

new identity

God in focus. World in scope.

On SHARING
YOUR FAITH,
TRUSTING *In* GOD,
DOUBT *of The*
HEART,
WHAT
MARRIAGE *Is For*,
Our CREATIVITY,
SPIRITUAL GIFTS,
PRAYER,
POLITICS & FAITH,
ENEMIES *of* US,
FINANCES *With*
FREEDOM,
CONFIDENCE *In*
CHRIST,
And TESTIMONY



ISSN 1946-5939



CONTENTS

5 EDITOR LETTER

Earthquakes & Intercession *by* Cailin Briody Henson

6 SHARE YOUR FAITH

A relational approach to communicating the love of God *by* Eric Gulley

12 DOUBT OF THE MIND AND DOUBT OF THE HEART

Holding on to what we know is true *by* Brandon Hurlbert

20 ENEMIES OF US

Changing our view of the world as we come to know Christ *by* Gary VanDeWalker

27 TRUST ME

Why we can trust God *by* Steven Butwell

36 FOR BETTER FOR WORSE

A look into the purpose of marriage *by* Hannah Helms

45 RELEASING OUR FINANCIAL BURDENS

Does God care about money? *by* Lindsey A. Frederick

52 CREATE

Thoughts on creator, creation, & creativity *by* Ben Helms

56 THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Proclaiming and demonstrating the kingdom of God *by* Luke Geraty

62 TESTIMONY

Christian lingo explained *by* Ramon Mayo

64 THE MISTAKEN IDENTITY OF CONFIDENCE

False humility and boasting in the Lord *by* Nicholas Sowell

71 OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST IS ALWAYS GREATER THAN OUR ASSOCIATION WITH ANY POLITICAL PARTY

A reflection on the intersection of faith and politics *by* Matthew Hamilton

79 PRAYER IS THE ALIGNMENT OF OUR SOULS WITH GOD

Keeping God at the center when prayer is hard *by* Sarah Mariano

Photo © Holly Lay | Flickr

new identity

God in focus. World in scope.

ISSUE 27

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 3

PUBLISHER/ EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cailin Briody Henson

COPY EDITORS

Ruth Montgomery
Sarah Mariano

EDITORIAL BOARD

Ruth Montgomery
Sarah Mariano
Jason Henry

LAYOUT & DESIGN

Cailin Briody Henson

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Lindsey A. Frederick
Ramon Mayo
Matthew Hamilton
Eric Gulley
Sarah Mariano
Steven Butwell
Luke Geraty
Hannah Helms
Ben Helms
Brandon Hurlbert
Gary VanDeWalker
Nicholas Sowell

BOARD *of* DIRECTORS

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

Cover Photo © Charlotte | Flickr

Send letters to the editor via feedback@newidentitymagazine.com or to New Identity Magazine, P.O. Box 1002, Mt. Shasta, CA 96067. Copyright ©2015 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. 3) 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.

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.

OUR VISION

Grow

Educating you about different Christian perspectives, understanding Christian concepts, jargon, disciplines, practical application of Scripture and more.

Connect

Encouraging you with testimonies, articles about relationships, fellowship, church, community, discussions and expressions of faith.

Live

Engaging you to live out your faith in the real world, with stories of people actively pursuing God and their passions, organizations and resources to apply ones gifts, talents and desires to serve God and others, sharing the love of Christ in everyday arenas.

BIBLE REFERENCES

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.

A photograph of a field of white daisies and purple lupines in the foreground, with a dark, dense forest in the background. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

EARTHQUAKES *And* INTERCESSION

Photo © Caillin Henson

MY MOM WAS SIGHTSEEING IN **KATHMANDU, NEPAL** WHEN A 7.8 **EARTHQUAKE** HIT THAT LEVELED MUCH OF THE ANCIENT CITY ON APRIL 25TH, 2015. MORE THAN 8,000 PEOPLE WERE KILLED AND THOUSANDS MORE INJURED. I woke up to hear the news that morning and quickly turned to Facebook to see if my mom had posted an update, but there was no news, so I checked my email. Thankfully in my inbox was an email from my dad who had gotten a call very early that morning—Mom was safe. Such joy and relief washed over me.

Three weeks prior, the night before she left on this “bucket list” trip she’d dreamed about for years, I was able to pray specifically for her at the dinner table for the first time. I prayed that she’d have an amazing trip and that God would protect her. I was confident that God heard those prayers as he always does, but had little idea how those prayers would be answered.

I’m prone to worry and anxiety, but surprisingly, I did not worry much about my mom while she toured India over the next two weeks. God even blessed me with that email, so I wasn’t fretting all day if she was alive or not.

Aftershocks. Power outages. Water issues. In the days following the devastation, I heard nothing. There were three more days until her scheduled flight home, but I had no idea if she’d be on that plane. I felt the Holy Spirit telling me, “No news is good news. If she isn’t able to fly home, she will certainly contact you.” Those three days were the most difficult. I wish I could say that I was at peace the entire time, but the worry came the last day.

My dad came over and I could tell he was tense with worry, which is unlike him. “She should be in the air now, flying to Delhi,” he said. “I’m sure they’ll have Wi-Fi in the airport there so she’ll be able to send us an email,” we discussed. She was to fly from Kathmandu to Delhi to Zurich to San Francisco. It wasn’t until the Zurich airport that we heard from her. Those were the longest hours you could imagine. Later, I’d hear from her in person what a miracle it was to be home. Amen to that!

Throughout that ordeal, I dealt with trusting God, having doubt, being confident, overcoming anxiety, and seeking God in prayer and it just so happens that we have articles on all those topics this issue. Brandon Hurlbert talks about doubt and holding on to what we know is true. Steven Butwell talks about trusting God and our tendency to worry. Nicholas Sowell talks about having confidence in what the Lord has for us and who God is. And Sarah Mariano discusses the difficulties of her prayer life and connecting with God.

I had to trust God that my mom was safe and couldn’t let my thoughts run rampant any other way. I had to have confidence that God heard my prayers and could act on them if he wanted to. I had to believe God’s love for me and my mom and not doubt that he wants what’s best for both of us. And I had to pray for my mom even more when I was feeling helpless with no communication and no idea what was going on. Prayer was my only link to her. Prayer was the only way to have any impact on her circumstances.

Come to find out, my mom had been walking on the road of a small village when the shaking began. A few minutes beforehand or a few minutes later, she might have been inside a collapsing building—it is truly the one and only God who could have protected her—and from this thankful daughter, gratefully he did.

Cailin



Grow



SHARING YOUR FAITH

By **ERIC GULLEY**

A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO
COMMUNICATING THE LOVE OF GOD

Photos © Lauren Rushing | Flickr

Jesus came to give
LIVING WATER to
 a thirsty world, and
 we have the honor
 and **PRIVILEGE** of
 sharing his message
 by the power of the
 Holy Spirit.

E **VANGELIZING**—OR SHARING YOUR FAITH—**IS SCARY** FOR THE MAJORITY OF CHRISTIANS, NOT JUST NEW BELIEVERS.

This is understandable; it's not exactly easy convincing a person that they need a savior to completely revamp their life, especially if this person believes they are happy without Jesus. When someone accepts Jesus, they leave their old priorities behind and make Jesus the center of their life. This is a huge step!

Yet, Jesus calls each of us to share the good news with the world. He came to give living water to a thirsty world, and we have the honor and privilege of sharing his message by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). The message is this: Jesus' sacrifice on the cross allows us humans to be born again into the Kingdom of God, to be made new creations that can live righteously and glorify the God who created us. Even though sharing Jesus can result in ridicule, broken relationships, and, in many cases, persecution, it's a message that couldn't be more urgent.

Your actions as a Christian can impact others and make people curious about your beliefs, but this isn't enough. It may help build a bridge to start a conversation or bring opportunity, but Scripture says we

are to verbally communicate the message of Jesus. In Romans 10:11-15 it says, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" God may be sending you to share Jesus with the people whom he has placed in your life.

As a new believer, how can you share Jesus with those around you? Perhaps you feel like you can't make convincing arguments for God's existence, or maybe you feel inadequate in your Bible knowledge. Even the Apostle Paul himself said the perfect words aren't nec-



The MOST
important thing
you can do is enter
each conversation
with a posture of
PRAYER.

essary. “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:1). Paul does call each of us to be prepared to give an answer for the reason behind our faith though. In 1 Peter 3:15 he says, “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” So, naturally, studying the Bible and internalizing reasons for God is a good thing to do. But maybe you simply haven’t yet. Maybe you’re discouraged because your Christian friends seem to be full of knowledge while you’re still learning. How can you, as a new believer, share your faith with an agnostic, a devout Muslim, or a well-read atheist?

The most important thing you can do is enter each conversation with a posture of prayer. Pray for the person you’re sharing with, that God would open their heart to accept him. Pray that God would give you the words to say. And a loving way to say them. Remember that it is God who saves people, and your sharing is a way for you to bring him glory. Also, remember that the person you are sharing Jesus with is made by God in his image (Genesis 1:27). This person is deeply loved and known by God, and he has a plan for their life that

Try to UNDERSTAND what a person believes, not what you THINK they believe.

you get to be a part of. Be thankful, and love the person you're talking to with a godly love.

Take a *relational* approach to sharing the good news of a having new life in Christ. With each person you talk to about Jesus, whether it's a coworker, old friend, relative, or someone you've recently met, speak with the intent of forming a friendship and having more conversations in the future. It's not likely that you're going to convince someone to accept Jesus through only one conversation. In addition, many unbelievers are hostile toward Jesus, God, or anything with a slight scent of religion; an established relationship can reduce the chances of that happening because they will be less likely to think you have some short agenda to convert them.

Don't expect to convince people of their need for Jesus with one conversation. Expect God to work in your relationship and use you to share Jesus through your friendship in his own timing. This takes a lot of pressure off you when you share Jesus. You can relax knowing this probably won't be the last chance you get to talk to this person. Rely on God's will to guide you to the next opportunity as it is presented. You don't need to lead the person from A to Z of Christianity in one

sitting; you can take time and take the person from A to B in one conversation and maybe C to D in the next. People are worth the time it takes to share Jesus and form a relationship.

Be genuine with your questions and get to know this person as a worthwhile human being. This will reward you because it will deepen your love for this person, and this person will have good reason to open up and trust you because you're invested in them. It's generally easy for people to sense insincerity, and people don't want to talk about important issues with someone who is insincere.

Be a good listener. When you ask questions tune in to the answers. Don't plan what you want to say next while the other person is talking. Don't assume that you know what a person believes because they claim to be Jewish, Muslim, or any other religion. Everyone has a different story and events in their lives that have shaped their unique and nuanced worldview. Try to understand what that person believes, not what you think they believe.

Eventually, the time will come in your relationship for you to share your faith. This could happen during

PEOPLE are worth the time it takes to SHARE Jesus and form a relationship.

your first conversation, maybe even the second or the eighth. Remember that the message of Jesus is not only offensive to the world, but it is foolish (1 Corinthians 1:18). No amount of logically sound reasons can convince someone to accept Jesus, so it is not up to you to do the convincing. It is up to God. Through the Holy Spirit, God is able to reach the human heart and draw a broken person out of sin and to himself.

You likely remember the way God did this for you. One of the best ways you can reach an unbeliever is to share your experience, especially if you are a new believer. Share how God brought you out of sin, how he took away your shame and gave you honor. Share what your new life in Christ is like. Share your story; yours could be one that the Holy Spirit uses to bring someone to Christ.

One of the scariest parts of sharing your faith is confronting a question you can't answer. Maybe the

person you're speaking to will rip your reasoning to shreds. Take this fear to God, and cling to God's promise that his Holy Spirit will keep you near to him as you share your faith. In addition, accept that your faith will be stretched as you seek to answer questions you've never thought of before. Be honest about what you don't know, and be faithful to seek answers on your own and return with what you find. Offer to join the search for truth with your friend, and your faith will grow exponentially as you seek the Lord together.

