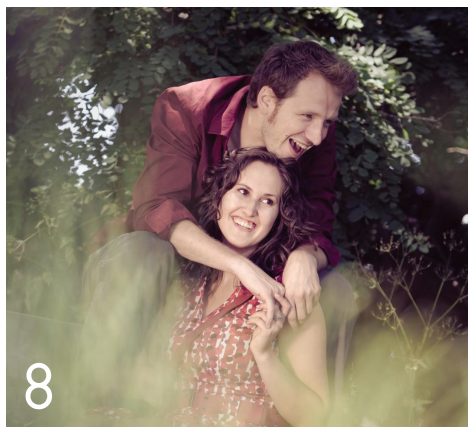
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com](http://www.newidentitymagazine.com)



# contents

## DEPARTMENTS

Spring 2010



### COMMUNITY

#### Give Back

##### 7 Harbor House

Harbor House meets the spiritual, physical and educational needs of their community.

#### Relationships

##### 8 The Pursuit of Happiness

Emily Chase-Ziolek talks about the fairy tale ending that we seek and the reality of working relationships.

#### Church

##### 10 Prayer's A Two Way Street

Derrick Engoy discusses seeking God with questions and the confusion that comes when you get an answer. Is it the answer you were hoping for? Did you ask the right question? What if you don't get an answer at all?

#### Discovering God

##### 12 Conquering Depression With Christ

One woman shares her story of depression and recovery in hopes of encouraging others to seek God in their darkest hour and find relief in love.

#### Connecting

##### 16 Plugging Into Faith And Community On Your College Campus

Just starting college and being new on a campus can be intimidating. Why is it important to plug-in?

### CULTURE

#### God Talk

##### 19 Are Christians Too Political?

Individuals reflect on many sides of the issue.

#### Spotlight: In Perspective

##### 22 Saving Sex For Marriage

We examine the Christian and cultural perspectives of saving sex for marriage, the weight that comes with the topic and the Biblical reasons for waiting.

#### Communication

##### 27 Media

Music Television: One Gospel

##### 27 Books On Prayer

The Practice Of The Presence Of God by Brother Lawrence

##### 27 Jargon

What is sin?

#### Snapshot

##### 28 Marriage and Melanin

Relationships can be hard work no matter who is involved. Wendy Harbottle discusses multi-racial relationships and the additional obstacles that may rise to the surface when cultural differences emerge.

### WORLD

#### Missions

##### 32 Richard Wurmbrand

Richard Wurmbrand became a voice for the oppressed and an aid to the persecuted. His life's work continues to make an impact on the global front.

#### Global You

##### 34 How To Save A Life

You don't have to be a Bay-watch babe or even wear a life-guard's outfit to save someone's life. We show you how.

#### Cuisine

##### 37 Passover Seder

Create your own passover meal and discover the meaning behind each course.

#### Events

##### 40 The Vibe At Easter

More than just florescent green grass and candy, Easter is the defining point of Christianity, but at times it seems, well, underwhelming. Tom Koel talks about why we should buff up Easter from it's lost luster.

### IN EVERY ISSUE

##### 4 Editor's Letter

##### 5 News, Fun Finds & Opportunities

##### 6 Masthead

##### 59 Prayer Plan

### ENVIRONMENT

#### Green Living

##### 44 Enriching Earth Day

Earth Day may seem like an overlooked day or odd thing to celebrate, but it remains a meaningful reminder of God's creation and His gifts.

#### Nature

##### 46 Purple Rocks

Chelsea Peterson shares with us the thrill of a tough climb and triumph of a great view, but also the life necessity of leaving things behind.

#### Health & Home

##### 49 Spring Cleaning Our Homes And Lives

Spring cleaning and Lent? We talk about the value and method of both practices, and the clarity that comes from letting go and moving on.

#### Science & Technology

##### 53 Fighting Piracy: Christians And The Downloading Of Illegal Music

The piracy of downloading shared music online is a problem. Are Christians culprits?

#### Sports & Recreation

##### 56 Personalized Retreats

Taking time away is a healthy discipline. Matthew Hamilton talks about why it's necessary and what can be gained from "getting away from it all" for a period of time.





People connect with God in many different ways, at different times, and in different places.

Some people retreat for silence to a cabin in the mountains. Others seek God as they sit at a cafe with a cup of coffee. Some get out into nature on a hike to hear God's voice, while still others may find their best times with God when sitting in traffic. What's important is finding Him and spending time with God regularly in whatever way is best for you. When discussing prayer, Phillip Yancey writes, "The goal is to spend time with God, not to follow legalistic procedure. If a system helps achieve that goal, fine. If not, I move on."

I've tried many systems and continue to strive to make more time for community with God and seek new ways of intimacy with Him.

In this issue we've had the pleasure of hearing from many writers and how they pursue and connect with God. Our writers share their thoughts in *Purple Rocks*, pg. 46, *Spring Cleaning Our Homes And Lives*, pg. 49 and *Personalized Retreats*, pg. 56. These stories may inspire you or give you more ideas of ways, times or places to seek God and enjoy His ever encompassing love.

*Cailin*

CAILIN BRIODY HENSON  
Editor-in-Chief



## WRITE TO US:

What are your thoughts on this issue? What topics or perspectives do you want to read about or hear from? We love getting feedback. Send your message via e-mail or letter and please include your name, address and daytime phone number. *New Identity Magazine*, P.O. Box 375, Torrance, CA 90508. Phone: (310) 947-8707; [feedback@newidentitymagazine.com](mailto:feedback@newidentitymagazine.com)

## The Elements of New Identity Magazine:

Why we do consider four main departments essential for a new identity in Christ? They represent important aspects of God's plan for his people in creation and redemption.

### COMMUNITY

God really wants us in community, helping each other, sharing life together. Acts 2:44-47 (AMP) says, "And all who believed (who adhered to and trusted in and relied on Jesus Christ) were united and [together] they had everything in common; And they sold their possessions (both their landed property and their movable goods) and distributed the price among all, according as any had need. And day after day they regularly assembled in the temple with united purpose, and in their homes they broke bread [including the Lord's Supper]. They partook of their food with gladness and simplicity and generous hearts, constantly praising God and being in favor and goodwill with all the people; and the Lord kept adding [to their number] daily those who were being saved [from spiritual death]."

### CULTURE

Everyone has a different culture. Whether it's how you were raised, what ethnicity you're a part of or what country you're from, culturally, we're all different—but God stays the same. By highlighting cultural differences, we can better understand the diversity of the body of Christ, and we can learn to see from within that diversity the foundational similarities and commonality that we all have through Christ. Romans 15:7 (NIV) encourages us to "accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

### WORLD

God is global. His love and compassion are far-reaching, extending to every corner of the globe and every people on earth. We want to represent the reality of the diversity of God's people. Acts 10:34-36 (The Message) says, "Peter fairly exploded with his good news: 'It's God's own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you're from—if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open. The Message he sent to the children of Israel—that through Jesus Christ everything is being put together again—well, he's doing it everywhere, among everyone.'"

### ENVIRONMENT

God wants us to enjoy, take care of and be a part of our environment. Activities like outdoor recreation, nature appreciation and sustainability, help us value our Creator and His creation. Genesis 1:26-27 (The Message) says, "God spoke: 'Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle. And, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.' God created human beings; he created them godlike, reflecting God's nature, He created them male and female."





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#### ARTSY OUTLET

### Rockharber Church

Art is a language, a bridge and a gift. That is the belief at RockHarbor Church in Costa Mesa, California. Keith Page and his team launched RockHarbor in 1997 as a non-denominational, evangelical church in Costa Mesa, which outreaches to the post-modern generation. Five thousand young adults gather every weekend in a warehouse building listening to pastors Mike Erre, Todd Proctor, and Steve Carter. The church's array of art teams provide a unique way of spreading the teachings of Jesus and building the community. Church members use their talents and passion to express themselves in new and different ways. The church has a wide variety of art works by church members displayed in the hallway gallery that are often created out of recycled materials like older works, old rags, paper plates, and other recyclable items. In addition to these displays, RockHarbor has teams who focus on creative video, creative writing, dance and visual arts. Those with a flair for behind the scenes work such as stage wardrobe and make-up, set design, set construction, lighting and sound, also have a place to practice their craft while spreading God's message through theatrical productions. For more information, visit [www.rockharbor.org](http://www.rockharbor.org) or call 714.384.0914 —Jeanne Le



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#### ENVIRONMENTALLY MINDED

### Deep Green Conversation

Deep Green Conversation, part of the Evangelical Environmental Network, is an online place where Christians who are passionate about the environment can come to talk about living a life that is pleasing to Christ and to the environment. The DGC hopes to "help you integrate your faith into a deep green lifestyle rooted in Christ and fueled by community and conversation." Although the website is still in the early stages, with their Facebook profile already sporting over 400 members, we see some definite potential in starting this conversation. To learn more, visit [www.deepgreenconversation.org](http://www.deepgreenconversation.org) —Cailin Henson



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#### GLOBAL COLLABORATION

### Tearfund

*"The church can do more for a struggling African village than any other organization, because it is with the people all of the time. Organizations come and visit, but the church is here not only on Sunday, but every day of the week."* - Pastor Harry, Fombe Village Church, Malawi

Tearfund is a nonprofit organization based in the UK that believes the local church is where lives are changed and people are transformed. They are primarily involved in Africa, Asia and South America. They work hard to link churches across nations, provide basic services and improve conditions, fight economic injustice, work to defeat disease, restore the environment around communities and tackle disaster. By partnering churches together, Tearfund is able to help others serve each other as Jesus did.

For more information about becoming involved visit [www.tearfund.org](http://www.tearfund.org) —Cailin Henson



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VOLUME 2 NUMBER 2

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

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MAGAZINE

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## MISSION STATEMENT

New Identity Magazine's mission as a publication is to help people find their new identity in Christ by presenting interesting topics, issues and ideas from multiple Christian perspectives. Through this, New Identity Magazine hopes to generate the communication and understanding to unite people that hail from different ends of the spectrum and encourage thought provoking discussion and commonality through Christ. By using scriptures of the Holy Bible as the source, the Word that binds Christians together, and highlighting different insights into their intention and application, New Identity Magazine aims to help readers live a more stimulating, inclusive, and passionate life with God. In addition New Identity Magazine is a publication that encourages learning, wisdom, creative expression, and showcases the cultural and world aspects of life and following God.

Our goal is to represent true-to-life followers of Christ that have questions, wonder, ponder, dream and have a willingness to learn about varying viewpoints. We desire to dissolve the rules, categories and stereotypes placed on Christians and non-Christians, shed God's light into the areas that may be forgotten or rarely talked about but are vital in many people's lives, and provide coverage of topics often overlooked by the mainstream media or in religious circles.

## REFERENCING THE BIBLE:

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

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## community

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## Harbor House

by Leila Evangelista

“[We are] bringing God’s love to the people of Oakland by meeting spiritual, physical, and educational needs.”

Since 1972, Harbor House has worked with over 100,000 individuals in the San Antonio community of Oakland, California. The ministry began with a single person—schoolteacher and First Covenant Church member, Olive Freeman. Freeman began offering assistance to her students and their families, providing books, food, clothing, and educational tutoring out of the trunk of her car. This grassroots assistance quickly caught on, and other locals began volunteering for her cause. Since then, the organization has been carrying out its mission to work “through God’s grace and mercy to create positive, systematic change for individuals” and the Oakland community.

About a quarter of Bay Area households do not have the income needed to fulfill the basic needs of members within each household. Food, housing, childcare, medical care, and other necessities are often not met, even with families working two or three jobs. Unemployment, underemployment, refugee status, illiteracy and inadequate educational preparation are just some of the challenges facing this Bay Area population. This cycle of poverty often continues on to the youth. Many youth have to enter the workforce early in order to contribute to the family income. More often than not, the youth lack sufficient adult role models, especially since parents are largely absent because of their around-the-clock work schedules to make ends meet.


Harbor House recognized that the issues and barriers faced by those within the low-income community were not symptomatic of just one thing. It was often the compacting of multiple issues that made individual situations difficult. In response, the multi-ethnic Christian based non-profit organization has served its community through a holistic ministry, “bringing God’s love to the people of Oakland by meeting spiritual, physical, and educational needs” in order to break the barriers that often keep

individuals from the opportunity to reach their potential.

The organization serves the Oakland community through its youth, education, economic development and spiritual development programs. Through the youth programs, children are equipped to grow academically, socially, and spiritually. There are sports, the arts, academic enrichment and other cultural activities. The program sustains itself as the children grow up and develop the skills and confidence within the program to give back to the community. Harbor House’s education programs include English as a Second Language for both youth and adults, with tailor-made curricula for those with less than three years of education, which are arguably the most difficult students to reach in the community. Youth Leadership Internships are also offered to equip the youth in the community with job readiness, community service, teamwork and diversity awareness training.

The economic development programs are twofold: addressing the immediate needs of individuals and then creating practical, long-term plans for a more permanent solution. The program recognizes that meeting the short- and long-term needs of an individual is when real change can happen. Harbor House’s future plans will address the economic issues of the population through education, awareness, and the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities, equipping individuals with knowledge and creating opportunities that will benefit the community as a whole.

The programs are open to everyone in the community. Christians and non-Christians alike are welcome to take advantage of the organization’s services; the spiritual development aspect is not required. But Harbor House does offer spiritual guidance and assistance to help individuals cope with everyday life stresses. Instilling each individual with the knowledge of their intrinsic value through God’s deep love is believed to be a necessary part of the holistic healing and wellness for each person. Pastoral care, Bible studies and urban study are all part of Harbor House’s spiritual development program.

To find out how you can support Harbor House in their mission, please visit [www.hhministries.org](http://www.hhministries.org) 



A man and a woman are laughing together in a garden. The man is wearing a maroon shirt and the woman is wearing a red and white patterned dress. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background is filled with green foliage.

# The Pursuit of Happiness

Emily Chase-Ziolek talks about the fairy tale ending that we seek, the reality of working relationships, and shedding light on our own expectations versus God's idea for marriage.

by Emily Chase-Ziolek

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Pick up any well-known fairy tale and you're likely to read this concluding line: "...and they lived happily ever after." Usually the line refers to a beautiful maiden and her handsome prince who has saved her from some unenviable life. In a life filled with inconveniences and setbacks, it's no wonder that many of us want to be rescued from our problems. Wouldn't it be nice if some charming prince or princess came to sweep us off our feet and ride with us into the sunset to our blissful future? After all, it's worked for many a fairy tale character.

Those fairy tale princes and princesses were happy after they met each other...weren't they? Thanks to Prince Charming, Cinderella no longer had to scrub floors or suffer verbal abuse from her evil stepsisters. Sleeping Beauty woke up from an unconscious state at the kiss of her prince, and Snow White, having been poisoned by an apple from her wicked stepmother, was cured by a prince who kissed her simply because he was captivated by her beauty. But were they really happy? Is it even possible to be happy when your life is literally and figuratively missing a third dimension?

For Christians, that third dimension is God. We may think that we can only be truly happy when that special someone comes into our lives, but more likely than not, that is a lie. What if our only true happiness comes from God and pursuing Him, not exclusively from marriage? What if marriage is something else entirely?

