

REBUILT

TO LIVE A GREAT STORY

PURSuing PEACE:

HOW TO FIND REST IN AN UNSTABLE WORLD

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REBUILT

TO LIVE A GREAT STORY

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We're a global magazine with versions published in the USA, Southeast Asia, Amsterdam, and the Philippines.

Rebuilt Magazine is written, laid out, and printed by young adult who love Jesus and want to write about God, life, and college. We hope this magazine is helpful, challenging, and thought-provoking while also encouraging you to pursue a strong relationship with Jesus.

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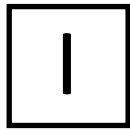
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ONE GUY'S

TRUE STORY

WRESTLING WITH TRUTH



I grew up in a very small town with two loving parents who raised me alongside my seven other siblings. My parents decided that they wanted to be a part of a church, so the year I was born they joined the church I still attend to this day. Being raised in what can only be described as a nothing-held-back, truth-telling church, there was no hiding from the fact that I needed Jesus, but as a punk 10-year-old kid I didn't know what that meant. So, I just did what I thought that meant. I behaved like a good little boy. That's what it means to be a Christian, right? Wrong! Oh boy, did that hit me like a truck.

It all started to become very clear to me the summer before



I started high school. I was about to be in the older kid's youth group, and I was going to be on the high school wrestling team. That was a big thing for me because I had been in wrestling since I was five. My parents believed that sports could teach you valuable life lessons, but they weren't ones to really push a sport on you. They let you choose, and I chose wrestling. I was so serious about it that, going into my freshman year, I decided I was going to make the varsity team.

At the same time, God was using my youth leaders, Andy and Laura, to tell me what it meant to be a Christian. It wasn't just about behaving like a good kid or even that I needed to do certain things; it meant that I needed to have a heart change. It also meant that I needed to stand up for the things that matter to God, like telling other people about Him and how much He loves them. Another thing it meant was telling the truth even when it was hard, and by hard, I mean super hard. In late February of my freshman year, our wrestling team was looking pretty good despite being plagued by one teammate who didn't seem to want to get his act together. We were still ranked second in our division and the postseason was coming up fast. Exciting stuff for the wide-eyed freshman I was. But then God decided it was time for me to choose Him or the world. For those that have come to this crossroads, it can be a painful experience, but it isn't something I would change for the world. The Tuesday before the regional tournament, I walked in on three of my teammates beating up the former teammate who had been giving us grief all season. The worst thing about it was that they were upperclassmen, and so I walked out as if nothing happened. That didn't

last long, though, because an hour later I was sitting in the principal's office, and he was demanding that I tell him what I saw. I asked him if I could be left alone to make a phone call, and I managed to get ahold of my mom. After I told her what was going on, she very simply and calmly told me that if I wanted to follow God this was the kind of truth I needed to get used to telling. On one hand were all the dreams I thought I wanted from the world: a chance at a team state championship and more. And on the other hand: God's plan for my life. That day, in that office, I surrendered my life to God and said, "Ok, here's my life and my plans. Do with it what you will." Then I told the truth.

Since that day it has been what can only be described as a roller coaster of a ride. God has shown me things I never thought a kid from a small town would see. I got the chance to be on my church's first youth team to the Philippines. I even got to experience things that I didn't think God wanted me to have! I ended up making it to the state tournament as an individual.

After graduating high school, I chose to go straight into the workforce. Through that, God has shown me what it means to work in everyday life to build relationships that will have lasting effects on the lives of those I come into contact with. He has shown me time and time again that if I trust Him with my plans and my hopes, He will show me even better plans and better dreams. Through all of this, some of the biggest things that God has taught me are that He loves to give good gifts to His kids, and He is willing to take us as far as we are willing to go. I'm very excited to see what God has for me next.

-Jon



GOODNESS & MERCY

A STUDY IN PSALM 23:6

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Psalm 23:6, KJV)

NIV: “Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Amplified: “Surely goodness and mercy and unfailing love shall follow me all the days of my life, And I shall dwell forever [throughout all my days] in the house and in the presence of the Lord.”

Message: “Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I’m back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.”

Surely goodness and mercy

Surely denotes a fact as certain as it is comforting. It has the basic meaning of “no doubt; this is absolutely true; this can never be doubted; it can never fail.”

In the light of what God had done for

him, David speaks confidently here of what God will do for Him. David knows the way God takes care of him, and because God is faithful, and not fickle, that kind of care will continue.