Share with urgency, but be gentle and loving. Treat the people you speak to with love and respect, as God loves them and created them with dignity. Trust in the Holy Spirit to speak through you, and continue to pray that God would use you. No matter how long you have been a believer, you can share Jesus with the confidence that he is with you and that he will use you for his glory.




Eric Gulley

Eric Gulley is a barista, fishing guide, and musician from Orange County, CA. He earned his B.A. in English and his Secondary Education Teaching Credential from Biola University in La Mirada, CA. Eric thoroughly enjoys teaching, writing, catching fish, drumming, crafting wonderful coffee drinks, and discussing and studying theology and philosophy over said coffee drinks.



Connect



DOUBT *of* THE MIND *And* DOUBT *of* THE HEART

HOLDING ON TO WHAT WE KNOW IS TRUE

by **BRANDON HURLBERT**

Photo © Derriel Street Photography | Flickr

IN SCRIPTURE, IT APPEARS THAT THERE ARE TWO LEVELS OF DOUBT: **DOUBT OF THE MIND AND DOUBT OF THE HEART**. Doubt of the Mind manifests as a simple question, “Why?,” and this is a good thing, even encouraged by Scripture. When Paul spoke in the city of Berea, the people “received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed” (Acts 17:11-12, ESV). This kind of doubt, which would be better named questioning, is natural, good, and leads to concrete answers.

Doubt of the Heart

Doubt of the Heart, by contrast, is less concerned with the intellect or with facts; this type of doubt crops up in spite of facts. Doubt of the Heart questions sincerity and is at the root of distrust. In the Christian life, it may take the form of doubting God’s judgment about our own circumstances. “Is God really good?” “Does God really love me as his son/ daughter?” “Am I really forgiven for what I have done?” This is the scary type of doubt, which attacks what God has said in the Bible regarding our identity and his own. This is what some might call a crisis of faith.

God’s people are **NOT IMMUNE** to doubt, and simply telling ourselves or others to stop doubting **WON’T HELP**.

In the Christian life, doubt is common and natural, something all Christians experience. You should not feel ashamed or guilty for questioning. God doesn’t look down upon you for asking questions. He loves you and doesn’t want you to suffer with distrust. A season of doubt is a chance to grow in your spiritual life, not a reason to despair.

Scripture is filled with believers struggling with Doubt of the Heart. In the garden, Satan asked Eve, “Did God actually say...” (Gen 3:1, ESV). The tempter’s question

Doubt isn't sin, but it is a temptation to sin.

rattled Eve's trust in the character of God and made her think God must be holding back something from her. (This would have been a good time to ask a question!) The Israelites on their way to the promised land doubted God and their identity as his people, grumbling that they would be better off in Egypt as slaves. God reminded Israel time and time again that he is their God, and they are his people.

God's people are not immune to doubt, and simply telling ourselves or others to stop doubting won't help. Unfortunately one cannot just wish the feeling away so easily. In the broad scope of Scripture, doubt is a temptation to disbelieve what God has said. In our own lives, doubt isn't sin, but it is a temptation to sin. So how can we combat our doubt and win the battle over temptation? Let us look to Christ.

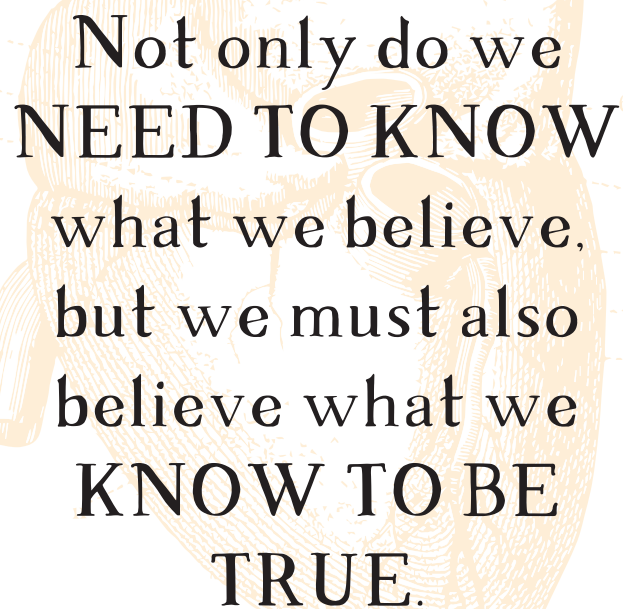
What Would Jesus Do?

When Jesus took on the human condition, he became like us in every respect, except without sin, and "because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:17-18, ESV). Before Jesus started his public ministry, he fasted for forty days, alone in the desert. Satan came to him and asked questions like the ones he asked in the garden: "If you are the Son of God..." (Matthew 4:3).

Satan's questions were designed to attack Jesus' identity as the Son of God, tempting him to prove it rather than trusting in it. What does Jesus do? He responds with Scripture. He doesn't play Satan's game, trying to prove who he is. Rather, Jesus challenges Satan and puts his trust in what God has said (Matt. 4:10).

The book of Hebrews exhorts us to stick to our confession even when we feel unsure, because Jesus is our high priest, and, as a result, we receive mercy and grace in our time of need. (Heb. 4:14-16). But what does it mean to have Jesus as our high priest? In the Old Testament, the high priest was the representative of the people to God and vice versa, and the people didn't dare to approach God apart from the high priest. But Jesus fulfills the role of high priest for us, going beyond what any human priest could do. Jesus, as our mediator, represents us before God the Father, and, through Jesus' sacrifice, we are able to come before God clean from sin.

Having to go before God as an unforgiven sinner would be a terrifying situation, because our holy God won't tolerate sin. But the grace we have through Christ has changed this entirely. When we're in Christ, God looks on us with grace, and better yet, lovingly accepts us. "And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:21-23 ESV).



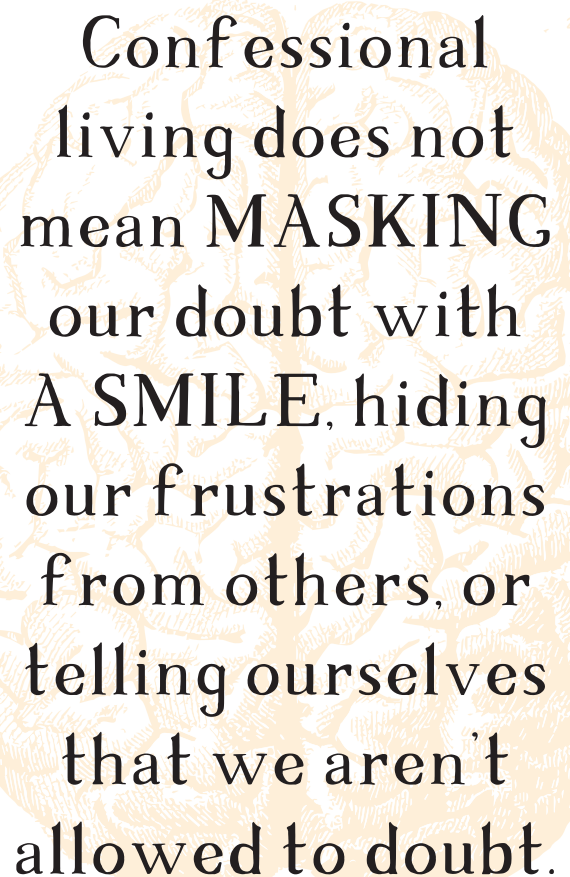
Not only do we
NEED TO KNOW
 what we believe,
 but we must also
 believe what we
KNOW TO BE
TRUE.

The author of Hebrews is challenging us to hold on to what we know is true (aka to live confessionally). Not only do we need to know what we believe, but we must also believe what we know to be true. In other words, we have to believe the facts that we get from Scripture about our right standing before God as beloved cleansed sinners. But do we believe this?

Doubt Meets Truth

At the heart level, we are capable of doubting this truth. We are tempted to believe that we aren't really saved, that God hasn't really forgiven our sins, that in order for God to truly love us we need to work harder or be better. These are lies, (see the similarity between this and the questions Satan asked?) and the only tool for confronting them is God's truth as communicated through his Word (the Bible) and through his Son (Jesus Christ).

How do we know truth? We know the truth because God in Christ has shown us the truth. He showed us who he is, what he is like, and who we are to follow, which can be summed up in the word "truth" (John 18:37). When Doubt of the Heart comes and tempts us



Confessional
living does not
mean MASKING
our doubt with
A SMILE, hiding
our frustrations
from others, or
telling ourselves
that we aren't
allowed to doubt.

Remember the times Jesus HAS been there, even when you THOUGHT he wasn't.

with lies about who we are or who God is, we are called to live confessionally.

How does this look on the ground level, in the day to day? An example from my life: in the past six months, my church was shut down, I had to change jobs, a relationship ended, I was forced to contemplate the future concerning graduate school, and I failed my first class. In the midst of this, God doesn't look too good, too loving, or that he is even in control.

However, I know he is good, I know he is loving, and I know that he is King and in control. Through unfavorable circumstances, God has been teaching me to trust in him. On the ground level, I'm learning to combat my own Doubt of the Heart by believing what I know is true, hanging on to the facts. God was and is teaching me to live confessionally.

Living Confessionally

What does it mean to live confessionally? Well, here's what it doesn't mean. It does not mean that we are to blindly trust in ourselves, in man, or even in the church, pretending human error isn't a reality. Confessional living does not mean masking our doubt with a smile, hiding our frustra-

tions from others, or telling ourselves that we aren't allowed to doubt. No, living confessionally looks very different.

First, we have to confess our doubt to God and others. We can talk to the Lord, confessing that we doubt that God is good, in control, or that we are truly saved. We can confess to him our struggles because he knows what we are going through.

Talking it out with other Christians helps too. Letting others in on your struggles allows you to process, but also, it allows others to grow in confessing their own struggles as well. Confession creates community with one another, and this community of believers can help you process your doubts (1 John 1:7).

Second, listen and reflect. As you confess your doubts and struggles to God and to his people, listen to what is being said. God speaks through Scripture (Ephesians 1 has been incredibly helpful to me) and through his people.

In addition to listening, reflect on what God has done in your own life. This will be like looking through old photos of yourself with unfortunate haircuts and asking yourself, “What was I thinking?” It’s just the same in your spiritual walk, realizing that you could have made better choices and that you could have trusted God more. It’s an opportunity to remember the times Jesus has been there, even when you thought he wasn’t.

Finally, confess the truth. This might come as a prayerful response to listening and reflecting. This confessing is a proclamation of who God is and what he has done in Jesus. This is you preaching the gospel to your-

self; this is you expressing the truth of your salvation. It can even come in the form of a humble exclamation, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

This confession is a prayer that you can’t do it yourself; you need the Spirit to work in your heart, to give you faith to believe the truth. Despite all of your circumstances, all of your sins, and all of your doubts, you can feel confident confessing the truth before the throne of grace, because Jesus has saved you and he has been loving you. He is much bigger than your doubts, and no amount of questioning will deter him from showing you grace. Like it says in Romans 8:39, there is nothing that can separate you from the love of Christ, not your sin, not even your doubt.



Brandon Hurlbert

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



by GARY VANDEWALKER



ENEMIES *of* US

CHANGING OUR VIEW OF THE WORLD AS WE
COME TO KNOW CHRIST

MOST DAYS, I LIVE WITH MY ENEMIES. YOU MIGHT EVEN MISTAKE THEM FOR MY FRIENDS, BECAUSE AT TIMES I LIVE TOO CLOSE TO THEM. They are hard to avoid. They are older than me, more experienced, and able to make me fit into their circle. Let me introduce them and a three-part series where I'll let you get to know each one better.

Meet the World. John, the Apostle, describes it in 1 John 2:16 (ESV): "For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world." The problem is, in our day and age, it is difficult for me to separate myself from the World. I live with it and it is all around me. Its embrace feels like a warm sweater. The World entices me by what I see and shows up in how I prioritize. The World keeps everything I desire within an arm's reach.

