

# new identity

God in focus. World in scope.

MAGAZINE

## BEYOND SUNDAY MORNINGS

EXPLORING THE WORLD OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

## FEAR THE LORD?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FEAR A GOD OF LOVE?

## GOOD GRIEF

ON DEALING WITH TRAGEDY AND LOSS

## HIS & HERS

*Gender Roles Series*

WHAT ARE THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHRISTIAN PARENTS?

# ELEVATING EASTER

*Celebrating Christ's Journey to the Cross and the Victorious Resurrection*



NEW IDENTITY MAGAZINE.COM

*Prosperity Is Not The Priority*  
pg. 40

# contents

## DEPARTMENTS

Issue 26B



13

### GROW

Spotlight: In Perspective

#### 6 His & Hers

What are the roles and responsibilities of Christian parents?

by Hannah Helms

Growth & Maturity

#### 13 Fear the Lord?

What does it mean to fear a God of love?

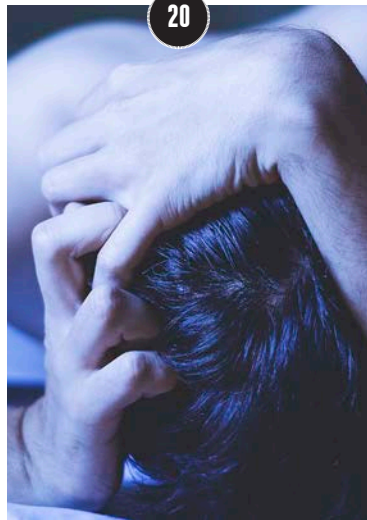
by Délice Williams

Jargon

#### 18 Washed In The Blood

The dictionary of Christian jargon for the ordinary person

by Ramon Mayo



20

### CONNECT

Life Together

#### 20 Good Grief

On dealing with tragedy and loss

by Sarah Mariano

Community

#### 26 Beyond Sunday Mornings

Exploring the world of community groups

by Lindsey A. Frederick



26

### LIVE

Give Back

#### 31 Justice for the Poor is Possible

International Justice Mission gives a voice to those who have none

by Matthew Hamilton

Culture & Creativity

#### 34 Elevating Easter

Celebrating Christ's journey to the cross and the victorious resurrection

by Luke Geraty

Careers & Callings

#### 40 Prosperity is Not the Priority

Defining biblical success

by Steven Butwell



NEW IDENTITY MAGAZINE.COM



## FROM THE EDITOR



### WRITE TO US:

What are your thoughts on this issue? What topics or perspectives do you want to read about or hear from? We love getting feedback. Send your message via e-mail or letter and please include your name, address and day-time phone number. *New Identity Magazine*, P.O. Box 1002, Mt. Shasta, CA 96067. Phone: (310) 947-8707; [feedback@newidentity-magazine.com](mailto:feedback@newidentity-magazine.com)

Like what you're  
reading?

Please support our  
nonprofit magazine by  
donating today.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” -Romans 5:7-8

I tend to get overwhelmed very easily. I also tend to run away when things are difficult for me to accomplish or face. Not physically run away, but emotionally run away. I call this distraction. Overwhelmed=distracted=me finding something more manageable (i.e. mostly less productive) to do. When I have to write something or start a new project at work, I get distracted by an untidy room in my house. Or when there are lots of people to pray for, I get bogged down before I even begin. This is ultimately part of my sin nature, but I know that God loves me in spite of this flaw (and many others).

As it says in Romans above, God knows my sins and still chose to love me. As I acknowledge my sin, I want to love God more than I want to indulge my sin nature. This means having confidence in God through sticky situations rather than trying to circumvent them.

Jesus never sinned like this. He didn't sin at all. But he knows us. He wasn't distracted; he faced issues head on. He was full of God and full of love. If I were truly full like Jesus is, my approach to problems would be different. I want them to be different. They will be different. It just takes time.

I desire to be filled with love rather than fear, with truth rather than lies and with God rather than myself. And while technically I am filled with God through the Holy Spirit who dwells within me, I must continue to make more and more room for him by submitting to his love and authority rather than submitting to sin.

Christ died and rose again so that this transformation would be possible for me and for you. In this issue, there are articles that speak to who God is, and they can help us to pursue this new direction. “Fear of the Lord?” by Délice Williams talks about why our love for God must be reverential. “Good Grief” by Sarah Mariano talks about having hope in who God is even when we are in deep pain. And “Elevating Easter” by Luke Geraty talks about making Easter more than just one Sunday. I hope you will join me this season in seeking to be less distracted and more in tune with God.

Happy Easter!

*Cailin*

CAILIN BRIODY HENSON  
Editor-in-Chief



TATTOOS & FAITH | EGYPTIAN COPTIC CHRISTIANS | WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP  
God in focus. World in scope.

# new identity

MAGAZINE

## A La Carte Faith

THE PITFALLS OF TAKING  
WHAT YOU LIKE FROM THE BIBLE  
AND LEAVING THE REST

THE  
MAGAZINE  
FOR NEW  
BELIEVERS

Deciphering Bible  
Translations  
FINDING THE BEST BIBLE  
FOR YOUR NEEDS

Nightclub Ministry  
ONE DJ WANTS TO BRING GOD  
INTO THE NIGHTCLUBS OF SPAIN

Breaking Bread &  
Breaking Barriers  
OVERCOMING CULTURAL  
DIFFERENCES

## PLUS:

WHAT IS PRAYER?  
SURFING AND SERVING IN PANAMA  
HOW GOD CHANGES YOUR BRAIN  
INSIGHTS FROM A CHRISTIAN VEGETARIAN

Equally Yoked  
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE  
"EQUALLY YOKED?"

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK





# new identity

## MAGAZINE

ISSUE 26

VOLUME 7 // NUMBER 2

God in Focus. World in Scope.

### Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

Cailin Briody Henson

### Copy Editors

Cailin Briody Henson  
Ruth Montgomery  
Sarah Mariano

### Editorial Board

Cailin Briody Henson  
Ruth Montgomery  
Sarah Mariano  
Jason Henry

### Layout & Design

Cailin Briody Henson

### Contributing Writers

Lindsey A. Frederick  
Ramon Mayo  
Matthew Hamilton  
Délice Williams  
Sarah Mariano  
Steven Butwell  
Luke Geraty  
Hannah Helms

### Board of Directors

Sean Estill  
Sandra Estill  
Ramon Mayo  
Yvette Mayo  
Tim Henson  
Cailin Henson

## Mission Statement

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

Tip

### Referencing The Bible:

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

Photo © Anaïs | Flickr (CC)

Send letters to the editor via [feedback@newidentitymagazine.com](mailto:feedback@newidentitymagazine.com) or to New Identity Magazine, P.O. Box 1002, Mt. Shasta, CA 96067.

Copyright ©2014 by New Identity Magazine. All rights reserved.

Reproduction in whole or part without written permission is prohibited. The opinions and views contained in this magazine are those of the author exclusively and do not necessarily reflect the views of the New Identity Magazine organization, staff, volunteers or directors.

New Identity Magazine (ISSN 1946-5939, Vol. 7, No. 2) is published quarterly, four times a year by New Identity Magazine, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, P.O. Box 1002, Mt. Shasta, CA 96067, United States.

New Identity Magazine is printed on FSC certified, 50% recycled paper - 10% post-consumer and 40% pre-consumer waste.

•Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

•Scripture quotations marked (The Message) are taken from The Message. Copyright 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

•Scripture quotations marked (AMP) are taken from the Amplified Bible, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

•Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

•Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

---

# His & Hers

SPOTLIGHT: IN PERSPECTIVE

*What are the roles and responsibilities of Christian parents?*



Photo © burner\_24\_7 | Flickr (CC)





by HANNAH HELMS

**A** midst the unsolicited advice and passionate opinions from friends, relatives, and strangers on the street, one of the greatest challenges that prospective parents face is the task of sifting through the endless sea of information about parenting. Hopeful parents must contend with a wealth of parenting philosophies, mommy blogs, safety information and product reviews. It is further complicated for couples navigating the intersection of their Christian faith and the role that each parent will take on as mother or father of their potential children.

The way Americans parent is dynamic. The stereotype of the nuclear family with a breadwinning father and a stay-at-home mother is no longer the norm. Biblical interpretation and Christian teachings on the responsibilities of men and women in regards to childrearing have a profound impact on parenting. What are these interpretations and teachings?