And not just His goodness, but His mercy. The Hebrew word, behind mercy, is *hesed*. And *hesed* is a very important word in the Bible

Hesed in its most basic sense is a zealous love or favor toward a person. But it also has packed up into its meaning a consistency in that. So it’s not just being zealously loving toward a person one time but continually doing so and commitment to always do so. This is why some call this word God’s covenant love or faithfulness.


The Old Testament phrase “goodness and mercy” corresponds

to the New Testament benedictions of “grace and mercy” frequently mentioned in the apostolic letters as a blessing. Goodness and mercy are attributes of God.

1. Goodness - meets our needs / Mercy - forgives our faults
2. Goodness - cares for the temporal / Mercy - cares for the spiritual
3. Goodness - bounty of God / Mercy - love of God
4. Goodness - leads to repentance / Mercy - leads to regeneration.
5. Goodness - convicts us of sin / Mercy - offers regeneration.
6. Goodness - caused the prodigal to come back home / Mercy - ran to meet the son.
7. Goodness - is God’s hand / Mercy - is God’s heart.

Shall follow me

“Follow” is a feeble translation of the

A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a person standing on the edge of a steep, rocky cliff. The person is looking out over a vast body of water under a clear sky. The cliff face is rugged and dark, contrasting with the lighter sky and water.

“GOODNESS” SCAMPERS BESIDE US WITH BOUNDLESS ENERGY, MAKING SURE WE ARE SURROUNDED WITH GOD’S PROTECTIVE AND PROACTIVE CARE.

Hebrew word *rapad*, which is found more than 150 times in the Old Testament. It’s usually translated “pursued,” “chased,” or “hunted.” As we encounter this word in Scripture, it typically describes being pursued by an enemy or by an animal.

Here in Psalm 23:6, David used the same Hebrew word to refer to his being pursued by goodness and mercy, and commentators have long speculated that David’s use of the verb indicated that he was thinking of his herding dogs. In rural lands, you’ll often see the shepherd going in front of the flock leading the way, followed by all the sheep, with sheepdogs bringing up the rear and running along the sides of the flock to keep them from straggling or straying.

He was expanding the analogy of the poem, telling us that the Good Shepherd who goes before us has twin sheepdogs named “Goodness” and “Mercy” who follow us, nipping at our heels. “Goodness” scampers beside us with boundless energy, making sure we are surrounded with God’s protective and proactive care. “Mercy” runs along behind, guarding our rear flanks, nipping at us if we lag, and retrieving us if we lose our way.

All the days of my life

The final phrase in the first line of Psalm 23:6 gives us the duration of God’s goodness and mercy. They extend to every day and to all our days. There are no “blackout days” to worry about: no exclusions, no exceptions, no

exemptions. His sheepdogs never take a day off.

Eternal life starts now! So many people think Christianity is all about giving up all the good things now so you can enjoy them later in heaven. But you don’t have to wait until heaven to start enjoying the benefits of eternal life. Eternal life starts now, and you can know this abundant life Jesus offers in this life as well as the next.

Here in the last verse of Psalm 23, we encounter the future tense for the first time. The writer says, “Goodness and mercy shall follow me,” and that makes verse 6 a promise, not just a statement of fact.

In the journey from here to there, from one day to the end of all our days, there will be many seasons and the promise of God is that He will be with us the whole way and that we will make it to the end.

And I will dwell

David closes the Twenty-third Psalm with a mighty crescendo of faith when he declares, “And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

The word “dwell” is simply a word meaning “to live”. The only difference is “to dwell” has the added idea of permanence to it. It denotes where you inhabit a place by fully taking up residency and living your life there.

In the house of the Lord forever

In Psalm 23, the name of God, “the LORD”, only shows up twice. Once in the

“MERCY” RUNS ALONG BEHIND, GUARDING OUR REAR FLANKS, NIPPING AT US IF WE LAG, AND RETRIEVING US IF WE LOSE OUR WAY.

first verse, “The LORD is my shepherd”. And then again in the last verse with “the house of the LORD.”

So “the LORD” as God’s special name for Himself is the beginning and the end of the Psalm. His name provides the bookends to the Psalm teaching us that life begins and ends with the LORD. Like Romans 14:8 says, “Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.”