Meet the Flesh. I wear it as my uniform. Paul tells the Romans: "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:7-8, ESV). The Flesh walks with me everywhere. I like to entertain him and put my focus on him. It is hard to tell the difference between the two of us.

When I focus on the
World, the Cross of
Christ
becomes
FOOLISHNESS and
the foolishness of
the World
becomes
WISDOM.

Meet the Devil. He holds my hand. I often let him define my world. He deceives, but I like the view. I continue to ask him how reality appears, because he's fun. In the back of my thoughts, I know he is wrong and he is doomed. "And the great dragon was thrown down, that

ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him” (Revelation 12:9, ESV).

There is my trio of enemies: the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. Their voices are familiar. I run from them, only to invite them back to my circle over and over. They seem safe. They are what I know. However, I want to know Christ too, and he will not make friends with them. Christ is uncompromising towards them; to place my heart, mind, and soul in Christ, I need to put any friendship with these enemies aside.

World in Focus

My oldest acquaintance of the three is the World. The World molds and shapes us from birth. I came into being, ready to be friends with the World. What makes the World so hard to avoid is that it is my location. I can’t change my location. The real trouble is the World becomes my source of information. It has my ear from the beginning. As I live with it surrounding me, I grow used to seeing and hearing about a reality without God.

The World never sees the spiritual aspects of life. It whispers the mantra from the old Carl Sagan series, *Cosmos*: “The cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be.” I’m taught to trust in only what I can see and touch. It presents truth through human philosophies, which are rooted in the finite. My temporal existence becomes everything. My riches are only what I can acquire during my life on earth. The World’s values get me through the system of human society but never contemplate a spiritual kingdom; science is regarded as the highest authority. Tolerance and acceptance are the characteristics of its friends rather than compassion towards others while they seek truth. When I focus on the World, the Cross of Christ becomes foolishness and the foolishness of the World becomes wisdom.

World View

The World has an inaccurate view of itself. It forgets the couple that stood in a garden before it was corrupted. There was a time, at creation, when the World was good, and God declared it so: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). But the choice Adam and Eve made changed the nature of the World. As they chose to disobey God

From the World, I receive an affirming slap on the back and MISTAKE it for the APPROVAL of God.

and eat forbidden fruit, their relationship to the World changed. God pronounced, "...cursed is the ground because of you" (Genesis 3:17).

This truth (also called original sin) erodes the World. Adam and Eve's transgression alters the World's relationship with humanity in many ways:

The World is no longer a forever partner with God's children; it becomes a place of physical ailments, old age, and death.

The World no longer supports the moral nature of the original creation; the cultures and eras become home to the most depraved actions of humanity.


The World's spirituality becomes hollow, creating gods who are no better than wounded humanity. The World comes to reflect thinking that can be warped and compromise God's view of reality.

The World welcomes disease, hunger, and brokenness in the wake of sin.

God's Way

By my friendship with the World, I declare myself an enemy with God. Not that I see my relationship this way. My first priority is seeking my own desires and my needs. Jesus spoke the opposite: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). I measure reality by my own standards, not realizing how much I sometimes stand in opposition to Christ. When I examine my thoughts, my words, and my actions, can I say that I "love my neighbor as myself," "love my enemy," or "love God with all my heart, mind, and soul?" From the World, I receive an affirming slap on the back and mistake it for the approval of God. The World woos me like a lover.

With the World surrounding me so tight, it would be easy to lose heart. But Jesus tells me, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). He has done what I am unable to do on my own, overcome the World and what it has become. Jesus' walk with the World for 33 years showed that his power and character could not be corrupted. He overcame the physical corruption of the World: the blind could see, the lame could walk, and



My view of the
World
changes as
I come to know
Christ.

the dead lived again. Jesus lived in the World, an imperfect moral environment, but without sin. His thoughts matched those of his Father. And when the World swallowed him up in a grave, Jesus defied the curse's grip on the third day by rising from the dead.

Jesus invites me to a friendship with him, where the truth about the World and the truth about what Jesus did gives me freedom. My relationship with the World has tainted me, but Jesus offers me a gift: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him (the Holy Spirit), for he dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:16-17). I may not have the strength to overcome the World, but, through God giving me his Spirit, I can live in the World and not be of it. "Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

More Than Shadows

My view of the World changes as I come to know Christ. I no longer view the World as a friend. I see the

corruption of truth which it only has in pieces and shadows. My passion changes from knowing the World and seeking its friendship to longing for a friendship with God.

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:7-11, ESV).

I don’t value those possessions the World has given me. I’m even willing to lose them, if only I may gain Christ. In the end, the graveyard that didn’t hold Christ won’t hold me either.

In one sense, my location has changed; with God’s gift of the Spirit, my real home is in Christ. I now see how

the World is temporary and its treasures are fleeting. I take hold of what is eternal and by knowing Christ I find a new source of information. I’m still going to stumble at times. I admit, there are moments when I give the World my ear. But it is no longer my hope or foundation. As I know Christ more, I find I want to know the World less.

I also realize my struggle with the World will end. There will be a day when the World will no longer be here and a new World will be put in its place. This World will be perfect again. “But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). Here I will live not with my enemies, but face to face as a friend of God.

Next issue: Dealing with the Flesh



Gary VanDeWalker

Gary VanDeWalker is a senior pastor in Mount Shasta, California. He has a Ph.D. in Philosophy and apologetics. He and his wife Monica run the Narnia Study Center, along with their three boys. He can be found reading, searching for new books, or watching Star Trek when no one is looking. He has a passion for all things C.S. Lewis.



by STEVEN BUTWELL

Photos © Lina Hayes | Flickr

TRUST ME

WHY WE CAN TRUST GOD

THREE YEARS AGO, MY WIFE JAMIE AND I **PLANNED A TRIP TO ALABAMA TO HELP WITH TORNADO RELIEF.** We both sensed the Lord was asking us to go even though in every way it seemed impractical. The unforeseen nature of disaster relief is that you can't plan for it. I recall wondering how I could take time off work, worrying about the income I wouldn't make while I was gone, and thinking, "How am I going to raise \$2000 in less than a week?" Jamie had the same question racing through her mind.

Less than a week before we were supposed to leave, an individual I hardly knew invited Jamie and I over to his house. We met him and visited for awhile. We prayed together, and, before we left, he gave us an envelope and said, "God asked me to give this to you." I opened the envelope at home and almost fell over. In the envelope was a check for \$1,200—almost to the dollar what we still needed in order to go. Jesus had stirred Jamie's heart and mine to go on this mission trip, and he confirmed that it was his desire by providing all the funds in his perfect timing and giving me favor with my boss, allowing me to take spontaneous time off.

Even though God provides for us both in the miraculous immediate need and in the no-less incredible daily

God's plan, and the
path he chooses to
ACCOMPLISH it,
doesn't always look
the way we
EXPECT.

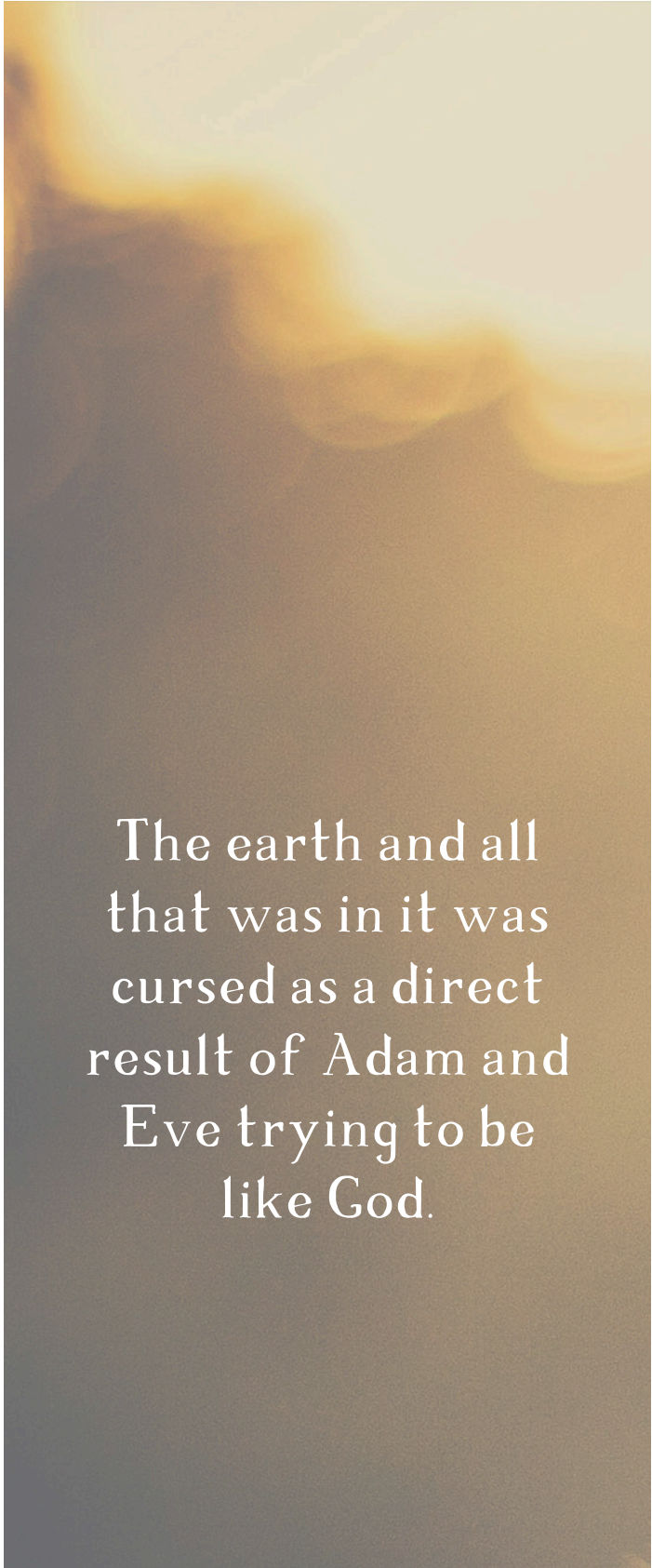
provisions, it's still difficult for us in the day-to-day to trust the words God spoke through Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11, ESV). The plans of the Lord don't always play out as we would like them to, but the moment I start to doubt, I remember what the Lord said, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9, ESV). God's plan, and the path he chooses to accomplish it, doesn't always look the way we expect.

Why We Doubt God

In a world where we usually trust only what they can see, it is a challenge to place all your trust in what is invisible, namely, God. I, like the next person, like the idea of controlling what my life's outcome will be and knowing what's next. Adam and Eve were the same way. In Genesis 3, they were tempted by Satan in the Garden of Eden to be like God, knowing good and evil, controlling things. Sadly, they were lured away from noticing what God had graciously given them—the earth, the trees bearing good fruit, the perfect relationship they had with him and with one another. Instead of trusting God, they chose knowing good and evil. Therefore, the earth and all that was in it was cursed as a direct result of Adam and Eve trying to be like God. To this day our default is trusting human knowledge over an all-powerful, loving and relational God.

Our misguided trust causes us anxiety. Jesus says in Matthew 6:25-33 (ESV):

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the



The earth and all
that was in it was
cursed as a direct
result of Adam and
Eve trying to be
like God.

birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

There must have been some doubt among the disciples that surrounded Jesus in order for him to transition into this teaching. If you recall, the disciples were just like us, they had their doubts. And like us, they questioned within their own hearts the plan that God had for them in following him. I can't help but hear the words of Peter, after Jesus' teaching on wealth, Peter says: "See, we have left everything and followed you"

(Mark 10:28). I love Jesus' response, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). It's obvious that the teaching on wealth and material possessions had struck a cord with the disciples. I speculate that all of them desired to speak what Peter did, but as it is Peter's custom, he usually is the first to speak his mind.