It helps to begin with an understanding of the history and the current state of the American family. According to Josh Sanburn's "A Brief History: The American Family" for *Time Magazine*, the pre-industrial American family of the 1700's was primarily agrarian, where both

parents were responsible for ensuring the success of a home based economy, and children were needed to both provide labor and actively participate in the family enterprise. In the Industrial Revolution of the 1800's, industry moved to urban areas, work became more separated from the home, and the idea of the husband as the breadwinner took off. According to Sanburn, this idea was further developed during the post-WWII prosperity of the 1950's, when the white suburban family with a stay-at-home mother and a father who worked 9-5 became the stereotype for the American family. This dynamic fostered the expectation that the father worked outside the home to financially provide



***With the tension between the history of family structure in America and its current status, Christians must determine what it means to parent, and that can include which partner in a marriage is responsible for which aspects of parenting.***

for his family, and the mother was to care for the children in the home.

This baby-boom era stereotype is still firmly planted in the minds of many Americans as how families should be. However the reality of the present day American family is a far cry from this stereotype. According to the Pew Research Center, 60% of American households have a dual income, meaning that fathers are no longer filling the role of primary breadwinners. For many Americans, the roles of mothers and fathers are merging – women are taking on paid work outside the home, and men are taking on more direct child care tasks, and both mothers and fathers are conflicted about their work-life balance. In a survey, approximately 50% of fathers interviewed expressed a desire to be at home and spend more time with their children, while the other half expressed a desire to work outside the home, despite the time away from their families. The response from mothers was nearly identical. Both parents desire to spend more time with their children, but also have a drive to provide for them by working outside the home. How do we reconcile this juxtaposition? What should the priorities of parenting be?

With this tension between the history of family structure in America and its current status, Christians must determine what it means to parent, and that can include which partner in a marriage is responsible for which aspects of parenting. Christian parents can look

for directives for childrearing in Scripture, specifically the book of Proverbs (a book of wisdom in all aspects of life). Apart from the obvious requirement of providing for the physical needs of children (1 Timothy 5:8), perhaps the most well-known verse pertaining to parents is Proverbs 22:6. It reads, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (ESV). This is not the only scripture that directs parents to be teachers of their children.

Deuteronomy 6:5-8 reads: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise..”

From these passages, it is clear that parents are responsible for the spiritual education of their children. Deuteronomy 4:9-10 and 11:18-19 echo similar commands.

Scripture also directs parents to discipline their children. Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 23:13, 29:15, and 29:17, direct parents to “use the rod of discipline” with their children. The intent of disciplining children is to keep them from folly and to further guide them in the ways of wisdom. In ancient Aramaic

culture, according to *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, discipline, including corporal punishment, was considered essential to a child's welfare. While the belief and instruction for parents to be disciplinarians still holds true, the methods of discipline that parents use are diverse. There are some theologians and denominations that take the directive to use corporal punishment literally; other Christians believe that corporal punishment in the Bible was culturally specific, and that it does not mean that they are required to physically discipline their children. Christians who choose not to spank their children implement other forms of discipline, such as time-outs, removal of toys, loss of privileges, or choosing other consequences.

Interestingly, Colossians 3:21 and Ephesians 6:4 also tells parents to "not provoke your children." The apostle Paul instructed Christians in the early churches to avoid over-disciplining children. Parents can perhaps reach a place of balance in the way that they approach childrearing by understanding the need for discipline as expressed in Proverbs, but to also enact discipline appropriately and in moderation per these passages. It is unclear if or how the responsibilities of discipline are to be divvied up.

Christian parents may find it frustrating to learn that this is the extent of the Bible's specific instructions regarding parenting and it doesn't even mention certain roles for a mother or father. The Bible tells parents to educate their children in the ways of the Lord, to discipline them, to meet their physical needs, and to refrain from provoking them. Within these directives, there is little expounded upon in regards to method, strategy, or parenting technique. This, according to John Kimbell's article "Biblical Commands & Wisdom in Parenting" for *The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, "releases some of the pressure that we may put on ourselves regarding all that we 'should' be doing for our children." This approach understands Scripture's relative dearth of parenting directives as a positive, granting freedom in childrearing choices.

The lack of specifics in Scripture allow for a wide variety of parenting practices, and may explain the

overwhelming number of books and teachings on how Christians ought to parent. Christian teachers or parenting advocates present their method of carrying out Scripture's instructions to parents as the correct means of doing so. Kimbell addresses this as well, stating, "It is crucial that we distinguish a biblical command that comes to us as parents from the application of that command which requires wisdom in particular circumstances and which may be applied in different ways in different families." There is no-one-size-fits-all way to parenting biblically, but parents can rely on Scripture and prayer to guide them in childrearing.

Though Scripture is vague in regards to the respective tasks of motherhood and fatherhood, there are still a variety of teachings and opinions within the Christian community as to what roles

***Despite the lack of clear instructions given to parents on the respective tasks of motherhood and fatherhood, there are still a variety of teachings and opinions within the Christian community as to what roles parents should take on.***



parents should take on. The complementarian view of male-female relationships results in specific ideas about motherhood and fatherhood. In short, the complementation view supports male headship in a family, with the wife submitting to the leadership of her husband and the children submitting to both parents. Complementarians hold that men and women are created with distinctive roles and responsibilities in relationships. This perspective on gender roles and relationships teaches that wives are subject to the rightful authority and leadership of their husbands, in the same way that the Church is subject to Christ. Husbands are called to submit to the authority of Christ and to love their wives. Philippians 2:3 provides a good overview of understanding submission in this context, as it states “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

Due to these views regarding male-female roles in marriage, many complementarians follow set roles for the mother and the father in a family. In an interview dated October 3, 2008, John Piper expressed his view on the different roles that mothers and fathers should take on. He asserts: “Fathers are given a unique responsibility in the marriage to lead, protect and provide for a wife, those three things. And the children are watching this, and they know that a special role is given to dad.” Piper sums up quite well the overall view that many complementarians have toward the role of fathers - that fathers are to be the leaders of a family, and that one of the greatest tasks that a father can take on is that of provider for a family. Because of this view, many complementarians subscribe to what Americans consider a “traditional” family model, with a father who is the primary breadwinner, and a mother who resides at home and takes on the majority of childrearing responsibilities.

In regards to the complementation view of what women are responsible for in a parenting relationship, many complementarians believe that marriage and motherhood are the primary calling for a woman. This is not to say that those who identify as complementarians do not support single

***While the Bible clearly instructs parents about their responsibility for the spiritual education and discipline of their offspring, these often fall to the wayside as mothers and fathers try to divide the childcare tasks.***

women, or single mothers, or couples who cannot have children. Rather, there is a strong emphasis and reverence on motherhood as a biblical calling for women. In his May 8, 2005 sermon John Piper elaborates on this, encouraging women to the “biblical calling of marriage, the joyful support of a husband and his calling ... and motherhood, the transmission of a God-centered, Christ-treasuring vision of life to your children.” The complementation view holds that one of the primary ways that women can submit to and honor their husbands is by supporting their husbands in work and ministry, and following their husband’s vision for marriage. According to the complementation view, gender roles with regards to childrearing are more clearly recognized. A wife is seen as primary caregiver and a husband as primary provider, usually monetarily.

Not all Christians see parenting as clearly divided by gender as complementarians do. Another viewpoint (called egalitarian) holds that both men and women are created equally, and that the hierarchy that

forms in male-female relationships is the result of the introduction of sin into the world. Egalitarians believe that men and women should submit to each other within the context of marriage and do not believe that gender pre-determines roles in childrearing.

In a blog entry entitled “Egalitarian Marriage: What it Looks Like,” Jonalyn Fincher emphasizes that, with an egalitarian view, there is room for more flexible roles. She writes, “Roles for the husband and wife follow from their gifts and abilities, not from their gender.” In an egalitarian marriage, the wife may be gifted with business savvy, and a husband may naturally have a caring demeanor and be nurturing. Because of this, it is not uncommon to see egalitarian relationships embrace the option of women playing the role of breadwinner, and men as stay at home parents. This does not mean, however, that egalitarian parents ignore differences between men and women. Fincher acknowledges, “sometimes our gender reveals our gifts: for a woman this may mean childbearing... But the role of a parent is open to both father and mother.”

Meredith Anne Miller echoes Fincher’s ideas in her article entitled “I’m an Egalitarian and a Stay At Home Mom” for The Junia Project blog. She writes, “The point is to use our giftedness to serve Christ and his Kingdom – in our families, our churches, and our communities.” Miller emphasizes that both men and women, fathers and mothers, are to first and foremost identify as followers of Christ. In the context of marriage and family, this means utilizing the unique gifts that each partner has been given for the spiritual instruction and rearing of their children. Miller summarizes this idea: “I became a stay-at-home mom precisely because I am an egalitarian. Egalitarianism reminded me that there is no set path I have to take because of my gender. I just need to steward the life and gifts God has given me.” Egalitarians see a freedom in marriage and in parenting based on individual gifts and strengths rather than one in which duties are predetermined on the basis of gender.