For Katelin Cummins, 24, from Madison, Wisconsin, her marriage to Allen was not just a path to happiness, but to holiness. Katelin described holiness as a way of life in which you become everything God intends you to be. "I had temptations and faults that only marriage could help me overcome," said Katelin, explaining why she chose marriage instead of singleness. She said that in sharp contrast to fairy tale endings, "You have to be willing to die for the person you marry because in a way, you will. It's self-sacrifice. That's what love is and that's hard stuff." How many of us think about our fairy tale weddings with self-sacrifice in mind? Yet over and over again, that's what I hear from people I talk to about marriage, whether they are married or single.

We have to be willing to consider the fact that some of our ideas about marriage and romance might be wrong. Dawn Eden, in her book, *Thrill of the Chaste*, notes that, "To tell yourself simply, 'I'll be happy once I have a boyfriend', is to deny the seriousness of your longing. It turns the hunger into a superficial desire for flesh and blood when what we really want is someone to share divine love with us – to be for us God with skin on." If what we really desire is God and the physical evidence of His love for us, marriage can't be the end-all to our search for happiness.

Marriage doesn't last like God does, and God is perfectly capable of making us happy.

At times marriage can be far from perfect. "Being married is still life," says Jessica, 24, from Beloit, Wisconsin. "It's sobering to remember that marriage isn't just someone waving a little wand and everything has been fixed, everything's perfect. Life is still hard. So I think I would like it if there was a person who was sort of my partner in this hard life, but sometimes he might make it hard too so it's not going to take away all my problems. It might even just give me new ones, but I'm still going to take that risk because I think that kind of partnership and relationship with another person is kind of scary but probably, I think, worth it."

Katelin, who has been married for two and a half years, would agree with Jessica. "I had a lot of hard things to do my first year of marriage," Katelin shared. "Marriage, first of all, magnifies your problems. You will have to look face to face with all of your faults, times ten." This should come as no surprise to Christians. Jesus' disciple Peter anticipated that Christians would suffer, writing in one of his letters, "do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." (1 Peter 4:12, NIV) Even though marriage is hard, Katelin still believes that "it's a wonderful, wonderful thing. Despite all this, it makes you grow so much."

Mary Ann Anichini, who has been married for 28 years, agrees that marriage is both challenging and rewarding. "Marriage is something you get up and work on every single day," she says. Over the years, Mary Ann has learned a few things about marriage and life. "My job in this kingdom is really quite simple," she says when referring to how she should live her life as she is following God, "it's just, how can I fill other people up?"

For any of us, whether single or married, a Christ-centered life (and therefore an "others"-centered life) is what will bring us true joy. Jon Hill, 25, from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, realized that although he desired to be married, he had to desire God more. "I really had to kind of come to grips with that and finally say you know what, if God calls me to a life of being single to serve Him I would be okay with that," said Jon. If married couples sacrifice their lives for each other, maybe singles can give up their lives, or at least their dreams, for God. If we can't be happy as singles, there is little hope in thinking that we could be instantly happy in marriage.

So we know that we might not live happily ever after like the stories, but with God at least we have a fighting chance.






# Prayer's A Two Way Street

Seeking God with questions and the confusion that comes when you get an answer. Is it the answer you were hoping for? Did you ask the right question? What if you don't get an answer at all?

by Derrick Engoy



**I**magine for a moment that God is speaking to you... right now.

But instead of hearing a profound morsel of wisdom, He simply tells you to leave everything you know and head in a direction that isn't even particularly clear. You're allowed to take your immediate family, as well as one of your brother's sons, and your belongings. But the certainty of your extended family, inherited job security, and solace of your friends are now history. You have to leave all your comforts behind. He promises you protection and provision, but, ultimately, God leaves it at that.

What would you do?

In Genesis 12, Abram is faced with this exact dilemma. God gives the father of Israel's faith two choices—either stay in a place he knows like the back of his hand or jump into a life, new and unknown, that's backed by the Creator. Thankfully for us, Abram obeyed. So what does this have to do with prayer?

For years, my prayer life was bookended by



"Dear God" and "In Jesus' name, Amen." For the most part, the middle was two to three minutes (if that) of obnoxiously arrogant demands. Sure I would throw in a "thank you" and an "I'm grateful for," but my prayer life was similar to a two-year-old who tells his parents "no" every time they ask him to put away his toys, and rants orders for new playthings every chance he can.

I spoke to God, but didn't listen to Him.

Prayer is supposed to be a two-way communication between God and us. Yet many times, we do all the talking. We've resorted to using our prayer times as one-minute monologues. We even have the audacity to expect God to answer when we don't take the time to listen to what He might have to say.

God is dying to have a conversation with us. He looks forward to those moments when we take time out of our day to spend time with Him. And He definitely has a lot to say. Unfortunately, we miss out on the morsels of wisdom because we're so quick to get to the latter part of the bookend and go about our business.

Jesus, in the Beatitudes, told the crowd to pray with the utmost honesty and simplicity. He said, in Matthew 6:7-8, "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him (NIV)."

Coming out of college into the middle of a confused career path, I continually asked God for guidance. I appealed to Him to clearly show me what career I needed to pursue. On top of that, I was nearing my wedding date and I desperately needed answers that would allow me to provide for my new family and live the American dream of having a nice home and 2.5 children. I, as Jesus so eloquently put it, babbled on and on, hoping that God would hear me. Ironically, He did. And He actually spoke and answered my prayers. I just wasn't listening.

When I finally decided to listen, I heard God's desire for me to leave my job and go. Where? At the time, it was unclear. But like Abram, God simply wanted me to obey.

When it comes to our relationship with God, I think most of us are willing to do just about anything (or, at least we tell Him that we are). But when it comes to complete obedience to Him, things become quite different. We're willing to say, in prayer, "I'll do this God, if you come through for me. I'll give up my addiction to alcohol, if you help my family out with our finances. If you bless me with a second chance to make things right, I'll go to church more often, pray daily, and devoutly read your word every morning."

We're quick to negotiate with God.

Yet, when it comes to diving head first into God's call for our lives, we hesitate. And for whatever reason, we're willing to sacrifice everything for that one thing we want at the time. The funny thing is God could care less about our sacrifices.

After the nation of Israel—or more specifically, Saul—took the practice of sacrificing animals for the atonement of sins too

far, God simply told them that all He really desires is their obedience, not their sacrifices. (1 Samuel 15:22)

Many times we pray out of desperation or an anguishing desire of our hearts. Other times we only resort to prayer because we want something from God, like a quick, easy solution, and can miss the deeper relationship. We treat God as if He were a genie promising to grant our wishes. But it doesn't always work that way.

Does that mean we should avoid prayer altogether or refrain from asking God for things? Of course not.

Remember, prayer is a two-way street. God *wants* us to come to Him with our requests. He wants us to come to him with our deep longings and desires. God wants us to divulge our hearts and vulnerabilities. But we need to be mindful that God wants to say something too and we have to be ready to accept what He has to say.

When God called me to leave my job security, I had no idea I was being called to a life more fulfilling than what a yearly salary could provide. I was leaning more on what made sense than on Him who actually knew what was ahead. I didn't know what every day would look like if I actually left my job. But after all the arguing, I let my guard down, trusted God, and left everything behind.

Sure the first few months terrified me, but I slowly began realizing God planted me in the center of what it meant to fully rely on Him. With a wife-to-be by my side and no job, the only one I could trust was God. After all, it was He who led me down the path of uncertainty.

Being a pastor and as involved as I am with the community now, in hindsight, had I held on to my other job I wouldn't have as much time to invest in the people I love. Leaving my job, in this case, was not only following God's lead, but was His way of releasing me from the shackles I didn't realize were binding me. It was God's way of building my trust and faith in Him, rather than building on my limited capacity to achieve.

Imagine for a moment.

God spoke over the course of six days and everything He articulated came into existence. Now imagine that very power speaking into your prayer life.

Imagine the possibilities.

## I spoke to God, but didn't listen to Him.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# From The Land Of The Dead To The Land Of The Living Conquering Depression With Christ

by Shannon Clark-Rivera

**I** don't know if my father was the first in our family tree to commit suicide, but what I do know is that when it's my time to leave this earth, it will not be by my own hand. At one point though, I felt differently.

I wanted to take my own life. It was a dark and scary time, and it was only God who prevented this act from occurring. When I was going through this period of anguish and anxiety I did not think that I would ever again enjoy the sunshine as God meant for me to enjoy it. Yet it was this dark pit, devoid of any light or even an atom of hope, that brought me to the place where I was able to reach for light from the only true source of eternal light.

I have since looked back on that time of my depression and wondered if there could have been another way that God could have reached me. I would often ask God, "Why did I have to go through that level of depression and be like a zombie for six months? God, why did you allow this to happen?" Now things aren't always God's doing, and sometimes there aren't answers or even reasons, but in my case, as time has passed, it has become clearer to me that God allowed me to go through this very scary, extremely dark and gloomy time because I would not have listened otherwise. Stubborn and with an opinionated personality, what I endured allowed me to listen to God again and led me to re-dedicate my life to Christ.

I was 29 going on 30 years old, and I had not picked up

my Bible in years, although I did occasionally still pray to God and often wrote to God in my journal. Other than that, I had cut God out of my life by deciding that Christianity was too narrow of a religion. I had decided when I was 18 that I did not want to be a Christian anymore and that I would no longer go to church. I was entering college and needed to focus on studies and concrete realities, and for me, Christianity was not included in this.

My depression started because I was extremely worried about the lack of having a career and about having dropped out of three Master's programs. To put this in context, ever since I was 18, I knew what I wanted to do. I had planned everything out. I was going to get my B.A. in psychology and then get a

Master's in Counseling or Social Work. I was then going to find the right guy and have four children starting with the first one at 26.

I completed my B.A. when I was 23 and started a Master's in Social Work the following semester, but dropped out after one

semester because I was having second thoughts. I looked into studying law, only to be scared out of it because of the LSATs, and did some Master's coursework in Urban Planning. Afterwards, I returned to try again at a Master's in Social Work. While I was a part-time student, I had an internship as a therapist at a school-based program. While interning in the program, I began having anxiety attacks and my fear of not being a good enough counselor plagued me. The physical and psychological doubt raked me into paralysis and I knew I could not continue with the program.

I had decided when I was  
18 that I did not want to be a  
Christian anymore.



*“For you, oh Lord, have delivered  
my soul from death, my eyes from  
tears, my feet from stumbling, that  
I may walk before the Lord in the  
land of the living.” Psalm 116:8-9*

Money started becoming an issue. Since my husband was working toward his doctorate, he wasn't making much money. I thought I needed to make money for us, so I took a real estate class and then got a job as a Loan Counselor at a bank and quit my Consumer Credit Counseling job to make more money. This position was stressful because I had a lot to learn and I had to do it quickly. It was during this time that I began to experience the beginning symptoms of depression. I was not eating very much. I had trouble sleeping and I was almost always worried. One day on the job I had to go to the bathroom and cry because I felt inadequate and was so stressed; this was part of an anxiety attack. Being a perfectionist and not allowing myself room to make mistakes was a huge contributing factor to the beginning of my depression. I ended up quitting that job. The course of these events built upon each other until I realized I could not relieve the weight of them on my own.

God's love is like light; it follows the darkness wherever it goes and it breaks through the slightest opening. God pulled me out of my depression with His light. I reached a point where I was not able to work. I was not functioning. I was not paying bills or even cooking. I could only carry myself to the bathroom. I had lost 20 pounds in about two months. My side was aching, and I had a horrible cough, probably due to malnutrition. I was always lying lethargically on my couch, hopelessness overtaking me. My husband was working from home and probably worried sick as well.

My husband and I had just gotten off the phone with a psychiatrist and made an appointment for the next day, which was not soon enough. I was laying on the couch, wishing that I was dead because that would be the easiest solution to how to best deal with the mess I had made of my life (that's what I thought at the time). I literally felt like a big black hole was trying to swallow me, suck me in and never let me out again; it was one of the deepest, darkest parts of my depression. As I was laying there on the couch, trying to sleep, I heard the song "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine" playing in my head. I had not heard that song since I was probably 8 years old and I definitely had not thought of that song in many years. Yet, there it was playing in my head as if I had just sung it that morning at church. It was like a large shot of adrenaline into my veins. As soon as I heard that song playing in my head, a glimpse of hope and light broke through that black hole that I was in. I got up and found my husband and asked him to take me to the beach to walk along the ocean because I needed to get outside. This was surprising to him because he had tried to get me to go outside for three days and I didn't want to go. We went to walk by the ocean and I was beginning to feel just a little normal again and began to feel the first rays of God's salvation.

When my depression was getting too heavy to bear,

God used the Holy Spirit to intervene and sing to me because I was seriously contemplating taking my own life. You probably think that after I heard "This little light of mine" playing in my head that I was sure that it was God and re-dedicated my life to Christ and started on the road to hope and happiness. But no, I'm stubborn, so I was still in the pit of depression and I decided to ask God that if He were really here for me, to speak to me through His word in the Bible. I sat down on my couch with my Bible in my hand and I asked God to speak to me when I opened it. I opened my Bible (with the Holy Spirit's leading no doubt) and it opened to Matthew 6:22 (NIV); "The eye is the lamp of the body, if the eye is good the whole body will be full of light, if the eye is bad the whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" Now God doesn't always work this way, but this time He did. This spoke to my heart, my life and my depression. First of all it was amazing that my eyes went directly to this verse in my Bible. This verse is towards the bottom of the page and it was not underlined at the time. God was telling me that I had been focusing on the negative aspects in my life and that is why my mind and body was so full of darkness. I then read the verses, "Therefore I tell you, do not

worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly

## [The Holy Spirit] kept me walking in the land of the living.

Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these." (Matthew 6:25-29, NIV). I wept for at least half an hour about this, because God was speaking directly to me and to my situation. He had proved to me that He was real and cared about me, and I will never doubt His existence again for the rest of my life.

My time recovering from depression was a time of renewal and immersing myself in the presence of God. Having a relationship with God at this time meant reading my Bible everyday for as long as I needed. It meant praying for at least an hour everyday and singing praise songs in the car and at home. God used different people to minister to me in order for me to become healthy. My relationship with my husband was a key element to my recovery. He was an angel here on earth for me, while I was in the black hole of depression he loved me like a mother or father loves her/his child, and I needed that unconditional love. He knew the true meaning of the marriage vow, "in sickness or in health."

Another person who showed me unconditional love was the Holy Spirit. One day I went into a Christian bookstore



and I specifically went to look for a book regarding Josephus, the historian that lived soon after Jesus died on the cross. But instead, while I was looking through the books, I literally felt like my eyes were led to another book, *Victory over Darkness*. I totally needed this book and the Holy Spirit knew it. This book helped me to know how to start changing my thought pattern and begin to see myself as the beautiful child that God had made me. I found out about Freedom Through Christ Ministries and called a church that I found listed in the back of the book to ask about counseling and prayer. At this church I was prayed for and counseled by an awesome woman of God. She was so full of faith and words of wisdom for me. It was another ingredient that God knew I needed in order to get me on the road to being healthy again.

It has been eleven years since I experienced severe depression and I know now that I am genetically disposed towards depression and I have been taking antidepressants for many years now, with some lapses. I definitely thank God for the researchers that came up with my medication, because it has kept me enjoying the sunshine as God meant for me to enjoy it. And the Holy Spirit's comfort, along with God's glory and Jesus' word, has kept me walking in the land of the living.