There is something magnetic about home. It always draws us back. If you have stayed over with a friend for the first time, you long for home. If you have been out on the road for what seems like a long month, you desire your own bed.

The house of the Lord is the place where God’s presence is centered. It represents the place of His throne, which is where He lives in the immediate essence of His presence.

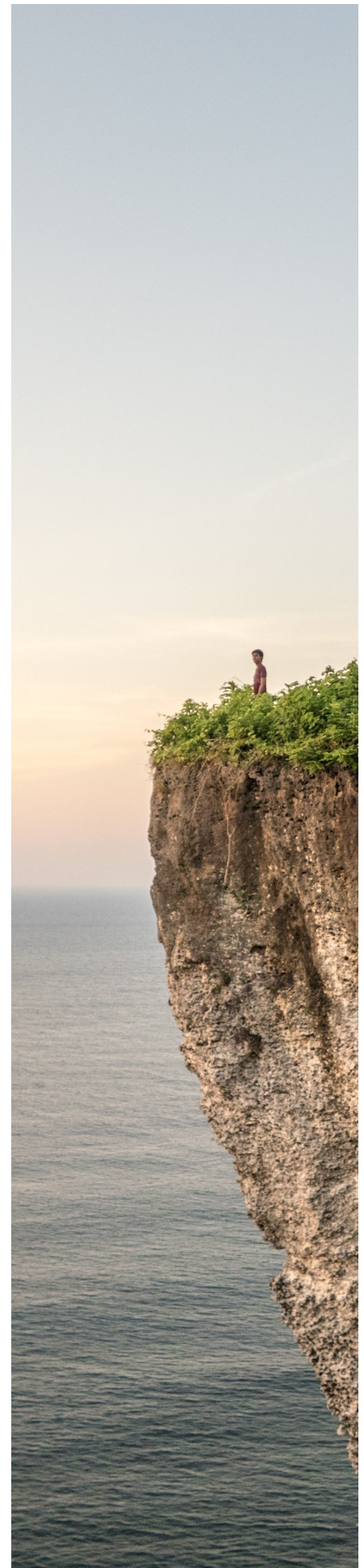
This should be the crown of all our hopes for the future, and the one great lesson taught us by all the vicissitudes of life. The sorrows and the joys, the journeying and the rest, the temporary repose and the frequent struggles, all these should make us sure that there is an end which will interpret them all, to which they all point, for which they all prepare. When God invites you into His home, it’s for keeps. You will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!

Never forget that the last word of Psalm 23 is the first word of eternity.

The 23rd Psalm is more than just a pretty passage of scripture; it’s a reminder of who we are and whose we are, of where we’ve been and where we’re going. Let it remind you of the love of God which enfolds you, the peace of Christ which surrounds you and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit within you, which promises to give you victory over sin and death, now and forevermore.

APPLICATION

1. Are you truly convinced that no matter what occurs in your life you are being followed by God’s goodness and mercy? Why?
2. If you could ask God for one thing, what would you request? David tells us what he would ask. He longs to dwell in the house of God. He wants to move in with him . . . forever.
3. It is amazing how much better life gets when you start actively, purposefully looking for God’s goodness and mercy in every experience. It will change your life! What is holding you back?



LEAVING THE NEST:

Church Edition

HOW TO FIND A CHURCH OUTSIDE OF THE ONE YOU WENT TO WHEN YOU LIVED AT HOME



We live in a culture consumed by choices: from entertainment to job selections, to even what we should be concerned about in our day to day activities. On top of that, we schedule our lives out through the minute. On the flip side, some of us hold out on making decisions until the very last second. Being involved in a church community and having a relationship with Christ, however, is one decision that can't be placed on hold because we're not sure, or put off because we're too busy.

If you're thinking, *"But I have a church back home, what gives?"* you're not alone. However, consider a few things about what you're missing out on if you neglect to find a church where you are.

COMMUNITY

Remember, the church isn't a place, it's people. We need each other. We are not called to do church alone. 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 talks about being one church body with many members. Verse 14 specifically says, "For the body does not consist of one member but of many" (ESV). Here, the apostle Paul uses the analogy of a human body to describe the church. We can't all go to a church expecting to be hands! What Paul is saying here is that each of us belongs to a local church where we can actively love each other by living out the function we're made for within the body of believers. This

inevitably invites diversity: different personalities, different life experiences, and different spiritual gifts. Christ is the head of the body, the church, which means you are not being yourself if you're not involved in a local church. We can't do church alone. We need people. We need other members of the body so that we all together can be a body. We need a group of people who will love us, challenge us, grow with us, and live life with us. People who will never accept "fine" as an answer to the question: how are you doing?