Despite the differences within Christianity regarding parental roles, both complementarians

and egalitarians agree that the biblical directives are the primary guides to parenting, and that, regardless of what role they play, both parents bear the responsibility to live those directives out. In his October 3, 2008 interview, John Piper states: “Both mom and dad are responsible to give commandments and give teachings. The book of Proverbs talks about the teaching of a mother as well as of a father, so a parental team confronts this child with the will of God and with godliness.”

In an article for *Sojourners* (a faith-based, social justice magazine) entitled “The Struggles of Christian Parenting,” Stephen Mattson elaborates on Piper’s point and also touches on the challenge and burden that comes with this responsibility. While the Bible clearly instructs parents about their responsibility for the spiritual education and discipline of their offspring, these often fall to the wayside as mothers and fathers try to divide the childcare tasks. Mattson writes, “This is probably the hardest thing about Christian parenting: wanting our kids to actually live like Christ... Christ-like parenting requires us to eagerly raise our children with the expectation that they might be viewed as subpar, unsuccessful, and complete failures according to worldly standards.” This idea seems completely out of line with everything that American culture throws at parents. When faced with the task of raising children to emulate Christ, the question of navigating gender roles and parenting seems to pale in comparison. This is the heart of the matter: in the midst of questions about gender roles, the most important responsibility that a Christian mother or father bears is to emulate Christ and spiritually educate their children. 📖



## HANNAH HELMS

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



# FEAR THE LORD?

*What does it mean to fear a God of love?*

by DÉLICE WILLIAMS

Photo © Korin Nameless | Flickr (CC)

**F**ear is not a feeling that most of us enjoy. We avoid the uncertainty, vulnerability, and powerlessness that often make up that emotion. Fear of an opponent can become a mental barrier that keeps us from winning, and fear of failure can keep us from reaching our potential and pursuing our dreams. Fear can get in our way and leave us with regret.

The Bible has a lot to say about fear, and some of what it says lines up with our typical way of thinking. Remember David and Goliath? When grown men and trained soldiers are too scared to face down a dangerous enemy alone, David takes down the giant with one stone from a sling-shot. David grows up to be a triumphant warrior king—a hero in his own time and in ours. Yet the hero held in his heart a different kind of fear, one that he wrote about in psalms. This fear is “the fear of the Lord.”

Over and over again in the Psalms, we read from David and other writers about this fear: “Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him” (Psalm 34:9, NKJV); “Make vows to the Lord your God, and pay them; Let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared” (Psalm 76:11, NKJV). God doesn’t reprimand David or the other writers for fearing him. Indeed Scripture confirms that the kind of fear David had is something God approves of.

What is this “fear of the Lord” and how can we make sense of it today? Because the Bible places such an emphasis on the fear of the Lord, and because the idea of fearing a God who is supposed to be all loving might seem like a contradiction, it’s worth taking time to think through these questions in light of Scripture.



## THE MEANINGS OF “FEAR”

The Hebrew phrase “yirah,” which is translated most often as “fear,” holds a range of meanings, and not all of them are negative. This word can mean terror or dread, but also “awe” or “reverence” and “respect” (En Gedi Research Center) “Yirat Adonai,” the phrase translated “the fear of the Lord,” is used repeatedly in the Old and New Testaments, and nearly every time, it refers to this “reverence,” “awe,” and “respect.” Oftentimes the “fear of the Lord” means “a holy way of life” because reverence for God leads one to follow God’s directions for right living.

In the Old Testament, the ancient Israelites were just beginning to learn about God’s character and power, so the call to fear is fairly direct. In Deuteronomy 10:12, Moses tells the Israelites: “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (NKJV). This scripture and many others point to the fact that our Creator is the most powerful being in the universe, and, as the source of all truth and all goodness, God is worthy of our reverence. God is not just another being and not comparable to the “gods” that pagan cultures worshipped.

One way to think of this fear is to compare it to the feeling you might get from standing in front of a vast ocean. You’re awed by the size and the power, and, at the same time, you sense how small you are in comparison. If contemplating the ocean can make us feel that way, then thinking about the God who created the oceans should fill us with even more wonder and respect.

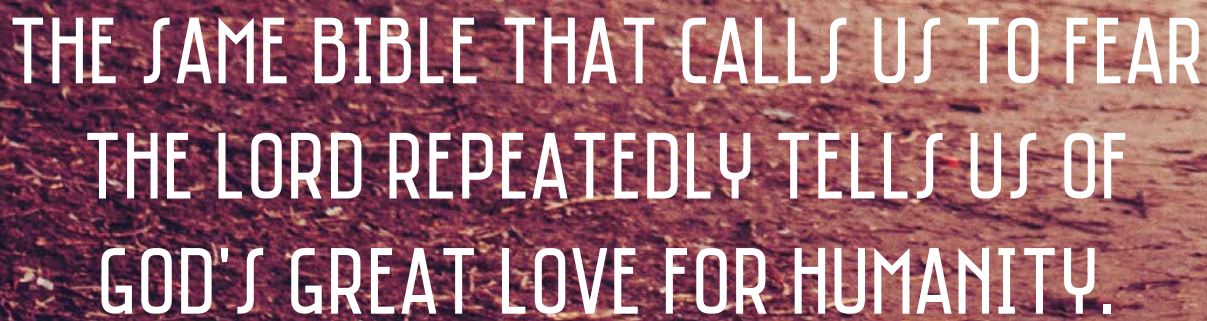
In the New Testament, where scripture writers focus on Jesus as the highest representation of God’s love for human beings, we still receive similar instructions to fear God. 1 Peter 2:17 tells us quite directly to “honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (NKJV). Acts 9:31 states that Jesus’ followers were “walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit” (NKJV).

# THERE IS A PLACE FOR THE RIGHT KIND OF FEAR—THE REVERENTIAL AWE AND RESPECT—IN OUR LIVES.

Even as God demonstrated love by sending Jesus to die on the cross to take punishment for our sins, God reminded people of the importance of fearing him. God is not only our savior, comforter, and friend who promises to be with us always (Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 28:20), but also the most powerful being in the universe. There is a place for the right kind of fear—the reverential awe and respect—in our lives.

This healthy fear keeps us mindful of three important aspects of God’s character and being. The first is God’s power. Genesis 1-3 tells us that God created the universe out of nothing, just by speaking it into being. Job 42 tells us that God “can do all things” and none of God’s purposes “can be thwarted” (NIV). God has power over every aspect of creation, including us. That’s not to say that everything that happens because God planned it that way. He has given us choices and freedoms. Ultimately, however, God can intervene at any moment. Part of fearing God is understanding that all power belongs to him.

Closely related to this power is God’s authority. He has the first and final word about what is true and good in the world. God speaks of this authority directly: “I am the Lord, and there is no other...I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right”



# THE SAME BIBLE THAT CALLS US TO FEAR THE LORD REPEATEDLY TELLS US OF GOD'S GREAT LOVE FOR HUMANITY.

(Isaiah 45:18 & 19 NIV). Earlier in the same chapter, he declares, “there is no God besides Me” (Isaiah 45:5 NKJV).

Clearly, not everyone respects that authority. (In fact, one way to define sin is to call it rebellion against God’s authority.) But our refusal to acknowledge God’s authority does not make it invalid. The Bible tells us that eventually all people will be held accountable for their responses to God’s authority (Hebrews 9:27). Isaiah 45:23 and Romans 14:11 tell us plainly that “every knee shall bow” before God and every tongue will verbally acknowledge God’s authority. Another part of walking in “the fear of the Lord,” then, is allowing our Lord’s authority to determine our attitudes and actions. In a real sense, Christians should see themselves as people who live under a higher authority.

The same Bible that calls us to fear the Lord repeatedly tells us of God’s great love for humanity. The most succinct declaration of that love came from Jesus Christ, who tells us in John 3:16 that that love covers the whole world. That love is as great as God’s power. In fact, 1 John 4 tells us that “God is love.”

If we separate any of these truths about God’s power, authority, and love from the others, then we distort God’s character and nature. Power and authority without love would make God dangerous

and threatening—a giant ogre rather than a loving creator. Love without power and authority would make God just a nice guy in the sky who makes us feel good, but one who can’t tell us what’s right, and can’t do anything about the evil in the world. Love and power without authority would mean influences other than God would have the right to tell us what’s true and right. When we fear God, we appreciate these three aspects of God’s character together and get a more accurate understanding of who God is in our lives.

Having this kind of awe or respect for God makes experiencing his love that much more incredible. Think about it: the most powerful being in the universe knows and notices each and every one of his creations and wants them to learn about and experience his love. That’s the most incredible truth in the universe, a truth that should give us hope and drive out our fears.