## The Reality

Why do people take their lives? Because they are completely spent; they have no hope in order to go on with everyday life and they are severely depressed. Once it's at the point they are seriously considering suicide they are no longer living in this world. As most of us know, perhaps they are functioning—eating, working, walking down the street—but they are like flesh that has been drained of the blood. So when suicide enters a person's mind it is quite simple to take the steps to take his or her life because he or she already feels half dead. It is one of the worst places to be: another hell on earth.

## What is Depression?

According to the DSM-IVTR, a manual used by professionals to diagnose mental disorders, on WebMD.com, depression occurs when you have at least five of the following nine symptoms at the same time:

- \* a depressed mood during most of the day, particularly in the morning
- \* fatigue or loss of energy almost every day
- \* feelings of worthlessness or guilt almost every day
- \* impaired concentration, indecisiveness
- \* insomnia or hypersomnia (excessive sleeping) almost every day
- \* markedly diminished interest or pleasure in almost all activities nearly every day
- \* recurring thoughts of death or suicide (not just fearing death)
- \* a sense of restlessness – known as psychomotor agitation – or being slowed down, retardation

\* significant weight loss or gain (a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month)

However, depression can look differently depending on your gender, your age, and even your ethnicity, so get a professional check-up if you feel that you have similar symptoms.

## What can you do to get on the road of wellness if you are depressed?

First talk to someone you trust. Tell them how you are feeling and what you are thinking about. This will relieve some of your stress and start you on the road to health. Ask Christ to guide you on your road to wellness, to bring you the right people into your life, the right books, the right music and the right friends. Ask Christ to speak to you through His word, through music, through other Christians. Seek professional help through your insurance or from a Community Health Center or even a hotline. See a therapist and a psychiatrist. Seeking help from a therapist will help you with your thoughts and emotions and the psychiatrist will help to find an antidepressant medication to help to alleviate your depression if it's needed.

Sing, sing, sing! Play worship music, sing worship songs to God. I know you will not feel like it, but if you begin to worship and praise God, your feelings will follow, you will be uplifted, even if it is just to go from a black to a dark gray mood. These are steps you can take to walk out of the gloomy forest of depression. Some books that may also help are: *Victory Over the Darkness* by Neil T. Anderson, *The Road Less Traveled* by M. Scott Peck and *Overcoming Depression* by Demetri and Janice Papolos. Psalms in the Bible can be especially helpful too!

## How to Help a Loved One Who Is Depressed

First of all, do not judge them or compare them to yourself. Accept them right where they are at and for who they are at the moment—their gloomy mood, dirty hair and all.

Imagine what you would do for a loved one that has terminal cancer or kidney failure, and do the same for your loved one with depression. Stay with them through the night, make meals for them, bring them flowers, take them to their doctor appointments, and love them unconditionally. Even if they tell you, they don't want you there or they are depressed, stay with them, even if they are angry with you. Don't listen to them about leaving, especially if they have expressed suicidal thoughts. Get them professional help if they do talk about suicide.

What helped me the most when I was being tormented by depression and suicidal thoughts was love and comfort from my husband and my sisters and love and prayer from Christians that God had brought into my life.





# Plugging Into Faith And Community On Your College Campus

by Michelle Johnson

*Just starting college and being new on a campus can be intimidating. Why is it important to plug-in? Why should it matter that you join a community to nurture your faith? Or a community at all? Michelle Johnson shares her college experience and the life-long friends she made through finding others to share her experience with.*





It was Saturday morning and I awoke to an empty dorm room. My roommate had gone to meet her family for the big football game. Realizing that I was alone was absolutely terrifying. After completing the finishing touches on my room, I spent the rest of the day counting down the hours until my roommate came back as I watched TV and surfed the Internet. Soon I heard knocking on doors and people talking. Eventually, a knock on my door came. I opened it and found a new neighbor of mine. She was walking the halls attempting to meet new people. It was then I realized that I was not alone and that other people were also new to the college scene. I knew that I needed to start meeting people and looking for a community to join.

Prior to my first day at the University of Cincinnati, I received a bit of advice from my mentor. She told me to sit down and think about what groups I wanted to plug into. I began to really think about what I wanted, the type of people I wanted to surround myself with and what new opportunities I wanted to discover. I made the decision to find a Christian group that was similar to the one I was a part of in high school. My leaders from Young Life suggested that I look for the Navigators (there are other reputable groups on most campuses as well). This was a group of people who would become great encouragers, walk along side me through my college years and become long-lasting friends. I highly recommend getting involved in a group during your time in college. The bonds I made in the Navigators drastically impacted my college experience and truly helped me grow in my faith.

Here are a few tips to help you get plugged in:

“I knew that I needed to start meeting people and looking for a community to join.”





## Campus Websites

Many college campuses will advertise about campus life on their websites. This is an excellent place to check and see what is available at your school. There may be links to each organization's specific website; this is where contact information, meeting times, mission statements and other important information would be.

## Facebook

Type into the search feature your school's name and group or type of group (e.g., "CSULB Navigators") you are looking for. See who is involved and use this as a jumping off point to start connecting.

## Activity Fair

Be on the lookout for activity fairs. These present a face-to-face opportunity to meet people involved in the organization you may be interested in.

## Flyers

Signs, posters and flyers will most likely litter the campus during the first few weeks of classes. Pick these up and check out the different groups. I have had friends who went and collected information that was either lying on the ground, scattered among tabletops in the student union, or that were posted to bulletin boards around campus. They would line up all of their handouts and would check out the meetings that fit into their schedule.

## Be Confident

Most likely you are not the first person to walk into an organization's large group meeting. Many new people will be there also looking for people to call friends. Do not be afraid to introduce yourself. Ask questions and make a new friend.

## Christian Groups

If finding a religious or faith-based group is important, try using the tips above. The most effective way would be to look up information using the group's website. Pay attention to the beliefs of the group in order to see how they view salvation, how they teach and interpret the Bible, and how they adhere to other basic principles of the Christian faith. Be sure to ask your pastor or church leader for Christian group recommendations.



A few well-known groups are:

The Navigators

[www.navigators.org](http://www.navigators.org)

Campus Crusade for Christ

[www.ccci.org](http://www.ccci.org)

InterVarsity

[www.intervarsity.org](http://www.intervarsity.org)

Chi Alpha

[www.chialpha.com](http://www.chialpha.com)

Young Life

[www.younglife.org](http://www.younglife.org)





# culture

## Christian Perceptions

HYPOCRITICAL

TOO FOCUSED ON  
GETTING CONVERTS

ANTIHOMOSEXUAL

SHELTERED

TOO POLITICAL

JUDGMENTAL



## Are Christians Too Political?

Photo: © Dustin Diaz | Flickr (CC)

Perspectives Collected by Kelli Ward

**I**n the last issue we covered the fourth perception mentioned in the book *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity: And Why It Matters* by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons (2007). In the book, Kinnaman and Lyons, with research from the Barna group, highlight the ways Christians are viewed in a negative light, especially among Americans aged 16 to 29. The authors' research findings indicate that Christians are best known for the things they are against, rather than the things they are for. Six broad themes represent the most common negative perceptions found in their study. These include the views that Christians are

hypocritical, too focused on getting converts, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political, and judgmental. Many of those interviewed in the study were quick to agree that "Christianity is no longer as Jesus intended."

We decided to get your feedback on the validity of such perceptions and asked you, in the fifth of this series, are Christians *too political*? From the responses, we were intrigued by the different interpretations of the meaning of "political" in the first place.

Here is what you said.

## POLITICAL=ACTIVISM

"Christians who are politically centric or leftist aren't political enough. They allow those on the right to represent the whole. Those who busy themselves hating on gay people, promoting extremist views on contraception, or defending their children from science education are the only representative voices.

The 'Good Christians' I know are too busy being good Christians to engage in tiresome political debates, but when an extremist minority is allowed to represent the majority, no good will come. I say take back the pulpit and let's hear from some Christian leaders who are truly speaking the Word."

*Michael Colucci*  
Los Angeles, CA

"Some Christians aren't political enough. It seems the extreme fundamentalist Christians are much more politically active at this point than other more accepting forms of Christianity, which paints a somewhat skewed view in the media of what it means to be Christian."

*Anonymous*

"I feel that before I can talk about whether or not Christians are too political I need to establish what that means to me. Different people will have different ideas about what 'being political' means. Obviously as citizens of the United States we have the right to vote and we should certainly exercise it. We also have various other rights allowing us to peacefully assemble, practice our religious beliefs, etc. I believe that when you see Christians participating in protests on TV against gay marriage or abortion things have gone too far.

I believe that we've lost sight of some of the fundamentals of Jesus' teachings and life. "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,'" is the simplest summary of what we should be doing.

The real problem isn't necessarily that we're too political; it's that we're too hateful and judgmental. What if there were Christian demonstrations demanding better shelter for the homeless? It may not get much media coverage but I believe that it would be much more in line with Jesus' teachings than what we frequently see on TV. I am not perfect; who am I to say that one person's sin is worthy of a demonstration and another's is not? I can, however, love people and I can choose to use politics as another avenue to express that love.

We need to keep in mind that they will, 'know us by our love.' More than ever, this is an uphill battle. Love doesn't sell ads or newspapers. If we're going to change the way people view Christianity, and more importantly, Christ, we need to be consistently following His most basic teaching."

*John South, 27*

*Oregon*

"It's true. But the reason is because we fight for what we believe is right. We fight for what we talk about: our belief, our faith. As Christians we are taught that faith without action is dead. By being political we say what it is we believe to be wrong and we express our faith and our point of view."

*Joseph Malepeai, 25*  
California

"Christians, Catholics, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, atheists, everyone is political. I don't think any one religion is more political than the other."

*Karma Turner*  
Los Angeles, CA

"Interesting question. I don't think [Christians] are too political. I think it is hard to put people in a category based on religious beliefs, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc. However, I do believe that humans allow their religious views to drive their decisions. I also believe that people use their religious beliefs to validate their wrong doing."

*Itta Aswad, M.P.H*  
Oakland, CA

## POLITICAL=INFORMED

"Given the fact that we live in this world, but we are not of this world I feel that most Christians are aware of what is going on politically. At the end of the day, however, we realize that we are not truly governed by man. God always has the final say."

*Jeanine Griffin, 28*  
Nashville, TN

"I don't think that Christians are too political. I think all people should be involved in the politics of their community, city, state, and national government. All citizens need to be informed citizens. No one should just sit back and let others think for them, decide for them, and act for them. We should have input at every level. I don't think it's a matter of Christian/non-Christian views....I think it's a matter of human/human kindness views. It's a matter of being involved for the greater good of humanity."

*B. Douglas, 63*  
Portland, OR

## POLITICAL=HAVING POLITICAL PRESENCE IN GOVERNMENT



"I think many people think that this is true because many American politicians in the higher tier of leadership present Protestant views. I think the reason for this is because Christian communities are willing to fund Christian candidates, more than other candidates, and there are a lot of Christian lobbyist organizations. Christianity is the largest religious population in the US [76% according to the American Religious Identification Survey in 2008]. At the voting level, Christians have a lot to do with the voting. The voting power is very strong, so their political issues are strong. Based on their individual values, that will influence the votes and policies. Christians [as a result] are indirectly political because of their voting power."

*Marty Lewis, 25  
California*

"I don't think it's a question of being 'too political.' As humans we are of this world, but when Christ died on the cross for us He gave us an opportunity to not have hope in what is in this world, but in Him.

Mat 22:21 (NKJV) "They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Therefore, being in politics is not a problem, being political is not a problem for Christ as long as it doesn't become your focus--that your gaze remains on God. Keep your eyes riveted on truth, the truth of the spirit.

John 16:13 (NKJV), 'However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.'

Oftentimes, things that are not inherently "evil" become evil because the demon uses our desire and passion that is a gift from God and turns into obsession and addiction. The only way to avoid being "too" anything is to follow His commandments, pray, study His word and above all, love Our Father in heaven."

*Alexis Peaches, 30  
New Orleans, LA*



Cellist  
Surfer  
Comic  
Cyclist  
Vegetarian  
Composer  
Teacher  
Poet  
Chef  
Golfer  
Carpenter  
Dancer  
Hiker  
Actor  
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# IN PERSPECTIVE

*Showcasing today's touchy subjects.*



## Saving Sex For Marriage

by Nicholas Sowell, Cailin Henson & Leila Evangelista

*We examine the Christian and cultural perspectives of saving sex for marriage, the weight that comes with the topic and the Biblical reasons for waiting.*



Most people have a viewpoint or opinion on premarital sex, abstinence or “waiting to have sex after marriage.” Christians are no different.

The generally accepted Christian viewpoint is that premarital sex is a sin. But why? As one of the Ten Commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” drops from Moses’ lips in Exodus 20:14, the taboo of premarital sex is etched in stone. But it is confusing, as the term adultery today, does not mean what it meant in the Old Testament.

During the time of the Old testament, adultery meant “do not touch what you haven’t entered into a marriage relationship with” and was applicable to both men and women. The word “adultery” in this context was also used in the same way as to commit fornication. When God gave the commandment through Moses, He meant to abstain from any sexual relationship outside of marriage. This is an important distinction from cheating on a spouse within marriage, which is the familiar meaning for most of us today.

Religion often plays a role in determining one’s view on the subject of sex, whether it’s in agreement with God’s position on premarital sex or not. Some see religion as trying to dictate their lives, telling them sexuality is a bad thing, ruling over their sexual decision making. Others see it as a safe haven, shielding them future pain, helping them avoid intimacy or vulnerability, or adding a layer of protection over something sacred. As each person is so unique, it’s difficult to assume that an individual’s decision would even share a corporate moral standard, even a Christian one. We are bombarded by sex every single day, so much so, that most have become desensitized to it. Billboards, commercials, TV shows, movies, and magazines, the list is never ending. Our society depicts premarital sex as being normal and totally acceptable. But according to God in Exodus, it is not acceptable. But is that decision to punish or protect?

Many perceive that if you’re not a Christian, you view sex as something that’s loose or casual and not saved for a single monogamous partner. Others perceive that if you are a Christian, you’re strict and rigid when it comes to your sexuality, you avoid your sexual desires entirely and reserve sex for a marriage relationship. But in real life the lines are often blurry, as even others believe sexual intimacy should be saved for the context of commitment but not necessarily marriage. Also the very definition of “having sex” is changed to accommodate our human desires, maybe to keep a clear conscience, maybe to do what we feel incapable of stopping.

Does the Bible say more about sex before marriage?

## VIEWPOINT

Premarital sex is fine. Sex, sex all the time.  
Whenever and with whomever.

## WORLD LORE

Everybody’s doing it. It’s a normal bodily need, like food or water.

## BIBLICAL STANCE

*“Everything is permissible for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything. “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food”—but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*

*Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*

—1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (NIV)

## PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION

What exactly is sexual immorality? The original Greek word is *porneia*, meaning illicit sexual intercourse, including adultery, fornication, homosexual activity, intercourse with close relatives or intercourse with animals. Anything unlawful, unnatural or extramarital.

In his book *Sex God*, Rob Bell explores the connections between sexuality and spirituality. He explains our sexuality between the parallels of animals and angels. An animal, he explains, would be the person that simply chalks up our desire for sex through primal instinct, as if it is the base nature of our behavior we simply accept because it’s part of who we are. We have a desire, hence we fill it. Bell explains, “In the ancient Greek world, people used a phrase to describe the understanding of what it meant to be human. They would say, ‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for the food.’ They understood a person to be a collection of physical needs – you’re hungry and there’s food to satisfy your hunger, you’re tired and there’s sleep. They

concluded that sex is just like food, so when a man was 'hungry,' he would go to a prostitute saying, 'food for the stomach...'

