

God in focus. World in scope.

new identity

MAGAZINE

Spring 2009

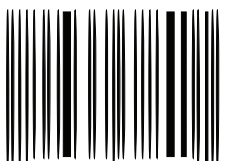
**GARDENING
WITH GOD**

**THE LIGHT OF
ETHIOPIA**

**INSIGHTS FROM
A CHRISTIAN
VEGETARIAN**

Higher Calling: Education

*How Christian teachers in public school,
private school and home school are living out
their faith and sharing life with their students.*



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Undefining Christianity

Being defined in the traditional sense means to be described exactly. However, if you have a word you think you can describe exactly, try looking it up in a dictionary. You may be surprised to find that you really only know a definition of the word, not the definition of the word, because there can be many alternate definitions for the same word.

In society, Christians are often defined in this “all assuming” way by much of the population and mass media, lumping Christians into one category or another, represented by one definition alone. Some define a Christian as a part of the Bible Belt in the southeastern United States, a megachurch, or as a Jesus Freak. Sure, those can be definitions of a Christian, but they are not the definition; rather, they are one of many. We are not to live our lives defined by society, though. We are to live our lives defined by Christ. And Christ alone.

Christ doesn't say that to be a Christian you must live in the Bible Belt, attend a megachurch, or wear a likeness of Jesus on your T-shirt—this is what society thinks. In Matthew 22:37-38 (NIV), Jesus asks us to live following after His heart: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment.”

Being defined by Christ does not mean we're all the same in the way we dress and speak, in our passions or interests. God created us all differently, as individuals with free will, from different nations, cultures and backgrounds. We are all unique on purpose and want to fit in the right mold—not the one shaped by society, but the one defined by Christ. That's what we should focus on, our own special blend of God-created uniqueness. In fact, we should celebrate it! That's what we try to do in every issue of New Identity. We want to celebrate the different interests, passions and hearts of those following Christ and living for God. We want to show society that we embrace diversity as we embrace each other—all disciples of Christ.

I feel like somewhat of a misfit when it comes to what society might say is a “typical” Christian. Honestly though, there is no such thing, besides being one who follows Christ. God created me to have a compassionate heart for all living things. As a result of this compassion, I am a vegetarian, and Christians aren't “typically” vegetarian. This was my motivation for including an article on the topic in “Insights From A Christian Vegetarian”, pg. 40. Though I'm a vegetarian by choice, we are not given such leeway by God in all areas and He specifically gives us more definite guidelines in other areas of life. Even with my decision, there have been moments in my life that I've wished I were different, wished I didn't have the compassionate heart that I do, or have feelings that sometimes weigh heavier on me than most. When I had to tell the man I would marry (who was not a vegetarian at the time) how much a part of me this compassion really was, I was desperately afraid. God reassured me the night before I spilled my heart to my husband that this was how I was created and it wasn't a crime, like society had made me feel it was.

As a new Christian I thought the mold I had to fit was that of other Christians, likes and all. Rather, Christ is the mold we are to fit into, and other Christians are molding themselves to His specifications, not society's. What an insult to God that I try and stuff away my compassion or any of the gifts or passions He gave me. It is far better to accept who we are and were created to be. To society, we may all look a little different but we're all the same to Christ, as we aim to fit His mold and no one else's.

Cailin

CAILIN BRIODY HENSON
Editor-in-Chief

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.”

WRITE TO US:

What are your thoughts on our first 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

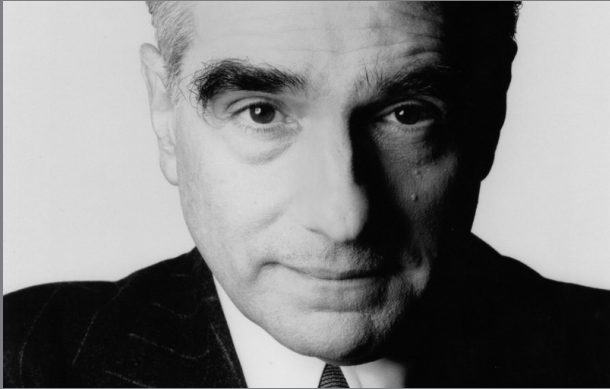


Photo of Martin Scorsese: DetLogan/Flickr (CC)

HISTORY LESSON

Silent Film

Filmmaker Martin Scorsese, known for his films *Taxi Driver*, *Goodfellas*, and *The Departed* plans to adapt the 1966 novel *Chinmoku* ("Silence") by Shusaku Endo, based on the persecution of early Japanese Christians, for the screen. This lesser-known part of Japan's history is believed to have affected as many as 30,000 Japanese in the 17th Century who were persecuted for their Christian faith. Scorsese plans to start filming later this year and expects a cinema release in 2010. (AFP)



Photo: Juan Romero/Stock-xchng

LIFE CHANGING

Recapturing Love

A nonprofit called Marriage Works, based in Florida, offers faith-based and secular classes that aim to help young married couples deal with the transition of love as the newlywed season wanes and couples begin to start a family. There are group classes for a small fee as well as couple's counseling sessions. For more information and to access their resources, visit <http://www.marriageworksforyou.org/>

VIDEO OUTLET

Sharing Faith

Average people and celebrities alike share why God is first in their life in *I AM SECOND*, a website that artfully highlights people's real stories through video. These stories about struggle, triumph, humility, and grace, from both young and old, are inspirational and give God the honor and glory for what He's done and can do in a life. Check out the videos at www.iamsecond.com



What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now! God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The Day is coming when you'll have it all—life healed and whole.

-1 Peter 1:3-5 (The Message)

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VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2

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


God in focus. World in Scope.

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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 representing interesting topics, issues and ideas from multiple Christian perspectives. New Identity Magazine plans 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 will help readers live a more stimulating, inclusive, and passionate life with God. In addition, New Identity Magazine will be 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.



HIDDEN FEATURES

If you see our symbol in gray, like this, throughout the issue, click on it and it will take you to additional content on our website pertaining to the article in which it was found.

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's Child

Committed to helping homeless women with infants make a life for themselves.

Photo: molly_darling/Flickr (CC)

"I'm very honored to have been chosen by God to head up a ministry that provides a shelter for homeless women with babies and small children who reside in the South Bay," said Tara Nierenhausen, Director of Community's Child, at a recent fundraiser.

Community's Child, a non-denominational Christian program in Southern California's South Bay region, is committed to providing homeless women with infants healthy alternatives to abuse, poverty, neglect, addictions, and hopelessness. The program offers homeless women and their infants safe, compassionate, yet structured living environments. At Community's Child, women acquire the education, skills training, employment opportunities and support services necessary to break the patterns associated with homelessness.

"I was shocked to find out we have 95,000 homeless children in [California], and these statistics are about four years old, so the numbers are actually growing. Nearly half are going hungry. The South Bay is tied with downtown Los Angeles for the highest number of homeless women with infants, so God really put it on my heart to do something in this community to raise up these women and children," says Nierenhausen.

"[The Lord] gave me a vision three years ago to move forward with a team of other Christian members in the community to build a facility and God knocked it out of the park. And while we were building it, he had us open up what started as a small food pantry in the area where we were taking care of maybe twenty families. But that food pantry and ministry has grown where we have touched almost 5,000 people's lives for Christ [last] year alone. I just thank Jesus for the privilege of serving Him and doing this.

"One of the major contributors to homelessness for women with children is acts of violence, whether is domestic violence, whether it's rape, verbal abuse, abandonment and it doesn't always have to be a spouse, a lot of times it's familial abuse that will cause women to flee with their children. A lot of times they hide and they hide because if you're found to be homeless in the community, The Department of Social Services will actually come and take your

children from you. So you've already suffered all this loss and then suffer the loss of their children as well, is sometimes too much for these women to bear."

In efforts to ensure a quality continuum of services, Community's Child works in collaboration with Southern California's foundations, business, churches, service clubs, legal aid, medical providers, social services, learning institutes, governments and other nonprofits.

"When the women come with their children to live in the house, they're given a lot," Nierenhausen explains. "The first thing they're given is open arms and unconditional love. These women often have a lot of hurts, so we really try to show them the love of Christ. The other things they are provided are food, clothing, complete shelter, help with health care, education and obtaining sustainable employment but also in obtaining a healthy support network. Most of these women do not have healthy families, do not have healthy support networks, so we set up mentoring programs, they go to Bible studies, they go to church, and we have in-services. They have a lot of stuff going on and sometimes [the women] tell me I have the bar a little too high.

"We also do a huge outreach, we have a community pantry and a community closet where we provide diapers, wipes, personal hygiene products, clothing, all kinds of things for families in need. This Thanksgiving we had the privilege of providing 221 families with complete turkey dinners to go home and cook and for those that were homeless we gave gift cards to and this [last] Christmas we [had] the privilege of providing 250 children in the community with a Christmas."

Nierenhausen adds, "We can't run without volunteers. We always need volunteers. If you're ever looking for a place to volunteer, please call us. There isn't anyone who can't contribute something." —Cailin Henson 🎧

Community's Child is located in Lomita, California. For more information call 310-534-4040 or visit their website at www.communityschild.com



Greg Park (middle) gives pointers on technique.

Greg Park lives a double life, as any ninja would. During the day, Greg is a humble civilian, just like you and me. But at night, he teaches martial arts for free and spreads God's good news. I am very proud to call Greg Park my *sensei* (Japanese for "teacher"). More of an art than a skill, Park teaches discipline, concentration, and compassion rather than the violence being a ninja might suggest.

You don't find a ninja, a ninja finds you. Park serves the Kingdom and his community by offering free online lessons and in-person instruction. He meets at a local park in Los Angeles, providing an after school program for students who can't afford expensive karate lessons.

He is more than a very knowledgeable sensei. He is family. He is a friend. He scientifically explains every detail of the techniques of self defense that he teaches. He explains in depth the history of the art itself as well as the country of origin. Once a month, the class sits down as a whole, after a grueling day of training, for fellowship and a barbecue. The instructors treat the kids whose birthdays fall in that month to a homemade birthday cake and celebration. Afterwards, Greg and the other instructors seek out the homeless community in the park and donate any leftover food.

Greg cares deeply for each of his students. As a brother in Christ, he is involved in each of his students' lives. God uses him to guide the students towards a positive way of life. His philosophy videos on YouTube are really Bible teachings, as Greg hopes to share and encourage his students to discover Christ, one at a time.

His students walk away not only stronger and tougher physically, but with a compassionate servant's heart. He instills stern self-discipline in order to help grow and strengthen the will to achieve future goals in the real world. He inspires and challenges each of the instructors and students to return the favor by contributing to their own communities. This may be through giving time, money, food, protection, or emotional comfort.

Park is a modest man. He refuses to take credit and simply looks up to the sky and gives the glory all to God. —Jena Campion



Park shows off his acrobatic skills.

Get more information about Greg Park by visiting www.nintaijutsudojo.com, or search for "Choson Ninja" on YouTube.com for free online lessons.

community



Many Christians are teachers on Sunday. Some Christians however, strive to create a learning environment for young people all week long. With a passion for educating minds and living for God, whether in public school, private school, or home school –these teachers shape the next generation.

HIGHER CALLING: EDUCATION

by Sara Bouska

J

t seems like a cliché adorned on many a teacher's appreciation gift, but that doesn't make it any less true—to teach is to touch a life forever. Teachers have a profound impact on our development and help shape the way we learn, reason, and act. Three Christian teachers share their experiences educating the next generation—and their passion for God.

Jessica Print, Public School

Every morning, Jessica Print, 25, drives into the city praying that she will have enough love to give each of her students. "So many of these kids don't feel any love at home," says Print. "They are dealing with abuse, neglect, and immigration issues. Even if they don't realize that I am loving them through God's love, they definitely notice that there's a difference in me as a teacher."

Print works as a Discipline Prevention Specialist at Academia Cesar Chavez, a tuition-free charter school in St. Paul, Minnesota. Her students face various challenges. One-third of the school's 300 students is English Language Learners, and ninety-two percent of the students qualify for a free or reduced lunch.

"Some of the biggest challenges at the school are financial," Print says. "Since we are an urban school, I have to buy all of the books in my classroom and all of the supplies. There is one computer lab in the school, and it only has 20 computers, so the students have to share."

As she gives her time, energy, and money to these students, she isn't just sacrificing her resources, but is being obedient to God's call on her life. "I've always wanted to be a teacher," says Print. "My greater calling happened when I was being called to the city. Education is such a leveling factor. When students in the city get equal education, it removes a lot of poverty lines."

However, Print is more than just an educator; she also tackles the roles of nurse, social worker, and even parent. Her philosophy towards her students is this: "If I am at school, I am available for the kids". Print opens her classroom to be available early in the morning for students to talk to her, or just to have a quiet place to go. She also takes two or three students to eat lunch with her each day to get to know them better individually. Through her interactions with her students, she regularly faces the reality of her students being evicted from their homes, facing

abuse, and getting caught up in immigration issues.