## **FEARING GOD DELIVERS US FROM FEAR**

Recognizing God as our loving creator and ultimate authority frees us from an inappropriate fear of other people or circumstances. In Luke 12, Jesus offers us clear and direct teaching on how the fear of God paradoxically gives us boldness to deal with dangers here on earth:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell...Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? ...Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. (NKJV)

Jesus brings together fear and love in this passage. He comforts his followers by telling them whom they should fear: God alone. He teaches us that God's power and love are inseparable. This all-powerful God pays attention to the tiniest detail about us and values all his creation. When we trust him, we have nothing else to fear.

Proverbs 29:25 aligns with Jesus' teaching and reminds us that when we fear other people, we get ourselves into trouble because we put them in the place of God in our lives. God wants us to reject that fear and have the courage that comes from trusting him and doing what he wants us to do no matter what other people think or say.

### **ULTIMATELY, WE CAN BE FEARLESS IN CHRIST.**

Proverbs 28:1 says "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion" (NKJV). The righteous—those who have accepted Jesus Christ as savior and seek to follow God's direction—can live fearless, courageous lives, experiencing blessing as they dare to do what he calls them to do in all areas of their lives. That's what God wants for us. Our powerful, loving creator, the source of all truth and good in the universe, didn't create us to be terrified cowards. When we have the right kind of fear of our Lord—a reverential awe based on an understanding of his power, authority, and love—we can move forward in our lives in confidence, trusting him to do great things in and through us. 📱

BASED ON AN  
UNDERSTANDING  
OF GOD'S POWER,  
AUTHORITY, AND  
LOVE—WE CAN MOVE  
FORWARD IN OUR  
LIVES IN CONFIDENCE,  
TRUSTING HIM TO DO  
GREAT THINGS IN AND  
THROUGH US.



#### **DÉLICE WILLIAMS**

Délice Williams holds a Ph.D. in English and has taught literature and writing at both the high school and college levels. She is an active member of her beloved Nazarene congregation, where she works with children's ministries and often chips in with writing and design work for church publications. She seeks to be salt and light in suburban Washington, DC.



# WASHED *in the* BLOOD

*The dictionary of Christian jargon for the ordinary person.*


by RAMON MAYO

**There are certain phrases that should give you chills. Some things are automatic stomach churners. One string of words that should cause an immediate negative reaction simply does not have the effect you think it would among followers of Jesus. The phrase: “Washed in the blood.”**

If someone came up to you and said they were “washed in the blood,” you would probably back away and hope they don’t invite you to the “blood bath.” But this saying was not sparked by Wes Craven or the latest Hollywood slasher flick. No, this comes from an unlikely source. It is a popular saying among followers of Jesus, but it can cause those who do not follow Christ to be taken aback. When Christians use the phrase “washed in the blood” they’re not talking about gore. It is much deeper and more positive than that. The idea is taken from the book of Revelation where it says that those who followed Christ have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Washed in the blood became a reference to what happens to someone when Christ changes his or her life. It is a way of stating that their dirty past is now made clean through the blood of Christ. In other words, it is shorthand for having your life made new

again through Christ’s sacrifice of his own blood.

What makes the phrase interesting is that we are talking about blood—something that we are usually trying to clean up. But this is no ordinary blood. It is the blood of an innocent man. It is the blood of the Son of God. This innocent blood symbolic for the sinless life that is substituted for the sinful life that has made us spiritually dirty. So being “washed in the blood” is not about being a part of some new cult, and it’s not the proving ground for a new cleanser. It is about the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the blood that was spilled on the behalf of those Christ came to save. Being washed in the blood sounds disgusting, but actually it’s one of the most authentic and genuine ways you can be made clean. 



## RAMON MAYO

Ramon Mayo is an author and speaker. He resides in Matteson, IL with his wife Yvette and his three children Kaydon, Syenna and MercyAnna. He recently published his first book, a Christian Black History Devotional, titled *His Story, Our Story*. You can check it out at Amazon.com. Also check out his blog at RamonMayo.com



God in focus. World in scope.

# new identity

MAGAZINE

PREMIER  
ISSUE

## Art To Glorify

How artists reveal their faith through works

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



Get Your Very Own Print Copy at  
[www.newidentitymagazine.com](http://www.newidentitymagazine.com)





LIFE TOGETHER

# Good Grief

*On dealing with tragedy and loss*

Photo © Davi Ozolin | Flickr (CC)





*by* SARAH MARIANO

**M**y dear, sweet friend, Lorrie, passed away a few weeks ago, and that is something I am not okay with. I will never be okay with it. Not because she had more life to live here on earth, though she did, nor because there isn't anything beyond this life, because there is, but because death exists. Death exists and it shouldn't.

When God created us, he didn't create us to die. He created us to live with him. He created us to enjoy the most full, satisfied, peaceful existence possible, and he created that to be everlasting. But he gave us a choice: choose life and love with him, or choose our own way with death and destruction at its heels. We chose wrong. And now because of our sin, our error, people die. Lorrie died. She shouldn't have died. It wasn't right.

But that is exactly why God sent his son, Jesus, to defeat death, by living a perfect, sinless life and then dying in the place of all the sinners, overcoming sin, paying the penalty for our sin, which is death, and fulfilling the requirements of the law the way we never could. For his glory, he made a way for us to live again as he intended: eternally in his presence.

Still, death exists. This doesn't mean Jesus' death

*I think it pleases  
God when we  
grieve death, even  
the death of a  
believer, because it  
is a reminder that  
the fight isn't over.*

was insufficient. His death was more than enough. However, we are still working out the effects of his sacrifice. The world has been given the grace of God, but now it must take effect. This means that sin is being uprooted still, a process that will continue until Jesus returns to send Satan into the fiery pit of hell and to call the righteous to himself, those who believed in him and called upon his name (Hebrews 9:28). My friend, Lorrie, is among those, so I should rejoice.

But I don't feel like rejoicing. She was here, with her family and friends, she lived out the gospel, she was wonderful, and I didn't want her to leave. Selfishly, I wanted her to stay because then I wouldn't feel the guilt of having not called enough, not prayed enough, not cared enough. God says all things work for the good of those who love him, he means it (Rom. 8:28), but I want her not to be gone.

But she is, and I hate it. It isn't right. Death isn't right, and we should grieve. Jesus did. Lazarus had been dead four days, his family was grieving, and instead of reassuring everyone that everything was fine, Jesus wept (John 11:35). He knew he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead in just a short time, but he wept anyway because death is not right. It isn't what God wants for us, and it does not please him. It's a reminder of the sin in the world. However, Jesus knew he was stronger than death, which is why he could go forth and call Lazarus from the grave. Because of Christ's strength and sacrifice we can rejoice and have peace that death is not the end, and it cannot hold those who believe in him.

But I think it pleases God when we grieve death, even the death of a believer, because it is a reminder that the fight isn't over. Death reminds us that sin is still in the world and that we are not yet living the fullness of our salvation, though we are saved and enjoy the benefits of it continually. These benefits of salvation include peace, joy, love, and hope, as well as so many other blessings. Matthew 5:4 (NIV) says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Grief isn't something we should shun, but something we should embrace. We should grieve all the more over the death of an unbeliever, because it is a reminder that there are those who choose to live without God, and some who have never heard of him, who cannot call upon his name to be saved because they do not know it. Yet that should not discourage us. It should grieve us, but that grief should motivate us to share the story of the cross and fight for truth and justice in the world.

The good news is that though we grieve, there is hope in Christ Jesus, our salvation. We grieve over sin

*Grief still believes that the promises will be fulfilled, but it acknowledges that we are still waiting for Christ to return and reconcile all things to himself.*



*I spent a lot of years  
feeling guilty because  
I mourned although  
I knew the promises  
of hope, so I shoved  
the grief down,  
pretending it didn't  
exist.*

in the world, but we do not have to grieve forever, because, when it comes to sin and death, we are victorious over sin in Christ, and one day we will be restored. We will be united in Christ. Every tear will be wiped away. Our pain and suffering will be no more. We will be made white as snow. We will enter into the presence of God and will be accepted, delighted in, loved. We will have no cause for grief, and death will never touch us. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4 ESV).

But this doesn't negate the pain now. I spent a lot of years feeling guilty because I mourned although I knew the promises of hope, so I shoved the grief down, pretending it didn't exist. My heart grew dark and bitter, until it was hardened to love out of the fear of loss and inadequacy. I wouldn't accept God's love because I felt unworthy of it. And I am, and we all are. No one can earn salvation.

But I let the knowledge of my unworthiness convince me that I was too far gone for God's love. I was too untrusting, ungrateful, unbelieving, because I knew about salvation but couldn't act like that made everything okay. I knew the facts, and yet I felt pain;

I believed that therefore, I must not really have been a child of God, because God's children are given faith (Eph. 2:8). Yet grieving isn't the same as unbelief. Unbelief despairs that there is no hope; grief based in hope cries because hope promises better. Grief still believes that the promises will be fulfilled, but it acknowledges that we are still waiting for Christ to return and reconcile all things to himself (Colossians 1:20).