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 implies that viewing sex as simply a need to fill is entirely superficial and not beneficial, because it does not include God, nor honor Him. God created us, so it is for His glory that we should act. Sex outside of marriage is in a sense outside of God. And if we were to follow our earthly desires, we would not be following His holy ones.

Not to say that marriage is perfect, but there are additional risks that come from this kind of position, such as sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy and added emotional turmoil from ended relationships.

#### VIEWPOINT

Some people say sex is fine if you're in love or in a committed relationship or once you're engaged.

*"Honestly, I think it is okay only with the mindset that you are serious about the person and vice versa. That it is understood that you and him are exclusive to each other and can possibly see a long future together."* —Kristin

#### WORLD LORE

Some say sex will draw you closer in love, or that it is not directly going against God, but rather He'd simply prefer it if you waited for marriage.

#### BIBLICAL STANCE

1 Corinthians 7:36-38 (NIV), *"If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better."*

*"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."* — Genesis 2:24 (NIV)

#### PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION

Marriage is defined by God as two becoming one. When consummating a relationship, a man and woman

are combined in mind, body and spirit. This powerful act is reserved for marriage, because in many ways it is marriage - the two become one. You could argue that having sex is what does in fact unite you in marriage, but it's just not legally binding or socially recognized. The problem is that sex is not the only part of "two becoming one". There is emotional and spiritual connection that lingers, as it should in a marriage relationship. But those who don't stay together after sex are ripped apart spiritually, because the two were made one by God through sex and now no longer are involved. This is the damage that is done from considering love the only requirement for sex. Of course, some people's promises of commitment without marriage are kept, but many more promises are broken or people fall out of love. At least with marriage, a legal binding of mutual commitment, there is additional support for a lasting union.

Though rare, there are Christians who believe that the definition of marriage has changed since Biblical times. According to research displayed in sources such as Marilyn B. Skinner's *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*, and F.R. Cowell's *Life in Ancient Rome: Absorbing Social History—A Vivid Portrait of a Magnificent Age*, marriage in its earliest form wasn't an issue that democracy or organized government dictated the difference between. Rather, it was the definition of marriage at its roots that simply stood for an unconditional love between two people: A love so strong and binding, it was the love that made the two people committed to one another for life. There was no legally binding document setting them apart from others in the community, formally dividing their married or unmarried, it was simply "Love". Marriage was determined by the act of sex itself—not a legal document stating that now the two could "have each other". The only issue with this argument is that there seems to be some form of a marriage ceremony found in almost every culture around the world, formally separating the "married" from the "unmarried"—there was some public recognition and endorsement of the community. Even this idea of "love" binding two people together still recognizes that having a sexual partner was meant to connect two individuals in marriage. The commitment through sexual intimacy that one would make in the past takes us to the ceremonious idea of marriage the happens in the present.

It's difficult to base our view of sex-before-marriage singularly on our interpretation of marriage over the centuries. All we can do is simply look at God's written word in the Bible and rely on His perspective of marriage and sexual intimacy. From the Scriptures it seems clear that there is a difference between "making love" and being "united in marriage" in the eyes of God. No matter the differences in opinion of the definition of marriage, it still requires a "union of love" under God and a public recognition and endorsement from the community.



### VIEWPOINT

Fooling around is okay, as long as you don't have full-on sex.

### WORLD LORE

The majority agree that sex is intercourse and intercourse is penetration. But there are also some gray areas for many people. What about other forms of sex? What really constitutes sex before marriage? Is dry sex breaking God's commandment? How about fondling or other forms of intentional sexual arousal? How about oral sex? Is that too what God considered adultery of the mind and body? Are these also improper?

### BIBLICAL STANCE

*"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." —Matthew 5:27-28*

*"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God" — 1 Thessalonians 4:3*

### PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION

Seeing dry sex or oral sex as not really sex brings in a whole slew of confusion. In some ways viewing premarital sex in this way is simply risky, staring natural sexual desire in the face and taunting it. It is a dangerous temptation that many are unable to resist, throwing out the "it just happened" card. Lust is a very real and powerful tool used by Satan to create chaos among our God-centered ideals and fooling around is in many ways an accident waiting to happen.

### VIEWPOINT

Sex is reserved for marriage only.

*"I believe that it's important to save sex for marriage in order to prevent, unnecessary grief, heart ache, guilt, regret, unwanted pregnancies, and STD's. Sex was meant to be something that united two people, for enjoyment and procreation. Why unite yourself, procreate or enjoy something with someone you may not spend the rest of your life with?" —Brittany*

### WORLD LORE

If you wait to have sex in marriage, you'll be missing out. You won't know if you're compatible sexually with your future partner. Married couples don't have great sex lives.

### BIBLICAL STANDPOINT

*But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control. I say this by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. —1 Corinthians 7:2-7*

### PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION

God's design, plan, and desire for us is to be united to Him and for us (except for those who are called to be celibate) to also be united, man-and-woman through marriage. God knows our desire for a sexual relationship--and more importantly, for a meaningful relationship--and designed us that way. To give us both, God desires for us to put Him first as our meaningful relationship and to do that, He call us to remain faithful, to put ourselves and our human desires aside to follow His commandments. At some point it will also be time to unite wholly with another human being "and the two shall become one."

### Believe It Or Not: There's More To Life Than Sex

*For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. —1 John 2:16-17 (NIV)*

People seek sex for connection, pleasure and fulfillment. The problem is as Christians, our fulfillment is supposed to come from God. On a basic level, sex connects you emotionally and physically with a person. On a spiritual level, sex connects you emotionally and physically with another person, but also with God. The vulnerability and self-sacrifice and giving that is needed to really love a partner is the same offering that is given by God to every

individual, a true surrender of love. It could be argued that the act of sex and the pleasure that stems from it was created by God to represent His abounding love for His creation, in addition of course to fulfilling His “go forth and multiply” command through procreation.

With God's explicit instructions to withstand sexual immorality, lust, and meanwhile keep the marriage bed pure, it is more than about simply obeying a command. One obeys because they love God and feel that is the standard to which we are called to.

Many people think that the Christian faith is all about self-control, not living for the moment, not indulging in a season, but it is really more about love. With a desire to rather glorify God through our actions because we want to make Him proud, rather than ourselves, and we want to be able to have made the right decisions for our lives. No one wants to have a conversation with their future husband or wife about how many people they mistreated or stepped on to finally wind up where they are now. On the flip-side of things, many of us have been in the trenches; maybe you've been brought down by something sexually. Many Christians can speak from first hand experiences how sex outside of marriage can be a very slippery slope, only growing faster until you hit rock bottom, not to mention the sexual baggage you carry after the fact.

But for those who have lost love or were promised commitment, have had a sexual experience that wasn't in the marriage bed, God offers insurmountable forgiveness. God loves you and would want nothing more than for you to come be loved by Him. For those who want to follow God's commandment now, regardless of your past—you can.

As Christians, we are called to conduct ourselves differently, even if that means refraining from a strong desire until God's proper timing, in a world full of sex. Our given mission is to have the highest standard of morals for our lives and in how we treat others.


Whether or not sex before marriage is seen as acceptable by society or as a travesty by the church, as Christians our faith is that God comes first and that He ultimately knows what's best for us when commanding us to stay away from sex until we are fully committed in law and in Christ to be with someone forever. Sex before marriage, they'd say, is not about denying ourselves, but rather lifting up Christ to reward us in this act, when and only when He deems it acceptable. 



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## JARGONSIN

### DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIAN JARGON FOR THE ORDINARY PERSON

I don't know about you but all the English grammar that I learned in elementary school has leaked out of my brain. The English language is so complex. Some words in English can be verbs *and* nouns. Take for instance the word *sleep*. You can *sleep* the night away and someone can ask you if you have had a good *sleep*. It can be a verb, a word describing an action; or a noun, a word describing a person, place, thing, or idea. Another instance of a verb and a noun is the word *study*. You can *study* for a test and you can do it in the library or in your own personal *study*. One of the most important words in the Bible that functions as a verb and a noun is *sin*. *Sin* is both a verb and a noun; an action as well as a condition.

The verb *sin* means to turn away from God because of distrust in His goodness. It is an attempt to get what is good outside of God, whether that is security, love, food, life, relationship, status, or reputation. The list goes on and on. Often recited are the seven deadly sins, lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride – all results of looking outside of God for things. Sin is the action of turning away from God – from what is good. This causes us to break the laws that reveal His nature and character. In short, *sin* is everything that moves us away from a relationship with God.

The noun *sin* is a condition of the human race. It is the reason why no matter how shiny and morally good we seem, there is always a dark side. It is this innate dark side that causes us to turn away from God and seek happiness outside of Him. Sin as a condition is a crack in our souls that continually leaks out evil and causes people to be separated from God and separated from each other. Christ died to redeem us from this condition of *sin* that marks us as humans, and it is only through God's help that we can hope to overcome the acts of *sin* that we commit in our everyday lives. —Ramon Mayo



## MEDIA TELEVISION



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### ONE GOSPEL

In November 2007, DStv Africa launched the continent's first 24-hour gospel music television channel. ONE Gospel is primarily a music video channel, but does offer about four hours a day of alternative Christian programming in the form of talk and music magazine shows.

ONE Gospel broadcasts seven days a week via satellite to over 47 countries across the African continent. The music on ONE Gospel is as diverse as the people that watch it, broadcasting everything from Southern African a cappella choirs to the latest music videos by artists such as Third Day, Hillsong United and Toby Mac.

The presenters of ONE Gospel are highly renowned and include Gerry Ranselli-Eldson, a former Miss South Africa, who hosts a show about modern day miracles and understanding the Bible. Southern African gospel heavyweights Jabu Hlongwane, Thabo Mdluli and Keke Phoofolo also host music shows on the channel. The youth aren't forgotten with a strong contingent of former child presenters such as Roxy Burger, Carly Fields, Xylon and Selae Thobakgale.

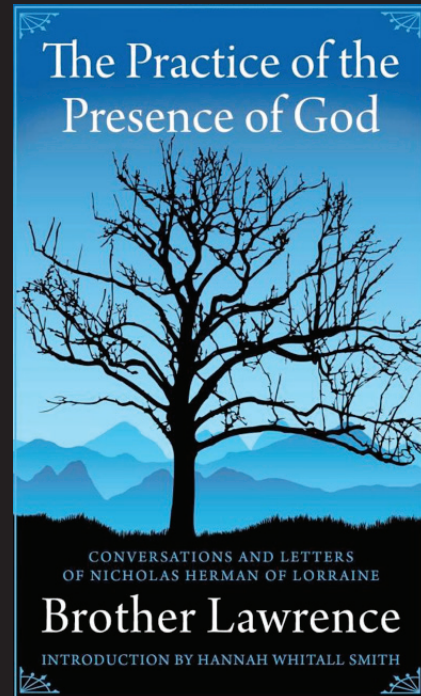
ONE Gospel seeks to be a channel that is honest, meaningful and unifying. One of the channel's slogans is "Reach, not Preach" and it tries to do just that by including content that provides joy, purpose and a sense of spiritual well-being to its audience. It seeks to be a compelling force on the African continent, promoting "unity in our diversity" through the medium of gospel music. On a continent so often divided by language, culture and ethnicity, ONE Gospel plays an important role in reminding Christians of what we all have in common: Jesus and music. —Wendy Harbottle

For more information on ONE Gospel:  
[www.onegospel.co.za](http://www.onegospel.co.za)

To buy a DStv decoder: [www.dstvafrica.com](http://www.dstvafrica.com)

To find ONE Gospel on your DStv decoder  
key in Channel 331

## BOOKS PRAYER



### THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD by Brother Lawrence

For those who struggle with routine or keeping schedules, especially when it comes to regular times of prayer and intimacy with God, the classic Christian text, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, might just be the encouragement you need. Compiled by Joseph de Beaufort, this book outlines a humble man's techniques to spending time with God. De Beaufort recites the wisdom of 17th century monk Brother Lawrence, who was known for his pious life and incredible relationship with God. Though Lawrence reserved time for the dedicated purpose of prayer, he had continuous real conversations with God and so was always aware of His presence. If forgotten, this small book helps to remind us of the ever encompassing existence of God. Lawrence's humbleness, love for God and outpouring of wisdom is as relevant to us today as it was to his friend Joseph de Beaufort, who decided to write it all down in the first place. —Cailin Henson



# MARRIAGE



# & MELANIN

Relationships can be hard work no matter who is involved. Wendy Harbottle discusses multi-racial relationships and the additional obstacles that may rise to the surface when cultural differences emerge.  
by Wendy Harbottle

Photo: Combined | Woman © carl dwyer (wagg66) | Stopwaching, Man © Ben Ishaque Iuthor | Flickr (CC)



4

*you are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen.  
We will make it through this.*

The words were written in irregular handwriting outside the lines that sought to contain them. They were written in red, scrawled across a page torn haphazardly from a notebook. They were courting words, wooing words - words meant for me, words meant for a heart that cracked a bit more every time it beat and pounded anytime he was near.

We met in December 2007, when the South African sun was being chased away by a thunderstorm. We met at my work. I am a TV producer and he was a guest on the show. He was early. He was also funny, entertaining and easy to talk to. We chatted while we waited for the show to start. Then bid farewell and went home. I saw him a week later when he invited me to the movies with his friends. We stayed in touch over email and text, and invited each other to different social events. I was never quite sure whether he liked me or not until one day I opened my desk drawers and in each one was a single long stemmed red rose. I couldn't speak for about an hour, I just sat there flabbergasted; he had taken my breath away.

A week later he took me for lunch but neither of us ate. We talked about my friends and the cold drinks and the way our bosses spoke. Then he took a deep breath, and said I shouldn't laugh, because he'd never done this before. Then he told me that he liked me, and asked if I liked him, and I said I did. I'd love to say that we then went on to live happily ever after, but we didn't. I took him home to meet my parents and they told me they didn't approve. They didn't like him because he was multi-racial and I was white.

That was the day my search started of how to have a successful inter-cultural or inter-racial family in a world which isn't always accepting of families, relationships or people that aren't like them. My search has led me to talk to families and couples of many different races, languages and cultures from all over the world. Some had married a person of a different race, language or culture, while others adopted a child into their formally mono-cultural or mono-racial families.

It is estimated that by 2020, 20% of the American population will classify themselves as multicultural, bi-racial or inter-racial. All terms which apply to people of mixed heritage whether because of culture or race. Technology and modern transport are making it easier for people of different nationalities and backgrounds to meet. As a result, multicultural families, whether through marriage or adoption, are becoming more common.

Jennifer, a Zimbabwean of Caucasian descent, clearly

remembers driving home from school with her mom one day and relating a story of a white teacher who had married a black man. Her mom turned to her and said, "Just don't marry one..." A decade later, Jennifer walked down the aisle in a pure white dress towards the man she wanted to spend the rest of her life with, a man her mom had told her not to marry, Phibion Mguni, a black Zimbabwean.