"I had a student who went back to Mexico over a break," Print recalls. "Their family got stuck at the border and never came back. Other students will go back to Mexico for months at a time without enrolling in school. They come back far behind other students. There is just so much to deal with. I don't know if I will ever figure out exactly how to deal with it all."

Fortunately, she is not alone in dealing with these pressures. She and nine other teachers meet every Monday morning. They pray, seeking God for their students, knowing that God can work in the broken homes and work out problems like immigration issues far beyond their own abilities.

Print spent two years teaching fifth grade, but in her current role as Discipline Prevention Specialist, she works closely with students who have behavioral problems. In both roles, she has shown her students Jesus's love, and taught them to do the same to each other. When she taught fifth grade, Print worked to create a sense of community by teaching her students basic social skills, spending the entire first month teaching about how the students could—and should—care for each other.

"Even if [my students] don't realize that I am loving them through God's love, they definitely notice that there's a difference in me as a teacher." - Jessica Print

"The first year I tried this it was a disaster," says Print. "There were lots of fights and not a lot of unity in the class. But last year was amazing. The students really cared for each other." At the end of the year, she gave the

students an opportunity to say any parting words to each other, and the entire class opened up. "It was so beautiful. Everyone in the circle was crying, trying to think of really encouraging things to say to one another. It was a really great way to end the year," Print recalls.

In her current role, Print works with fifth and sixth grade girls, teaching them to find their identities. "I tell them they have all been created and made for a purpose, that they are special," Print says. "I tell them what they should and shouldn't focus on, especially

not to find their identity in boys. I can never come out and say '[In Christ] is where your identity should be,' but I point them toward the kingdom and not toward the world."

Working in a public school has its challenges, and teaching about God or the Bible are typically prohibited. However, as Jessica Print demonstrates, actions can speak louder than words, and being a living example of Jesus's love and compassion can plant seeds in students' hearts. "We are called to go out into the world and bring the kingdom of God to wherever we are [God building His kingdom



through us]," says Print. And she hopes to do that—even if it's just two or three students at a time, every lunch hour.

Laura Christian, Christian School

Laura Christian, 24, knows the value of living among non-believers. She became a Christian when she was nine years old, on the way to the grocery store with her mother. Having attended public school from kindergarten through twelfth grade, a secular setting was her first choice when she decided to become a teacher. "I thought I should be at a public school. I thought it would be a privilege to be a Christian in the public school setting—seeing people come to know Christ," says Christian.

After getting married last summer, Christian moved the Midwest, where she taught in a suburban public school, to San Diego. Her prayers for a job in Southern California were answered, and she began teaching at Mira Mesa Christian School. "[California] had just cut hundreds of jobs in the public schools, so I felt lucky to have a job," says Christian.

Mira Mesa Christian School is a small private school, with ninety students in kindergarten through sixth grade. A typical day at school starts with the Bible. The students follow a curriculum, share verses and thoughts, and are assigned a verse to memorize each week. Afterwards, the school day unfolds just as it would in a public school, but with additional biblical perspectives, of course.

Laura Christian doesn't claim Christian education as a calling, but she clearly understands that God led her to Mira Mesa, where she teaches fifth and sixth grade, as well as physical education. "When I moved out here, God put me here," says Christian. "If I were to tell you about a spiritual turning point, this would be it."

That spiritual turning point surprised Christian more than her new job. Teaching in a Christian school has exposed her to an entirely new educational perspective. "I had never really thought about education and biblical truth intertwining. It has really caused me to be a lot more aware when I am teaching and planning—how I can implement God's Word, Truth, and the Bible into my lessons?" she says.

Christian often quotes 2 Timothy 3:16-17, reminding herself of the importance of using the Bible in all areas of study: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Equipping her students for every good work has changed the way she teaches. Christian no longer teaches wellness in her physical education classes for vanity's sake. Instead, she teaches the students to have stewardship of their bodies, because their bodies are God's temple. As her classroom studies symmetry, Christian points out God's love of order and symmetry in creation, using trees and the human body as examples.

In addition to incorporating biblical truth into her curriculum,

Christian also strives to set a good example. "Being at a Christian school, I really need to watch my actions—even more than at the public school. The kids don't just see me as a model of character, but a model of godliness—a spiritual person. It makes me more mindful of anything I say or do. They are watching every move I make because I am not only teaching math, I am teaching how to be a better Christian," she says.

As Christian strives to be an example of godliness in her students' lives, she gets to experience watching her students come to know Christ. "I've seen kids accept Christ as their savior," Christian says. "I don't know if I had anything to do with it, but I trust that God is using what I say and my example."

Jessica White, Home Schooling

The last career Jessica White, 29, ever thought she would have was a home school teacher. White, who lives in Des Moines, Iowa, watched her cousins go through the home schooling process and

thought they would never make it in the real world. "I made fun of people that were home schooled," says White. "I thought they would never cope with life because they were never exposed to it."

But as her cousins matured into adults, White saw that her presumptions were false. Her cousin Kelly is a typical college girl, peppy and joyful. Her social skills are

developed, and she has integrated successfully into college life.

White herself doesn't fit any home schooling stereotypes. She is young and doesn't drive a minivan. Her children—Colin, 7, and Amaya, 5—are children from her and her husband Andre's previous marriages. Most importantly, the mention of denim jumpers and long, braided hair activates her gag reflex.

But when White started taking ownership of her faith three years ago, she became intrigued by the lives of families at her church who home schooled. Now she has almost two years of teaching under her belt and is growing in love for the process. "I had to be won over," White recalls. "My husband, Andre, is a very go-with-the-flow kind of guy. He had to hear that it was a good idea, but I was the one who had to do it."

White and her husband made the decision to home school when Colin was entering kindergarten. White's memories of her elementary years are traumatic. But she remembered an opportunity one of her high school teachers gave her an opportunity to take a test audibly; she aced the test. The thought of teaching her children in a flexible way that met their needs was appealing.

However, White acknowledges that she is only able to teach through the strength of the Lord. Not having a formal degree in education, she is frequently challenged to think of new and creative ways to teach. This was such a tall order that she and her husband made the difficult decision to enroll Colin in public schools this year. "It was obviously a rough year. I felt inadequate, but now seeing him in public schools gives me confidence that he is at the right level," says


“With home schooling, I get to know where my kids are emotionally and educationally,” - Jessica White.

White.

Unexpectedly, Colin's switch to public schools has actually increased White's desire to home school. "Home schooling allows you to build up your child's character when they are young", says White. "When that base is established, then you push education hard. The public schools try to get a lot of education in you when you are young, and then expect you to be good people. It just doesn't work like that."

School at the White household starts around 9:00 a.m., when the children help make breakfast. They spend time reading the discussing the Bible, then move on to the day's lessons. All of their lessons are finished by noon, and afternoons are filled with various activities and play dates with other home schooled children.

Ultimately, it is White's love for her children and her desire for them to know Christ that spurs her on to continue home schooling. She says the appeal of home school is "the safety and security of knowing where my kids are and what they are doing, and having a close relationship with my kids. With home schooling, I get to know where [they] are emotionally and educationally."

Secular or sacred, at school or at home, these three women are all reflections of Christ to their students. Whether they are allowed to directly teach from the Bible, or can only demonstrate God's goodness through their actions, they bring glory to God in their classrooms. Regardless of circumstance, God uses each of these teachers, and the various gifts He has blessed them with, to reach the next generation of hearts and minds. 

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The Dating Life

Pursue or Be Pursued?

Should the man or woman take the lead role in dating?

Should the man or woman take the lead role in dating? We asked a handful of Christians what their perspective on dating is and whether there is any Biblical authority on the subject. From tradition to Biblical description, together we find some intriguing answers and wise words.

"It goes either way. Well, if they are both going to get what they want out of a relationship, it shouldn't matter who makes the first move. I prefer to make the first move just to show that I'm interested."

- Jorge

"Whoever is interested should pursue. A successful relationship takes work from the beginning. If it is God's will, then both will have an interest and both should pursue it from the beginning. Of course, how each person 'pursues' is based on the individual, whether man or woman."

- Charles

"The man should always make the first move. It's always been the guy who makes the first move. It's tradition. It's just the way I see it; it's the way society sees it. There are a few girls that would make the first move but I think most of them want the guy to approach them. My dad always taught me that if you like the girl and you want the girl, you have to make the first move."

- Edgar

"I strongly believe the man should pursue. I think many women have forgotten how to be submissive to men (and I mean submissive in a good way). There is a wonderful dance that occurs

when a man is pursuing a woman and when a man pursues a woman he is showing her that he is a leader. I believe most women want that from men. I know I do."

- Christina

"The concept of the man pursuing the woman seems clear in the way a marriage is described in Ephesians Chapter 5. It casts the dynamic of marriage in relation to Jesus and the Church, with the husband taking on the role of Jesus. Jesus sought out and asked his disciples to follow Him. Likewise, a man should seek out a woman and lead in a relationship according to this scripture. It also calls for him to bring the best out of her, so it is definitely a relationship of mutual respect."

Ephesians 5:21-33 (The Message):

Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another. Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing. So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands. Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ's love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They're really doing themselves a favor—since they're already "one" in marriage. No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it. That's how Christ treats us, the church, since we are part of his body. And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cher-

ishes his wife. No longer two, they become "one flesh." This is a huge mystery, and I don't pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband."

- Matthew

"Anyone who has been to Baja Beach Club or Dead Freddies on ladies' night would be surprised to know that men don't always hotly (a term for "passionately and enthusiastically") pursue women. Men are often times struggling to take leadership roles in the church, in relationships and in the world. Is this because of fear? Cultural pressures? Something else? We fear taking leadership roles because that means responsibility and with responsibility comes the desire to succeed and if we fail to live up to our responsibility than we can't succeed. But, if we don't take the responsibility in the first place then we don't need to worry about success or failure. Our culture puts a lot of pressure on men to not only be successful, but to do so in a way that shows our inferiority to women. As men then, we begin to take on that lazy persona immobilized by our fears and living up to a perceived cultural norm.

Ultimately, we have forgotten how to be Gentle Men. I separate these two words because I think they show the balance of what God intended for his creature - man. Scripture teaches us that we are to be humble, loving and kind or to be gentle. But it also teaches us that we are to be wise, bold and leaders or to be men. So to be gentlemen we must embody the work of Christ as he was both sacrificially loving and the king of kings.

Good Charlotte's album Good Morning Revival has a song called "Break Apart Her Heart." Part of the chorus says, "Don't tell her she is the reason that you live/Don't give her everything that you got to give/If you want to keep a girl for as long as you live/Just break apart her heart." With the pervasiveness of culture we can be easily confused and distracted from our calling to be Gentle Men.

But searching for happiness and hanging our hopes on answers that distract us from our relationship with Christ are not gender specific issues. Man's hot pursuit of woman with a Biblical focus is simply the fruit of men hotly pursuing Christ. How hotly are you (man or woman) pursuing your relationship with your Lord and Savior?"

- Jeff (Reprinted With Permission. Jeff Price is founder of the Young Adult Reformed Fellowship ministry in Baltimore, Maryland and regularly posts on his blog at blog.eyarf.org/)

"And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'" Genesis 2:18 (NKJV). God created men and women for relationship (both with Him and with people) and intended for men and women to have companionship in marriage and friendship in life. As God made Eve (women) comparable to Adam (men), it emphasizes that men and women are of equal value in God's eyes. Each person simply takes on a different role than their counterpart as pointed out in Ephesians 5, and equally shares in the welfare of the other. This is not to say that a woman can't ask a man out, or that men are forced to do the asking, but perhaps you might reflect on what role you want to have and are meant for, pray for truth to what your heart is truly seeking and pursue your relationship with God's design in mind. —Cailin Henson



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DENOMINATIONAL DIFFERENCES, Part 2

Helping make sense of today's variety of church choices.

To some extent, Christian denominations can be seen as ways to “do church” differently. Usually, what sets denominations apart is their take on certain biblical subjects, beliefs, interpretations, and practices. Variations on a recipe, if you will. In some denominations, the style of the church gathering is different; others have different perspectives on topics, such as the meaning of baptism or the proper response to contemporary cultural issues. In the last issue, we highlighted the Baptist and Lutheran denominations and tried to sum up some of the differences, for a quick overview. This issue we highlight the Methodist and Presbyterian denominations. Remember, only you and God can decide which denomination is the best fit for you, but it's important to know what different denominations believe and practice.

METHODIST

Notable Distinction: A movement of Protestant Christianity, John Wesley, a Christian theologian who founded the Arminian Methodist movement in the 18th-century, preached that each person could be saved by faith in God and encouraged congregants to experience Christ personally.