We cannot tell a person how to grieve; only that grief is permissible, even good. Christ's death on the cross allows us to grieve because it is our source of hope; otherwise, we could only suffer and despair that life is cruel and capricious. Because of the freedom and hope of the cross, we can lament the pain of this world in whatever way we need to. We can share the deepest sorrows of our hearts with each other when we feel angry, alone, afraid, cheated. Staying in those emotions would turn into despair, but we can communicate those things to each other and to God because they are valid. The Psalms are full of grieving, and full of angry questions towards God, and people of God wrote those psalms. Grieving, however unfaithful it may seem, is allowed, and even encouraged in scripture. The interesting thing about these psalms is that they were communal, meant to express individual and community lament. They encouraged grieving with others, and they expressed that grief towards God, knowing he was their hope and salvation.

Grief doesn't ignore hope, but it does face the pain. Often in our pleasure-seeking culture, we want to medicate the grievers with our happy sentiments meant to lift the spirits and get things moving again. Grief is uncomfortable; it is slow, and sickening, and sad. It confronts sin and death, things we would rather ignore. He's in a better place. Or She's with Jesus now. We often cling to these phrases as life preservers in the uncharted waters of comforting someone experiencing loss because they don't know what to say. Believers know these phrases, and the truth they contain, but repeating them like a mantra won't make the loss disappear, and it won't make the pain any easier to bear. These statements, when uninvited, can come across as belittling the

griever's struggle or belittling their faith. These helpful reminders can then lead to shame, guilt, and hiding.

I remember feeling pathetic for still suffering over my father's death, feeling inadequate, unworthy, and guilty because those statements weren't enough to quell the storming sadness, the gasping, aching loneliness that tugged at my mind even though those around me spoke of hope. It took years for me to learn that I had a right and an obligation to grieve. My dear friend Lorrie played a huge role in that discovery, and later, her sickness and death would serve as a direct application for everything she taught me. The irony is not lost on me.

Community comes alongside one who grieves. It mourns with those who mourn and rejoices with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). Our hope allows us to confidently acknowledge the pain in this world because we know it will not last, and it does not defeat us. The triumphant believers can face loss knowing they have already won.

If you are grieving, then grieve knowing you are safe in the person and work of Christ because he has defeated death and given us the promise of eternal life with him, and because your grief does not disqualify you from life with him. Grieve freely, grieve passionately, and grieve for as long as you need. His sacrifice is sufficient for you, and your grief does not lessen your faith in him or your place in his fold. God has said he will turn our mourning into gladness (Jer. 31:13), but he did not say it would be overnight.

If you know someone grieving, come alongside his or her grief in whatever ways you can. Follow your strengths. If you are not an emotional person, then offer to cook meals, clean, run errands, etc. If empathy is your strong suit, offer your heart and your time. But above all, pray that God may be glorified in the grief and that the grieving does not turn to despair. Not only are our prayers heard by God, they do much to change our own hearts to make them align with God's plan for us. He is the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:12 NIV), and he will be glorified through his people. 🙏

*If you are grieving,  
then grieve knowing  
you are safe in the  
person and work of  
Christ because he has  
defeated death and  
given us the promise  
of eternal life with  
him, and because  
your grief does not  
disqualify you from  
life with him.*



## SARAH MARIANO

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



by LINDSEY A. FREDERICK

COMMUNITY

# BEYOND SUNDAY MORNINGS

*Exploring the World of Community Groups*



**P**atty wanted a more connected church experience. She returned to church after a several year hiatus and wanted to be involved beyond Sunday mornings. “I also wanted to meet other people who had similar interests and desires.” Patty signed up for a community group. That’s where she met Noel.

Noel was on a two-year Navy assignment. His wife and children were on the opposite coast and he needed a different kind of family to support him during his time away. Noel signed up for a community group and met Tony and Hope.

Tony was visiting church for the first time with his friend Hope. Hope signed up for a community group, but Tony wasn’t interested. “I was just there to be a fly on the wall,” says Tony. But then he ran into Joon.

Joon and Tony worked out at the same gym and immediately struck up a conversation. Joon’s girlfriend Rina thought it would be a good idea to join a community group together as a way to deepen their

faith and develop closer friendships in the church. Tony decided he would check out the community group after all. So did Shirley, Stacey, Andrew, Ann, and Donna Rose.

It was hard for Tony to maintain his fly-like state. He had so many questions about God. Everyone did. Over a lot of good food, laughter, teasing, and even a few tears, the group tucked into the Bible and started bonding through lively, honest debates—grappling with questions, admitting struggles, and celebrating newfound revelations.

### The First Community Gatherings

This description is not unlike the first followers of Jesus, who gathered in homes to learn about his teachings. They ate meals together, they prayed together, they shared possessions, and talked about the miraculous things God was doing (Acts 2:42–46). There are many types of groups within the church that can enhance your spiritual walk and connect you more deeply to your pew buddies, as well as meeting

the needs of the church or local community.

### Community Groups

*“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who 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...”* (Acts 2:42–46 NIV)

Also known as life groups, small groups, or fellowship groups, these gatherings provide deeper connections between church members and opportunities to deepen faith through group discussion. If you have questions about Sunday sermons or are curious about how to practically apply biblical principles, community groups are a great place to hash out your questions and gain spiritual insight, advice, and encouragement. Patti says, “Group is a safe place to question what I believe or how I think or act in a certain situation. Understanding that God loves me no matter what, as long as I accept him and repent, has both shaken my faith and deepened it. . . . Even some of the most devout, scripture-quoting, firmly religious members of my group will quickly say they are sinners, but they know God loves them and they are saved. That is awesome.”

The structure of each group is different. Some focus on studying the Bible or reading a spiritual book, while others discuss weekly sermons in more detail. Others gather to serve the needs of the church or local community.

### Bible Studies

*“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* (Psalm 119:105 ESV)

In Romans, Paul tells us the scriptures were written for our guidance and instruction, and to give us endurance, encouragement, and hope in our faith

**MEETING  
TOGETHER  
REGULARLY TO  
LEARN MORE  
ABOUT GOD  
CAN DEVELOP  
A BOND THAT  
MAY SEE YOU  
THROUGH SOME  
OF YOUR DEEPEST  
STRUGGLES AND  
REVEAL MORE OF  
THE TRUE NATURE  
OF GOD.**

(Romans 15:4). In his Relevant Magazine article “4 Ways the Modern Church Looks Nothing Like the Early Church,” New Testament expert Preston Sprinkle explains Bible study wasn’t an option for first century Christians. According to his research, new believers were required to spend their first three years of faith immersed in group study.

Many churches offer Bible studies where you can learn more about a book or passage of scripture. These groups may have formal study guides or be self-directed. Have questions about the more confusing tenets of faith, such as what’s up with those Old Testament animal sacrifices or how exactly does the Trinity work? Group Bible study can be extremely beneficial to help you understand the social, political, religious, literary, and historical context in which the scriptures were written when multiple

people's research, perspectives or knowledge are incorporated.

### Prayer Groups

*"...as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many." (2 Corinthians 1:11 NIV)*

Jesus said, "Where two or three gather in my name, there I am" (Matt. 18:20 NIV). Through prayer groups you develop the discipline of prayer and thanksgiving, helping you to become more aware of how God is at work in your life and in the world. Most churches offer one or more prayer groups, which may be centered on church needs, the needs of church members, or the work of missionaries who are accomplishing God's work in many parts of the world. Prayer groups may meet in large or small groups.

### Volunteer Groups

*"Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" (James 2:15–16 NIV)*

Throughout the Bible, we are repeatedly instructed to feed the hungry and take care of the poor (Psalm 82:3), as well as to use our God-given gifts to serve the needs of the church and its people (Acts 20:28). For this reason, most churches offer some type of volunteer or community service. Volunteer groups may focus on the weekly or day-to-day needs of the church—door greeters, ushers, welcome center hosts—or on the needs of the community, coordinating volunteers for homeless shelters, working at crisis centers, after-school tutoring, and more.

The benefits of joining a small group are myriad. But perhaps the most important reason is found in the word "community" itself, which, means "with unity." Meeting together regularly to learn more about God can develop a bond that may see you through some of your deepest struggles and reveal more of the true

**"ON THE DAYS  
WHEN IT'S HARD  
TO SEE JESUS,  
[YOUR] GROUP  
BECOMES THE  
IMAGE OF CHRIST,  
WEARING HUMAN  
FLESH, WALKING  
WITH YOU."**

nature of God. A dear friend of mine, who has experienced some unimaginable losses said it best, "On the days when it's hard to see Jesus, [your] group becomes the image of Christ, wearing human flesh, walking with you." *"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Psalm 133:1 ESV).*

### Community Group FAQ

**How do I get involved in a community group?** Flip through your church bulletin, or visit your church's welcome or hospitality center to find out about smaller group activities. A pastor or church elder can also help point you in the right direction.