Phibion and Jennifer will have been married four years in April but were together for 7 years prior to their marriage. Jennifer recalls that much of the ups and downs of their early years together were caused because of uncertainty about parental approval. "For a long time the fear of what their opinions would be kept me from bringing up the subject," Jennifer confessed. "When

I came to a point where I was convinced that our relationship was right for both of us, I was prepared to face their disapproval and even rejection if that is what it came to." Fortunately, both families warmed up to the idea and now fully accept Phibion and Jennifer into their families.

The couple, who now live in Brussels, Belgium, don't believe

## Interculturally blended families and couples often find themselves at the center of discussions around racial stereotypes.

that their marriage is more difficult because two different races are involved. "I am a difficult person!" laughs Phibion, "the thing is not that Jen is white or not black (took me a bit of time to see this) but the thing is she is perfect for me." Jennifer chimes in, "The race or culture aspect of our marriage is more of a big deal to others than it is us. I don't really think about myself as being in a relationship that is different to other marriages just because we're not the same race... being in a relationship will always bring difficulties because it's two selfish people trying to get along and share a space! Yes, others have given us a hard time sometimes because we don't fit people's limited view of what a relationship should look like - but because our security hasn't rested on the opinions of others this hasn't affected us really."

Interculturally blended families and couples often find themselves at the center of discussions around racial stereotypes. Phibion and Jennifer recall how people often assume they aren't together because of their different races. Another couple, Justine and Garvin Willemse, relate how some of her old school friends walked past her husband in the garden and thought he was the gardener when they came to visit. Both South Africans, Justine and Garvin were put under much scrutiny as the country has only recently begun reshaping itself after apartheid.

Perhaps, because of the South African context, Justine and Garvin's relationship was originally not supported by friends and family. "My family [was] cautious," Justine says, "concerned I hadn't considered the effect on any children we may have. Garvin's family [was] concerned that I was playing with him. Why would a white English speaking doctor be interested in a colored guy?" The couple, who met while performing in the worship team at their church, didn't start dating until two years after they met



and got married 18 months later.

The Willemses have now been married for six years and have three children. Although their immediate family is now very accepting and loving towards them, the couple admit that distant family still treat them as a novelty or a freak show. "It hurts when they reject one of us, but we know that in Christ we are an example of reconciliation and love across the color barrier in our nation. We demonstrate that in Christ it works!" Justine speaks honestly, "Also we have children and a longstanding relationship, so it's not just a fling which everyone can shake their heads about and say I told you so..."

Apparently, not allowing others' opinions of your relationship to affect you is one of the keys to maintaining a healthy multi-cultural or inter-racial relationship. This is even more important when you bring children into the mix. One of the objections I hear most often to multi-racial and multi-ethnic marriages is "But what about the children?" In a recent discussion with Grammy Award Winning Gospel artist Nicole C. Mullen who is based in Nashville, Tennessee, she replied emphatically, "What about the children?"

Nicole who is African-American has been married to her Caucasian husband, David, for over 17 years. The couple has three children, two biological and one adopted African American child. Nicole admitted in an interview with FamilyChristian.com that before she got married she was more paranoid about the race issue than her husband, "I was always like, 'Oh no, what are people going to think?' He always said, 'Who cares?' We finally got to a point before we got married when I said, 'We're not asking the world's permission. We got our parents' permission. We got the Lord's permission and we love each other.' We don't get up every morning going, 'Oh, we're in an interracial marriage.' You just don't think like that. It's an important part but at the same time, it's irrelevant because it's a people issue, it's not a color-of-your-skin issue."

As a recording artist, Nicole, often broaches the topic of race in her music. One song, "Black, White, Tan" was written by David and Nicole for their daughter. "It's not bad to notice color. It's not a mean thing. It's a good thing," comments Nicole refreshingly, "When God made the rainbow, He made it multi-colored on purpose because He loves variety, He loves color, He loves beauty. When He made the grass and He made flowers, He made them colorful. They're not just black and white. They're not just pale. And so we always encourage other people that when you see these things and when you see people that look different, that speak different, get to know them. Appreciate it. Look at it. Don't become colorblind all of a sudden."

With 17 years of parenting under their belts it's worthwhile listening to the Mullens' thoughts on raising children. Nicole

says her children are aware of color but not overwhelmed by it. "We talk about history - there were good white people and there were bad white people. There were good black people and there were bad black people. You'll always have that. We have currently and we will have it in the future. Color's not what makes them good or bad. It's the heart of man. And without Jesus Christ, we're all inherently evil. And without Him redeeming us and saving us, that's our lot in life."

South African couple Richard and Anne Tait looked past the color of skin to the hearts when they chose to adopt their two daughters, Emma and Christina. The couple, who now live in Mauritius, adopted Emma almost four years ago and Christina a year ago. Although Emma and Christina have a darker skin tone

than their parents, Anne says, "The race of our children is not something we think about very much...The joys of adoption I imagine are the same as for any parent. There's nothing more incredible than watching a child grow and them being totally dependent on you for everything."

The couple admits that having children of a different race sometimes brings them more attention than they would like

and sometimes means having to answer awkward questions in front of the children. Anne also admits to being worried about how her children will be accepted amongst their peers. However, this doesn't make Richard and Anne regret their choice to adopt trans-racially one little bit, and when asked if they have any words of advice for people considering adoption they say, "Just do it! We have received more joy than is imaginable. The race and adoption are really no big deal. You and your child both need each other and I believe will form bonds as strong as a biological child. I decided long ago that I would die for my children - just like any parent would."

It's been 18 months since I found the note saying we would make it. We have so far, but it's not always easy. My parents still do not approve of our relationship although they are always civil and often surprise me with their kind actions towards the two of us. A year ago we decided to start dating. Since then we've laughed, we've fought, we've wanted to kill each other and at other times we've needed to be reminded of that note, "We will make it through this." I'm not sure what the future holds but I know my life has been made more beautiful and rich because of the diversity, and the diverse people, I have allowed to become part of it.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wendy Harbottle is a writer who blogs at [www.halfformedwish.blogspot.com](http://www.halfformedwish.blogspot.com). She tries to worship fully, spend less, give more and love always.

Not allowing others' opinions  
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relationship.

# world

## RICHARD WURMBRAND

*Richard Wurmbrand became a voice for the oppressed and an aid to the persecuted. His life's work continues to make an impact on the global front.* by Chelsea Peterson

**A**s Communist control took over Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand's homeland of Romania, church after church swore loyalty to the new regime in hopes of protecting their lives. When the Wurmbrands' turn came to swear fidelity to the Communists, Sabina told her husband to "wipe the shame from the face of Jesus." Imprisoned for a total of 14 years over his lifetime, and tortured for his love of Christ, Richard Wurmbrand was a missionary to the Nazis and Communists of World War II. Wherever he traveled, Wurmbrand exhibited a life filled with Christ and spread the gospel—even in prison. According to him, "A flower, if you bruise it under your feet, rewards you by giving you its perfume." Out of Richard's bruises came the ministry *Voice of the Martyrs*. Founded in 1967, *Voice of the Martyrs* is now a foundation reaching out to Christians persecuted around the globe.

The official website, [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com), informs the public of the persecution crisis going on all over the world. In religiously restricted nations, Christians are being persecuted, tortured, and killed for their faith. *Voice of the Martyrs* is responsible for distributing funds and supplies, and finding supporters for the missionaries suffering in these countries. They reach out to

many sub-ministries, providing books, information, resources and testimonies for the public so that others will remember those in need.

Although Richard Wurmbrand's life and family were ripped away from him for years at a time, all the while he was storing his treasure in heaven. Because of this, his books and ministry continue even after his death. Many people are unknowingly affected by this man's life and all he was willing to sacrifice. The pain of the past is truly being rewarded by the fruit of the present and God is still working through Richard today.

To read some of his works check out:

*Tortured for Christ* by Richard Wurmbrand  
*In God's Underground* by Richard Wurmbrand  
*Extreme Devotion* by Voice of the Martyrs

Other related resources:

[www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com)  
[www.omusa.org](http://www.omusa.org)





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# new identity

MAGAZINE

Winter 2008/09

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# HOW TO SAVE A LIFE

by Wendy Harbottle





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**Y**ou don't have to be a Baywatch babe or even wear a lifeguard's outfit to save someone's life. In fact you don't even have to leave the comfort of your armchair or part with much hard-earned cash. Even during the recession, there are relatively easy ways to be a savior. Here are our top ten:

### 1. Sponsor a LifeStraw®

You're meant to drink 8 glasses of water a day but more than one billion people (start counting because that's a lot of people) don't have access to clean drinking water. However, they could if they had a Lifestraw®. A Lifestraw® is a water purifier that looks like an overgrown straw but makes even toilet water taste like spring water. Head over to [www.lifestraw.com](http://www.lifestraw.com) to donate a straw for as little as three dollars.

### 2. Give the gift of the Jab

You probably can't remember all the vaccinations you had as a child. Most of your vaccinations took place before you were two years of age and protected you against polio, small pox and a whole host of other diseases that you're fortunate enough to never have heard of. Immunization can be expensive, but for just \$8 at [www.gifts4good.co.za](http://www.gifts4good.co.za) you could equip a community nurse in South Africa with an immunization kit and save a child's life.

### 3. Just listen

If your friend starts telling you about something terrible that's happened to them, open your ears and close your mouth. You never know when just listening might be all a person needs to prevent them from ending their life. Simple rule of thumb here – ask more questions than you answer. Best of all - this one costs nothing!

### 4. Be Streetsmart

You don't want to give the street kid money but you don't want him to starve to death either. What do you do? Believe it or not—eat out! Just make sure you choose your restaurant wisely by going to one listed on [www.streetsmartusa.org](http://www.streetsmartusa.org). (Don't forget to check out Streetsmart restaurant guides in other countries like the UK and South Africa) All the restaurants on the websites offer the diner the opportunity to add an optional donation of \$3 to their bill which goes to projects to help street kids improve their lives.

### 5. Do the Heimlich maneuver

This isn't a fancy way to get the guy you like to slip his arm around you. But if you happen to be around when he is choking, you could find him in your arms. This simple lifesaving technique

is best learned from professionals and is often taught along with CPR (another nifty lifesaving tool). Simply go to [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) to find out where they will be holding the next basic first aid course.

## 6. Buy a mosquito net

We have all killed a few mosquitoes in our lives, but in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa mosquitoes have avenged these deaths by taking more than a few human lives. Many of the deaths could have been prevented by the simple use of a mosquito net. If you want to save a life, log onto [www.spreadthenet.com](http://www.spreadthenet.com) and for \$10 they'll make sure a mosquito net gets to a family who needs it.

## 7. Know your status

You've heard this one before but it's one of the simplest ways to save a life. If you've had unsafe sex then get tested for HIV/AIDS and make sure your partner(s) are tested too. If you already know your status, then head over to [www.gifts4good.co.za](http://www.gifts4good.co.za) where for just \$8 you can sponsor an HIV/AIDS test for someone living in Africa.

## 8. Free a sex slave

Bet you didn't expect to see this one on the list! Head over to [www.saribari.com](http://www.saribari.com) and buy a beautiful hand-sewn bag or blanket from India for about \$25. The money goes towards the training and support of women who have been exploited in the sex trade. A few dollars provides them with a safe haven and an alternative income. Each product is adorned with the name of the woman who directly benefits from your purchase and who now has the opportunity to choose a new life.

## 9. Donate blood

Only 3 out of every 100 people in the US donate blood, but this simple act can literally save a person's life. Blood that you donate could be used to save the life of a premature baby, a child with leukemia or person who was driving in the wrong place at the wrong time. The best part is donating blood costs you nothing except a bit of time. If you'd like to know more or to find out where your nearest blood bank is go to [www.givelife.org](http://www.givelife.org).

## 10. Sign your name

Cure® is an international organization which provides medical help to children who can't afford it. You don't even need to have money to help save a life at this website, simply sign a virtual cast, and \$6 will be donated to cover the medical expenses of putting a cast on a child being treated for a clubfoot. Maybe you won't save a life with this one but you'll definitely change one by going to [www.helpcurenow.org](http://www.helpcurenow.org)!



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# PASSOVER SEDER

*Create your own  
passover meal and  
discover the meaning  
behind each course.*



By Leila Evangelista

**T**he Passover Seder is a ritual feast that marks the start of the Jewish celebration of the Passover. Though the accuracy of the belief is questioned, many believe the well-known Last Supper prior to Jesus' death was in fact a Passover Seder meal. Regardless, the importance of its meaning and preserving its integrity should not be lost on Jewish and Christian alike. The meal evokes the themes of slavery and freedom, recounting the Israelites' bitter suffering and persecution in Egypt, and then their mass exodus after God sends the Ten Plagues and parts the Red Sea, leading them to freedom. These accounts from the Old Testament are important events in both Jewish and Christian history. Partaking in the Seder allows us to understand the practices of our early church members, as well as the Christian practice of Communion, which derives portions from the Passover meal. Like Communion, the food in a Seder meal becomes a tangible metaphor of history and teaching of religion.

Since Passover Seder celebrations are meant to be experienced and not simply read about, check out one of your local Christian churches or Jewish synagogues for interfaith services to share with others (Christian or Jewish) in a common heritage.

## THE SEDER FEAST

Though specifics of the meal can vary from country to country, certain ingredients are consistent in any Passover Seder.

### Parsley, celery, or boiled potato

*Karpas* is a vegetable found on the Passover Seder plate, other than the bitter herbs (see below). This is usually parsley, celery, or boiled potatoes. These vegetables are dipped into salt water, which symbolizes the pain felt by the Jews, who could only eat simple foods during their Egyptian enslavement. The salt water represents the tears shed during that time.

### Unleavened Bread

There are three *matzahs* (unleavened bread) served during the meal. As described in the Torah and the Old Testament of the Bi-



ble, the Jews had to leave Egypt in a rush after God's final plague during the Passover. They left so quickly that they could not allow the bread dough to rise, so the bread was quickly baked in its unleavened state and taken with them as they fled.

### Horseradish or Lettuce

Horseradish or small pieces of different types of lettuce are served and called *maror*. These items are meant to be the bitter herbs that symbolize the bitter times the Jews endured as slaves in Egypt.

### Paste

*Charose* (also spelled *charoset* or *haroset*) is a paste made of a mixture of apples, figs, dates, nuts, cinnamon and sweet wine (recipes vary). It is served as a remembrance of the mortar that was used endlessly by the Jewish slaves to build the storehouses of Egypt.

### Roasted or Hard-Boiled Egg

An egg, or *beitzah*, is eaten before the actual holiday meal. Daily temple sacrifices used to be made in order to be righteous before God. For Christians, this can also remind us of the sacrifice that no longer needs to be made in order to be in good standing with God because of Jesus. The egg symbolizes that sacrifice as well as the renewal of life.

### Lamb Shankbone

The *z'roa*, or *zeroah*, is a bare shankbone of a lamb. Lamb does not necessarily have to be eaten, as roasted chicken, goat, beef brisket, or beets (for vegetarians) are often the main portion of the meal. But a lamb shankbone is present to remember the Pesach (Passover) sacrifice. In the book of Exodus, the innocent blood of a lamb was placed on the doorpost of the Jewish people, saving their firstborns from the Angel of Death, the last in a long line of plagues brought on by God to free the Israelites from the Egyptians. Thousands of years later, Jesus Christ sacrificed himself as the perfect Passover Lamb to save us from our sins and bring us to freedom through God. In John 1:29, John the Baptist says when he sees Jesus coming, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

### Wine (or Grape Juice)

Wine or grape juice is symbol of joy and happiness and is consumed at four specific points during the meal. This is done to remember the four expressions of "freedom" or "deliverance" of the Israelites from Egypt promised by God in Exodus 6:6-7: 1) I will bring you out. 2) I will deliver you. 3) I will redeem you. 4) I will take you to Me as a people.