“John Wesley and the early Methodists were particularly concerned about inviting people to experience God’s grace and to grow in their knowledge and love of God through disciplined Christian living. They placed primary emphasis on Christian living, on putting faith and love into action. This emphasis on what Wesley referred to as ‘practical divinity’ has continued to be a hallmark of United Methodism today.” (UMC)

Written Statements of Beliefs: Nicene and Apostles’ Creed. Many also use The Articles of Religion, The Confession of Faith, Wesley’s Sermons and Notes on the New Testament, and The Book of Common Prayer.

Original Sin: “Man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.” (UMC)

Notable Methodists: George Lucas, Rosa Parks, George W. Bush, Hillary Clinton, William Booth (Founder of The Salvation Army), Dionne Warwick, Gaylord Nelson (Founder of Earth Day)

For more information about the Methodist denomination or to find a church near you, visit <http://www.umc.org>

Source: ReligionFacts.com

PRESBYTERIAN

Notable Distinction: One of the largest branches of Protestant Christianity, Presbyterianism originated with the 16th Century Swiss Reformation and the teachings of John Calvin. Central to their belief and practice is the Bible, the sovereignty of God and grace through faith in Christ. The name Presbyterian comes from the representational form of church government, known as a Presbytery, where elected leaders, known as “elders”, are given governing authority of the church and work with the congregation’s ordained minister.

Written Statements of Beliefs: Nicene and Apostles’ Creed, Westminster Confession

“Presbyterians are distinctive in two major ways: they adhere to a pattern of religious thought known as Reformed theology and a form of government that stresses the active, representational leadership of both ministers and church members”. - Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Original Sin: “No one of us is good enough on our own--we are all dependent upon God’s goodness and mercy... from the kindest, most devoted churchgoer to the most blatant sinner.” (PCUSA)

Notable Presbyterians: Billy Graham, John Wayne, Mark Twain, Shirley Temple, Lucy Maud Montgomery (Canadian novelist; *Anne of Green Gables*) Daniel Defoe (English novelist; author of *Robinson Crusoe*)

For more information about the Presbyterian denomination or to find a church near you, visit <http://www.pcusa.org/>



Photo: Sarah Casha/Stock.xchng

When the Church {Body of Christ} Malfunctions

To be disillusioned or disheartened by imperfect people or imperfect actions in the Church can happen—but it doesn't have to stay that way. Chelsea Peterson explores the biblical principles behind what the Church should look like and how we can be a part of it, despite our own human error.

By Chelsea Peterson

When I was almost fourteen, I became part of what started as a home church with several other families. We had two pastors who traded off preaching every week. To me, it seemed like the perfect church with near-perfect leaders. I loved the atmosphere, my new friends, the sermons—everything.

Previously, church disasters seemed to haunt my family. Because of this, I was desperate to fit into our new church home. I set our leaders and their families on a pedestal and allowed myself to be swayed by their opinions. As our fellowship grew over the years, we moved from the living room of our pastor's house to the basement of a library where we had more space. We were a church with unshakable foundations, a perfect mix of people, convictions, and personalities—or so I thought.

Before long, there were whispers of disagreements between the pastors. I didn't worry about it, positive they'd sort out their differences eventually. When one of the pastors ended his sermon with a resignation, the entire congregation sat in stunned silence. Not even the co-pastor knew what was going on. My friends and I were on the verge of tears as the adults tried to make sense of what was happening.

The next few weeks were filled with meetings, letters, and phone calls as the church scrambled to patch what couldn't be mended. The result was a tangled mess of slander, bitterness, and an ugly church split. The co-pastor sent out a series of nasty letters to the congregation, defaming the other pastor's character. The people I thought were near perfect had let me down. Our wonderful leadership had made mistakes. The decisions made, words spoken, and actions committed during that time affected several lives for the worse. I couldn't believe my perfect church had come to such an abrupt and imperfect end. I felt so confused. I didn't know what to believe anymore as my pedestals came crashing down.

Our fellowship dissolved completely and my family was left stranded. For a while, we watched sermons on video every Sunday, not wanting to get involved with another church body. When we felt ready, we began searching for a new church home, only to watch it fall to pieces as well. My attitude towards the Church soured. How could this be the Body of Christ? How could the people sow-

ing all these seeds of discord claim to be Christians? My family and I searched for a Bible-preaching church without real results. We were exhausted, disillusioned by the Church.

Many of you may have been through similar experiences. You've watched the "perfect church" crumble or have been stabbed in the back by people who claim to love God. Some of you have been afraid to become members of a church body lest you find yourselves burned once again. Still others migrate from church to church, refusing to become attached to any one body of Christians, while others neglect the gathering of the saints altogether. What should you do when things seem so hopeless for the Church?

What Should The Church Look Like?

THE BODY OF CHRIST 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that we are the "body of Christ". In a body, there are many different parts like the arms, the legs, the fingers, the eyes, or the mouth. Each part is important and all parts together make the body functional. My younger brother is missing a foot. Though this foot has since been replaced by a prosthetic, he will never have the same flexibility or be capable of performing the same activities that people with a real foot have. The same can be said of the church. When certain members refuse to function as part of the body, the church is crippled.

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST If you take a look at Ephesians 5:21-30, you'll see Christ compares himself and the church to a married couple. The church is referred to as the bride of Christ, which He will one day present to Himself as holy and unblemished. In this passage it says, "Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another. Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing. So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands." (The Message) Grave responsibility is laid on both the wife and the husband. No less responsibility is laid on the church. The church is to be submissive to Christ, to be seeking His face. We are to be adorning ourselves with the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22), just as a bride adorns herself for her wedding day.

You Are The Change

THE SALT OF THE EARTH Matthew 5:13 tells us disciples of Jesus are to be the “salt of the earth”. What is salt? Salt is a preservative. Before the time of freezers, salt was the means by which people preserved their food. If they didn’t have salt, they were in trouble; food would begin to rot. In the same way, Christians preserve moral standards and biblical principles as they apply them to their lives. Salt is also a flavoring. They add flavor to an otherwise flavorless and rebellious culture.

Part of the problem with churches today is that the individuals of the body don’t understand their responsibility and come with a “get” instead of a “give” attitude. Think about this for a minute: when we look for a church, we look to see what we can get. We check out the programs, the people, the activities, et cetera. We “try on” the church a few times to see if we like the people, the sermons, and the music. We are uncommitted and focused on ourselves and our needs and preferences. We aren’t looking for accountability; we want to be left alone to do our own thing and follow our own pursuits. In his book *Stop Dating the Church*, Josh Harris writes, “The plain fact is, when we resist passion and commitment in our relationship with the church, everyone gets cheated out of God’s best. You cheat yourself. You cheat a church community. You cheat your world.” (pg. 18)

In short, we cheat the body of Christ. The Bible instructs us that we are not to neglect the gathering of the saints. Biblically, the church is to equip, to instruct, to hold accountable, and to minister to every member. In turn, the members are to reach out to the lost, becoming the hands, mouth, eyes, and ears of Christ so that we might do His work. The members of Christ’s body come to serve, rather than be served, meeting together as a fully functional unit. It is a beautiful plan, designed by God and made to last.

If only every church could be described this way.

Imperfectly Doing Everything Correctly


Suppose we are doing what we’re required to do and more. We are committed, we serve, we are at the doors of our church every other minute. What’s our responsibility when our church starts falling away from the Biblical model? I believe that first, we need to make sure our own behavior is in line with Scripture. The church is full of bad apples and hypocrites who are more concerned with themselves and their agendas than they are about other people. However, our own attitudes are more important than these bad apples. We must be sure we aren’t contributing to the problem by our own lack of love and understanding.

To be honest, I’ve been through so many unpleasant church experiences that I can pinpoint almost immediately which kinds of people are bound to cause problems. There are some folks who make me grit my teeth and wish they would just leave. Is this the attitude Christ would have if He were in my shoes? Of course not. Jesus genuinely loved His persecutors. He loves you and me, even though we are the reason He had to be tortured and nailed to a cross. Does this mean we have to love all the nasty things people do? No. Does this mean we have to smile and nod our heads when someone says something contrary to the Bible? Absolutely not. Jesus had no tolerance for heretical theology, but He loved people so much He died for them.

Once our own attitudes are in check, the next question we should be asking is this: Is my church hindering me from serving God? Recall that the church’s purpose is to equip and minister to the saints so they in turn can go out and preach the Gospel to those around them. Some people can best serve God by staying in a church that seems to be falling apart at the seams. Others feel they can serve God best by leaving. Only God can tell you whether you should leave or stay. There are no set answers for whether or not you should abandon a church. Sometimes, the answers will be black and white, while other times, solutions won’t be as clear. Prayer must play a major role in your decisions as you wait for the Holy Spirit to guide your steps.

You may answer by saying, “Well, I can serve God better by not being a part of a church body.” For a short period of time this may be true, but then again we were created for community. The Bible tells us we are not to neglect gathering together (1 Timothy 4:13-14). Accountability in the lives of believers is an important part of growing in Christ. Some are called to join a church while some are called to start churches. Either way, it is important that we belong to a body of believers and be committed to that body.

Acts 4:32-33 (NASB) says: “And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonged to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.”

This is how the church is supposed to be. This is the vision every Christian should have and strive for. We have to realize this kind of church begins with community; the gathered, corporate body that shapes us through our common purpose in Christ. It begins with us giving our lives over completely to Christ to do as He will with us. It means becoming functioning parts in the body of Christ and loving Him as His bride. We must bring the salt that preserves the church by being committed and add flavor to its existence by being involved. We must empty ourselves out in service to Christ, committing to ministering to others. When we do this, it is God who fills us back up and it will be His love that overflows in our lives. This is the type of Christian I long to be, and it is this kind of Christian who will revolutionize church as we know it now. It’s up to us whether or not we want to be a part. 



Chelsea Peterson is a 19 year old college student. She enjoys writing, exploring the outdoors, being with her family and learning new things. After going through several church mishaps, she now worships with a growing church community she has learned to call home.

culture

Christian Perceptions

In the last issue we mentioned the book *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity: And Why It Matters* by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons (2007), that details nonbelievers' view of Christians. In it, Kinnaman and Lyons, with research from the Barna group, highlight the ways Christians are viewed in a negative light, especially among Americans aged sixteen to twenty-nine. The authors present research indicating 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."

To gauge the validity of such perceptions, we asked you, are Christians hypocritical?

"Yes, because when people help each other, it is done conditionally. They do it for appreciation. When people don't get appreciation, they lose motivation. And the meaning of helping is supposed to be unconditional and asking nothing in return."

- Chiaj, 29, Ithaca, NY

"Every single human being that exists that has a percentage of hypocrite... no matter what the religion is... They don't always do what they say they'll do."

- Jason, 24, Hawthorne, CA

"When I first started walking with Jesus and even before, I didn't like Christians. They were just like everyone who was not a Christian. I didn't go out of my way to make Christian friends because I thought they were hypocrites and judgmental. I took a leap of faith, and started to make Christian friends. I found out the majority of Christians are normal. Only the small minority of Christians are legalistic, judgmental, and hypocritical. It is a flawed understanding of Christians. If people don't get exposed to the majority, they will believe the flawed understanding of Christians."

- Dan, 25, Lomita, CA

Next we'll take a look at Christians being "too focused on getting converts." Write to us and share your own thoughts, opinions and experiences regarding the Christian "convert" perception letters@newidentitymagazine.com

HYPOCRITICAL

TOO FOCUSED ON

ANTI-HOMOSEXUAL

SHELTERED

TOO POLITICAL

JUDGEMENTAL

ARE CHRISTIANS HYPOCRITICAL?

GETTING CONVERTS

The Lord says:
"These people come near to me with their mouth
and honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
Their worship of me
is made up only of rules taught by men.

-Isaiah 29:13 (NIV)

IN PERSPECTIVE

Showcasing today's touchy subjects.