**Can community groups take the place of Sunday morning services?** Community groups are meant to enhance your corporate church experience through group worship, scripture reading and recitation, and sermons—not to replace it, just as a group discussion circle in school facilitates the understanding and application of a class lecture.

**What if my church doesn't offer community groups?** If your church doesn't offer community groups, or you're having trouble gelling with an existing group, don't worry. Many successful groups



are formed organically inside or outside the church; consider forming your own group.

**How big should a group be?** Most churches recommend groups do not exceed 16 members. However, 8 to 12 members is optimal, as it's large enough to encourage group sharing, while not so large as to overwhelm quieter members. Prayer groups or volunteer groups may vary in size.

**Where do groups meet?** You can meet anywhere your group agrees—a park, a coffee shop, or a pub. However most group meetings take place in a group member's home.

**How often do groups meet?** Groups usually meet weekly to facilitate ongoing connection. However, depending on the group type, they may meet bi-weekly or even monthly.

**How long does a meeting last?** Meetings typically last 1.5 to 2 hours.

**Who leads the group?** Groups are usually led by a volunteer. Some churches facilitate training and leadership programs for small group leaders and/or supply resources.

**What are the responsibilities of group members?** To get the most out of your group, commit to showing up and sharing regularly. Each individual's perspective and experiences shape and enhance the group's dynamic. If you can't make a meeting, notify the other members. And don't forget to bring food! Most groups like to have a meal together or assign a person or two to bring a snack each week. 🍽️



## LINDSEY A. FREDERICK

Lindsey A. Frederick is a communications manager in the Washington DC area and writes frequently about life, art, and faith. You can follow her on Twitter @la\_frederick or visit her online: [lindseyfrederick.wix.com/writes](http://lindseyfrederick.wix.com/writes)

# Tips for Making the Most of Your Group

**Don't force a sharing.** While you should encourage group sharing, allow members to share at their own pace. Remember, vulnerability breeds vulnerability. Sharing your own experiences creates a safe environment for others to share their own.

**Do be intentional.** Make a point to get to know members one-on-one, outside of group. Practice listening, asking questions, and offering encouragement. This helps foster a growing sense of community and friendship.

**Don't judge.** Each person in your group has a unique life experience and may be at a different point on their spiritual journey. Be respectful and careful not to criticize or condemn. This decreases group openness, making it an unsafe space to talk openly and honestly.

**Do respect group confidentiality.** As people become more comfortable sharing, it is increasingly important to maintain your trustworthiness as a group member. What someone shares in the group should stay within the group. Never share another person's story without their permission.

**Don't turn meetings into group counseling sessions.** While the purpose of the group is to grow spiritually and to support and encourage fellow group members, it can be tempting to turn the meeting into a group counseling session. If this happens, it can be a great opportunity to return to the scriptures to understand how they apply to our problems and needs.

**Do understand the value of diverse groups.** It's tempting to seek people who are "like" us, whether they share our age, life stage, or gender, but diverse groups keep us challenged, active, and engaged. Learn to value the wisdom and perspectives of those who are older, in a different life stage, or from a different cultural or socioeconomic background.



IJM

GIVE BACK

by MATTHEW HAMILTON

Photo © Mateus Lucena | Flickr (CC)

# JUSTICE FOR THE POOR IS POSSIBLE

*International Justice Mission Gives A Voice To Those Who Have None*

**Stolen.** For many poor and oppressed people in Latin America, Africa, South and Southeast Asia, “stolen” refers not only to physical possessions but also to freedom and dignity. Slavery and sexual exploitation is common in underdeveloped countries, but the poorest people have no recourse from law enforcement or government. This is where the nonprofit International Justice Mission (IJM) comes in to help.

IJM was founded in 1997 by a group of Christian politicians who were concerned about human rights and violence against the poorest people. The poor

are most at risk for exploitation as sex workers or as forced laborers. Often the police fail the victim by not pursuing criminals.

When the powerless are taken advantage of, by both those breaking the law and those sworn to uphold it, it calls for help in multiple areas. IJM has a three-pronged approach: Collaborative Casework, System Reform, and Sustain Gains.

IJM assists through its Collaborative Casework model, partnering with local authorities to provide casework, research, and funding that normally would not be available to improve the likelihood that suspects will be prosecuted. In one recent example in Cambodia,



IJM's work with local police required perseverance but helped to break a sex trafficking ring that had been masquerading as legitimate businesses.

IJM also addresses System Reform—working to change current laws that hinder bringing violent offenders to justice. For example, in the Philippines, an overburdened legal system was improved when the Supreme Court of the Philippines passed legislation allowing for faster prosecution of sex-trafficking cases. This allowed local prosecutors to make more convictions in one month than in the previous five years combined.

The third area IJM undertakes: Sustain Gains. This is done by studying the results of interventions to determine which areas still need improvement and could use further assistance. IJM is committed to having a lasting presence in the countries that need its help the most.

IJM offers people the chance to give a voice to those who have none. You can:

**Make financial donations.** The organization has the highest rating for efficient use of donations from Charity Navigator, the online philanthropy guide.

**Get the message out about the work that IJM is doing.** IJM representatives can and do speak at events. You can also share the information that IJM provides with family, friends, co-workers, and church members.

**Contact elected officials to bring awareness to the problems that IJM is working to end.**

**Pray.** IJM's weekly newsletter reports on current projects that you can pray for.

The International Justice Mission is rescuing thousands, protecting millions, and proving that justice for the poor is possible.

For further information go to [ijm.org](http://ijm.org). 

INTERNATIONAL  
JUSTICE MISSION  
IS COMMITTED TO  
HAVING A LASTING  
PRESENCE IN THE  
COUNTRIES THAT  
NEED ITS HELP THE  
MOST.



## MATTHEW HAMILTON

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



CULTURE & CREATIVITY

# ELEVATING EASTER

*Celebrating Christ's Journey to the Cross and the  
Victorious Resurrection*

Photo © martinak15 | Flickr (CC)





*by* LUKE GERATY



**Holy Week, a central point of remembrance during the Christian calendar, focuses upon the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is no surprise. Had Jesus not risen from the dead, our faith would be useless, and we would still be guilty of our sins (1 Cor. 15:17).**

Holy Week helps us reflect upon the last week of Jesus' life. There are a number of ways that Christians celebrate Holy Week, but there is a common commitment to expressing deep gratitude for Christ's death and celebration of his resurrection! In this piece, I want to explore some of the significant events that took place from Palm Sunday to the Resurrection and suggest some ways in which your devotional life can become richer as you grow in your relationship with God.

### **Palm Sunday (Matt. 21:1-11)**

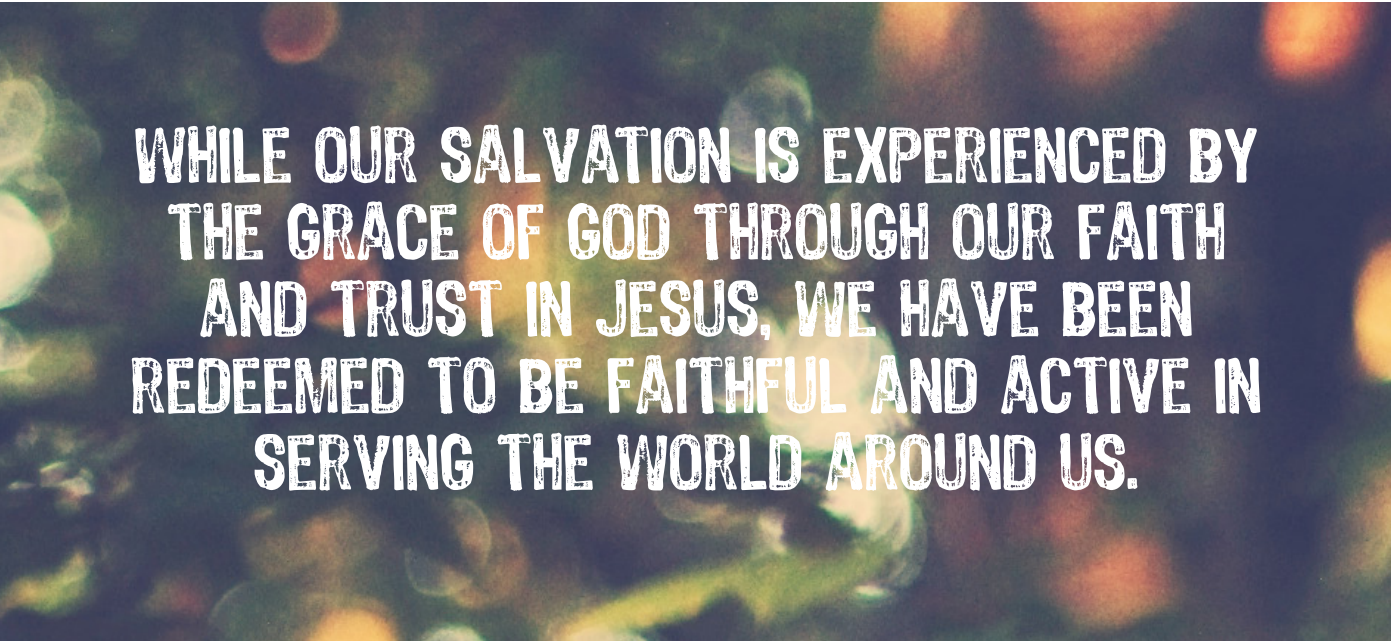
Turning to Matthew's Gospel, we read of Jesus' triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. As Jesus made his way into the city, the crowds cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" As N.T. Wright notes, this passage has "royal implications". Jesus was entering into Jerusalem

as king, but few understood what kind of king he was. In fact, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, a humble animal for a humble king (a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9).