People like to surmise that God is not concerned with material possessions, but this couldn't be further from the truth. God is very concerned, and happy to provide everything we need. However, he doesn't want this to be our primary concern. Jesus wants our primary concern to be following him, and making him known, and along the way trusting him to provide all we need to survive. Indeed, if you stop and think about it, Jesus is everything we need to survive. He is the one who places the clothes on our back. He is the one who fills our bank accounts with money. Jesus is the one who puts food on the table each month. He is the creator of all these things. We need only concern ourselves with the

When a person CONSISTENTLY tells the truth, TRUST FOLLOWS.

things of God, that is, all people reaching repentance and coming into a personal relationship with him. Therefore, if we know on a personal level the one who supplies all the needs why would we wager to think he wouldn't provide them?

Jesus is talking about having a proper perspective. Our sinful nature is prone to focusing on ourselves and our own needs and desires—and because of this we worry. Jesus wants us not to focus on ourselves, but to focus on God. When we focus on God, we will have a perspective centered on God's glory and goodness and the joy and peace that comes from meditating on such splendor.

Paul writes that letting our daily concerns and requests be known to God will also bring us peace. Not a peace that comes from knowing the outcome, but a peace that comes from knowing God will and does take care of us in the way that is best for us. In Philippians 4:6 he writes, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." The peace we get from knowing God and trusting him with our daily concerns will guide our hearts away from sin and our natural selfish tendencies.

Satan likes to trick us into thinking we can provide for ourselves. But God is truly our provider, so we need to rely on him and not ourselves. God wants us to take these words to heart: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones" (Proverbs 3:5-7). God is in the business of providing healing, refreshment, and peace, among other things, to those who love him. The very opposite of what worry and anxiety can and will create in our lives if we don't acknowledge him and his authority in our lives.

Why We Can Trust God

Trust is gained through truth. When a person consistently tells the truth, trust follows. We trust God because he tells the truth—always. Scripture is clear: God cannot lie; his character doesn't permit it. "God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (Numbers 23:19 NIV) God won't lie, and he never goes back on his word.

A woman with blonde hair in a braid, wearing a black tank top and denim shorts, is walking away from the camera on a path covered in fallen leaves. She is carrying a patterned bag over her shoulder. The scene is set in a forest with tall trees, and the sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a warm, golden glow. The text "When God speaks, he speaks truth." is overlaid in white serif font at the bottom of the image.

When God speaks,
he speaks truth.

When God speaks, he speaks truth.

A great example of a fulfilled promise of God would be the promise he made to Israelites through Moses. “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him” (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19). The promised one that God was speaking of is the man who we know as Jesus. That promise was delivered hundreds of years later.

God also promised that he would have Jesus delivered to be crucified. Jesus tells his disciples in Mark 8:31, “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.” Thousands of witnesses attested to the validity of this event.

Another promise that effects us to this day (not to say the others don’t, they do) is the promise of the Holy

Spirit given to all people who put their faith and hope in Christ. Jesus tells us in John 16:7-11, 13-15, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” This promise is again reaffirmed in Luke 24:49, “And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” And realized in Acts 2:1-4, “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested

on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

The God whom we serve promised to provide a Savior, and his name is Jesus. God promised that he would deal with sin, and he did by making him who knew no sin to become sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus promised that once sin was dealt with that he would give the gift of the Holy Spirit to all believers so that his work of bringing people into right relationship with him would continue through those who had placed their faith and trust in him. God can be trusted. When he promises something will happen, we can be sure it will, but in his timing, not ours.

We often forget that God is trustworthy and faithful to his word. God knows we are forgetful. God knew the Israelites would forget how he delivered them from the Egyptians, so he instituted the Passover. God knew the people would forget crossing the Jordan into the land of milk and honey, therefore he set up twelve memorial stones to remember by (Joshua 4:9). Jesus knew we would be tempted to forget his sacrifice for all mankind on the cross, and all he did for us in giving his life for our own, so he instituted what we know now as

Communion. Each time we gather together, we are to eat the bread and drink the cup to remember the Lord's death until he comes again (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Defeating the Enemy's Mind Games

Satan is unlike God. “...there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). This is intimidating, but God is on our side. He shares his wisdom with us, and it begins with the fear of God (or respect for God) and continues with daily obedience in this foundational truth: that Jesus Christ was the one and only Son of God, who was crucified, buried and raised on the third day. By faith, we understand that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). It is by this knowledge of God (belief and conviction) and his great gift of Jesus, that we have hope. Jesus both defeated the enemy and redeemed us through his sacrifice on the cross and we now have freedom and eternal life through knowing Jesus.

Putting Anxiety In It's Place

The apostle Paul says, “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Jesus wants us to know the Bible so, when an alternative perspective appears, we way it against the truth of the cross. We can take that thought or idea, compare it to God’s words spoken in the Bible, and know whether it is trustworthy or not. On the other hand, if we don’t know what the Bible says, we can’t know what is true or not.

As we are people prone to wander, tempted not to trust, and quick to forget all God has done for us, God wants us to remember the times we leaned on his understanding and not our own. God reminds Moses and the Israelites in Deuteronomy: “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” (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Like the Israelites, I find myself needing constant reminders to always speak of God’s faithfulness. As a people set apart for God, we should always be talking about what God has done in our own lives. Just as I have shared my story of God supplying what was needed for my wife and I to help with tornado relief efforts, let us always share about God’s provision, talk about God’s goodness, walk with others through their own lives as Jesus would, and contemplate the gospel of God always. “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 ESV)

We learn to trust God because we experience the truth of his Word and have encounters with him in our own lives where we can say “God showed up.”

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.

Live



By HANNAH HELMS

Photos © Kyle Steed | Flickr

For
BETTER
For
WORSE

A LOOK INTO THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

WHEN MY HUSBAND AND I **GOT MARRIED** FOUR YEARS AGO WE DISCUSSED WHETHER WE OUGHT TO WRITE OUR OWN **WEDDING VOWS** OR USE A MORE TRADITIONAL FORMAT. Traditional wedding vows are pretty comprehensive – for richer and for poorer, for better and for worse, and quite a few things in between. Ultimately, we chose traditional vows, in part, because we liked how they fit with our ceremony. But the main reason that we chose to say our vows this way was that the words felt solid and time tested, spoken by countless couples before us. We figured that if they had worked for others, then they would work for us too.

Maybe if I had known what I was really getting into – what hand we were to be dealt in the first year – I would have been a bit more cautious about saying yes to those vows. We had no idea at the time that the “better and worse” we were agreeing to would cover career change, living with the in-laws, unemployment, multiple moves, disappointment, intense loneliness, and miscarriage...and that was just the first year.

Now, four years into my marriage, I can say that as comprehensive as our vows were, they were also incredibly vague. It seems that wedding vows are good at

It's very noble and
ROMANTIC to
 promise to stay
 married through a
 variety of **EXTREME**
 circumstances, but
 actually doing that is
 another matter
 entirely.

establishing what each partner in a marriage will do but are pretty lousy at spelling out how to do that. It's very noble and romantic to promise to stay married through a variety of extreme circumstances, but actually doing that is another matter entirely.

So how do we follow through with those vows? And what's the point of staying married if things really get bad?

Many people would say that if a marriage has hit rock bottom, there is not much point in sticking it out. This

Most Americans believe that LOVE is the primary foundation of a marriage.

is the impression given by the media, advice columns, and the slew of opinions expressed via social media. The general consensus in American culture today is that a marriage is worthwhile as long as the two people involved are happy and are in love with their partner.

According to D’Vera Cohn’s article *Love and Marriage* for the Pew Research Center, most Americans believe that love is the primary foundation of a marriage. In fact, “in a 2010 Pew Research Center survey, love wins out over ‘making a lifelong commitment’ as well as ‘companionship,’ ‘having children,’ and ‘financial stability’ as a very important reason to wed.”

The trouble with love and happiness is that they are emotions, and, as C.S. Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*, “no feeling can be relied on to last in its full intensity, or even to last at all.” Despite the fact that the majority of the people seem to think that marriage is based on these emotions, I believe there is more of a reason to stay married than whether or not I feel happy or in love with my spouse at this present moment.

What is it, then, that gives meaning and purpose to a marriage when things get rough and the good feelings run out?

The answer to that question, from the Christian point of view, is quite a few things. The starting point for the Christian understanding of the purpose of marriage is in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Many Christians believe that the story of the creation of Adam and Eve, the first humans, is also the part of the Bible where God most clearly lays out the intention and purpose for marriage.

Reflecting God’s Character

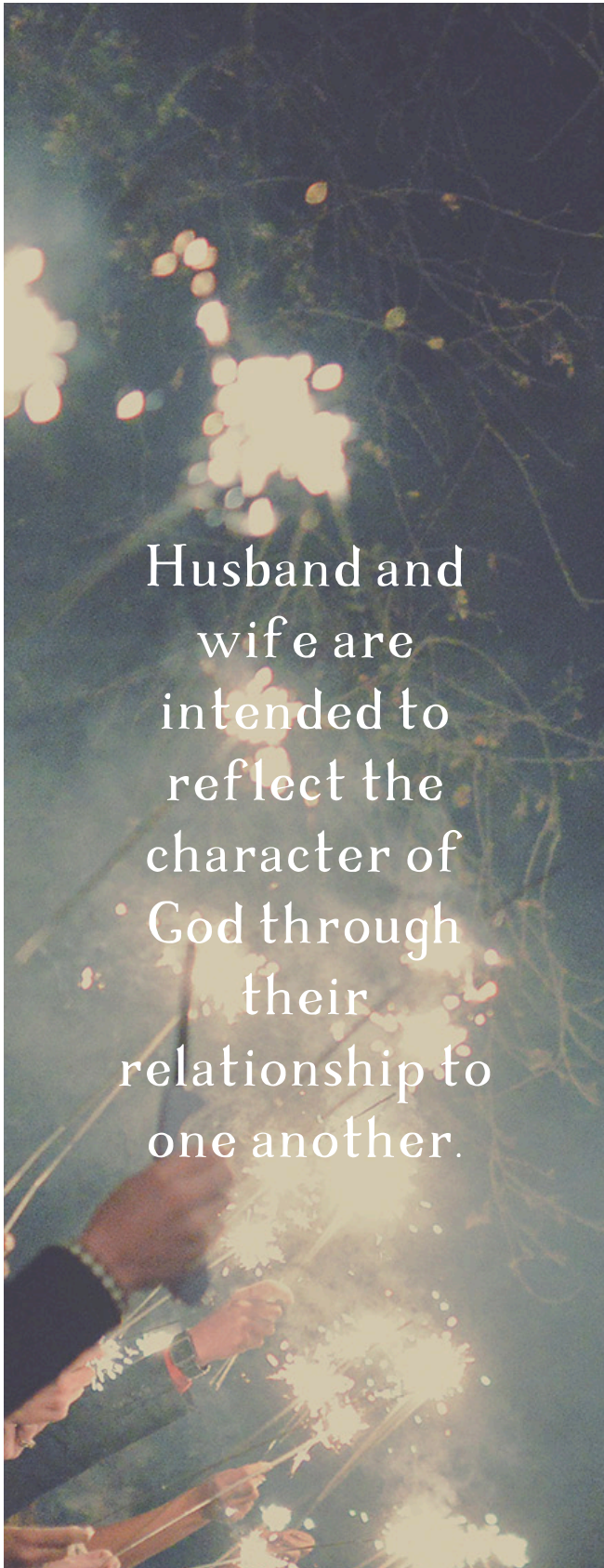
In Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV) we see the creation of man and woman, and the first indicator of God’s purpose for marriage:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

In this passage, God reveals his nature as a relational being - in speaking to himself he references the Trinity, that he is the three distinct persons of God the Father, God the Son (manifested in the person of Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit while still being one God. When God creates man and woman in his image, he endows them with characteristics that he has - reason, language, creativity, and capacity for relationships. In a marriage, the husband and wife are intended to reflect the character of God through their relationship to one another.