## RECIPES

### MATZO BALL SOUP



Photo: © Ben Golub | Flickr (CC)

## INGREDIENTS

#### Broth:

- 1 small 2 lb fryer (young chicken)
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon paprika

#### Soup greens:

- 2 large carrots, sliced
- 2 celery stalks, sliced
- 1 large onion, chopped (reserve tablespoon for Matzo Ball recipe)
- Chicken bouillon, or salt and pepper to taste

#### Matzo Balls (Makes 8):

- 2 tablespoons of melted chicken fat (for kosher soup) or butter (not kosher)
- 1 tablespoon of chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons soup stock
- ½ cup matzo meal



Pinch of baking soda

## DIRECTIONS

1. Cover chicken with water in a large (6 quart) stock pot. Bring to a boil.
2. Using a large spoon, skim off the fatty froth as it rises to the top.
3. Reduce heat to a simmer for about an hour.
4. Add seasonings and vegetables. Allow everything to simmer for another 20 minutes.
5. While the soup is cooking, prepare matzo balls. In a small (1 quart) saucepan, brown the onions in fat (or butter).
6. Mix in eggs, stock, then matzo meal and pinch soda. Set in refrigerator to chill, about 15 minutes.
7. Remove chicken from soup. Take the meat off the bones and return to soup. Now raise the heat to a hard boil.
8. Take the matzo ball mixture out of the refrigerator. Wet your hands with cold water and roll a heaping tablespoon of mix between your palms into 1 inch balls and drop into broth.
9. In another 30-40 minutes, the soup will be ready.

(From Cooks.com)

## APPLE-NUT CHAROSET



Photo © ianagrimo / Flickr (CC)

## INGREDIENTS

- 6 peeled apples, coarsely chopped
- 2/3 cup chopped almonds, walnuts or pecans
- 3 tablespoons sugar, or to taste
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 lemon grated rind
- 4 tablespoons sweet red wine

## DIRECTIONS

Combine all ingredients and mix thoroughly. Add wine as needed. Blend to desired texture—coarse and crunchy—and then chill. Makes 3 cups.

(From The Jewish Holiday Kitchen, by Joan Nathan. Schocken Books, New York: 1988)



*More than just  
florescent green  
grass and candy,  
Easter is the  
defining point of  
Christianity, but at  
times it seems, well,  
underwhelming.  
Tom Koel talks  
about why we  
should buff up  
Easter from it's lost  
luster.*

# THE VIBE AT EASTER

by Tom Koel







Photo by Alexa Wen



Easter time is a hard time to get excited about. Besides the fact that it is loosely connected to spring break, you just don't see much hoopla about it. As we head into the dry days of spring, there aren't any decent holidays until summer, unless you're on the edge of your seat for President's Day or Memorial Day. Easter doesn't even provide a day off work, and feels more like Mother's Day, doesn't it? Secretly, everyone is really waiting for the Fourth of July and the start of summer.

It doesn't help that its name is mysterious, and its mascot a chocolate-bearing rabbit. The name Easter comes from an ancient fertility goddess, Eastre. Fortunately, the kids don't ask for an explanation of the connection between her and the rabbit, and I've never heard anyone ask for a justification for the chocolate. Even Easter's subtle sexual subtext and many a chocolate animal can't seem to bring much excitement to the holiday. It pales next to Halloween; the candy isn't as good, and the rabbit is too tame to inspire wild parties.

The energy--or lack of it--surrounding a holiday or an event is something that interests me. I like to study the stream of emotion passing through whatever social situation I'm in; I want to be aware of what the people around me are feeling. I think that the collective mood of a group of friends or a community is a fascinating and important phenomenon. When several people are thinking the same way, then it becomes more

important, more relevant, than when just one person has an interesting thought.

For instance, I think that there is a tangible feeling of optimism in the air on a Christmas morning. I think that our communities by-and-large are giddy, if not drunk, with excitement. I don't believe that it is wishful thinking or personal optimism. When I step outside on Christmas morning to walk my dog, I believe I breathe in a communal sense of well-being.

Opening presents, children laughing, and families celebrating are events that most everyone share on Christmas morning. And the neighborhood at large grabs on to the hope of better times ahead. Some connect to Jesus directly, while others more tangentially.

It is not the same on Easter. For one thing, there is a disconnect between the rabbit and what is going on in the churches on Easter Sunday. Non-believers do not make the connection. They do not see God in Easter. They do not come to the cross. They stand back.

Both events, Christmas and Easter, benefit the world. God came to earth to save man at Christmas *and* on Good Friday. The Friday before Easter, He died for the sins of the world,

and on that following glorious Sunday He rose, victorious, and humanity was no longer doomed by their sins.

I'm not sure why non-believers stand back. Perhaps it is as simple as being ashamed of the cross. When I really think about what happened at the cross, I feel two opposing and very dramatic emotions. I can barely keep my eyes dry

If you love the one-handed catch in the end-zone, if you love the stories of war and courage and victory, if you love the poetic tales of the gods, if you love a performance that takes your breath away, then you will love the story of Easter.

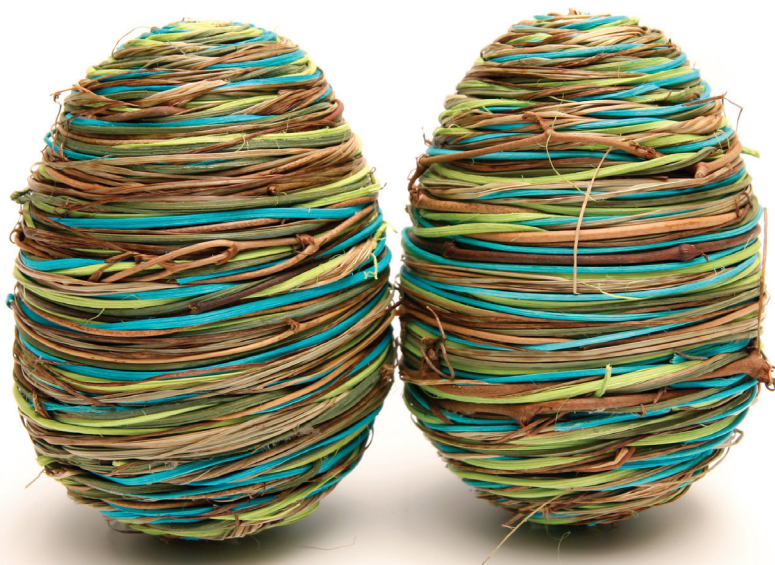


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because I cannot avoid the horror that the most righteous man that ever lived had to experience. He had to be tortured and killed for my sake. I did it. He had to go to the cross or I could not be saved. I did it to Him, and He did it for me. The thought of that fact, that unavoidable truth, shames me to the point of tears whenever I think about it.

Shoulder to shoulder with this heavy crushing weight is the fact that Jesus pulled it off. He was able to shock heaven and hell, to say nothing of the earthly witnesses. With a mind-blowing victory, beyond anything we could have imagined, he rose from the dead. What else could a man do that could really make the heavens stop and stare? No one could have done it; no one thought it could be done. It is no disrespect in my mind to consider Jesus the all-time superstar, hero, rock star, you name it. Compared to Him, no one has really accomplished anything. Compared to His, all other victories are babies taking their first steps.

If you love the one-handed catch in the end-zone, if you love the stories of war and courage and victory, if you love the poetic tales of the gods, if you love a performance that takes your breath away, then you will love the story of Easter. Christ is the performer, the actor, the accomplisher of all time. He is the physical personification of victory.

All across the world, Christian brothers and sisters will be remembering this event. Some will walk in parades holding candles or incense or signs. Some will make pilgrimages. Many will be singing, hands raised. Prayers by the billions will be going up, thanking God and remembering that victory.

We should remember that the tradition of celebrating the Easter weekend is not a relic of mindless imitation, a repetition of some cultural custom that we can no longer trace the origin of (like that rabbit, by the way). We know why we do it.

So Easter weekend brings these two super dramatic emotions out of me—exceeding shame and exceeding joy. And in the end, the joy props me up and I feel confident. I know I'm forgiven. The power of the victory has crushed the heavy block of shame, and I can be confident again.

Unfortunately, not all Christians get to take the time to ponder and celebrate the event. Sometimes I get distracted by that rabbit and his chocolate. But if I'm focused, I will be sure to go to church and dive into the reality of the events that Easter really stands for. And when I walk out of the service with everyone else, that vibe, that communal sense, will begin surging through the streets where I live. As Christians we can infuse our communities with that sense of victory if we ourselves have grabbed hold of it. I think it will spill out through our smiles, our handshakes, our "Happy Easter!" wishes. We can give more of this Christian contentment to our neighbors at Easter than at any other time of the year. We owe it to Christ to acknowledge His victory and to show the world that we find joy in it.



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# environment

## Enriching Earth Day

*Earth Day may seem like an overlooked day or odd thing to celebrate, but it remains a meaningful reminder of God's creation and His gifts. We share a little history of this environmental tradition and why this year might just be a good time to get involved.* by Joshua Mumphrey





**m**other Nature, such a fascinating, yet mysterious creation. Her complexity and consistency are indeed evidence of a greater power. This green Earth was created by God and given as a gift to all who inhabit it. We must consider the well-being of our planet, keeping God's gift in order, as it was first received. We must have reverence for all of God's creations so gracefully bestowed unto us, reclaiming our environment and enriching Earth Day.

April 22, 2010, marks the 40th anniversary of the globally-celebrated environmental holiday Earth Day. Annually, individuals concerned for the Earth's well-being gather together to support our planet and its ever-changing environment, establishing a better life for us, and a better way for our world.

Each year, you can find numerous listings for environmental festivities affiliated with Earth Day. A variety of organizations community action programs have taken it upon themselves to come to the aid of our malnourished world. Organizations such as The Earth Day Network (EDN) offer online resources, giving individuals the chance to share in the restoration of the Earth and its environment. The Earth Day Network supports and encourages young students, potential futurists, to take part in the "Green Generation," whose primary purpose is to ensure our environmental prosperity and secure our survival.

The Earth Day Network's new campaign "The Green Generation" was launched in 2009, awarding students who have excelled in environmental restoration. The Green Generation consists of normal people who want to make a real difference in the world. Anyone can become an environmentalist. Interested individuals can start by checking out Earth Day Network's web page. Members can actually help the Green Generation even without making crazy changes to their lifestyle! Committed consumers can simply buy 'green products' instead of their environmentally harmful counterparts. For example, try buying locally grown produce instead of produce that must be transported from far away, contributing to carbon dioxide emissions. Even worse, this produce must be chemically treated to stay fresh through transport.


The impact of Earth Day has yielded amazing results, offering new and obtainable jobs, a much-needed boost to the weakened economy. These jobs are generally oriented around the engineering of new and innovative technologies. Also emerging are

new positions for scientists, researchers, environmental analysts, renewable energy plant managers, associated plant employees, construction workers, architects, and many others. These are just a fraction of the enriching opportunities developing because of an increasing awareness of the needs of the environment. According to the Environmental and Energy Institute, "Energy efficiency now employs eight million individuals. The renewable resource-oriented plants are now rising daily to total 450,000 (employees)." Associated EDN resources reported, "Green jobs are a win, win, win, for the workers and the environment."

The reach of Earth Day has come a long way from its humble beginnings. In a speech to a small Seattle conservation group in 1969, U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson announced his idea for a nationwide day to teach about the environment. Senator Nelson tasked Denis Hayes with organizing the first nationwide environmental protest, and on April 22, 1970, twenty million Americans publicly demonstrated in support of a healthy and sustainable environment. The first Earth Day was received with unprecedented support from opposing groups; Republicans and Democrats, rich and poor, urbanites and country folks alike came together in support of the environment. Lasting effects from this first outpouring of environmental activism can still be felt today. The Environmental Protection Agency, as well as the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species Act were all created in reaction to Earth Day 1970.

In 1990, Hayes was asked to bring Earth Day to a global audience. That year, Earth Day went global, with over 200 million people from 141 countries showing support for environmental awareness. Since then, Earth Day celebrations have brought attention to various aspects of environmental awareness, from recycling to global warming to clean energy. On April 22 this year, join the multitudes as they celebrate forty years of working towards a healthier planet.

*"And God blessed them, and God said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the seas, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'"—Genesis 1:28 (NKJ)*

God's plan for us as Christians and unbelievers alike is to meditate upon His word, seek Him in prayer and much more. We must join together and make a true change in our environment, restoring and rebuilding a better world for us and for Christ. 

The impact of Earth Day has yielded amazing results, offering new and obtainable jobs in the present economic downpour.

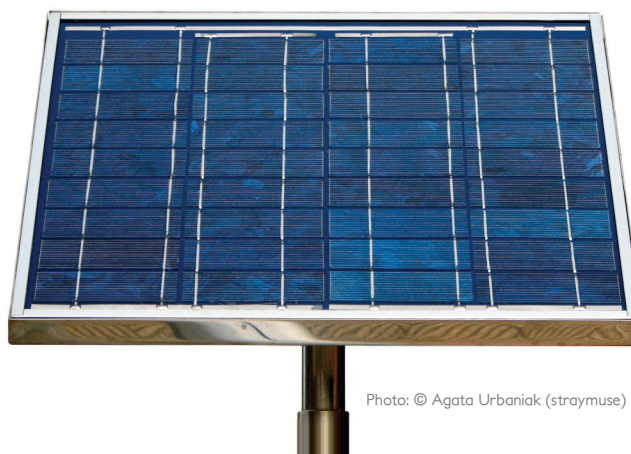
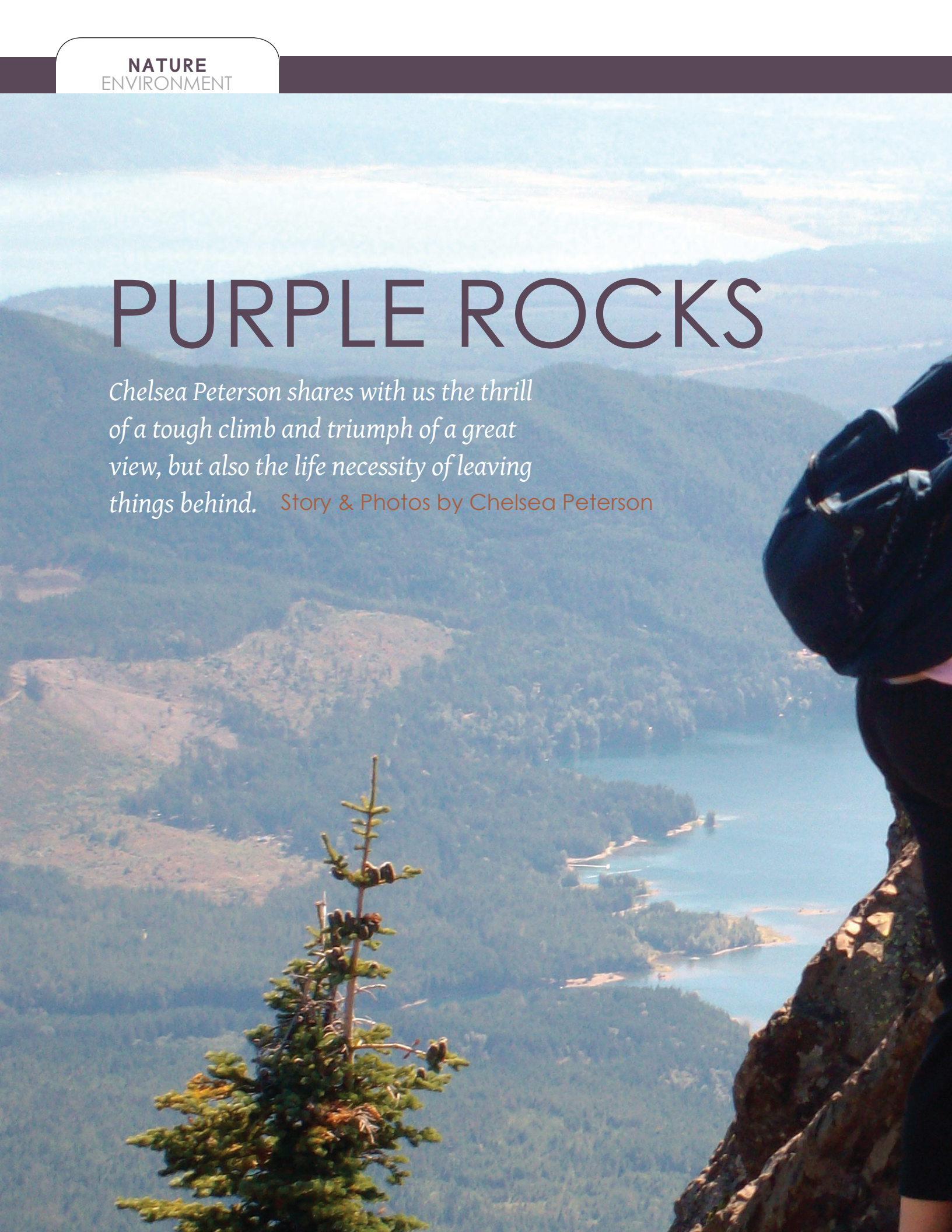