In some traditions, Palm Sunday is celebrated by waving or anointing palm branches (or branches that are available) and much is made of the kingly reign of Jesus. During the first Holy Week, most people were unaware of the nature of Jesus' kingship; today we look back and celebrate, fully aware that, as Abraham Kuyper famously stated, every square inch is his. Eastern tradition notes that the donkey Jesus rode in on was a sign of peace, whereas the horse, traditionally associated with a king, was a sign of war.

### **Holy Monday (Mark 11:12-19)**

As Jesus made his way to the temple, he came upon a fig tree that had no fruit, to which he said, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." In Matthew's gospel, we read that "the fig tree withered at once." Once Jesus arrived at the temple he saw the money changers and observed how this sacred place was being abused. Thus, he cleansed the temple and said, "It is written, My house shall be called a house of



**WHILE OUR SALVATION IS EXPERIENCED BY  
THE GRACE OF GOD THROUGH OUR FAITH  
AND TRUST IN JESUS, WE HAVE BEEN  
REDEEMED TO BE FAITHFUL AND ACTIVE IN  
SERVING THE WORLD AROUND US.**

prayer', but you make it a den of robbers."

For Holy Monday, focus upon the withered fig tree. This serves to remind us that those who do not bear fruits of repentance will face judgment. Being a follower of Jesus means that we surrender our lives to him. Repenting from sin means that the direction of our lives change; we reorient and reorder our lives around King Jesus and his kingdom. "Bearing fruit" means that our faith and actions match up. Holy Monday marks a turn in the emotion of Holy Week as the "mood" becomes more reflective.

## **Holy Tuesday** **(Matt. 21:20-25:46)**

Tuesday was a full day for Jesus and his disciples. Scripture indicates that as Jesus and his disciples make their way back to the temple, they see the withered fig tree and Jesus teaches his disciples a lesson about fruitfulness. Upon arriving at the temple, Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders enter into heated and controversial discussion about Jesus' authority and where it came from. Finally, Jesus and the disciples made their way to the Mount of Olives and Matthew records Jesus' teaching there.

One way to appreciate Holy Tuesday is look to the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30). This parable

reminds us to remain steadfast and faithful, for Jesus promised he would return to reward or to judge. While our salvation is experienced by the grace of God through our faith and trust in Jesus (Eph. 2:8-9), we have been redeemed to be faithful and active in serving the world around us (Eph. 2:10).

## **Ash Wednesday** **(Luke 21:37-22:6)**

The tragedy of Holy Wednesday is tied to the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. While Jesus continued to teach in the temple, Judas met with the religious leaders who were planning to kill Jesus. It is at this point, Luke writes, that "Satan entered into Judas" (Luke 22:3 NLT). As crowds continued to gather around Jesus to listen to his teachings, the Sanhedrin plotted how to kill Jesus in order to end the momentum of his public ministry.

The Church contrasts Judas' betrayal with how Mary anointed Jesus in John 12:2-8. While Judas betrayed Jesus and essentially "sold his soul" due to his love of money, Mary knelt before Jesus to wash and anoint his feet with expensive perfume. On Ash Wednesday, Christians consider how to extravagantly worship Jesus. We must also humbly recall that Judas was once a disciple and that the love of money can be truly destructive (1 Tim. 6:10). Many denominations

use ashes to represent repentance and symbolize turning from sin to turn towards Christ (Daniel 9:3).

## Maundy Thursday (Matt. 26:17-46)

As preparation for the Passover began, Jesus gathered his disciples together to celebrate a meal and give one of his last teachings to his disciples in what is called the upper room discourse (John 13:1-17:26). The Last Supper is where Jesus initiated the sacrament that has come to be known as Communion or the Eucharist. Jesus used bread and wine to point to a greater truth to come (his death) and took time to demonstrate what sacrificial service looked like by washing the feet of his disciples. After a long evening of fellowship and teaching, Jesus spent time in the garden of Gethsemane praying to his father, “not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39 NIV).

Maundy refers to “foot washing” and comes from the Latin *mandatum*. Traditionally, Maundy Thursday is celebrated as Christians gather together, fellowship with the breaking of bread, and wash each other’s feet. This is deeply humbling as well as a powerful opportunity to experience God’s presence as the bread and cup are received in the presence of the Christian community. Whether one identifies as Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, the celebration of communion and the washing of feet is a compelling approach to reflecting on Maundy Thursday.

## Good Friday (John 18:2-19:42)

Shortly after midnight, Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested in Gethsemane. Jesus’ “trial,” if we can call it that, was actually before two governing bodies. He first stood trial, in the middle of the night, before the Jewish leaders Annas and Caiaphas and then, after sunrise, before all of the primary Jewish leaders, called the Sanhedrin (cf. John 18:13-24 and Matt. 26:57-27:2). After the Sanhedrin found Jesus guilty, he was

brought on “trial” before the Romans.

So early in the morning, Jesus stood before both Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect (governor). One of the Roman customs was to grant the Jewish people the release of one prisoner whom they would choose. On this occasion, rather than choose a man whom had healed people, raised the dead, and fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures, the crowds chose a rebel and murderer named Barabbas (Mark 15:7).

Jesus, on the other hand, was flogged, given a crown of thorns, and condemned to die by crucifixion. His holy life was exchanged for the life of a known criminal. How peculiar that the crowds who had cried “Hosanna” five days earlier now cried, “Crucify him!”

While Jesus carried the cross upon which he would soon hang, the crowds were divided, some expressing great sorrow for him, others celebrating his sentence. Along the way, Jesus became unable to carry his own cross and an onlooker was forced to carry it for him. Finally, after a long journey, Jesus was nailed to his cross, raised up before the crowds, and crucified.

Because Good Friday is the day where Christians reflect on the death of Jesus, God’s Son, the day is a solemn occasion. After all, this is the day upon which human beings killed the son of God. Christian traditions approach the day for reflection in a variety of ways: fasting, “stripping the altar” (removing all decorative cloths from the altar), singing psalms and laments. Others will not celebrate Holy Communion until Easter Vigil (early morning before Easter sunrise). In some Christian traditions, believers will follow the events of Jesus’ journey by viewing artistic images of up to fourteen scenes called the Stations of the Cross (In fact, recently churches have gone from simply displaying images that portray events that occurred on Good Friday to putting together multi-sensory experiences where you can walk through and hear, smell, view, and pray around these “stations”). The most important tradition is shared by all Christians: Good Friday is an invitation to



meditate upon the tremendous sacrifice that Jesus made for his people.

## Holy Saturday

Known as the “Great Sabbath,” Holy Saturday is considered a day of silence that points to how Christ “rested” physically in the tomb. Churches that have services on Holy Saturday often keep their worship gatherings simple and bare, encouraging participants to rest in anticipation for Easter.

On Holy Saturday, taking a moment to pray and reflect on Jesus’ death is a practical way to remember God’s work. How does Jesus’ death affect you? What does his death mean for you, both personally and for the church? How might you respond to Jesus’ death? What areas of your life do you feel most affected by Jesus’ sacrificial death?

## Easter Sunday (Luke 24:1-53)

Early Sunday morning, as women went to the tomb Jesus had been buried in, something incredible happened! Instead of finding Jesus’ body, the tomb was empty! All that Jesus had spoken and promised concerning his death and his resurrection had happened! As the women were perplexed and trying to figure out what had happened, two men (angels!) appeared to them and said, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen” (Luke 24:5-6). The crucified Son of God was no longer in the grave but had been powerfully raised from the dead! This is the most significant event in all of recorded history!