Stewardship

Reflecting the character of God in the marriage relationship is also apparent in the directive that man and woman are to have dominion over the created world. This verse is also understood to mean that the man and woman will take care of, tend to, or be stewards of the world around them. This isn't something that is told to the man or the woman as individuals, but rather the intention is that they will work together at this in unity, as one entity, thus further reflecting the oneness of God.



Husband and
wife are
intended to
reflect the
character of
God through
their
relationship to
one another.

In their article Together for The Center for Biblical Equality, Tim and Anne Evans explain, “This procreation mandate is not limited to biological parenthood; it includes adoption, foster parenting, and caring for spiritual children. Parenting allows us to remember that ‘it’s not about me.’”

Learning To Love

This is the difference between the current culture and Christianity’s perception of the purpose of marriage: Contrary to what the world around me may say, marriage isn’t solely about me and making me happy. Later in the Bible, Jesus reiterates how we can best honor God with our lives, when he repeats the greatest commandments in Mark 12:30-31, “‘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: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Marriage is about both loving God. It’s also about loving people. Marriage allows me the opportunity to learn to love people (specifically my spouse) the way God loves him, at both his best and his worst. Sometimes loving my spouse in this way is easy, and some-

times it is a challenge. However, marriage is ultimately one of the best ways to learn to “love our neighbor as ourselves.”

But given that loving someone the way that God loves me isn’t always an easy task, can a marriage still reflect the nature of God if two spouses are struggling to do this?

Companionship

While God intends marriage to be about living out the greatest commandments, he does not intend for it to be an unpleasant experience for the couple involved. One of the key purposes for marriage is also companionship. Genesis 2:18 states, “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’” Up until this point, everything that God has made has been good. The man’s loneliness deviates from this and must be amended.

So God brings someone else into the picture as a helper for the man. It’s easy to be put off by the word “helper.” I tend to associate this word with someone in a subordinate position. This isn’t the case here—in this context, “helper” means “one who supplies strength in an area

that is lacking”. When the woman is created to meet this need for the man, she is neither inferior or superior but a perfect match for him.

Intimacy

The oneness or intimacy that is possible inside of marriage is echoed in the man’s response to meeting the woman for the first time, when he exclaims, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23a). “Companionship” seems too weak a word to describe the depth of relational unity that is present here. The man uses a phrase that, in ancient cultures, was used exclusively to describe blood relatives. Here, he uses it for the woman, indicating that marriage is intended to create one of the most intimate of human relationships.

A significant factor in fostering the intimacy of the marriage relationship is sex. Sure, we’ve already addressed the fact that one of the aims of marriage in the Christian understanding is to procreate. But not all sex is procreative in nature; much of the time, it is about building a connection between spouses. As Madeleine L’Engle says in her book *The Irrational Season*, “Until [my husband] and I started our first baby, our

love-making was a discovery of each other, was creating this strange new creature, a marriage.”

So when we break it down, we can see that there is a lot more to God’s intent and purpose for a Christian marriage than happiness and feeling “in love.” The marriage relationship is intended to reflect the nature and character of God, to allow for a couple to work in unity as stewards of the world, to procreate, to learn to love, to provide companionship, and to allow for a truly intimate human relationship.



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.



LIVING & LEARNING

Know Your Baggage

Acknowledging the baggage that my husband and I each brought to the table (both good and bad), allowed us to sort out the intersection of our respective family norms with the purposes of marriage as spelled out in the Bible.

We grew up in very different households. My parents got married when they were in their early twenties and have been together for nearly three decades. They were transparent with my siblings and me about the need to apologize and forgive, the importance of fostering a friendship and connection with each other, and the importance of praying together.

My husband's parents divorced when he was five, and he and his older brother were raised by his mom. His take away from that experience was the desire for a unified family, and he has aspired to be a dad since kindergarten. His experience fostered a clear idea of what he did and did not want for his own marriage.

Seek Out Wisdom

Early on in our relationship, my husband and I went to couples we respected and asked for their take on what makes for a good marriage. They offered up their experiences and shared what they found worked well in regards to communicating, managing finances, and navigating in-law relationships.

Once we were engaged we did pre-marital counseling. Our counselors helped facilitate conversations between my husband and I regarding topics we had never even considered would impact our marriage - everything from preferences regarding screen time to expectations around holidays and family traditions.

Assume the Best

Somewhere along the line, someone told us that we should always assume the best about each other. With that in mind, we have worked to cultivate a deep respect of one another, so that whether we are in the middle of an argument or a serious decision, we can still hold the other in high esteem.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

It's easy to assume that good communication is about quantity, rather than quality—at least this was the attitude that I brought into our marriage. However, rather than just trying to talk about anything and everything at length, my husband and I have found that it is more important for us to find a communication style that works for us. Sometimes this means taking a break in the middle of a disagreement or spanning a conversation over a few days.

Marriage Gets Better With Time

Marriage is something that gets better with practice. Now that I have had a few years of marriage experience, and my husband and I have stuck it out through some difficult trials, we are able to say yes to staying together and to each other through challenges that we would not have had the strength to say yes to when we were first married. Saying yes on our wedding day and all the yeses that followed have built a stronger foundation for both of us.

Ask for Help

If you are struggling in your marriage, or are facing challenging or unresolved issues, I strongly encourage you to ask for help - sooner rather than later. Seek out the counsel of a couple whose marriage you admire, a pastor, or a marriage and family therapist. If your spouse is unwilling to seek out counsel or therapy with you, pursue it on your own. Even if it doesn't seem possible now, there is opportunity for healing and redemption in your marriage.

Hannah Helms



Live

by LINDSEY A. FREDERICK

Photo © Nathan Congleton | Flickr



RELEASING OUR FINANCIAL BURDENS

DOES GOD CARE ABOUT MONEY?

I GAVE MYSELF AN EARLY BIRTHDAY PRESENT THIS YEAR. Two weeks before the big day, I made my last payment on my college loan. The top of the debt thermometer hanging on my refrigerator read, “Happy Birthday to me, I’m debt free!” I scribbled up to the goal line and smiled as I snapped the cap back on the marker. I’m free! I mused. Now what?

I pondered a list of frivolous purchases: a cruise, a new set of luggage, luxurious goose-down pillows. I’d created a fun saving and spending plan. But what about giving? Wasn’t that, like, a cardinal rule of Christianity?

Money can be a heated topic in the church. Many are just plain confused about it. We carry the burdens of how much to tithe and wonder if spending is a sin. But does how we manage our money matter to God?

Money Managers

Often, our lives revolve around money and possessions when they should revolve around God. The first chapter of the Bible sets the tone for how we should view these things. After God made the earth and heaven and skies and seas, he created man and woman and

assigned them as caretakers to rule over “every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:28). In other words, if Earth was a business, God, the owner, hired us as managers.

In Christian circles, this concept is called stewardship, which is an Old English term for “one who manages another’s financial affairs.” This principle is reiterated several more times throughout Scripture when it says, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him” (Psalm 24:1, NLT). This includes our money. You may earn it, you may invest it, and you may spend it, but God owns everything. And how we handle money demonstrates what we believe about God. That’s big. Let me make that clear: What you do with your money indicates whether you believe God is the God of the universe, or whether you believe that you are god of your own world.

So how would God like us to manage his money?

Shrewd Savers

When it comes to wealth, some Christians claim, “Money is the root of all evil. It’s in the Bible!” But let

SAVING money
isn't a sin. It's
actually a healthy,
RESPONSIBLE
habit, which the
Bible endorses.

me tell you a secret: That's a big fat lie. Money, itself, is not evil. Money is also not intrinsically good. It's an object—a tool, which can be used for both harmful things and good things. Money can buy a cocaine high or money can build an orphanage in India. Money goes where we tell it to go. The Bible actually says the love of money is the root of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). This verse is a warning that people are prone to sinful, destructive desires, such as greed and gluttony.

Saving money isn't a sin. It's actually a healthy, responsible habit, which the Bible endorses. In the book of Matthew, Jesus tells a story called "The Parable of the Loaned Money" (Matthew 25:14–30). It goes like this:

A wealthy man went away on a long trip and left his workers in charge of his property. He gave one employee five bags of gold, a second employee two bags of gold, and a third employee one bag of gold. The first and second employees immediately invested their money and doubled it. But the third dug a hole in the ground and hid the money.

After a long time, the man came back from his trip and ask his workers what they did with his money. He was pleased with how the first two managed it, and he told

You DON'T need to build an orphanage or feed a VILLAGE.

them, "Great job! You have proved you are reliable and trustworthy; you have wisely managed what I gave you. I will now entrust you with more responsibilities."

The third worker produced the original bag of gold and said, "I know you have high standards and hate careless ways. I know you demand the best and have no tolerance for error. So I was afraid to lose your money and I buried it in the ground."

The man was furious and said, "If you knew I wanted the best, why did you do less than that? You could have, at least, placed the money in a savings account and returned it with some interest. Give your money to the man who risked the most and leave."

You might be scratching your head, thinking, *You've got it wrong! This story isn't about saving and investing money. It's about using our time and talent to serve God and build his kingdom.* Exactly! The Bible tells us not to mindlessly collect and waste possessions, including time, talent, and money, which can be destroyed on earth "where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19, NLT). This doesn't mean we shouldn't acquire wealth: it means we shouldn't hoard it. When we share our

time, talent, and money, we make a deposit of God's love into the life of another, which results in a heavenly celebration and in God saying to us, "Great job! You have wisely managed what I gave you."

Gracious Givers

As Christians, the one thing we confidently know about money is we are supposed to give some of it away. We're just not always sure to whom or how much, and sometimes this paralyzes us into giving nothing. The Bible provides a few practical guidelines by telling us to give justice to the poor and the orphaned and to uphold the rights of those oppressed and in need (Psalm 82:3). You don't need to build an orphanage or feed a village. Often a simple meal will do.

Sometimes we don't give because we're scared to part with our money. Particularly those of us who view it as a security blanket. Anne Frank wrote in her diary, "No one has ever become poor by giving." What would your diary say about your relationship with money? A fear of giving may, once again, reflect what we believe about God. Do you believe God can take care of all your needs? Just a glance around God's creation shows how

Each should diligently seek God's WISDOM in how MUCH to give.

he cares for it: "Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?" (Matthew 6:26, NLT).

Other times we twist this concept into irresponsible giving. We hear the Bible story of the widow who gave away everything and extrapolate (Mark 12:41-44) that we should do the same. But the Bible also says if anyone does not provide for his own family, he has "denied

the faith and is worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8, KJV). There's some debate over exactly how much we should give to the church. Old Testament law says give back 10 percent, and this is still a common practice. The New Testament is more ambiguous, with recommendations like "decide in your heart how much to give" (2 Corinthians 9:7, NLT). Each should diligently seek God's wisdom in how much to give—often that wisdom looks suspiciously like a budget plan.

But let's forget numbers for a second and bring our minds back to God's money-managing perspective: everything we have is already God's. He does not need or want money. He wants our hearts. And giving is a heart matter. 2 Corinthians 9:7 continues that we not to give reluctantly or under compulsion. Deuteronomy 15:10 says to give generously without a grudging heart. In his book, *Dave Ramsey's Complete Guide to Money*, financial expert Dave Ramsey says, "...the act of giving changes us. It crushes our hearts and reforms us into something that looks and acts a little bit more like Christ." God is a giver—he gives us choices and wisdom and abilities. And most importantly, he gives us life and love unconditional—both now and forever.

The love of
money is the
root of evil, but
the LOVE of
God and his cre-
ation is a path of
LIFE.

Financial Freedom

I thought I achieved financial freedom when I paid off my debts. But the truth is, freedom is much more than paying off a debt. Freedom is a way of living. And God wants us to be free in every sense of the word. Freedom can be messy and hard, and it can feel unsafe, but we

have God as a guide to properly navigate it. You and I will never experience this freedom if we don't acknowledge whose money we're dealing with—if we hold our money with a grip of fear and entitlement. “The clenched fist is the international sign of anger,” says Ramsey. “But even a dog understands the warmth and reception of an open hand.” Money is a gift and a resource that can both help us experience and demonstrate God's love to his most treasured investment: people. The love of money is the root of evil, but the love of God and his creation is a path of life. So, yes, money matters.