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# PURPLE ROCKS

*Chelsea Peterson shares with us the thrill of a tough climb and triumph of a great view, but also the life necessity of leaving things behind.* Story & Photos by Chelsea Peterson







I was sweaty, sore, tired and sunburned. I'm from western Washington--I do not handle sunburns well. In fact, where I live, if the weather is warm enough to moderately tan your skin, it will make the headlines. Yet even with the discomfort, I felt the thrill of success. Viewing the world from a mountaintop was worth every step.

Next to me stood Mount Washington and a host of other no-name mountains linked to the Olympics. They sprawled out like pieces of an unfinished jigsaw puzzle until the skyline buried them under a layer of cloud. In front of me, I could see only glimpses of civilization. Speed boats on the lake looked like zipper pulls, their wakes the open zippers. In one direction in the distance stood Seattle, its silver buildings like Lego creations. In my direct line of vision was Mount Rainier, reminding me how small I really am.

It took me and some of my family members about three and a half hours to climb the upper trail of Mount Elinor (those of you who climb real mountains, please refrain from laughing). Though not an incredible feat, it was an experience worth repeating and something my 7-year-old brother could manage. When we began our hike, Dad went over the rules of behavior (mostly for my 9- and 7-year-old siblings)- do not damage the trail, watch our footing so we do not get hurt, drink lots of water, and do not argue with each other.

Everyone was eager to reach the top. For the first 15 minutes my younger siblings wanted to walk at a furious pace despite Dad's instructions not to exhaust themselves too quickly. Every detail was exciting. The rocks, the plants, the trail, the people we met coming down from the top--even tree bark held some fascination for them. In western Washington, plants and trees are no novelty. Everything is green. But as we climbed, the scenery began to grow unfamiliar. Dirt gave way to rock and we discovered enormous boulders bedded down amongst the trees. Eventually, rock face took over entirely, and plant life grew increasingly sparse.

My siblings were wide-eyed as they realized almost all the rock possessed a purple hue. They had never seen purple rocks before. They began grabbing handfuls to place in their backpacks, but dad stopped them. The rock, though beautiful, would only wear them out, slow them down, and make it harder to keep their balance as the trail grew steeper. Instead of being grateful for dad's advice, my siblings began to argue. "Why can't we keep the rocks? What about just one? We'll be careful!" On the way down they were allowed one rock each, but until then Dad was firm. Unfortunately, it didn't stop a few pouting looks.

As adults, we can understand my father's determination to save his children from sweat and tears. But how often do we argue with God, our Heavenly Father, over all of our "purple rocks"? Often, our lives are referred to as journeys, full of mountains and valleys. The Bible likens it to a race.

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witness-





A breathless view that makes everything worth it.

es surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 12:1 NASB)

We are instructed to set aside things in our walk with Christ that draw us from Him. Yet so many times we become distracted with the “rocks” of this world. These rocks may not be a breaking of the Ten Commandments, but they may distract us, slow us down, or keep us from doing what is right or committing ourselves fully to Christ. Whether it is certain types of movies, books, music, an obsession with material things, or the need for the next thrill, we must look carefully to see if we have rocks in our spiritual backpacks. Many of these rocks seem innocent, attractive, or even so small we do not think of them as big deals. But they are.

Revelation 22:7 reads, “And behold, I am coming quickly...” Jesus is returning to earth, which means His followers should be racing as fast as they can to reach as many people as possible with the Gospel. The last thing a professional runner would think of doing is tying his legs down with extra weight. Yet as spiritual athletes, we often do not think twice about piling weight on ourselves. Society tells us we need more, that we can never have enough. The things that weigh us down have beautiful colors, shine, sparkle, and look too beautiful too pass by. They are the purple rocks of our mountain and like little children we often tune out the words of our Heavenly Father when He tells us we would be better off without them. During these times we should train ourselves to heed the voice of Christ so that “...what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” (NKJV) Paul says in Philippians that “...but one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (NIV)

About a year ago, I read the book *When God Writes Your Life Story* by Eric and Leslie Ludy. In it, the Ludys challenged readers to look at their lives and truly question how much of what we do is done for Christ or for ourselves. I realized just how

much I would have to give an account of before God one day: every word, every thought, every action. As a Christian, my purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. I asked myself how much of my life glorifies God. How many movies would I be willing to watch again if Jesus were sitting in my living room? If I were living exclusively for God, would I be as willing to listen to some of the same music? At that time so much of what I allowed into my life was worthless or directly opposed what Christ wanted for me. The old adage, “garbage in, garbage out” holds so much truth. This book motivated me to throw out certain garbage in my life that was hindering me. A year has passed and I see that I have picked up more “rocks” in my life and the time has come to clean them out. There is still so much I could throw away or sacrifice. I’m hoping that God gives me the strength to throw out what I need to until I finally become completely willing to live only for Christ.

The mountains in our lives will yield incredible views and worthwhile experiences, but are we doing what it takes to make it to the top? Are we leaving the purple rocks behind us so we can keep pressing towards the goal? Jesus says His burden is easy and light. Taking it upon us will be worth trading our heavy pile of rocks.

Climbing Mount Elinor was exhausting, but worthwhile. At the same time, I wish I had been in better shape to conquer it. We should focus our efforts on training to overcome our mountains in life so we can safely say, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7, NIV) 

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chelsea Peterson is a 20-year-old college student and works part-time as a veterinary assistant. She loves blogging, nature, music, being with her family, and working on the novels she’s been in the process of writing over the last six years.



The author resting at the top.





Photo: © jek in the box | Flickr (CC)

## SPRING CLEANING OUR HOMES AND LIVES by Cailin Henson

**A**fter snow and stormy weather for months, spring arrives with a feeling of renewal and refreshment. Windows are opened, dust is swept outside and the sun quenches new life for more hours in the day. Along with the change in weather, comes the cherished tradition of spring cleaning.

The desire for freshness, cleanliness, rejuvenation, and change leads many people to tackle previously unattended aspects of their life: the papers spilling out of their desk, the piles

of unorganized pictures lying around the house, or the tower of boxes gathering dust in their garage. Spring cleaning removes the clutter in our lives to give us a chance to bloom more fully during a season that literally stimulates growth and new life. For Christians around the world, the season appropriately coincides with Easter, a celebration of the resurrection of Christ and the new life His sacrifice brings for all of us.

In preparation for Easter, many Christians practice Lent. This tradition marks the period of 40 days prior to Easter Sunday

as a time for fasting, reflection and prayer. The significance of the 40 days is to remember the 40 years the Israelites spent traveling in the Sinai desert, and the 40 days and 40 nights in the desert Jesus spent in prayer and fasting preparing for His ministry (Matthew 4:1-2). The specific date changes each year, but in 2010, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday February 17th and ends on Holy Saturday, April 3rd, the day before Easter.

Lent and spring cleaning are similar in that they both are necessary hardships that result in rejuvenation, renewal and a more promising future. Satisfying (or daunting) as it is, spring cleaning can be much more of an emotional task than a physical one. Assessing your life can be a spiritual and cathartic activity. When we look around with fresh eyes and the light hits the dark corners of our lives, neglected areas or lost priorities are often revealed. Relationship cobwebs, spiritual clutter, and the dust from past addictions all come to light.

Spring cleaning through the view of a faith-based practice such as Lent adds new meaning to what may be seen merely as work. Lent is a great opportunity to take a deeper look within ourselves to find the cobwebs or clutter that we've personally been carrying around for the last year or more.

## WHAT IS LENT?

The first time I remember encountering the tradition of Lent was in college, specifically at the dining hall table. Food items were a popular thing to give up for Lent. Foods my friends once enjoyed were suddenly passed up. As a young student with little knowledge of Christian traditions, I thought Lent must be a religious practice where you tortured yourself with self-discipline and denial because it was required by a harsh God. Later on as I gained somewhat of a better understanding, I began to draw parallels between Christ's torture and death on the cross and giving up mundane things like chocolate, soda, television, or other things that pale in comparison to what Jesus endured. It was to honor His sacrifice that my friends gave up their vices. But back then, fasting from food items or other pleasures was unfortunately all I knew of Lent and consequently, I didn't see the point.

What I hadn't understood was that the physical commitment of fasting wasn't the entirety of Lent. There is a very emotional and spiritual component of reflection and prayer and a more intensified focus on the presence of Christ in one's life. Lent is a season of fasting, self-denial, and, yes, discipline. But it is also a movement toward simplicity, conversion, and Christian growth. It is a chance for reflection and transformation, an opportunity to reflect on how we can become more like Christ.

For example, suppose you give up soda and realize how difficult it is. But you may also come to see how much more energy you have by substituting it with water, that maybe you've lost a little bit of weight, or even how much you don't really need

it in your life as much as you thought. The material results can be awesome. But each time you choose not to take a gulp of soda, you are also reminded of why you're choosing not to. You are remembering Christ, experiencing a minuscule portion of His ultimate sacrifice in something small, simple, and everyday.

Others may give up something like television. People discover more time to do other things in their lives that maybe they thought they would never have the time to do. But in addition to

Spring cleaning can be  
much more of an  
emotional task than a  
physical one.

this, every time they choose not to turn the television on, they are given an opportunity to remember Christ and to converse with God. Others use Lent to focus on praying. They go through the struggle of giving up things that have really hurt them in their development as a person and in their relationship with God. Vices like smoking or over-consumption

of foods, or sins like gossiping and anger are given up in prayer to God, in hopes of overcoming it permanently. Lent becomes a spiritual training ground for us. This movement towards simplicity gives us a chance to see what's really within us, and to take control of our lives in small or big ways. It is a chance to make way for real transformation even after Lent is over.

Lent is not a biblical commandment, but rather a great opportunity to assess your life and find renewal in God. Many find that while fasting, they focus more on God or learn to listen for Him more intently. Emotionally, one might uncover pent-up anger or unresolved personal issues that might lead to prayer. Some might even realize that they have in some way neglected friends or family. During prayer someone might feel the love or contentment or peace they had missed in their busyness and discover more meaning for their lives.

## LENT AS SPRING CLEANING

The word Lent comes from the Teutonic (Germanic) word for springtime. It is our time to do a spiritual and emotional spring cleaning, taking spiritual inventory and clearing out the things that keep us from deepening our relationship with God. There are many ways that people practice Lent, just as there are many ways people practice spring cleaning.

Every time I go on vacation, whether it is for a week or a weekend, I get a view of my life from a distance. This is my own personal version of Lent. When I remove myself from the busyness of work, home and my various commitments, I have the freedom to see my life from a new perspective and can see the positive potential for changing, rearranging, and growing in certain areas. After a weekend away, I might have an epiphany about how to organize my kitchen. After a week I may be inspired to incorporate a more healthful diet, or see opportunities to correspond more with friends or create times for prayer. Maybe it's the mountain air or peace of mind that encourages my mind to wander and get creative, but I feel God encourages this



## You can make your clutter mean something.

break and this type of meditation so that we can experience the refreshment and rejuvenation that comes from a closeness with Him. In some ways, during these times away, I am also practicing the emotional and spiritual components of Lent.

Spring cleaning is traditionally a time to thoroughly go through one's home, look through all the little nooks, and to clean and remove the clutter from one's living environment. The physical work that comes with spring cleaning gives us an opportunity to assess our lives and find renewal in God. There is easily a sense of accomplishment when you've completed a to-do list, cleaned out the fridge or had a yard sale with stuff you had forgotten you had. There is also a sense of emotional well-being that comes from cleanliness. Seeing less clutter or creating a tidy environment in your living space really does emotionally impact you. The duration of your physical task can be a great opportunity for prayer and reflection, bringing you closer to bettering your environment and emotional health, and bringing you closer to God.

How can you spend time meditating on God as you spring clean? The basic components of Lent give you a great foundation to make your spring cleaning more meaningful and spiritual.

## BASIC COMPONENTS OF LENT

### FASTING: CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS?

Like physical cleaning, fasting is meant to cleanse. But that cleanliness is supposed to aid in your reflection of your lifestyle and in your relationship with God and with others. While clearing out your space, pray about what would be beneficial to keep in your life and what you can do without. Are you ever going to read those books that have been collecting dust at the corner of your office? Will you ever wear those red cowboy boots that you bought on a whim but have barely looked at since? Should you keep those Cuban cigars for guests even if you're trying to give up smoking? There are definitely things we need, things that we save for important occasions, and items with sentimental value that are worth keeping. And then there is everything else that's just...extra.

### REFLECTION: SEEING OUR LIVES FROM A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

Reflection is something that you can really do anywhere and anytime. For me it just seems to happen more naturally when I'm physically located in a place different than my normal abode.



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## IF YOU'RE GOING TO CLEAN – BE GREEN

Not only does your physical environment impact you emotionally but it can also affect your health. That's why when you clean, the products that you choose are just as important. It's best to use eco-friendly, biodegradable products that are easier on your health and the environment. Many cleaning products contain harmful chemicals or strong perfumes that linger long after the cleaning has been done. Some popular choices to look for at your local store use simple mixes of regular household solutions that are natural and inexpensive for most cleaning needs. For example, baking soda is a great surface scrub and whitener, and vinegar can easily clean windows and floors when mixed with water. You can find many effective recipes online for creating great cleaning products with what's in your cupboard. Clearing out your cleaning supplies to make room for greener counterparts can be another great spring cleaning endeavor!