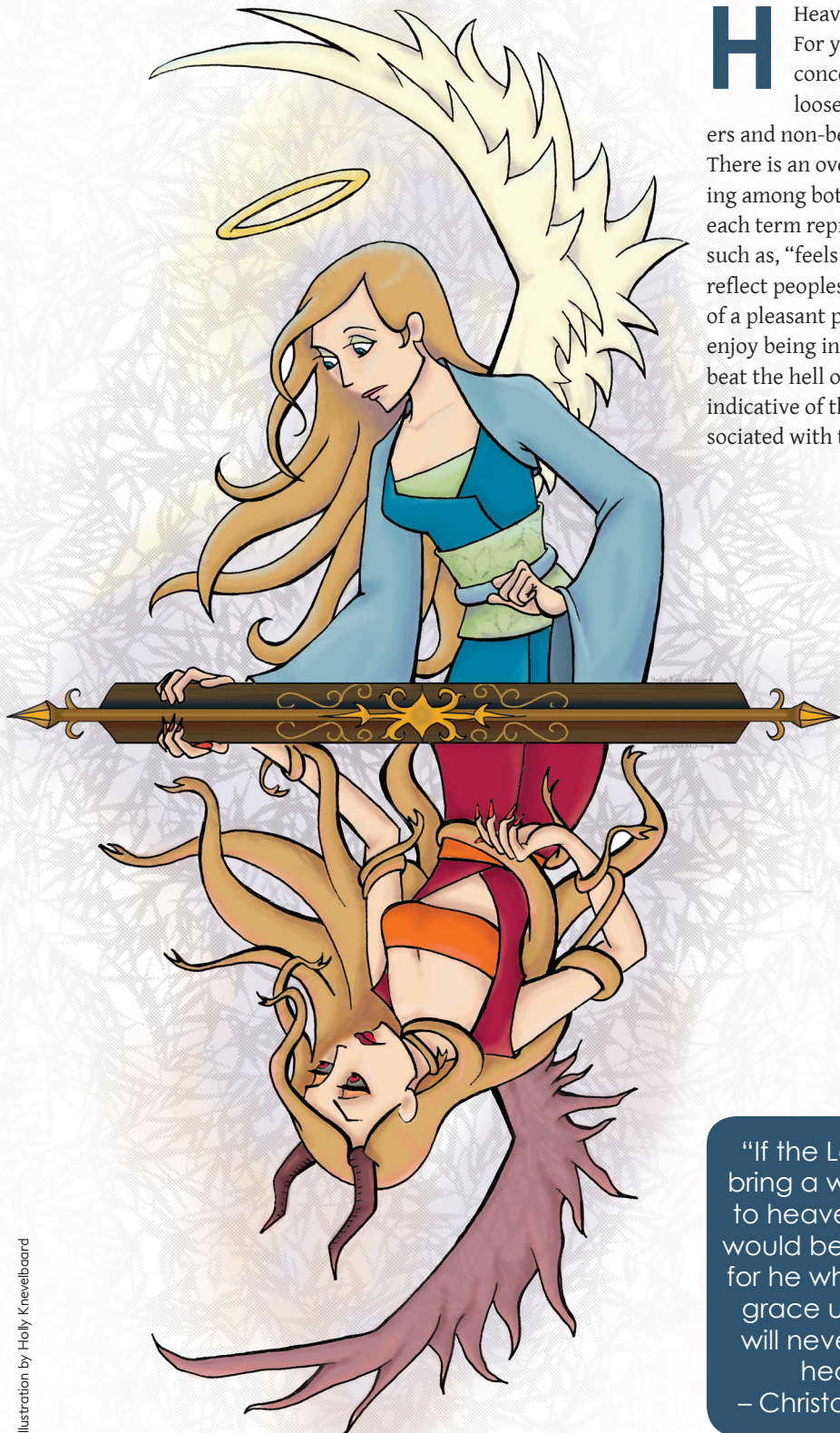


Illustration by Holly Knevelboard

H Heaven and hell. For years, these two concepts have been loosely used by believers and non-believers alike. There is an overall understanding among both groups of what each term represents. Phrases such as, “feels like heaven” reflect peoples’ visualization of a pleasant place they would enjoy being in. “I’m going to beat the hell out of you” is more indicative of the discomfort associated with the term hell and

the understanding that nobody wishes to have such an experience.

“Heaven can be thought of as the Garden of Eden which we were evicted from after Adam and Eve desired more than was available to them,” Noraly Hernandez, a believer, says. “On the other hand, hell would be perpetual torture. Based on childhood Bible teachings, heaven and hell are the final destination of the human spiritual journey. Heaven is a

Anglican/Episcopalian

Heaven: “By heaven, we mean eternal life in our enjoyment of God.” BCP (1979), p. 862.

Hell: “By hell, we mean eternal death in our rejection of God.” BCP (1979), p. 862.

Assembly of God

Heaven: “But human language is inadequate to describe either heaven or hell. The realities of both fall well beyond our most imaginative dreams. It is impossible to describe the glory and splendor of heaven ... heaven enjoys the total presence of God.” AG.org

Hell: “But human language is inadequate to describe either heaven or hell. The realities of both fall well beyond our most imaginative dreams. It is impossible to describe ... the terror and torment of hell ... Hell is a place where one will experience total separation from God ...” AG.org

“If the Lord should bring a wicked man to heaven, heaven would be hell to him; for he who loves not grace upon earth will never love it in heaven”
– Christopher Love

"The future is like heaven - everyone exalts it, but no one wants to go there now." - James Arthur Baldwin

place or state of being where we were intended to be."

Charles Lee, pastor of New Hope Church in Los Angeles, agrees. "If heaven is our final destination then we should live life a little different here on earth. People shouldn't get caught up with material possessions here on earth because they won't take it with them." "If heaven is our final destination then we should live life a little different here on earth," Pastor Charles Lee, from New

Hope Church, Los Angeles, CA said. "People shouldn't get caught up with material possessions here on earth because they won't take it with them."

Such concepts are more easily accepted by people of faith. For those who don't associate with any religion, heaven and hell can have little significance.

"I just don't believe that there is a heaven or a hell," David Sanchez, a non-believer, says. "I think that once you die,

that's it."

However, for some believers, the existence of a heaven or hell is not what's most important; it is the connection and relationship that individuals have with Christ that matters most.

"We carry out our relationship with Christ here and we'll end in a place where we will continue our relationship with Christ," says Lee. "If you don't have that relationship, then that too will carry over."

Lee adds, "Everybody fears death. There is always a small percentage of doubt in all humans; even in Christianity. For me, believing in heaven is good, but having a relationship with Christ is the ultimate goal. Heaven is just a byproduct of that relationship with Christ. Most people would take heaven without Jesus; I don't want to be in heaven without Jesus."

—Cristian Vasquez 

Baptist

Heaven: "The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord." SBC

Hell: "The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment." SBC

Lutheran

Heaven: "Eternal, or everlasting, life ... is the end of faith, the ultimate object of a Christian's hope and striving ..." LCMS

Hell: "The doctrine of eternal punishment, repugnant to natural man, has been repudiated by errorists ... but is clearly revealed in Scripture. To deny this doctrine is to reject the authority of Scripture." LCMS

Methodist

Heaven: "John Wesley himself believed in an intermediate state between death and the final judgment, where those who rejected Christ would be aware of their coming doom ... and believers would share in the 'bosom of Abraham' or 'paradise,' even continuing to grow in holiness there. This belief, however, is not formally affirmed in Methodist doctrinal standards, which reject the idea of purgatory but beyond that maintain silence on what lies between death and the last judgment." UMC

Hell: "John Wesley himself believed in an intermediate state between death and the final judgment, where those who rejected Christ would be aware of their coming doom ... This belief, however, is not formally affirmed in Methodist doctrinal standards, which reject the idea of purgatory but beyond that maintain silence on what lies between death and the last judgment." UMC

Presbyterian

Heaven: "If there is a Presbyterian narrative about life after death, this is it: When you die, your soul goes to be with God, where it enjoys God's glory and waits for the final judgment. At the final judgment bodies are reunited with souls, and eternal rewards and punishments are handed out." PCUSA

Hell: "The only official Presbyterian statement that includes any comment on hell since the 1930s is a 1974 paper on universalism adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. It warns of judgment and promises hope, acknowledging that these two ideas seem to be "in tension or even in paradox." In the end, the statement concedes, how God works redemption and judgment is a mystery." PCUSA

Roman Catholic

Heaven: "Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness." Catechism - 1024 "To live in heaven is "to be with Christ." Catechism - 1025

Hell: "To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell." Catechism - 1033

RESOURCE

DISCOVER FOR YOURSELF

This is just a representative sample of different Christian denominations' views and is not meant to be extensive. An excellent resource for further discovery is Randy Alcorn's book Heaven.

culture

MEDIA THE CLEANER



THE CLEANER A&E Network

After years of battling drug addiction, William Banks finally decides it is time to quit. The birth of his youngest daughter serves as the catalyst for him to finally break free of his addictions. Through this commitment to sober living, he also develops a relationship God.

A&E's *The Cleaner*, loosely based on the true story of an addict-turned-addiction intervention specialist, tells the story of William Banks. Portrayed by Benjamin Bratt, Banks is a man who makes a promise to God that, if given a second chance at life, he will end his drug abuse and help others to face and conquer their own addictions.

With a team of other recovering addicts, Banks uses unorthodox, occasionally unethical and at times illegal tactics to help people beat their addictions. In addition to his attempt to fulfill his promise to God, he also works to repair his tenuous relationship with his wife and children, on whom his addiction has taken many tolls.

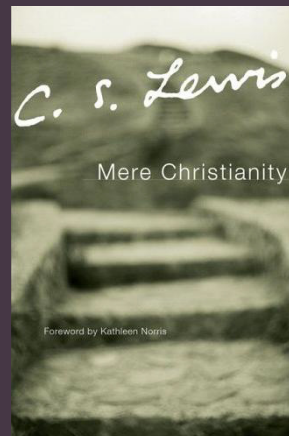
Banks's relationship with God is atypical. He doesn't go to church and doesn't pray as traditionally depicted. He does, however, speak with God. These conversations usually take place when he is caught between keeping his promise to God and fighting his personal demons. Banks must also balance his beliefs and values with those of his team, all three of whom he helped recover from addiction, and one of whom he was romantically involved with during a separation from his wife.

Helping others beat their addictions while he struggles with his own issues constantly makes Banks question what he is doing and why he should continue. Just as easily as he blames God for the never-ending obstacles in his personal and professional life, he finds solutions that reaffirm that his new calling is the right thing to do.

In each episode, Banks asks God why something

happens or doesn't go the way he wants it to. Despite this, he realizes that he cannot stop what he is doing. He continues not out of a sense of obligation to anyone, but because he believes that he is doing what God wants him to. For Banks, helping people break away from the depths of addiction is more important than a job; it is a calling. Furthermore, he realizes he needs God's help to accomplish it. —Cristian Vasquez

BOOKS MERE CHRISTIANITY



"[The Christian] does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us." C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Mere Christianity, written by world-renowned writer C.S. Lewis, is an introduction to the Christian faith. Adapted from a series of his own original radio programs broadcast during World War II, the book discusses the primary beliefs upon which

Christianity is built. A former atheist, Lewis eases into fundamental Christian ideas and describes the Christian common ground with an ability to take a step back and answer many of the initial questions that arise concerning Christianity. Lewis eloquently explains many of the arguments against Christianity, makes a case for Christianity, and reveals much of God's plan for humankind in a way that is neither judgmental nor arrogant. If you're seeking an introduction to Christianity by a skilled and thoughtful writer, *Mere Christianity* is an excellent first step in your journey. —Cailin Henson

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For,
"All men are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.
1 Peter 1:22-25 (New International Version)

JARGONBORN AGAIN

DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIAN JARGON FOR THE ORDINARY PERSON

What would it be like if you had the chance to start over again? If somehow all the filth and pain of this world could be washed away and somehow deep within your conscience everything felt...clean. This is what Christians mean when they use the term "born again". Although it did not fall into common usage until the late 18th and 19th centuries, the phrase "born again" is derived from the Bible and a theological concept called regeneration. There is a passage in John 3 where one of the religious leaders of Jesus's day asks him a question about being a part of God's plan for humanity. Jesus replies that the only way to do that is to be born again.

To use a million dollar theological word, this process of being born again is called regeneration. The natural world is full of animals that regenerate. Most lower life forms are able to grow back limbs or a tail through the process of natural regeneration. It sounds weird and gross when you think about it like that, but spiritually this is what Jesus is talking about. Part of us has died. Our hearts have been cut off and disconnected from God and the remedy is for us, our hearts, to be born again. This means to be free from guilt and shame over the many wrong things we have done—whether it's cheating on a girlfriend or stealing cable. Being born again means that, just like a lizard gets a new tail, we get a new start in life, free from the past. Not only that but we are new in our very being in a way that is indescribable. Like Neo in the Matrix we realize that it is the same "us" and yet we are not the same. We are different and are able to see the world and be in the world differently. This is what it means to be alive to God; to be born again.