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 on Facebook @/lindseyafrederick



THOUGHTS ON CREATOR, CREATION, & CREATIVITY

by BEN HELMS

WE ALL DO IT. WE CAN'T **HELP** OURSELVES.

We must create. Whether we did it as homework in high school, or we do it because it's our passion; we're all creative beings and we must be creative.

Unfortunately, many people don't think of themselves as creative at all. When was the last time you sat down and painted a beautiful, sprawling landscape? Or perhaps composed a haiku about a snow-covered tree? While we're not all expressing ourselves through creative endeavors on a daily basis, it might be a discipline we should take more time to cultivate.

We were all created—quite literally—as *creative* beings. In fact, the very first chapter of the Bible tells us that that God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.” He even repeats that fact two more times in the very next verse as well, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

The concept of humanity being created “image of God.” What does this mean exactly? The full definition could fill a dissertation—several, I'm sure—but to sum-

As beings
CREATED in the
image of God, we
are inherently
endowed with the
ABILITY and
craving for
creativity.

marize, we can learn two things from this: 1) We are above all other creations, as we are of God and share his likeness, and 2) Ultimately, true fulfillment can only be found in Christ, and everything else we look to for meaning will fall short.

As beings created in the image of God, we are inherently endowed with the ability and craving for creativity. Look around you. It is in his nature to create, just as it is in ours.

Picture in your mind an art class. Whether you were an art major or even if you just saw one in a movie once,

Each time we put the brush to canvas or finger to keyboard, we're IMITATING the very first creation.

you can probably picture it. A bunch of students, each with their own easels, all painting the same thing. And what are they painting? I bet it's one of two things: either a beautiful nature scene, or the human body. Even the most renowned, respected, and prolific creators (artists) throughout history can't help but try to mimic and recreate these things that the Lord first created.

Each time we put the brush to canvas or finger to keyboard, we're imitating the very first creation. What we create with paint or keystrokes is up to us, but the fact that we're creating at all is a reflection of the character of God. Everything we create, whether it's a sonata in D major or a lopsided coffee table is a reflection of who we are. It says something about us. But even more importantly, it says something about God.

But what exactly does creation say about God? For starters, the Lord and his works are flawless (as we read

in Deuteronomy 32:3-4 & Psalm 19:9), just as every single thing he's created started out flawless as well. Just as we learn more about God as we dive deeper into our relationship with him, we can learn more about him from his miraculous creation.

The book of Romans tells us knowing who God is, is quite easy actually. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:18-20).

The Apostle Paul wrote that we are without excuse in knowing about God, and that it is plain to see. Just by looking around at the world he created, we can see the majesty, power, and greatness of God. Through both observing his creation and taking part in being creative, we can learn more about the Lord; about his character, his wisdom, and his love for us.

One of my favorite authors, Donald Miller, wrote in his book, *A Million Miles In A Thousand Years*, something that's stuck with me for years. Every once in awhile, whenever I'm awe-struck at the site of a beautiful sunset, or a child's laughter brings a tear to my eye (yes, I'm a new dad), the following passage comes to mind.

When you are born, you wake slowly to everything. Your brain doesn't stop growing until you turn twenty-six, so from birth to twenty-six, God is slowly turning the lights on, and you're groggy and pointing at things saying circle and blue and car and then sex and job and health care. The experience is so slow you could easily come to believe life isn't that big of a deal, that life isn't staggering. What I'm saying is I think life is staggering and we're just used to it. We all are like spoiled children no longer impressed with the gifts we're given — it's just another sunset, just another rainstorm moving in over the mountain, just another child being born, just another funeral.

We call him the Creator not just as a designation of what he did, but as a descriptor of who he is. And he made us in the same way, to be creative beings, infusing our relationship and knowledge of him into our

actions, into our speech, and into our relationships with others.

So what do we do with all of this creativity burning a hole in our pockets?

We can't all be amazing artists or singers, right? Well, that's probably correct. And I won't write some drivel about how we all have beautiful voices in the eyes of the Lord, because while he probably appreciates our praise, he also has ears.

Our calling and desire to create is one that comes directly from the Lord, and with every creative endeavor we take on, we have the responsibility to and spread his name and glorify him with that creation.



Ben Helms

Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, Ben earned his degree in writing from Azusa Pacific University in Los Angeles. After a few years in Portland, he and his wife, Hannah, moved back to small town Mt. Shasta, CA, where they reside, raising their two beautiful daughters. A mobile app designer by day and musician by night, Ben occasionally finds time to write at www.benhelms.com.

The
SPIRITUAL
GIFTS

PROCLAIMING AND DEMONSTRATING THE KINGDOM OF GOD



By LUKE GERATY

Photo © GU Photography | Flickr



WHEN A PERSON BECOMES A CHRISTIAN, THEY ARE TOLD ABOUT THE **GRACE** OF JESUS, THE **LOVE OF GOD**, AND THE “FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”; GOD THE FATHER AND JESUS CHRIST THE SON ARE FAMILIAR AND HAVE LOTS OF DIALOGUE IN THE BIBLE, BUT THE **HOLY SPIRIT** IS PRETTY QUIET AND OFTEN OVERLOOKED. SO WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO?

In the Old Testament, the Spirit gave the leaders of Israel power to produce signs (think parting of the Red Sea), prophesy, and guide the nation. While Jesus is fully God, he lived his life on earth anointed by the Holy Spirit, receiving the power to heal people, teach with authority, and raise people from the dead. Though it's sometimes less dramatic in our lives, the Holy Spirit shares practical gifts with us; when we serve in his name, when we worship, when we pray, the Spirit brings us closer to God.

What Are Spiritual Gifts?

From start to finish, Christians are connected to God and given power by way of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the most well-known aspect of the Holy Spirit's work is

Jesus lived his life as a human being, anointed by the Holy Spirit, receiving the power to heal people, teach with authority, and raise people from the dead.

related to spiritual gifts. But since spiritual gifts are a popular topic, the information can be overwhelming or confusing.

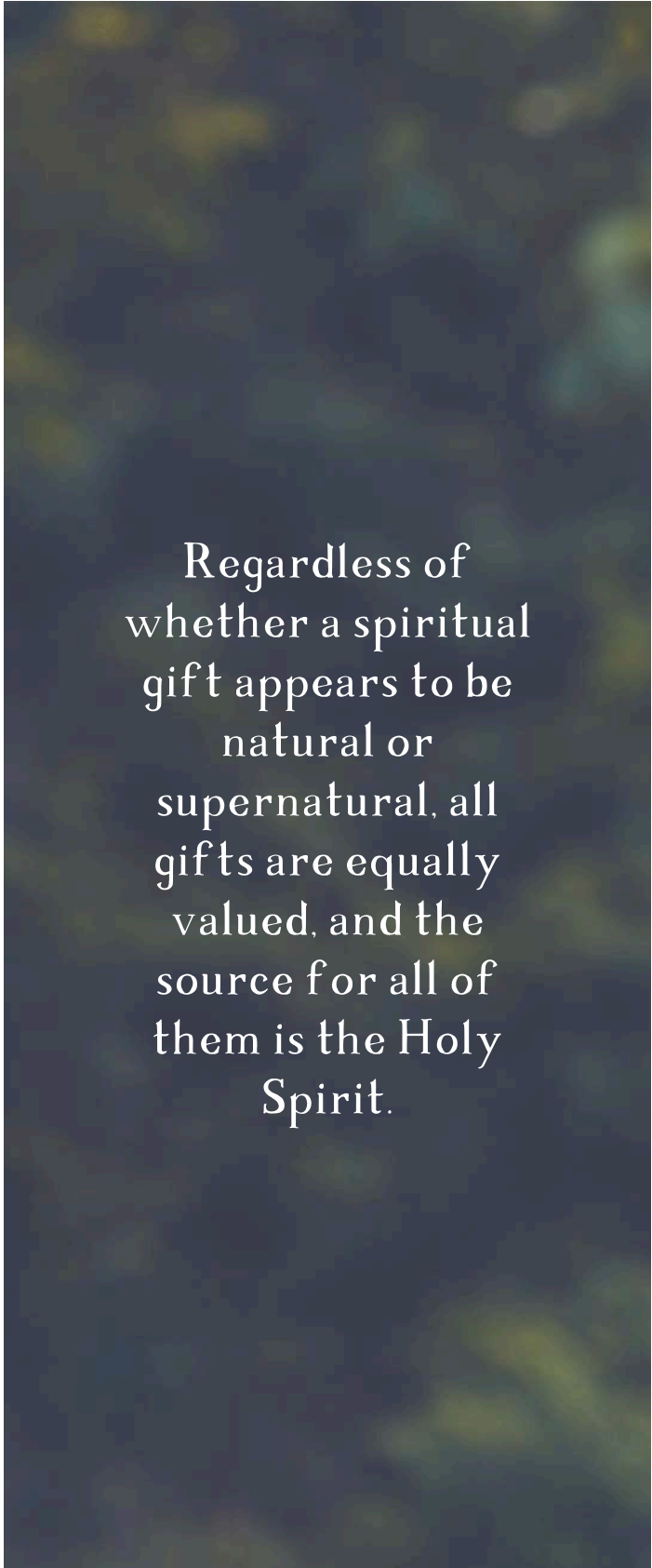
Spiritual gifts are abilities that we have by way of the Holy Spirit. Michael Bird, in *Evangelical Theology*, defines a spiritual gift as “an empowerment from God for God's people through the Spirit for spiritual work in the church.” So what does that mean? God gives you abilities for you to use to serve others; they are “spir-

itual” because they are directly tied to the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4, 7). Contrast this with abilities in general: regular abilities can be chosen and developed as a way to profit yourself; spiritual gifts can also be developed, but you don’t choose them, and they’re meant for serving others and glorifying God.

The New Testament has several lists of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 7:7; 12:8–10, 28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). Some of the spiritual gifts could be described as “natural” and others appear to be “supernatural.” For example, Paul lists “gifts of healing” and “working of miracles” along with “leading” and “acts of mercy.” This is important to note because, regardless of whether a spiritual gift appears to be natural or supernatural, all gifts are equally valued, and the source for all of them is the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12).

Who Has Spiritual Gifts?

Sometimes Christians believe that only certain people have spiritual gifts, such as pastors or people who have been Christians for a long time. Not true! Every single follower of Jesus is given spiritual gifts to use. The apostle Peter wrote, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied



Regardless of whether a spiritual gift appears to be natural or supernatural, all gifts are equally valued, and the source for all of them is the Holy Spirit.

grace” (1 Pet. 4:10, ESV). There truly are no “superstar” Christians who have all of the spiritual gifts. God doesn’t want anybody to sit on the sidelines. Instead, followers of Jesus have all been given the presence of the Holy Spirit to empower them to contribute their gifts to the “team” — the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

This, of course, raises another issue: *who decides who gets which gifts?* A few years ago a person told me that if he preached at the church I serve, he could *guarantee* that our congregation would receive the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and healing. (We’ll discuss these gifts in more depth later.) But this runs counter to what the New Testament teaches: all these [spiritual gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Cor. 12:11, ESV)

No person determines who gets which spiritual gifts; that is a decision that the Holy Spirit makes. So if someone tells you that they are able to *impart* or *give away* spiritual gifts at *their* disposal based on *their* will, that person is not teaching what the Bible teaches. Watch out.

What Are My Spiritual Gifts?

Many churches and individuals use spiritual gifts assessments. In these “tests,” people are asked questions that help them determine what spiritual gifts they most often function in so that they can know what they have. While this is a popular way to explore the subject and it can raise helpful questions, there’s more to it.