"WE CAN'T ALL GO TO CHURCH EXPECTING TO BE HANDS!"

TEACHING

We are to grow in grace (2 Peter 3:18). Think of it this way: in college, we are introduced to all kinds of secular, global, and relevant authors of all kinds of issues. We should do the same for our faith. However, this doesn't mean we can live off of podcasts, college ministries, and home studies - that would be like

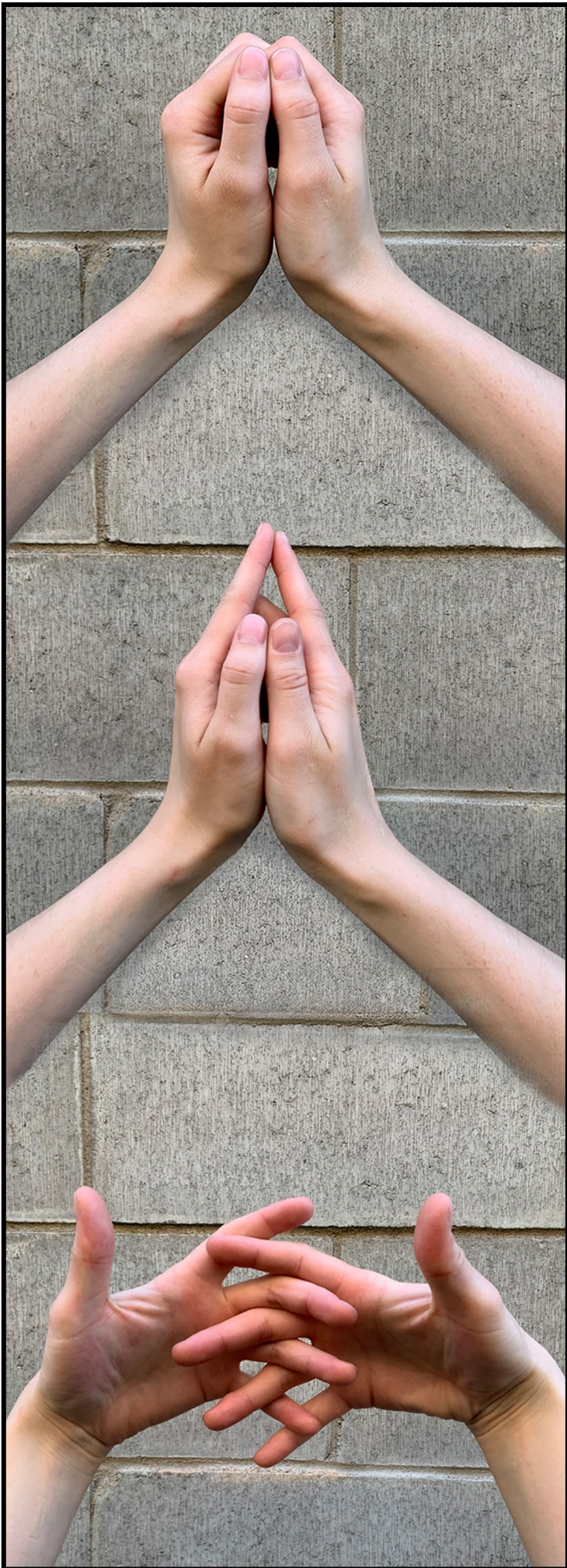
eating dessert for the rest of your life. You'd enjoy it for the first couple of meals, but all that sugar would eventually make you get fat and go insane. You need substance, like grains, proteins, and vegetables. You need biblically-rooted pastors, elders, and other church leaders who have followed Christ longer than you to help you live life the way God calls us to. We need biblically sound teaching from a local church that keeps us rooted and growing in Christ right where we actually live.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Sin will always be overpowering even though we want to do good (Romans 7:17-19). But it's not okay to give into it over and over again; we are called to address the sins of the day, today (Hebrews 3:12-13). How comforting it is to find a church body where we also know that they are experiencing similar struggles against sin (see 1 Peter 5:6-9)! Being connected to a church means you're connected to people who will not only help point out sin issues in your life, but will also encourage you, laugh with you, and live life with you.