Now being born again doesn't mean that afterwards you grow a halo and fly off to the heavens. You still have to live in the real world and things in the real world aren't so born again. There is still racism, terrorism, sexism, materialism, and any other kind of -ism you want to throw in. Those things will be erased in due time although that's another subject. The point is we have all been cold towards God and after being born again we can say with John Wesley, the Founder of Methodism, "I felt my heart strangely warmed." —Ramon Mayo

EDUCATIONAL

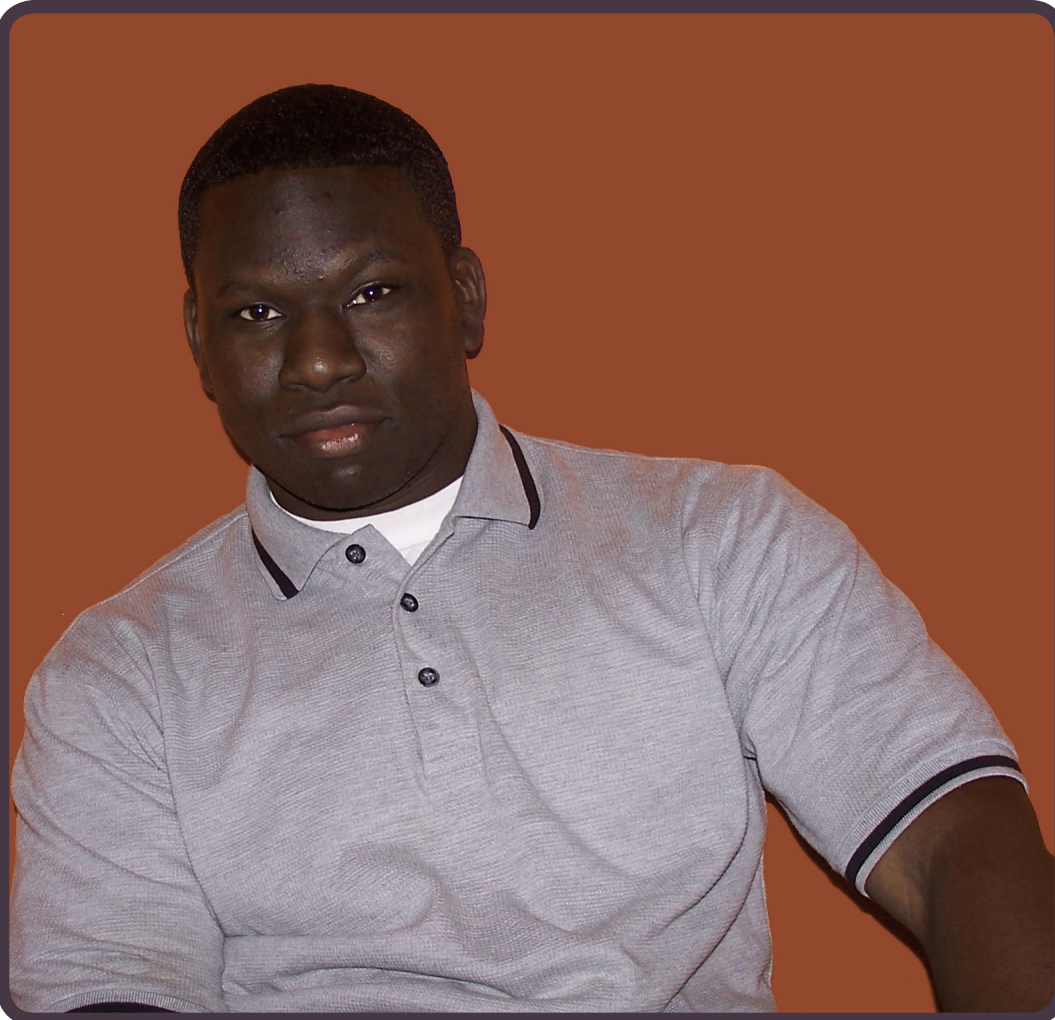
ENTERTAINING

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JASON HENRY

A hip hop security guard who hopes to change the world – and one day escape L.A.

Interviewed by Jena Campion

New Identity: Where are you from?

Jason Henry: Los Angeles, California.

NI: What is your occupation?

JH: Community Service Officer, a.k.a. security guard.

NI: What does your average day look like?

JH: My average day consists of: waking up thanking God for another day; checking e-mails while eating breakfast; traveling forty miles to go to school; leaving school and going to work; and leaving work and going home to prepare to do it all over again the next day. My average off-day consists of: waking up and thanking God for another day; relaxing; studying; and spending time with my wife.

NI: What are your hobbies?

JH: I love reading books, mainly about theology; making Christian hip hop music; singing, and rapping.

NI: Where and for what are you going to school?

JH: I am getting a Bachelor's degree in Theology at Life Pacific College.

NI: How did you become a Christian?

JH: I grew up in a Christian church with my mom forcing me to go to church every Sunday until I was eighteen years old. It was not optional. Although I never accepted God as my Lord and Savior, I grew up in an African-American Pentecostal church and even sang in youth choir. Still not accepting Jesus, I rebelled against the beliefs I was taught and everything they stood for. But, on September 2, 2002, I finally accepted Jesus and began to walk with Him as one of His disciples.

NI: What do you feel are your giftings or calling?

JH: In 2005, God confirmed to me, in His own special way, a call to be a pastor. I know I am called to pastor. At my former church, I took active steps to become a licensed pastor and even began to preach. I switched churches and am now an intern pastor, really learning how to pastor, and am a small group leader.

NI: What is your favorite scripture or person in the Bible, and why?

JH: James 1:22 - "Be doers of the word, not just hearers." You have to become authentic in the faith, the opposite of hypocritical. I love it because you are walking in complete authenticity. How you walk matches how you talk.

NI: What aspects do you like or dislike about Christianity in general?

JH: I like everything surrounding the Christian faith itself, like Scripture and theology. But I don't like how people choose to apply and interpret the scriptures and truth—people talking the talk but not walking the walk. When I try to bring people to Christ in my context—urban South Central, Los Angeles—people have a misconception of preachers. They see preachers as just stealing the people's money and doing with it what they want. They don't come to church because they think the preachers are stealing all the offering money. They categorize that as Christianity, period. But that's wrong. That is what we imperfect humans do, not what the Bible teaches.

NI: Why do you think some non-Christians are fearful of becoming Christian, and what are some obstacles they face?

JH: Non-Christians may not be hearing from Christians about God's grace. When non-Christians are not exposed to Christians' interior lives, they are only exposed to misrepresented Christian teachings in the media. There is a lack of true Christian teaching and exposure to the world, and a proper understanding of the grace of God. They also might see Christianity as having so many rules, and if you don't live up to those rules, you are judged. But God is the only judge, not men.


NI: What might you share with a new believer to take heed or offer some encouraging words to?

JH: I remember my youth pastor said, "There is more to it than what you are experiencing now." That wisdom caused a deep drive to learn more about faith and have deeper knowledge. It led to deeper depths beyond what I could have imagined. I would also recommend the message of Matthew 7:24-25—build your house on rock, not sand. Believe everything for yourself, not just because someone else told you to. Everything you believe is going to be tested. But if you believe it for yourself, you will not be moved.

NI: What do you find is the hardest thing in your faith to talk about, share or bring up?

JH: The hardest thing to talk about would be passing up job opportunities that do not line up with my vision. People often think that when a job offer comes along that offers more money that you must take it immediately, even though it will interfere with your God-given plans.

NI: Any final thoughts?

JH: Christianity is not religion, but it is a kingdom, a spiritual kingdom of light. If you dig deep enough, you will find the truth. 

Uncover God.
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Red Roots

Tree painted with red roots
bleeding into deep browns
rooted in blood.

Can red symbolize anything besides blood?
Your blood is in my roots.

But water, and not blood, came from your side.

A broken body
mine is too.

Red roots

painted into the ground, up the trunk.

Climbing the pole, hugging it, hoisting myself up.

Feeling so young in my age.

Clouds that went in different directions

Not seeing you.

A dove flying away

My reaction is fear and anxiety.

Wanting to be near and know for real who you are...to me,

How you and me intersect.

Grabbing but not grasping.

Doubts push me

Down.

Back hurting, throat scratching, pride whimpering.

I am not so tough.

Petrified of making...messing...missing...the mark.

I am not a straight shooter, nor

Consistent.

My idol is my image of myself.

I give myself away with no discretion.

And find myself to be
alone

Again. Empty without knowing, I wait for You.

Why do I offer myself to everyone who comes near me?

I am willing to sacrifice you, and what you've done, to them.

To people who can never hope to love me like you do.

Red roots.

You would think that blood would be enough.

—Emily Chase-Ziolek

world

JORDAN

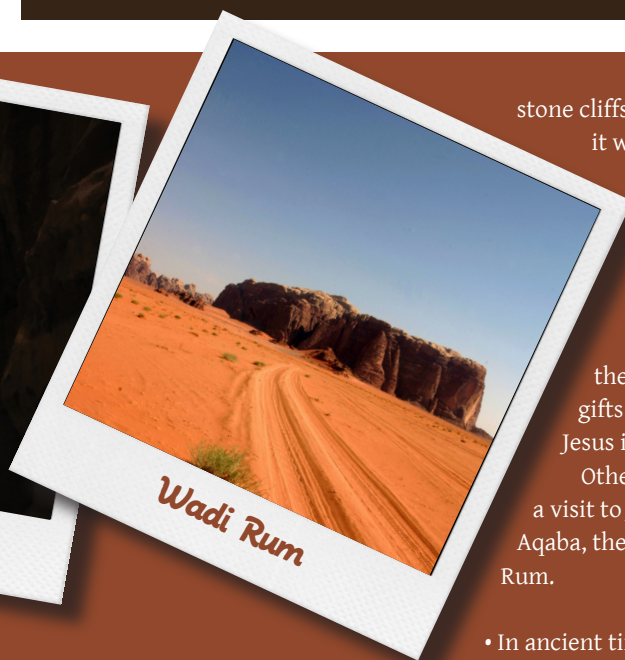
WHERE JESUS WALKED

By Carolyn Briody

Photo: Ricketts Fish/Flickr (CC)



The Treasury



Wadi Rum

Pulling my T-shirt from the drier I glanced down at the “Made in Jordan” on the label. Images of windswept landscapes, Bible stories and the Dead Sea came to mind. *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. *Lawrence of Arabia*.

A remarkable country at the crossroads of the Middle East, Jordan sits strategically bordering Syria, Saudi Arabia, the Red Sea, Palestine, Israel, and Iraq. It is a land steeped in history, an integral part of the Holy Land. Archaeologists have traced many events from the Old and New Testaments to sites in present-day Jordan.

Jordan is an ideal destination for those seeking cultural knowledge and spiritual enrichment. Primarily a Muslim country, freedom of all religions is protected and the rights of all of its religiously and ethnically diverse population are valued. This spirit of tolerance and appreciation contributes to the stable and peaceful cultural climate that is Jordan.

Jordan is a modern country with an ancient culture, a land where visitors can walk through the valleys, hills and plains whose names have become part of human history by virtue of the simple deeds and profound messages of prophets who walked the land and crossed its rivers during their lives.

Christian history has strong ties to the land of Jordan. “Bethany Beyond the Jordan”, the site of Jesus’s baptism, formed part of early Christian pilgrimage routes. Moses viewed the Holy Land of Canaan from Mount Nebo, overlooking the Dead Sea, the Jordan River Valley, Jericho and the distant hills of Jerusalem. In Umm Qays, overlooking the Sea of Galilee, a basilica from the 4th Century was recently discovered and excavated. The King’s Highway is the world’s oldest continuously used communication route. Abraham, who passed through northern, central and southern Jordan, would have used this route on his journey from Mesopotamia to Canaan.

Jordan’s best known tourist attraction, now a UNESCO world heritage site, is the ancient city of Petra. It is known for the hundreds of ornate classical-style facades carved into its red sand-

stone cliffs. Sometimes referred to as the “Lost City,” it was used in the film *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* as the repository for the Holy Grail. Petra’s most famous monument, the Treasury, appears dramatically after walking through a kilometer-long gorge.

Biblically, Petra was almost certainly the last staging post of the Magi who brought gifts of frankincense, gold and myrrh to baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

Other tourist attractions not to be missed on a visit to Jordan include the Red Sea port city of Aqaba, the desert castles, the Dead Sea, and Wadi Rum.

- In ancient times, Aqaba was the main port for shipments from the Red Sea to the Far East. Some of the world’s earliest known churches have been discovered here. It is also famed for its preserved coral reefs and unique sea life.

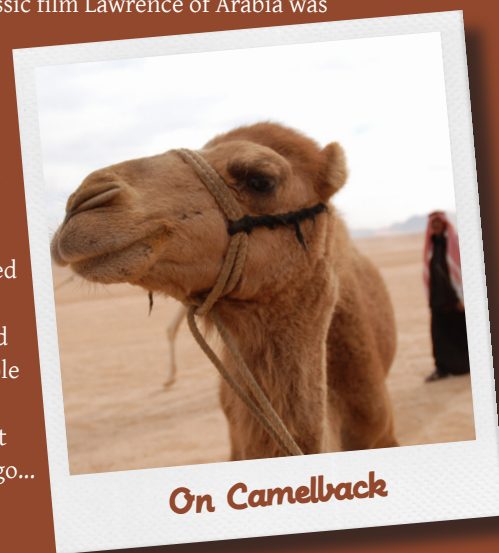
- Jordan’s desert castles are actually Islamic-era lodges once used as caravan stations and trade centers. They contain mosaics, frescoes, stone and stucco carvings that tell stories of life as it was during the 8th Century.