These assessments can give the impression that once people know what their gift is, that it is the only gift they have, or that they’re “off the hook” in areas where they didn’t have high scores.

People think they should wait to know their gifts and/or develop them before they can serve in ministry.

If test questions concentrate on where you already function most often, you may be leaving something out. For example, if you’re already involved in teaching, the test may overlook the gift God has given you for mercy.

The Holy Spirit
empowers us to
serve giving us the
right words to say,
the wisdom to know
what to do and when
to do it, as well as the
strength to carry out
the work you see
before you.

But there is no Scripture in the New Testament that teaches Jesus' followers that they only receive one spiritual gift. There is no Scripture that suggests they need to figure out which gift they have before they can obey God or serve others. The upshot is spiritual gift assessments aren't evil, and they can help us identify our gifts and abilities, but it's best to learn what the Bible teaches and consider the implications of those teachings.

We can summarize the New Testament's approach to spiritual gifts in two ways: First, the New Testament emphasizes that as Christians we are to serve other people and God. Second, the New Testament teaches

that the Holy Spirit empowers us to serve—giving us the right words to say, the wisdom to know what to do and when to do it, as well as the strength to carry out the work you see before you.

In future articles I will explore other issues related to the subject of spiritual gifts. This will include some of the more controversial or confusing spiritual gifts such as prophecy, gifts of healings, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, and much more. This will include more discussion on how spiritual gifts function when we're sharing our faith as well as building up other Christians. If the Holy Spirit has been sent to empower the church for the work of ministry, having a healthy understanding of what Scripture teaches concerning spiritual gifts, which are given by the Spirit, would seem rather important! So stay tuned for our next issue to learn more about this subject!



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, MultiplyVineyard.org, and VineyardScholars.org.

TESTIMONY

CHRISTIAN LINGO EXPLAINED

THE WORD *TESTIMONY* CONJURES UP A TENSE SCENE IN A COURTROOM. A black robed judge sits with gavel ready as a witness is questioned. The witness is required to honestly state her understanding of the facts she knows and is even called upon to swear an oath that everything she says is “nothing but the truth.” This scenario has some relation to the Christian concept of testimony but the Christian concept also has some unique elements that make it stand out from legal drama as seen on TV and in the movies.

For the follower of Christ, a testimony is more than just a factual account; it is the story of what we have

experienced of Christ. It encompasses is the highs and lows, the mountain peaks and valleys of our journey with God. The whole journey, or just a small snapshot of the journey, can be spoken of as a testimony.

The key to a testimony is it’s story-like quality, but with a factual account of past events or current experiences related to our relationship with God. Basically, our testimony is a story about our life with Christ and what he has done for us. These stories can be shared in private, one-on-one conversations at Starbucks or even, God forbid, around the water cooler at the office. They can also can be told in a packed auditorium full of Christians who desperately need to hear your story

For the follower of
Christ, a
TESTIMONY is
more than just a
factual account it
is the story of what
we have
EXPERIENCED
of Christ.

and be encouraged. A testimony is more than just an infomercial or facts to be stated in a courtroom. It is the story of the journey you have taken with God.

Our testimony is the narrative of what Jesus has done, and, although it is personal, it doesn't start with us, and it will not end with us. We saw what God did in others' lives and had to experience it for ourselves when we became believers. In the same way, God is drawing others through our testimony to be included in his greater story. It is a story that began way back when he created the universe. It is a story that unfolded when he parted the Red Sea for the Hebrews being set free from Egypt. It is the story of Jesus rising from death and the grave. Our testimony is our small slice of the story of a great and magnificent God.



Ramon Mayo

Ramon Mayo is an author and speaker. He resides in the Greater Chicago area 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 Ramon-Mayo.com

THE MISTAKEN IDENTITY *of* CONFIDENCE

FALSE HUMILITY AND BOASTING IN THE LORD

by NICHOLAS SOWELL

Photo © Joe St. Pierre | Flickr

Connect



I HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD AND TRUST THE ABILITIES THAT GOD HAS GIVEN ME. Some people have unfortunately mistaken my confidence for pridefulness and thought they should correct me. Chastising a person for self-assurance is a common practice, because we don't want to be prideful or boastful in our own abilities, which the Bible warns against (1 Cor 1:29). Pride and boasting are real dangers, as Mark 7 says these "evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Yet, while I have prideful moments, as we all do, it would be inaccurate to say that every time I am bold, I am acting pridefully. Our fear of pride can hinder us from boldly declaring our faith in Jesus. In contrast to pride, the Bible encourages having confidence in God, as 1 Corinthians 1:31 says "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." However, it seems many people can confuse the two, and have a hard time identifying what is confidence in the Lord versus pride in ourselves.

I think Christians are often afraid to make themselves fully known as people of faith because they are worried about how others will view them, particularly concerned they will come off preachy or arrogant. But if we show and share our faith with love and respect for others, we do not have to fear this. As 1 Peter 1:22


God hasn't called
any one person to
be GREATER than
another but he has
called us to be
CONFIDENT in
him.

says, "Love one another earnestly from a pure heart." The Bible is full of stories about men and women who stepped out for God with confidence and humility. Seeking God's will isn't about always appearing right, or seeking fame and recognition, but when we follow God's plan and step into the confidence and authority he's given to us, the world is going to take notice.

God hasn't called any one person to be greater than another; but he has called us to be confident in him. In Luke 22: 24-27 it says:

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."

Be great in what you're called to do or how you're motivated to serve because the world needs you. In service to God, we can have confidence. As it says in Hebrews 13:6, "So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:6). If we're afraid of being labeled as prideful or anything else, we may not step out in faith and do what God intends for us. We can rely on the Holy Spirit in our actions and service. When we place our confidence in God and what he's placed in us, we begin to change



When we place our
confidence in God and
what he's placed in us,
we begin to change
things.

things.

Take the story of David and Goliath. David, a full-time shepherd, ended up facing off with a giant because he was delivering groceries. As he made his delivery on the battlefield, he heard Goliath taunting the army of Israel. David responded, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:26, NIV). In other words, “Who does this guy think he is!” Hearing him say this, David’s older brother Eliab became angry. Eliab said to David, “Why did you come down here and with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and your insolence of heart.” (1 Samuel 17:28, NIV). Eliab did two things here: he demeaned David and his profession and accused him of being prideful.

But if David had been prideful, as his brother accused, he wouldn’t have been on that battlefield. David’s father was a fairly wealthy man, well-off enough that he had servants, so David could have said “You have servants. Why don’t you send one of them instead of risking the life of your youngest son in the middle of a battle?” But he didn’t. David obeyed his father and humbly delivered food to the battlefield. And, because he did, God put him in place to become a giant killer

Are you confident ENOUGH in Christ and to step into the ROLE that God has for you?

and Israel’s most famous warrior.

Our greatest model of confidence is Jesus. There was never a moment when he lacked confidence in the Lord. He was bold and believed in what he could do because, as he said, “All things have been committed to me by my Father” (Matthew 11:27, NIV). In ultimate humility, he sacrificed himself to save us. “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). Jesus was perfectly both humble and confident in God, his Father, so let me chal-

AUTHENTIC HUMILITY IS *Not* ABOUT THINKING LESS OF YOURSELF, BUT RATHER THINKING *of* YOURSELF LESS.

challenge you today: are you confident enough in Christ and to step into the role that God has for you? Christ has the power and ability and to carry you through. In some cases, the posture of humility has been pushed to the point that people adopt it as virtue, whether their hearts are humble or not—this is an attitude of false humility. The Devil would love to keep us walking in false humility because it distracts from the path that God intends for us, a path that leads to an accurate sense of value and identity in his eyes.

What is false humility? False humility happens when a person is affecting a posture of submission, saying, “I’m not important and what I want isn’t important; it’s all about God,” when they are lying to themselves and in reality trying to manipulate situations to suit themselves, trying to impress others with their humility. The truth is that you matter and Jesus matters, but true humility involves putting the focus on God and

his will and sacrificing your desires for the love and benefit of others. When we step out in humility to live out God’s call on our lives he gives us more grace. “But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6).

In contrast to false humility is real humility. Authentic humility is not about thinking less of yourself, but rather thinking of yourself less. The world needs humble Christians who know their worth, their value in Christ, and their ability to operate in God’s will and do and communicate the Lord’s truth in the places and moments they are needed.

Consider Jesus’ words:

“No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is

nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them.” (Luke 8:16-18, NIV)

God made each of us to shine. He made each one of us unique so we reflect his glory in a way that no one else can. If you allow God to do it, his glory will be seen in you and will never be replicated in the same way.

Maybe you’ve known pride as synonymous with confidence. Maybe you’ve believed that there’s a very fine line between the two, but there really is a very big one. Pride says, “I’m better than other people, and I want attention.” Confidence says, “I’m not called to be greater than anyone else, but I am called to be confident that God can and will use me. Attention isn’t a priority.” Jesus says in Matthew 23:11-12 (NIV), “The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted all.”

God is the artist who made us in his image. Demeaning and devaluing ourselves in false humility doesn’t glori-

fy God, but neither does being too afraid to step out in faith. We need to have both humility and confidence, and God can supply both. We should aim to glorify God by accepting ourselves as his valued creation, filled with the gifts he has given us to accomplish his will. And it is through the gift of Holy Spirit that we can operate in love, confidence, and humility as we do so. “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit” 2 Corinthians 3:5-6. When we realize the greatness of the Holy Spirit inside of us and rely on him, acknowledge that God made us and loves us, our service and sacrifice become all the more valuable.



Nicholas Sowell

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

OUR IDENTITY
IN CHRIST
Is ALWAYS
GREATER
THAN *Our*
ASSOCIATION
With ANY
POLITICAL
PARTY

A REFLECTION ON THE INTERSECTION OF FAITH AND POLITICS



By MATTHEW HAMILTON

Photo © Stefano Montagner | Flickr



THE ISSUE OF WHETHER CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE **INVOLVED IN POLITICS** IS COMPLEX, ONE THAT CAN LEAD TO **DISAGREEMENT** AMONG THOSE WITH EVEN THE MOST **SINCERE FAITH**. Especially if you are new to Christianity, someone that is seeking or someone that is newly committed, you may find that politics is one of the major things (along with interpretation of scripture and method of worship) that divides believers of a common faith.

Within many groups of the Christian faith, political involvement, or the lack thereof, is what distinguishes them from others. For every group such as the pacifist Amish that do not allow its members to seek or hold public office, there are churches that allow candidates, whether liberal or conservative or somewhere in the middle, to speak to their congregation during times typically designated for worship.

If you look even briefly throughout world history, major events or change of government have often been associated with a predominant faith, often with another religious group seeking to claim the power to rule or at the very least not to be persecuted. From the change of the pagan Roman Empire to Christianity under the rule of Constantine, to the Crusades of the

Unfortunately,
POLITICS is one of the
major things that
DIVIDES believers of
a common faith.

Catholic church seeking the conversion of most of the known world in the 1100-1200's, religion and faith dictated daily life, as a particular faith usually dictated how people were governed.

More recently, within the past 400 years, the founding of the United States, at least in part, came about because people sought the opportunity to worship freely, in a society that specifically did not have a state religion. Even today, actual wars between faith groups are responsible for death and destruction in many places in earth, most notably in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. Even conflicts between Christians, Catholics and Protestants, have resulted in casualties in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Integrating your political BELIEFS with your faith can seem a DAUNTING task.

With all of this information to consider, integrating your political beliefs with your faith can seem a daunting task. A good place to start is to identify how the scriptures talk about politics and thus show how we can apply the same principles today. If we look at the Bible, we need to first recognize that although the messages are timeless and very much apply today, the specifics reflect cultures from thousands of years ago. So, while you will see mentions of kings and queens, you will not see mentions of presidents. There were people in charge then as there are now.

One instance that show God's influence in government is found in the book of Daniel. Daniel saw many visions from God, but one in particular addresses how God has a direct hand in the rulers of the world. "During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said: 'Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and

seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning'" (Daniel 2:19-21, NIV).