Instead of saying “Hello” to one another, on Easter Sunday, many Christians greet each other with the Easter Acclamation. This custom starts with one person saying, “Christ is risen!” and the other person responding, “He is risen indeed!” So important is the Resurrection that Peter, in his introductory prayer of blessing, stated that God “has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of

# THE RESURRECTION SEPARATES JESUS FROM ALL OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS BECAUSE ALL THE OTHERS ARE STILL IN THEIR GRAVES.

Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). Death could not hold Jesus, the Lamb of God. Rather, that grave was opened and Jesus came back and was seen first by the women at the tomb, the disciples, and by over 500 others (1 Cor. 15:4-6).

The Resurrection separates Jesus from all other religious leaders because all the others are still in their graves. And followers of Jesus participate in the power of the resurrection through the Holy Spirit. As Paul writes, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11). The same Spirit, the Holy Spirit, that raised Jesus from the dead, will give life to you.

Jesus victoriously conquered death, which fuels Christian worship and empowers their celebration of both God’s great mercy and powerful acts of salvation. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! 🎉



### LUKE GERATY

Luke Geraty is a young budding pastor/theologian interested in ecclesiology, missional theology, and coffee. Husband of one, father of five, and deeply committed to proclaiming Jesus and the kingdom, Luke contributes regularly to [ThinkTheology.org](http://ThinkTheology.org), [MultiplyVineyard.org](http://MultiplyVineyard.org), and [VineyardScholars.org](http://VineyardScholars.org).

# PROSPERITY IS NOT THE PRIORITY

*Defining biblical success*

**A**t age twenty, I was a young man deeply devoted to Jesus. I was reading the Bible regularly. I was interning in the media department of a church. I'd quit using alcohol and drugs. And I was surrounded by incredible people who held me accountable and encouraged me in my faith. It was a great place for me as a new Christian.

Photo © philhearing | Flickr (CC)





*by* STEVEN BUTWELL



But I was also a young man with dreams and aspirations. I'd set for myself a dream career in film, and when I got an opportunity to move to California to work on a movie, I thought God agreed with my idea. Solely on the basis of a personal reference from the head recruiter, I began my career in film. It appeared that the adage, "*It's not what you know, but who you know*" was true.

At the time, I calculated success based on who I knew, the position I held, and the pay I received. In these respects I was deemed "successful" by the watching world but inside I was miserable—working terrible hours, and surrounded by people who used drugs and alcohol, luring me back to that lifestyle. Eventually I caved, and my closeness with Christ grew weaker and weaker. Because of my past history with substance abuse and it's prevalent temptation within the film industry, it was clear that if this was progress, I wasn't going to make it according to the world's standard of success.

## **Biblical Measurement of Success**

We commonly measure success based on what other people have, whether that means more or less. We feel superior if we have more or inadequate if we have less than our neighbor. The Bible has a different approach.

The Lord said to Moses: "*You shall not covet your*

*neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's*" (Exodus 20:17 ESV). This means that what is your neighbor's is his or hers, and what is yours is yours, and God has given you what he has given you because he knows what is best for you and every other person. Biblical success is not defined by making your life look like your neighbors'. Biblical success is defined by making your life look like Jesus'.

The apostle Paul also clarifies that even beyond material items, a different life does not equal a less or more important one: "*Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him...*" (1 Corinthians 7:17 ESV). The tendency to envy another person's life can skew our measure of success. If we measure ourselves against another person and what God is doing in their life it has the potential to lead us to a place where we feel less important or valued. It's good to be motivated or inspired by someone's life, but not if it means deflating your own worth or doubting God's love for you. It's important to remember that the proper biblical perspective on success is emulating Jesus, not emulating your friends. So what does that look like for you and me?

## Priorities in Perspective

People say things on their deathbeds that they consider the most important information they can pass along. Consider some of David's final words to his son:

*When David's time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn" (1 Kings 2:1-3 ESV).*

Solomon took these words to heart. He didn't immediately ask the Lord for wealth and power but instead for wisdom and discernment (1 Kings 3:1-14). He later wrote in Proverbs to his own son:

*My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man. (Proverbs 3:1-4 ESV)*

Solomon knew that wealth and power were secondary to true success in the sight of his father David. The secret to David's success, which indeed isn't a secret at all, is to know God. Knowing God is the key to all life's success.

## Knowing God More Is To Succeed

In Mark 12, Jesus is asked which is the most important commandment. He used the opportunity to teach about God's priorities:

*Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall*

If we measure  
ourselves against  
another person and  
what God is doing  
in their life it has  
the potential to  
lead us to a place  
where we feel less  
important or valued.

# We find that God has given us gifts that are to be used for his purposes and whether those are the same or different gifts than our neighbor does not matter.

*love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31 ESV).*

As Christians all the things that we deem important comes second to knowing God. All success flows from this foundational truth. This doesn't mean that a relationship with God will necessarily bring you financial wealth or material goods, but a far deeper success of being enabled by God to love our neighbors the way we ourselves want to be loved, and not see them as status symbols, but as fellow sinners who need a Savior. It all starts with knowing God.

So how do we "know" God? After the initial encounter with Jesus, we come to know God better by keeping his commandments (and his commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3)), as they reflect his character and desire for our lives. We know God by reading his words to us contained in the Bible on a regular basis. We know God by communing with other Christians in fellowship. We know God by communicating with him through prayer. These things don't earn God's forgiveness or approval, but through them we grow closer to God—and his vision and purpose for our lives.

Our trust in, and relationship with Jesus can be hindered by allowing our skewed definition of success get in the way. In our culture it is ingrained in us that we need to work for our success, that we need to work to get what we want. While it is good to set goals and we are supposed to work hard (Ecclesiastes 9:10), our efforts do not automatically mean a better result because God is the ultimate giver. John the Baptist assures us that: *"A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven"* (John 3:27 ESV).

To understand where our gifts come from we have to accept God's free gift of Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus is our starting point that helps us understand what gifts on earth are meant for. We find that God has given us gifts that are to be used for his purposes and whether those are the same or different gifts than our neighbor does not matter. The gifts God has given you, inside a career or outside of it, can be used for a life based on God and his principles of success.

## Contentment Is Success

Paul writes:

*But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Timothy 6:6-10 ESV)*

Don't miss Paul's point; godliness with contentment is great gain. It's not wrong to set goals, or to strive towards our passions or even to be rich. However without God at the helm of our lives, none of our success would even be possible, indeed our lives would not even exist. *"For by grace you have been*



*saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV).* Christians learn and experience contentment in the present moment through seeking God on a daily basis.

## **With God, Not For God**

In the world, success and performance often go hand in hand. We think we need to perform or work for God’s and man’s approval and favor. God’s grace towards humankind says otherwise. The only approval we need was realized through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross; that is what enables us to partner with God in his work and not perform for God to be accepted. We already have God’s approval by acknowledging Jesus as our only Lord.

I have always found Psalm 37:4 to be such an encouragement, because to me it says, if I make knowing God my number one goal, all of what I do with my life will be a successful endeavor to my loving Father. *“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.”*

God doesn’t need our careers or our money or our work. The work God required was the work of Jesus on the cross. We become successful when we take our own work and allow it to get behind Jesus. Ultimately a God-based, successful human life is one that is molded by, determined by, and driven by Jesus. What looks good to God is a life that is lived out for Jesus and even more so, seeing that life touch the lives of others. That is what it means to be truly successful. It really is not *what* you know, but *who* you know—and that’s Jesus.

*“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10 ESV).* 🕊

**The only approval we need was realized through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross; that is what enables us to partner with God in his work and not perform for God to be accepted. We already have God’s approval by acknowledging Jesus as our only Lord.**



### **STEVEN BUTWELL**

Steven is a former atheist who encountered Jesus face to face at age 19 in a vision. Since then, Steven has devoted his life to serving Jesus in every facet of his life. Currently, Steven is the youth director of EDGE church in San Juan Capistrano, CA where he passionately teaches the gospel of Jesus to students. Steven’s other passions include: learning to be a godly husband to his lovely wife Jamie, reading the Bible, writing, traveling, playing Playstation 4 and public speaking.



# new identity

MAGAZINE

Dear God,  
Thank you for the  
opportunity to read the  
stories of what you are  
doing in the lives of others.  
I desire to know you more  
and find my purpose and  
identity in you. I want to  
take my first steps by simply  
coming to you and asking  
you to forgive me for all the  
things that have kept me  
from you. Jesus, I recognize  
that my sins are forgiven  
because you cleared all my  
wrongs on the cross. May  
you cleanse me and make  
me new. Holy Spirit, guide  
me in all truth and give me  
the strength to follow in  
your ways.

In Jesus' name, Amen