- The Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth, remains as much of a draw to tourists today as it was to the kings, emperors, traders and prophets of old. Not only is the abnormally salty and mineral-rich water believed to have health benefits, some of the most dramatic and enduring Old Testament stories staged here.

- Wadi Rum, with its seemingly endless orange sands, granite and sandstone cliffs and deep canyons can be seen from atop a camel, if you like. This is the classic landscape of the Middle East, and much of the classic film *Lawrence of Arabia* was filmed here.

Since the dawn of civilization, Jordan has played an important role in the Middle East. Its awe-inspiring geography and unequalled Biblical resonance has made it a desired destination for people of all faiths.

Time to put on that T-shirt and go...



On Camelback




Missions with a Click

As our world continues to change and becomes far more Internet-oriented, numerous opportunities are becoming available for Christians worldwide. Mission outreaches, once limited to those who could physically travel around the world, are now only a mouse click away.

One of the most powerful ways Christians are reaching others daily is through social networking sites like Xianz.com, FaithLight.com, HolyPal.com, and Tangle.com, faith-based online communities similar to MySpace and YouTube. Some individuals who visit these sites are looking to network with others with similar beliefs, while others are actively searching for answers to faith-based questions. In either case, your presence can communicate a life-changing message to others internationally.

As well, setting up a personal web page on non faith-based sites like Facebook or common-interest forums

and networking with others can open doors for meaningful contact with individuals around the world, twenty-four hours a day. Even with limited time for outreach, a personal testimony on your social networking site web page can begin to change lives around the world. Devoting extra time to network has the potential to make an impact.

Google's Keyword Search Tool shows that over sixteen million people searched the Internet for information about the keyword "God" in January 2009, more than five million more than in previous months. This does not even include searches with the keyword "Christianity" or "Bible," which have also increased dramatically. Mission opportunities are abundant in whatever way Christians want to reach others on the Internet. With the click of a mouse, Christians can be one step closer to making a meaningful impact on others worldwide. —Jeanne Henry 

A photograph of a young woman in traditional Ethiopian clothing, including a pink and white headscarf and a peach-colored tunic with frayed edges. She is standing in a doorway with a red frame, looking thoughtfully to the side. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

ETHIOPIA



Ethiopia is one of the oldest nations and one of the oldest Christian nations in the world. There has been Christianity in Ethiopia even before there was Christianity in Europe.

Ramon Mayo interviews his friend Abex, an Ethiopian Christian, about the spirit and strength of a nation, and the differences between Ethiopian Christianity and American Christianity.

Photo: *hiro008/Flickr (CC)

THE LIGHT OF ETHIOPIA: A GROW

m

any people think of Ethiopia and only think of famine, war or pictures of starving children. I have to admit this was my first image of Ethiopia. I have now come to realize that it so much more than that; what we see in the media is not the whole story. For me, Ethiopia is like a

second home. After visiting eight times, I have grown to know and love a lot about this beautiful country. Every time I mention to someone that I have been there eight times, they almost look bewildered. The other day, I told one of my professors and he did a double take and, in his own classic way, made it not just eight times but eighteen times. In some ways, I feel that, if given the opportunity, I would want to visit even more than that.

The question is: what draws me to go back year after year? What motivates me to learn the national language, Amharic, or read Ethiopian history books cover to cover? Is it the tasty injera bread and spicy wot stew? Is it the longstanding tradition and history of the only uncolonized African country? I believe these aspects of Ethiopian culture play a part in my affinity for Ethiopia, but one thing I know for certain is that I am drawn to the intense spirituality of its people. In the many times I have visited, I have sensed a love for God and openness to the spiritual world that I just don't find in America. In Ethiopia, speaking of God and participating in the supernatural is as normal as breathing.

Ethiopia is one of the oldest nations—and one of the oldest Christian nations—in the world. There was Christianity in Ethiopia even before there was Christianity in Europe. There is a story in the Bible about an Ethiopian eunuch who served Queen Candace. He was baptized after he heard the good news about Christ and rejoiced all the way back to his homeland in Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-40). Officially, Ethiopia became a Christian nation in the 4th Century through two men from ancient Tyre named Frumentius and Aedesius. The rich Judeo-Christian history is immediately noticable as soon as you set foot in the country and get to know people's names—like Markos (Mark), Solomon, and Samuel—or look at their necks and hands and see cross necklaces and tattoos.

This is only the surface of Ethiopia's vibrant Christian heritage and future. The largest and oldest church in Ethiopia is the Ethiopian Coptic Orthodox Church. As a visitor to Ethiopia you cannot help but notice the beautifully designed churches, the colorfully dressed priests, and the sound of chanting and singing blasting from speakers. There is something magical and mysterious about this tradition that has been in Ethiopia for 1,600 years.

Christianity is not the only spiritual tradition in Ethiopia. Many years before, the prophet Muhammad introduced Islam to Ethiopia as he fled from Saudi Arabia, and there have been Muslims there for at least 600 years. This has not been an easy tension to resolve, as there have been many wars and private battles between Christians and Muslims. There is also the recent growth of the Prot-

estant church in Ethiopia. Most non-Protestants have given them the name "Pente," short for Pentecostal. Although they are from many different denominations—Lutheran, Mennonite, and Baptist, for example—they are labeled "Pente" because of their lively worship and strong faith in God, which is similar to those of the followers of Jesus in the book of Acts. I had the opportunity to interview an Ethiopian friend of mine named Abex about his take on spirituality. He had some very significant things to say concerning Ethiopian and American Christianity.

What is it like spiritually in Ethiopia?

If you are a non-believer, spirituality looks like fighting between Protestants, Orthodox and Muslims. You can see the competition. Muslims are running to convert people and have a lot of new members, and the Protestant church too. They are running and they say, "Thank you Jesus for these new members," and the Orthodox are running to save their historical church. They are not worried about salvation, but want to be the owner of the history which is the first Christian church in Ethiopia. They want to keep the Old Testament and Jewish culture, and they want to keep it with the New Testament.

Christians want to empty themselves, make themselves humble, keep themselves far from the world. Some don't want to participate in non-believers' birthday parties. We say we are free from cultural rules and expectations, but this can keep us from connecting with non-believers and traditional Christians. In Ethiopia, it is very normal and common to be praying and fasting and worshipping three or more times per week. We love this and we all have small home groups as well. When friends get together, we always have prayer, worship and preaching time for each other. I miss this very much. Prayer is very normal. As new Christians, this was very difficult at first, and we didn't have the strength to pray for a long time, as others could. But everyone grows and gets this strength.

When you pray, do you receive miraculous answers to prayer?

We have seen many miracles in our own lives and other people's lives. If you have a church, you have miracles. We have seen so many miracles. I was working in UNHCR [The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] refugee camps on the Ethiopian side of the Somali/Ethiopian border. Part of my job was water sanitation for 45,000 people.

There was a drought and there had been no rain for a year and half. All the water supplies had dried up and it was a big problem. I was a fairly new Christian then; I had started a small church because there was no church in the area. I talked to my church and we decided to fast and pray for three days. We needed permission for the time off to pray. I went to my boss on a Friday to ask for time

MOVING NATION OF FAITH

by Ramon Mayo

off to pray. He laughed but gave me the time off. I told him that I was sure Sunday we would have rain. I walked away and felt very bad—why did I say this? If there was no rain on Sunday, what would we do? This was a Muslim refugee camp and of the twenty-eight Ethiopian staff, only five were born-again Christians. I was scared. Why did I tell him all that?

We prayed and fasted. Friday, clear skies. Saturday, clear skies. Around 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, I went outside for a break, and I saw my boss. He asked where the rain was and laughed at me. I scratched my head and said I didn't know. After that we cried and looked in the Bible; Elijah had prayed and the rain came. Yéchallal—it is possible. Afterwards, I gave up praying for rain.

At 3:00 p.m., the wind started blowing on our tent church. I went outside and the sky was black. The rain came, and I ran to take care of the dam. From that day on my boss gave us the responsibility to take care of money, or any other important responsibility. He would call me for prayer needs and still calls my sister to pray for him. I was very happy in that area. Even though we were in a desert, for me it was green because God was training me in faith and prayer.

How long have you been a Christian?

If it was later, what were your original perceptions of Christianity as a whole?

What about American Christians?

I have been a Christian for eleven years. Before I became a Christian, I thought it was a boring group of good people. I felt that was the only way to show your community you were a good person. I believed that I was bad because I was not a member of that group. I thought they were in a prison, and they didn't have the right to have fun. We believed them and trusted them, because they were good people, living under some good rules, but we didn't want to live under those rules.

As for American Christians, I didn't know any personally, but we heard that the born-again Christian movement was from America or the West. There was a rumor that if you joined the born-again Christians, you would get fifty Ethiopian birr [Ethiopian currency] every month from America. After I became a Christian, some of my friends who were not believers asked me about that money.

How has the Church been doing in Ethiopia? Has it been growing?

What has that been like to be a part of the Church recently?

The church continues to grow. There are churches in every small town and every neighborhood of every big city. The youth especially have been converted. As a member of an Ethiopian church, you have a lot of Christian friends. There are also many opportunities to minister. We have one-on-one outreach in the community. We also have many programs: Bible study programs, healing programs, fasting programs, and prayer for baptism in Holy Spirit. Every church, rich or poor, is busy with these programs. Churches have multiple pastors and evangelists. They are all very committed and ready to care for people. My pastor traveled by bus to visit me when I was a new Christian and still addicted to a local drug. He stayed with me and prayed with me for two weeks. In those two weeks, I was freed from my addiction and at the same time, I learned something about

how to serve people.

What is life like for you during an average week in Ethiopia?

When I worked in the refugee camp, we had an hour-long prayer program every morning in our church. Three days a week, we had night worship, preaching and praying programs. Sunday we had regular worship. We saw God do amazing things there.

When I moved to Addis Ababa [the capital city of Ethiopia], I would go to work in the morning. After work, I would go with my friends to visit some people who were sick. We would pray for them and share what we had. One woman was so sick for two years; she couldn't walk or talk, and her bed was soaked with urine. Everyone thought she had AIDS. She had been strangled by her fiancé and was left for dead. But God gave us direction and we found her. We prayed for her, cleaned her up, brought her food, and fixed up her home for 6 months. She started to stand, then walk, then talk, then she started serving us. Now we can't find her because she is out serving others. This was my life in Ethiopia. We have so many testimonies.

"I feel like I don't see any warrior spirit [in America]. It is like people believe their problems are okay for them."


What is an Ethiopian church service like?

Sunday morning services start around 9:00 a.m. with prayer and then worship, followed by listening to the word of God, and then more worship until about 1:00 p.m..

That's very nice.

Now that you live in the United States what is your impression of American Christianity?

I feel like I don't see any warrior spirit. It is like people believe their problems are okay for them. Like the Bible says, reject Satan and he will be far from you, and call on God and he will be close to you. I have learned a lot about psychological and emotional problems living in America, and I see there is demonic activity working in Christians, but I don't see any Christians standing up and breaking these evil spirits like a soldier.

The prayer style is odd for me. It is very short. They spend a lot of time talking about something and then the prayer is short. Instead of the Bible, they like ideas from different books. I feel that American Christians go to other books before the Bible. I read Christian books myself, but in the church we should be studying the Bible. Since we moved to the U.S.A., I have seen a fasting program only once. In Ethiopia, we might fast every week. I told my pastor in Ethiopia by phone about this. He said, "They don't have any problems. Why would they need to fast? We have a lot of problems, so we even have to pray instead of sleeping." Maybe Americans don't think they have problems. They are going to church to feel like a saved Christian. But Christian is a name of a group of people with a lot of jobs to do, like praying for the nation, freedom for our neighbors, or a solution to the problems with the economy. We need to seek God to see His glory. We should see a miracle when we are together. The Bible says, "when two or more gather, [Jesus] will be there." American churches and Christians seem to be cool and calm. I haven't seen all of America, but this is what I have seen. 

The Joy of Food and Company

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:44-47 (NIV)

As demonstrated in Acts above, Christian community thrives when being engaged in each others' lives, aware of people's needs, sharing meals together, and honoring God as one. We hope that as you hear different perspectives and learn about God, culture, community, the environment, and the world in each issue, you may want to bring your friends together to eat and converse. Here we share recipes from the countries featured in the world section. Enjoy!