This constancy of the presence of God in the affairs of human history mentioned in the passage is important to remember. With every regime change, whether by force, by coup, by succession or by democratic election, God is present and aware. While you may live in a country that allows you to have a voice in your choice of leader or not, the omniscience of God means that the outcome was known already by him. How this truth is possible, called God's sovereignty, is one of God's greatest mysteries, and one that we often have a hard time wrapping our minds around.

Often Christians cite the Ten Commandments mentioned in Exodus 20:1-17 as a basis for laws that should be applied to government.

“And God spoke all these words: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. “You shall have no other gods before me. “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. “You shall not murder. “You shall not commit adultery. “You shall not steal. “You

shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

There some definite correlations between some of the commandments and many current laws. The sixth commandment forbidding murder is a law that is commonplace in most societies, although one could debate as to how it is effectively used. The eighth commandment against stealing also currently applies although the value of the theft and the circumstances can vary. The ninth commandment about bearing false witness would closely relate to the charges of perjury or libel and slander in most judicial systems. Keeping the sabbath holy at one time was widely enforced as law in the United States in the form of “Blue Laws” forbidding doing business on Sundays in many areas, but now is more often adhered strictly in a religious settings.

The other commandments: Having no other gods, make no graven image, not taking God’s name in vain, honoring your father and mother, and coveting are now considered more behavioral and religious in nature as opposed to being able to be enforced in civil law.

When discussing the specific topic of Christians and political involvement, the passage that is most often mentioned is where Jesus is discussing the payment of taxes with some followers. “Show me the coin used for paying the tax.’ They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, ‘Whose image is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. Then he said to them, ‘So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s’” (Matthew 22:19-21, NIV).

This particular passage addresses probably the most passive method of political involvement, paying taxes. All of us pay some tax at sometime or another, be it wage tax, property tax, income tax or sales tax. While it can be safe to assume that no one enjoys paying taxes, the amount of opposition to paying taxes varies greatly depending as to where you may find yourself on the political spectrum. There is often great debate as to how the government uses your contribution for practices that may conflict with personal religious beliefs. An example of this conflict include pacifists groups such as Quakers and Mennonites withholding payment of taxes because of funding for the military.

Gracious and LOVING political opponents are not NEWSWORTHY.

In today’s world, there is no shortage of things about which people can disagree and argue, even among Christians. Fellow Christians question the sincerity of one another’s faith depending on their opinion, and this can damage Christian unity. For example, one side favors recognizing marriage between a man and a woman only; others advocate unions between two people of the same sex as well as traditional marriage. The terms “Right to Life” and “Reproductive Rights” too may not seem to contradict each other, but in they represent opposing sides on the issue of abortion.

The Bible stresses that despite our differences we are called to love each other above our political positions. “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance

against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:12-14). You may feel like how politics and religion intersect in the public sphere communicate the exact opposite of this, and you’d be right. Media outlets report drama and conflict. Gracious and loving political opponents are not newsworthy.

It can be very intimidating to take in all the opinions and differences in Biblical views and interpretation. The Bible is such a large book that there are people that devote their lives and careers to its study. The topic of politics and its intersection with faith might be one of the toughest to sort out because your first exposure may be when these issues are debated on religious grounds in the news. And those debates are often one-sided. It is important to remember the contrast between the fleeting issues of the day with the permanence of a relationship with God. Pastor Rob Steinbach of Seaside Church in Bremerton, Washington puts this into perspective. “Our identity in Christ is always greater than our association with a political party. When a sinner becomes a saint through the work of Christ he/she gains a new identity and one which the Bible gives shape to. He/she enters into a life long

journey of growth, discipleship, and time of learning what the Bible says about every issue (worldview) he/she should care about (also vote about). My encouragement to believers is to put Jesus and the Word of God first and conform your worldview to timeless truths rather than the temporary shifting commitments of a political party.”

While you may find that many Christians in your area have similar opinions on political issues, it’s important to remember that there are equally sincere believers that still may differ from you or those around you. That is why it is important to concentrate on the faith that you share. It may be hard, but by first acknowledging a common point of faith, and sharing how that faith has made an impact on each others lives means that you don’t have to see eye to eye to share in the goodness of God.



Matthew Hamilton

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



By SARAH MARIANO

Photos © Holly Lay | Flickr



PRAYER
Is THE
ALIGNMENT
OF *Our*
SOULS
With GOD

KEEPING GOD AT THE CENTER WHEN PRAYER IS HARD

A FEW MONTHS AGO I PICKED UP R.A. TORREY'S BOOK, *HOW TO PRAY*, AND BEGAN **READING WITH SOME HOPE** THAT IT WOULD WAKE MY **TIRED** SPIRIT. I flipped through the first few chapters, letting conviction and information seep in, and, for a few days, I seemed to improve. My motivation to read Scripture and spend time with God increased. I caught a fleeting glimpse of what my life could be like when prayer took precedence. But then I forgot to pray, and I watched as motivation slipped further and further away from me, until prayer was a distant memory, and I began to feel like I could live without it.

Prayer is one of the most difficult things to do because it takes time, energy, and honesty when we don't always want to give it. Yet prayer is one of the most important things a Christian can do. How do we call ourselves believers if, as Torrey says, prayer is the alignment of our souls with God, yet we do not pray? How can we know God and imitate him if we do not take the time to communicate with him and listen?

To say that prayer isn't essential minimizes one of the most prominent themes in the life and ministry of Jesus. Mark 1:35 (ESV) says, "Rising very early in the

morning, while it was still dark, he [Jesus] departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." Jesus Christ, God in flesh, felt it necessary to remove himself from the patterns of daily life in order to communicate with the Father. If we are to be imitators of Christ (Eph. 5:1), we must recognize the importance of this act. Jesus believed communication with God to be so important that, though he was God, he devoted specific time alone to it. This must be an example for us.

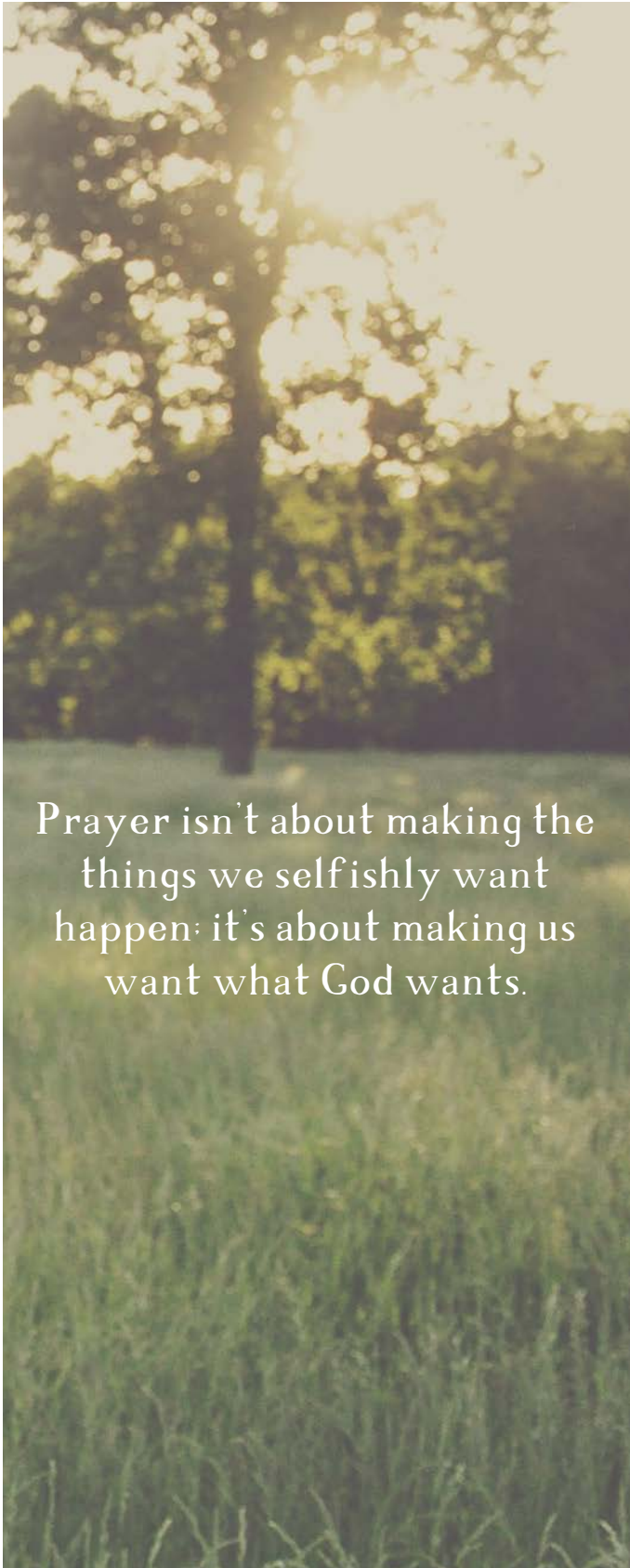
Christ made prayer a central component of his ministry. We know it's important, but why? The Bible gives us a fascinating picture of what prayer does in our lives and in the world around us. Hebrews 4:16 says that by prayer we may "receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." But the necessity for prayer goes beyond times of need.

In prayer, our desires can become more like God's desires, and we may align our wills with the will of God. 1 John 5:14-15 (ESV) says, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." We are therefore, according to this passage, called to pray in a way that

reflects Christ's will, not our own will.

If we pray in this manner, our desires and hopes will become more like Christ's because we train ourselves to hope for things that are consistent with his plans. Romans 8:26 makes this clearer by introducing the Holy Spirit's role in our prayers, saying, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." The Spirit works at aligning our prayers to the will of God, and thus, when we pray, we are brought closer to right relationship with him. Prayer isn't about making the things we selfishly want happen; it's about making us want what God wants.

In a similar way, prayer allows us to express thankfulness, but also trains us into an attitude of thankfulness. By prayer, the apostle Paul expressed his gratefulness for the generosity of the Philippians and the faith of the Colossians. Philippians 1:3-11 paints a beautiful picture of Paul's prayerful thanksgiving for the church in Philippi. He thanks God when he remembers these people because they have partnered with him in sharing and living the gospel. Paul then goes on to pray that they may grow further in love and become even



Prayer isn't about making the things we selfishly want happen: it's about making us want what God wants.

We must then BELIEVE that prayer is ACTIVE outside of us as well as inside of us.

more like Christ. What is striking about this passage of thanksgiving is that Paul expresses his gratefulness in prayer, and he immediately follows that by explaining his assurance that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). This suggests that not only does prayer allow him to communicate his gratefulness to God but it also brings him better understanding of the source of his gratefulness.

Not only does prayer tune our hearts towards God’s will and to thankfulness, but it also changes the world around us and directly affects the people and the ministries around us. Since the Spirit intercedes on our behalf (Rom. 8:26), we must then believe that prayer

is active outside of us as well as inside of us. We are instructed to be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Eph. 6:8).

When we pray with the will of God at the forefront of our hearts, we are able to intercede on behalf of the people around us. God hears our prayers and answers because we have asked those things that align with his will in the name of Jesus. The Bible instructs us countless times to pray for others, and we are to do this believing that “whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13). If we align ourselves with God, then we

We do not need
to FEAR the
things of this
world or the
WEAKNESS
in ourselves.

can have the confidence to ask for the things we desire because we know those things are also the things God desires. Therefore, we do not need to fear the things of this world or the weakness in ourselves. Paul explains that we must not “be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6). By laying ourselves before God in prayer, we allow him to change our hearts and work in the world around us. Fear is replaced by confidence for the believer who approaches God in prayer.

I don’t have all the answers; I speak as someone in the middle of a very dry spell in my faith. Yet I hope this will encourage, inform, and, most of all, I hope it will help you pray, even when prayer feels impossible. “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).



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.

new identity

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