FOR SOME GREEN CLEANING RECIPES VISIT  
[planetgreen.discovery.com/go-green/green-cleaning/](http://planetgreen.discovery.com/go-green/green-cleaning/)

While you spring clean, not only might you reflect on God's purposes or priorities for your life, but also your relationships with friends and family. Spending time reflecting on your life gives you the chance to process your experiences, allowing you the clarity to appreciate what you have—from your quiet moments with God to the slice of pizza sitting before you.

## PRAYER: A LOVELY LANGUAGE

Coinciding with reflection is prayer. You can talk to God at anytime during your cleaning process, and stop to read some scripture during your break. Take inventory of your items, your habits, your goals, and your relationships. Make time with God an important aspect of your spring cleaning. Even though we should all be in prayer regularly, few of us have truly mastered our schedules, so use this time to pray. Reflect in prayer on your gratefulness for God, what He has done for you and others, where you've been or how far you've come. What might have started as an unpleasant cleaning task can become much more enjoyable as you converse with God.

There is a sense  
of emotional  
well-being that  
comes from  
cleanliness.

*without watering the earth  
and making it bud and flourish,  
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,*

*so is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

*You will go out in joy  
and be led forth in peace;  
the mountains and hills  
will burst into song before you,  
and all the trees of the field  
will clap their hands.*

*Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine  
tree,  
and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.  
This will be for the LORD's renown,  
for an everlasting sign,  
which will not be destroyed."*

## GIVING: SHOWING CHARITY TO OTHERS

Lent is not just about getting rid of things in our life, but putting positive things in their place—replacing vice with virtue. We've talked about spending more time with God and reflecting on our lives. But once we've done this, another portion of Lent is almsgiving or charity. This can mean visiting a hospice or volunteering for a project. Even in the midst of your spring cleaning, you can make your clutter mean something. Try organizing the things you've removed from your home and give it to a charitable organization. In the spiritual and emotional sense, we can also be more attuned to the emotional and spiritual needs of others. Take the time to be there for the people you care about or even strangers, and share the refreshing presence of your newfound clarity. Or better yet, help others find clarity with Christ by spending time to help them spring clean. Remember, joy is experienced more fully when shared.

As you take the opportunity to personally reflect and renew your surroundings, you may find joy to be a likely side effect. And the commitment you put in will not only nourish your soul, but also nourish your health and environment. Any task, big or small, will not be in vain, because you will be spending time with God and may even see personal growth in the process. Being in a relationship with God and being renewed by Him, is if nothing more, time well spent; Isaiah 55:10-13 (NIV),

*"As the rain and the snow  
come down from heaven,  
and do not return to it*



## FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

What are some things that  
clutter your mind and heart  
and stop you from growing—  
spiritually and emotionally?

In what areas have you  
stopped listening to God?





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## FIGHTING PIRACY: CHRISTIANS AND THE DOWNLOADING OF ILLEGAL MUSIC

by M. Chitra

*The piracy of downloading shared music online is a problem. Are Christians culprits? Often, yes. What should be the Christian response to this law-breaking action? And why?*

Would you be surprised to find out that 95% of music downloads are illegal? If you're like me and live among college students, you wouldn't be. Downloading music illegally simply has become an integral part of campus life in the twenty-first century. What else is there to do when you're stuck on the computer with an assignment due date that seems so far into the future? With an access to high-speed Internet connection and all the time in the world, downloading as many free music files as possible seems like the perfect way to procrastinate.

Most of us know that making copies of music we haven't paid for is called piracy and is *illegal*, yet it hasn't stopped 80% of us from doing it. In recent years peer-to-peer programs have risen in popularity, and everything from music to movies to software is readily shared from one college student to another. Christian students are not less likely than non-Christian students to be guilty of piracy. Just why is this a cause for concern?

To begin with, piracy directly violates one of the Ten Commandments; "Do not steal" (Exodus 20:15). That's a pretty popular commandment, so no one can claim ignorance. If something doesn't belong to you and you haven't done anything to deserve it, then you really shouldn't take it—simple as that. It helps to remember that the songs we listen to are the product of hard-working artists who have spent months, sometimes years, writing their lyrics and arranging their music. Making a free copy of their music for our personal gain deprives them of the money they rightfully deserve. A common argument about how these artists are already millionaires who won't be hurt by a trivial sum of money is irrelevant. It doesn't justify taking something that

belongs to them. Besides, what better way to show appreciation toward artists you like than to actually buy their music?

I remember thinking as a first-year student, "If everyone is doing it, surely it can't be that bad?" But the prevalence of people who download music illegally doesn't excuse the seriousness of piracy. In reality, distributing copyrighted materials over the Internet has been established as a felony—a serious crime not unlike arson or murder. The No Electronic Theft (NET) Act of 1997 holds that anyone who "infringes a copyright willfully," even those who have no "purposes of commercial advantage or private financial gain," is liable to imprisonment of up to five years or a maximum of \$250,000 in fines. After the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) launched a litigation program to combat digital music piracy, thousands of college students have had to face the bitter consequence of persistent illegal downloading.

Yet in spite of this, music piracy is still rampant on the Internet. Warnings sent by Internet Service Providers (ISPs)

to users who have misused peer-to-peer programs are rarely taken seriously. In many cases, these users simply wait until they believe their ISP is no longer watching them like a hawk before they resume their illegal downloading. A lot of students are convinced they'll never get caught, and with seemingly so much to gain and so little to lose, they choose to take their chances. Some people may be a little cautious at first, but the relative anonymity on the Internet gives them a sense of invincibility. It also feels safer to click on a link from behind a computer screen than to physically steal something from a music store. Seeing others do the same can further reinforce the belief that piracy isn't a big deal.

The Bible advises us to obey the law "to keep from being punished and to keep a clear conscience" (Romans 13:5). While

## Piracy directly violates one of the Ten Commandments.

### No Electronic Theft (NET) Act

(b) CRIMINAL OFFENSES- Section 506(a) of title 17, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

`(a) CRIMINAL INFRINGEMENT- Any person who infringes a copyright willfully either--

`(1) for purposes of commercial advantage or private financial gain, or

`(2) by the reproduction or distribution, including by electronic means, during any 180-day period, of 1 or more copies or phonorecords of 1 or more copyrighted works, which have a total retail value of more than \$1,000, shall be punished as provided under section 2319 of title 18, United States Code. For purposes of this subsection, evidence of reproduction or distribution of a copyrighted work, by itself, shall not be sufficient to establish willful infringement.'

`(c) Any person who commits an offense under section 506(a)(2) of title 17, United States Code--

`(1) shall be imprisoned not more than 3 years, or fined in the amount set forth in this title, or both, if the offense consists of the reproduction or distribution of 10 or more copies or phonorecords of 1 or more copyrighted works, which have a total retail value of \$2,500 or more;

`(2) shall be imprisoned not more than 6 years, or fined in the amount set forth in this title, or both, if the offense is a second or subsequent offense under paragraph (1); and

`(3) shall be imprisoned not more than 1 year, or fined in the amount set forth in this title, or both, if the offense consists of the reproduction or distribution of 1 or more copies or phonorecords of 1 or more copyrighted works, which have a total retail value of more than \$1,000.



## The government shouldn't have to babysit us.

the prospect of paying a lot of money as a punishment in this case can be an excellent incentive for us not to break the law, I believe that it shouldn't be the only reason. Instead, we should do it simply because we know that music piracy is wrong and we choose not to have any part in that. As children, our parents and teachers taught us right from wrong and reprimanded us as necessary. Now that we're a little older, we should already have a moral foundation to build on and the government shouldn't have to babysit us—we should know better.

Understandably, doing the right thing can be hard because the right thing to do isn't always the popular thing to do, and no one wants to risk being known as a goody two-shoes. It is rarely a good idea, however, to abandon values that we learned as children merely out of convenience. Besides, the Bible has also encouraged us to "be happy if you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God will come upon you. If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs" (1 Peter 4:15 NLT).

One source of concern among Christian communities is the illegal downloading of Christian music. Some young Christians as well as church leaders believe that this type of music piracy should be more acceptable than the piracy of secular music. Even if CD sales decline, what is a little loss of money compared to the opportunity to witness to others and save lost souls?

In response, the Gospel Music Association (GMA) launched a "Millions of Wrongs Don't Make It Right" campaign, which goes back to the idea of how stealing is never right no matter the circumstances. With the help of popular artists such as Steven Curtis Chapman and Staci Orrico, the organization wanted to clarify that the making of a CD is a little more complicated than what a lot of people think. Music piracy then hurts not only artists, producers and record companies, but also the less well-known folks who work behind the scene, such as the truck drivers or assembly line people.

The issue of music piracy is rarely considered a serious one, but the fact remains that it is a form of stealing and is thus inherently wrong. Getting free music is tempting when we have plenty of other life expenses to pay for, but as Christians we also need to learn to have self-control and adhere to Christian principles at all times. We shouldn't be "forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth" (Ephesians 4:14 NLT). In this case, the least we can do is not contribute to the high number of illegal music downloads on the Internet.



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### 10 REASONS USED TO EXCUSE PIRACY

1. Everyone else is doing it. What are the chances of me being caught?
2. The studios and artists are rich. I'm just a financially starved individual.
3. Maybe if they didn't charge so much for a CD, this wouldn't happen.
4. I just don't care.
5. I'm not the one uploading (making it available), I'm just downloading, which is the lesser crime.
6. I've paid my dues, I've bought so many CDs. The studios owe me this one for free.
7. It's like I'm making a back up copy of my CD but it just happens to be living at a friends house. What's the difference?
8. The music I'm downloading for free is unavailable, a special recording that I can't purchase anywhere! So it must be OK.
9. The artists want us to hear their music, right?
10. If it's Christian music I download, it's like spreading the Gospel, right? Share the Word!

**BOTTOM LINE:** Stealing is still stealing.



# PERSONALIZED RETREATS



*Taking time away is a healthy discipline. Matthew Hamilton talks about why it's necessary and what can be gained from "getting away from it all" for a period of time.* by Matthew Hamilton



Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness for prayer and introspection, taking some time to breathe and refocus. So we know that the desire to take off and get away from it all is nothing new. Using Jesus as our example, we should make it a habit to take some time off for ourselves. However, the term we often use, “getting away from it all” depends on our particular situations. So often we assume that “getting away” involves taking a romanticized trip removed from day to day stressors: away from traffic, away from crowds, and away from the busyness of life. But the reality is that a retreat starts simply by quieting your mind, not necessarily changing your location.

To determine the best method of retreating and spending time away, you must first determine from what specifically you need reprieve. If it’s work, or friends, or even family, you might simply need to turn off your cell phone for a determined amount of time and spend some time undisturbed. For families with children, it might just mean finding a sitter and getting some elusive alone time as a couple.

Your preferred method of retreat depends mainly on what would put you in “retreat mode.” Many people find that devoting time to focus on a skill, such as a language class, cooking, or even yoga can provide that much needed time for themselves. If I have a few hours, my camera, and a tank of gas in the car, I go on a photo shoot and create art for my own personalized retreat. I look for anything and everything that might look interesting. If I keep my eyes open, I can find beautiful landscapes, cityscapes, and fascinating animals and people to make impromptu portraits. Depending on the time of day, natural light and its shadows provide ample opportunities for great abstract images as well. I may take up to a 100 shots in an hour and keep only a few, but the process of looking for and capturing the shot of a lifetime takes my mind away from my stressors, even if it is just for a few hours.

There are other times when you might need a change of scenery, a completely different set of surroundings. That’s when you should take a temporary break from a busy environment to spend some serious time in nature, but it can also be a chance to gain new experiences and take in the culture of a city. Whether you live in the city or a rural area, swapping your scenery for the other can be just what you need.

But more than “getting away,” the purpose of a retreat is to dedicate time to allow reflection, to gain inspiration and to renew oneself to better prepare for re-entry back into everyday life. Unfortunately, we don’t all have the luxury of week-long trips to the Caribbean or extended treks through the Himalayas. Fortunately, there are inexpensive resources that are available just to give you a break.

For centuries, many believers have sought meditation and introspection through prayer mazes. While not specifically a Christian tradition, many churches and retreat centers have incorporated these combinations of the spiritual and the physical to provide a sanctuary of peace. According to the website, Veriditas.org, “There are many ways to describe a labyrinth. It is a path of prayer, a walking meditation, a crucible of change,

www.newidentitymagazine.com



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## Real renewal comes from finding new opportunities.

a watering hole for the spirit and a mirror of the soul.” To use the labyrinth, one must only walk and follow the lines. This allows users to meditate and focus all their attention on one thing. Most facilities charge little or no cost for use of the facilities. A good resource for finding prayer mazes or labyrinths is the World Wide Labyrinth Locator.

As for a spiritual activity that is specifically Christian in nature, many churches worldwide participate in a specific form of worship called Taize. Named after the location of the first church where it was performed in France, this worship strives to promote reconciliation between all Christian communities. A typical service includes repetition of singing simple meditative hymns in unison with the participants. The languages of the hymns vary by the native tongue of the country, but are oftentimes sung in Latin. While mostly performed in Catholic and Anglican churches, the service has been adopted in other locations as well. While nearly 100,000 people make the pilgrimage to Taize every year, local churches also have services year-round. There are many good resources for finding out more about Taize services; Beliefnet.com is a good place to start. In addition, searching Taize in YouTube also provides some informative videos about the worship service.

While these suggestions may seem solitary in nature, they don't have to be. If you are connected with a local church or small group, coordinating a getaway for you and your friends can provide both a time of reflection and an opportunity for spiritual growth that can be both personal and communal. Group retreats can be found through local churches or if you would like to coordinate one of your own, a good resource is *Find the Divine*, an online directory of retreat centers. There are even listings for scheduled retreats that have open admissions.

Going away on a retreat can also have a specific focus. I recently went on a men's retreat with my church which focused on us being men in God's image. Meeting at a campground, the group had a big cookout, played horseshoes and cards, giving us the opportunity to unplug from many outside influences that affect our everyday lives. More importantly, we had time for individual and communal prayer and a chance to focus on what positive steps we could take in our lives. We took the opportunity to explore the roles we have as fathers, brothers, bosses, teachers, and other roles that influence those around us.

In contrast, one of the women's groups at our church recently attended a women's conference which took advantage of the many cultural opportunities of the city, such as museums, restaurants and shopping. But this time also became a time of fellowship, focusing on the time spent together at group meals, Bible study and the larger worship service.

Regardless of your reasons for seeking a retreat, keep in mind that real renewal comes from finding new opportunities. The benefit from retreat comes from the opportunity to take a break from the expectations of others and explore new ways to better ourselves.



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## PRAYER PLAN **SPRING 2010**

Meditate on the meaning of Easter and how it affects you. You might even feel more like celebrating.

Pray about and write down 10 priorities in your life. Try to arrange them from most important to least important. Evaluate how you're doing on each item and if you need to make an adjustment in your life to make room for your priorities.

Talk to a friend about what they're passionate about--playing music, helping the homeless, or education. See if you can help them jump start action in that area of interest. It helps to have the encouragement and companionship of a friend to take that first step.



*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. –1 Timothy 4:12 (NIV)*

# new identity

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