Ethiopian Vegetable Stew (Ethiopia) *Alecha*

- 4 Tbs. Margarine or oil (30ml)
- 2 clove garlic
- 2 onion, chopped
- 2 cups water
- 6 medium potatoes, chopped in large pieces
- 4-6, chopped
- 1 1/2 Tsp. Salt
- 1 Tsp. Ground ginger
- 1 Tsp. Ground Turmeric
- 1/2 Tsp. Pepper
- 2 lb cabbage, chopped (1 kg)(about 5 cups)
- 2 green chili pepper, seeded and quartered

In a large saucepan combine margarine or oil, garlic and onions. Saute onions until soft, but do not brown. Add 1 cup water, potatoes, carrots, 1 Tsp salt, and spices. Cook 10 minutes until potatoes and carrots begin to soften. Add cabbage, 1 cup water, 1/2 Tsp salt and the green chili peppers. Stir gently to combine, taking care not to mash vegetables. Serve with injera (Ethiopian flat bread) or rice.

Serves 8-10

Ethiopia

Noah's Pudding (Jordan)

- 3 cups water
- 3/4 cup bulgur wheat
- 1/2 cup short grain rice
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup milk
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup golden raisins
- 1/4 cup dried currants
- 1/4 cup chopped pitted dates
- 1/4 cup chopped dried apricots
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- Chopped walnuts or chopped almonds for topping (optional)

In a medium saucepan combine water, bulgur wheat, uncooked rice, and salt. Bring to a boil, then reduced heat. Cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Add milk, sugar, golden raisins, currants, dates, apricots and orange juice, stir thoroughly. Cook, uncovered, over low heat for 20 minutes. Spoon into serving bowls and sprinkle each serving with walnuts or almonds. Serve warm or chilled.

Serves 8

Jordan



Tensions between Israel and Palestine have existed for centuries, and this conflict has become one of the world's most enduring and volatile. A particular point of contention is the Gaza Strip, an area of land located between Egypt, Israel, and the Mediterranean Sea. With both sides claiming rights to this 139-square-mile strip of land, Israeli-Palestinian relations continue to be as unpredictable as ever.

by Cristian Vasquez



A

recent BBC report partially attributes the December 2008 rocket attack by Hamas to a blockade set by Israeli forces in Gaza. The blockade was established nineteen months earlier in an effort to cut off the gasoline supply to the region. Mutual attacks between Israel and Palestine have escalated since

Hamas's rise to power in 2007.

Prior to Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, a rival Palestinian political party, Fatah, had control of the region. In August 2005, the Palestinian Authority, made up of Palestinian nationalists from Fatah, took control after Israel left the territory. Unlike Hamas, Fatah believed that a solution could be reached between Israel and Palestine in Gaza. However, in June 2007, Ismail Haniyeh led Hamas forces in a coup to overthrow Fatah and take control of Gaza. Members of the international community have reached out to both sides in search of a peaceful resolution. However, intervention from foreign nations, and the United States and Britain in particular, is in many instances viewed as creating more tension than resolution.

"The problem with the UN," says Edgar Klaska, a political science professor at California State University, Long Beach, "is that whenever it does get involved in something and maybe manages to 'move the ball' closer to the goal, the U.S. steps in to either vote against what the UN wants or to undermine the process."

The difficulty with reaching a resolution stems from the various historic perspectives that exist in the disputed territory, which has been continuously settled for thousands of years. According to www.globalpolicy.org, in 135 A.D., the Romans forced most of the Jewish population out of Jerusalem and named the area Palaestina.

Palestine, as it would later be known, would go through many more foreign occupations and inner revolts. Groups of Palestinian Arabs carried out rebellions against Egyptian occupation and also against the Ottoman Empire, which took control over the land in 1517. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the conclusion of World War I, the Gaza Strip remained part of Palestine but was subject to Western occupation. Through a League of Nations mandate, Britain was given power to administer and set new boundaries over Palestine.

The many years of fighting against foreign empires and states created a sense of nationalism among Palestinians. When combined with the belief that they have a historic right to the land, this makes it difficult for Palestinian authorities to reach an agreement with Israel. "It's more of a question of fighting Israel as a colonizer of their land," Kaskla says. "It resembles more of a postcolonial situation. For most Palestinians, it is getting one's country back, which they view as having been taken from them by the Israelis and given to them by the Western powers."

Understanding Israel's claim to the land is not any simpler. There has been a Jewish presence, even if in small numbers, throughout most of Palestine's history. During the Spanish Inquisition, a large number of Jews were allowed to settle in Palestinian cities to avoid

persecution. After the Romans exiled the Jewish communities in Palestine, a small percentage of the population remained.

Due in part to the constant Jewish presence in the area, Jews also make a claim to Palestinian land. These claims intensified with the creation of the Zionist movement in 1897. The central rhetoric of Zionism is that Jews are people tied to a land and not just followers of a religion. This movement helped fuel feelings among the Jewish community that they had a historic right to the land in the area.

With frequent migration, Jews often settled in Palestine, the most recent instance occurring during World War II. Despite British rule over Palestine, European Jews trying to escape Nazi-occupied Europe were denied entry. However, through an organized system of illegal immigration, Palestinian Jews helped bring their fellow Hebrews to safety.

During their mandate of Palestine, the British showed support for a Jewish national state, accompanied by a desire to not offend the non-Jewish population in the area. The possibility of a Jewish homeland became a reality when, through a United Nations resolution in 1948, Western nations established a boundary for the

state of Israel without consulting the Palestinians. Despite fierce opposition from the Arab world, the land now known as Israel has become the homeland to Jews around the world.


Palestinian reactions to the loss of land led to a split in opinion within the population. Some support Hamas's radical beliefs, while others support Fatah's more moderate stance toward Israel. "There is a serious divide among Palestine in terms of support, which complicates matters," Kaskla says. "It shows that

the Palestinians have a diversity of opinion."

1993 marked a milestone in easing Israeli-Palestinian tensions. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), led by Yasser Arafat, officially recognized the State of Israel, and in return, Israel recognized the PLO as a legitimate representative of Palestine.

However, Israeli foreign policy in the region continues to fuel bitterness from neighboring Arab states. Israel justified its recent bombings of Palestine as defensive actions. On the other hand, Palestinians viewed the attacks as acts of terrorism, and resented what they felt was little or no foreign intervention. "The brutality that Israel shows then feeds this really vile anti-Jewish hatred that many people in the region hold on to," says Kaskla. "The U.S. does not take a strong stand against Israeli policy even though it seems warranted."

Israel's actions are seen by many Middle Eastern countries as a byproduct of the U.S.'s leniency toward the nation. Foreign intervention, or a lack thereof, is a considerable barrier to the peace process. Kaskla explains, "The U.S. role in being a stalwart supporter of Israel is a definite obstacle. There is a perception that even when the U.S. tries to act as mediator in the peace process, they will side with the Israelis in most instances."

As both sides continue to fight for the land they call home, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is as complicated and unpredictable as ever. 

As both sides continue to fight for the land they call home, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is as complicated and unpredictable as ever.

environment



Biomimicry: An Ocean of Possibilities

We know that God's divine hand is showcased in the creativity of nature. It only stands to reason that the best ideas are His. The following are some of our favorite examples of biomimicry—nature-inspired items that try to apply the perfection found in nature's designs and processes to solve everyday human problems.

STICKY SITUATIONS

Mussel Glue

Funded by Columbia Forest Products and others, Dr. Kaichang Li, a professor at Oregon State University's College of Forestry, discovered what some could call a natural superglue, after asking himself how mussels keep their grip on the rocks as waves come crashing down. He learned that the mussels secrete proteins called byssal threads, which are incredibly flexible and amazingly strong. In his research, Dr. Li found that he could modify soy proteins to perform in a similar way. This led to a breakthrough adhesive called PureBond®, which offers superior strength and impressive water resistance. This formaldehyde-free bonding agent offers a quality and environmentally healthier choice in creating hardwood plywood. Check out www.columbiaforestproducts.com/PureBond.aspx for more information.



Photo: Werdok Werdokarian/Stock.xchng

AERODYNAMICS

Shark “Skin” for Cars Hope to Increase MPG

Those in the field of aerodynamics have recently been testing a type of car wrap that imitates shark skin, hoping to increase fuel efficiency. Scientists believe that the tiny dimples in shark skin help reduce the animals' surface tension through the water. Produced by SkinzWraps and similar in concept to a golf ball, whose dimples make it travel further, the car wraps are touted to cause an eighteen to twenty percent improvement in miles per gallon. Visit www.fastskinz.com for more information about this new technology.

WHALE POWER

Whale Fin to Wind Turbine

Humpbacks are the most acrobatic of whale species, often seen reaching their long flippers out of the water and into the air when they breach. The purpose for the many bumps and ridges on their flippers have virtually gone unknown—until now. Frank Fish, a professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania, has developed a wind turbine that mimics the humpback whale flipper. Reportedly, the bumps on the front help water to flow over the flippers more smoothly and allow the animal to swim tight circles around their main source of food, krill. This energy-saving design seems to work well in the air too. Who knows—in the near future, we may have whale-inspired ceiling fans. For more information, visit www.whalepower.com/drupal/



Photo: Catapa 34/Flickr (CC)

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new identity

MAGAZINE

Winter 2008/09

PREMIER
ISSUE

Art To Glorify

How artists reveal their faith through works

S: BRINGING GOD INTO THE NIGHT CLUBS OF SPAIN
S: REDEEMING THE HEART OF HIP HOP
S: EARTHBOUND: STEWARDSHIP OF THE PLANET



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"God gave our first parents [Adam and Eve] the food He designed that the race should eat. It was contrary to His plan to have the life of any creature taken. There was to be no death in Eden. The fruit of the trees in the garden was the food man's wants required." - Ellen G. White, Founder of the Seventh Day Adventists

Photo: Mark Aplet, Dreamstime.com

INSIGHTS FROM A CHRISTIAN



W

hen you think of a vegetarian, you may think of a hippie, a health nut, a Hindu or Buddhist, but do you think of a Christian?

A vegetarian is one who excludes meat—such as beef, pork, mutton, game, and slaughter by-products—as well as fish, sea animals, and poultry

from their diet. Some people think vegetarians just eat vegetables, but actually, they eat a variety of foods, such as grains, vegetables, legumes, fruits, berries, seeds, nuts, dairy products, eggs, and honey.

“A Christian concept of God must be shaped by the Christian scriptures,” remarks Richard Alan Young in his book, *Is God a Vegetarian?* (Open Court Publishing, 1998).

For many, Biblical Christianity and vegetarianism are hardly related. Most church potlucks are full of meat items and vegetarians are often an afterthought at such events, leaving them with few eatable options.

However, vegetarianism is more than a diet; it’s a lifestyle choice. With valid arguments and supportive scriptures on both sides of the vegetarianism issue, it’s a choice that God gives individuals to make for themselves.

Sandra Estill, a Christian and a vegetarian, explains her call and transition to vegetarianism. “At the time, the man I was to marry was a vegetarian. From his testimony and my personal conviction, I asked the Lord to help me to become a vegetarian. During the time of making my decision, the Lord showed me many reasons to become a vegetarian. God showed me that there is nothing wrong with eating meat, even telling Peter to kill and eat what He has made clean in Acts 11. However, it’s the ignorance and the overconsumption of our culture that really bothers me about the meat industry. People don’t realize how animals and the meat are handled.”

TO BE COMPASSIONATE

Some Christian vegetarians find support in the scriptures and in the knowledge of God as a loving, kind, and compassionate God as the main reason for their vegetarianism. Before Jesus died on the cross for our sins, we were headed for death for the wrongs we could not right. In His compassion and love for us, God gave us new life in Him, a sacrificed Son to take our place. Would God, who chose mercy over death for His people, perhaps also want the same for the animals He has created in this life?

Just as the scriptures in the Bible shape a Christian, they also shape vegetarian Christians. Genesis 1:26 (AMP), God gives us permission to have dominion over all the animals of the earth: “Let Us [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] make mankind in Our image, after Our likeness, and let them have complete authority over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the [tame] beasts, and over all of the earth, and over everything that creeps upon the earth.”

We are given permission, as stated above, to treat animals as we would like. But the question remains, would God agree with the way we are currently treating them? We tend to use animals for our own pleasure and gain, inflicting cruelty and providing them with poor living conditions.

VEGETARIAN

by *Caillin Henson*

TO BE ORIGINAL

“Did you know that before the [first sin] in the garden of Eden, God intended us to be vegetarians?” asks Estill. In addition to God’s loving nature, Christian vegetarians also find encouragement in God’s original and peaceful purpose of all His creation.

Then God said, “I’ve given you
every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth
And every kind of fruit-bearing tree,
given them to you for food.
To all animals and all birds,
everything that moves and breathes,
I give whatever grows out of the ground for food.”
And there it was.
—Genesis 1:29 (The Message)

In the beginning, people were just given the fruits and plants of this world to eat, and only after the world was destroyed by the great flood were people given the invitation to eat animals. In Genesis 9:3 (AMP), God tells the people: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green vegetables and plants, I give you everything.”

Estill explains, “Adam and Eve had broken the one rule that God gave them in the Garden of Eden and the sense of shame and guilt was on them. The human race eventually had to sacrifice animals to eat, clothe themselves from shame, and pay for their sins through their sacrifices. Praise be to God that He has made another way for us to come to Him. We no longer have to slay a lamb or a goat to ask for forgiveness, we now have Jesus who made the ultimate sacrifice through His death on the cross.”

However, there’s no reason to condemn meat-eaters. After all, Jesus, the ultimate role model, ate meat, as recorded in Luke 24:43-43 (NIV): “They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.” Likewise, there is no reason to accuse a vegetarian of being wrong either.

Putting God’s ultimate plan in perspective, Estill says, “Isaiah 11:6-9 mentions a day when wolves will live with lambs, leopards will lie down with goats, calves and lions will eat together and little children will lead them around. Wow, a day will come when even animals will not kill to survive. God’s plan is for all humans and animals to live together in peace, and to be filled with knowing Him.”

For some, choosing vegetarianism is a step towards a life of harmony with nature and a time prior to original sin.

TO BE HEALTHY & ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” 1 Corinthians 10:26 (NIV)

God’s ownership and the call to stewardship of God’s

resources is another reason Christians are conscious of their eating habits and the effect these habits have on the rest of the world.

“Our God-given responsibility is to do what we can do to feed the poor and bring the Gospel to them,” Estill says. “God has also called us to be good stewards of our own bodies. The number one killer in the U.S. is heart disease and eating too much meat is one of the causes. I believe this goes against God’s heart for us to be good stewards of our own bodies and our responsibility of caring for world and the environment. We should live simply so that others may simply live.”

Farmed animals consume seventy percent of the corn, wheat, and other grains grown in the U.S., and one-third of all the raw materials and fossil fuels used in the U.S. goes to raising animals for food. Furthermore, forests are cleared to make room for more crops to feed livestock or to build factory farms. In most countries, meat is a luxury, many times available only for special occasions, but in the United States it has become a part of breakfast, lunch and dinner. Paul McCartney says “If anyone wants to save the planet, all they have to do is just stop eating meat. That’s the single most important thing you can do. It’s staggering when you think about it. Vegetarianism takes care of so many things in one shot: ecology, famine, cruelty.”

For many Christians, taking care of God’s creation and stewardship of the environment is a priority and part of the Christian life. It says in Psalm 19:1-5,

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.


Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.

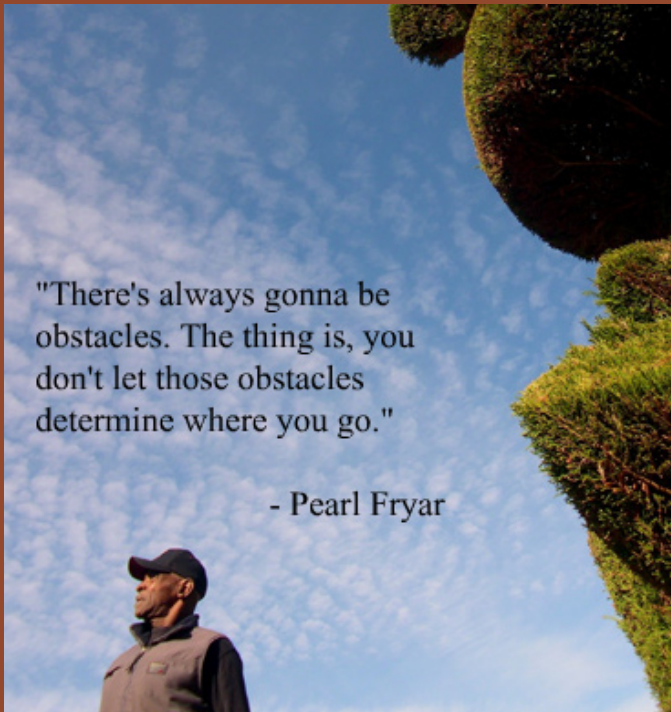
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard. [a]

Their voice [b] goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,
which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

The environment and natural world are pleasing to God and bring praises to His name. Since the practices of the meat industry destroy many of the natural resources and forests He might have enjoyed otherwise, wouldn’t it stand to reason that for the sake of all creation, we might want to scale back our meat consumption?

“I still crave the flavors of meat and fish,” says Estill, “but the Lord showed me that this was my personal way of a lifetime fast to better connect with Him and to become a better steward to my world and my own body. Even though it feels like a sacrifice sometimes, I realize that I am gaining more than before in this lifestyle. Not only do I feel healthier and am more “regular”, but I discovered the richness of new flavors. I feel blessed that the Lord brought this to my attention and helped me to be changed and help bring hope to others.” 



"There's always gonna be obstacles. The thing is, you don't let those obstacles determine where you go."

- Pearl Fryar

DOCUMENTARY

A Man Named Pearl

Pearl Fryar, a self-taught topiary artist (sculptor of trees and shrubs) shares his life and story in *A Man Named Pearl*, a documentary film from Tentmakers International about the expression of humanity, the achievement of dreams, and the foundation of faith. For more information, visit www.amannamedpearl.com.

God's Garden

*The Lord God planted a garden
In the first white days of the world,
And He set there an angel warden
In a garment of light enfurled.*

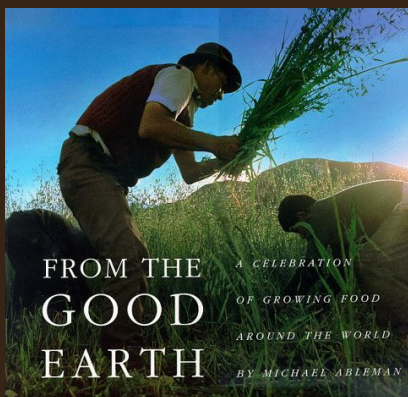
*So near to the peace of Heaven,
That the hawk might nest with the wren,
For there in the cool of the even
God walked with the first of men.*

*And I dream that these garden-closes
With their shade and their sun-flecked sod
And their lilies and bowers of roses,
Were laid by the hand of God.*

*The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth,--
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth.*

*For He broke it for us in a garden
Under the olive-trees
Where the angel of strength was the warden
And the soul of the world found ease.*

-Dorothy Frances Gurney



CELEBRATING FOOD

Global Green

From the *Good Earth: A Celebration of Growing Food Around The World*
by Michael Ableman

In this collection of photo essays, Ableman presents a stunning photographic experience of farming across the world, from Kenya to China.

The best place to
seek God is in a
garden. You can
dig for him there.

~George
Bernard Shaw,
*The Adventures
of the Black Girl in
Her Search for God*,
1932

Gardening With God

Finding connection with God in nature and uniting with life.

By Tim Henson



G

learned to love gardening from my mother while growing up in Phoenix, Arizona. When I was in grade school, she gave me some space in her flower bed and some seeds to plant, and I was hooked after seeing my first sunflower grow from a small seed to a giant that towered twice as high as I was. Phoenix wasn't the easiest place to garden, with summer

temperatures reaching the 120s and winter nights below freezing, but it taught me to confront challenges and keep going in the face of difficulties.

Today, twenty years later, I garden in Los Angeles, the second most populous city in the United States. The temperature is much more moderate, but finding space and time are equivalent challenges. Over the years, I've been drawn away from the television and the comfort of a soft couch to my knees as I pull weeds, plant seeds, and pray. The physical act of gardening is only a small part of the entire story. Blisters and aches last for a few days, but the lessons I've learned will last a lifetime.

Gardening has taught me hard work. In the spring, the soil must be prepared. There are weeds to remove, compost to dig in, and trees to trim. Sometimes I'm tempted to slack off and skip a few weeks, but I have learned that it's easier to get the weeds while they're small, and dig while it's cool. Proverbs 14:23 wisely teaches that "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." This is true in gardening and life in general.

I've learned to have hope when the world wants to give up. I must believe that the dry seeds I plant will one day spring to life and produce a harvest that will be worth my effort. In the same way, I've learned to hope that a kind word I speak to a neighbor walking their dog will encourage them, or a prayer I pray will be answered. And each spring, as tender plants emerge from the carefully prepared soil, prayers are answered.


Gardening has also taught me patience. As I browse through a seed catalog, I can almost taste the harvest. Unfortunately, even selecting one-day shipping won't speed things up very much. Plants grow on their own timetable, governed by the seasons. No amount of worry or work on my part can make them grow any faster. Sometimes in life we must soak up the sun, wind, or rain and wait; God does the growing.

While I must wait patiently, I must also remain watchful. Other creatures are also watching my plants grow, and they seem to enjoy the taste of my strawberries just hours before I hope to. Slugs and aphids, debt and lust—these are some things we must guard our gardens and lives against.

I must remain faithful. I must continue to tend my garden for however long it takes to reach the harvest. My plants will wither and die if I become distracted with other interests instead of watering in the heat. Waiting only halfway to the harvest results in sour grapes and green pumpkins.

When the harvest finally arrives, I know a joy that is sweeter than any juicy peach and more nourishing than any colorful vegetable. It is the joy that comes from planning, hard work, and patient watchfulness. It is the result of hope, faith, and a labor of love. The instant satisfaction offered everywhere these days seems like a limp, withered carrot compared to the crisp crunch we are meant to enjoy.

After the harvest, plants return to the earth to provide nutrients for next year's garden. Everything has a purpose, nothing is wasted. My plants have spent all their energy to fulfill the purpose they were planted for. I hope to spend the rest of my time wisely, following the rhythm of the seasons that God has created

instead of the hyper-caFFEinated, Hollywood-driven, bigger-better-now world we live in. I will slow down and feel the cool of the morning and heat of the day again. I'll listen to the birds and chat with my neighbors while growing some nutritious vegetables to eat, flowers to brighten one's day—and I'll learn a little about life in the process. 

Over the years I've been drawn away from the television and the comfort of a soft couch to my knees as I pull weeds, plant seeds, and pray. [But] the physical act of gardening is only a small part of the entire story.

Don't Have Space Of Your Own? Try These Community Garden Opportunities:

www.farmgarden.org.uk/ (Britain)
www.communitygarden.org/ (US)
www.communitygarden.org.au/ (Australia)



Twist & Spout Garden Pourer

This garden pourer fits snugly on common soda and water bottles. If you want to reduce waste, or at least reuse a soda bottle before recycling it, the Twist & Spout Garden Pourer will do the trick.

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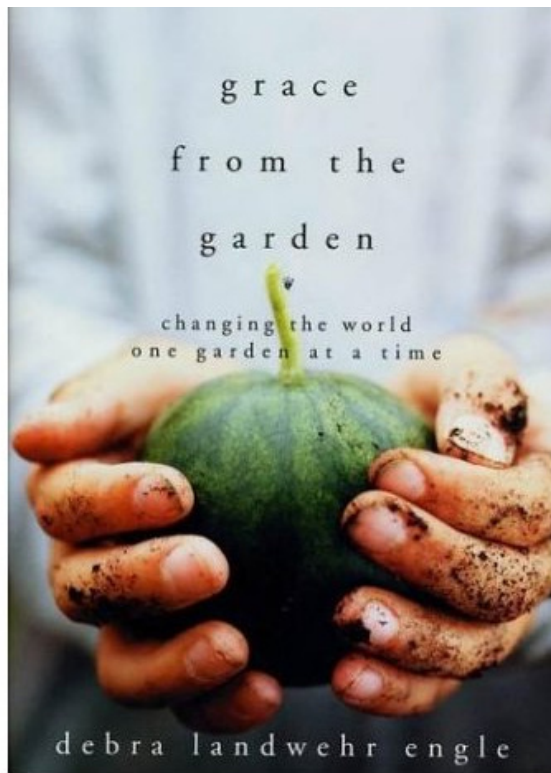
Available to purchase at

www.re-modern.com/product/FD-SPOUT.html



Seeds of Change

This seed catalog boasts 600 distinct varieties of 100% organically grown seeds for the home gardener. Looking at their beautiful photos and rare varieties will make you want to taste them all. Visit www.seedsofchange.com/ for more information and to order seeds.



Grace from the Garden

Grace from the Garden: Changing the World One Garden at a Time
by Debra Landwehr Engle

People from all walks of life celebrate the grace and change in life through gardening in the many personal stories that light up and inspire in Engle's book.



What does Spring mean to you?

Pray for the churches in Ethiopia, and for
continued strong faith.

Pray for ways to overcome the “hypocritical”
stereotype in the eyes of others.

Reflect on God’s creation this Spring and your
impact on the world around you.

Spring 2009 Prayer Plan

Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.

For instance, a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume he should only be a vegetarian and eat accordingly. But since both are guests at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.

—Romans 14:1-3 [*The Message*]