CORPORATE WORSHIP

We are designed to worship God (Psalm 100) but it cannot be fully realized on our own (Hebrews 10:25). Corporate worship allows us to sing praise to God together, which glorifies Him and reminds us of who we really are in light of His power. Of course we are called to worship God



on our own, too, but it is part of the function (and the joy!) of the church to worship Him together as a body.

Certain areas have only one church in their community whereas others have as many churches as there are bars, if not more. How then do we know which church to attend?

Ask God First

Before we even begin searching for a church community, we should seek out what God's opinion is. Be willing to ask Him where it is and with whom. Be willing to ask Him where you will get to know Him best, where you are meant to live out the trials and disappointments that life will bring, and where you will ultimately experience the most joy in Him as you grow in obedience and love.

Stand on the Word

Are they scripturally sound? Do they teach from the Bible? Are the leaders actively rerouting you to His Word?

Do Your Research

Talk to people in your community including other college students. Ask them where they attend and why. Go beyond surface level questions by asking: What has God shown you at the church you attend? What parts of His character and your character has He shown to you in the last year? Or even five years?

Commit Yourself to Them

Make a commitment to a local church. Show up, serve, and become actively involved. Pastor John Piper from *Desiring God* put it like this, "*I don't think Jesus died to create unattached, free-floating Christians. I think He died to create the Church where the real true individuality [of] every believer comes into its own. The more disconnected we are from a local church, the more confused we will be about who we are, who God made us be. We find our true individual selves in relationship with others.*"¹ This means it's pointless to hop from church to church, picking out pieces from each that we enjoy. You'll lose the community, accountability, and teaching from a church because God has designed us to be committed to just one. You'll be even more lost than when you first started! Commit to a local church and see what God has in store for you and your surrounding community. Your home church simply isn't a placebo for where God wants you to be now.

Leaving what is comfortable is always hard. The job you love, your parents' home, and even the church you grew up in. But if you're serious about loving God, then you need a church to call home in the place that you are right now. What are you waiting for?

¹www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-i-commit-to-one-church

YOU NEED FRIENDS *NOT* LIKE YOU

3 REASONS AGE IS A DIVIDE WORTH CROSSING

H Humans tend to find similar things and group them together. From an early age, we're taught to categorize by all sorts of identifiers: color, shape, size, gender, age... Categorizing is one of the ways we make sense of the world around us. It's efficient to organize fruit at the supermarket so you can quickly find what you're looking for. It's logical to group by age in school so teaching can be customized to the developmental stage of each grade level. There are times where grouping is helpful, but sometimes sticking to your prescribed category is more damaging than not. We recognize cultural diversity is a good thing, but age is a divide that seems uncomfortable to cross. The people we consider "friends" tend to be around the same age, in similar life situations, and are more similar to us than they are different.

It's only natural that we seek friendship with people our same age. We meet them in school and we grow up together. With people our same age, our day-to-day schedules are roughly the same so it can be easy

to find a convenient time to get together. Let's be real: it can be awkward to talk with people who are older or much younger than us. *They're old and I'm not. What would we talk about? They're married and I'm single. They have kids and their life is busy. What common interests could we possibly have?* There are plenty of reasons to stick to our own age bubble, but we will miss out on the opportunity to learn from people who are different from us.

Our culture has mastered the art of being surface level. Friendship can be as casual as touching an "add" or "follow" button, but we need to call these what they are: mere acquaintances. We might get more and more "friends" and we're still lonely. The truth is, we need the intimacy genuine friendship provides, but that requires a willingness on our part to be known more deeply than we have before. Real friendship is being there for other people and letting other people be there for you through thick and thin. God created us and knows we thrive in community. In a body of believers, a local church, the unity we gain from our shared love for Jesus breaks down the barriers of age.

We've been brainwashed into thinking the church is anything but beautiful. Our experience of the church may not match the biblical description given for what God wants His church to look like. Maybe the church in your mind is full of people over 55. In the Bible, God's church is described as dynamic and made up of people of different ages, locations, and life circumstances. It's far deeper than just another social club. Following that example, here are three reasons I want to encourage you to embrace intergenerational friendship.

1 YOU HAVE THINGS TO LEARN FROM THOSE WHO ARE OLDER THAN YOU.

The Bible instructs us to learn from men and women who have been walking with the Lord longer than we have (Titus 2:3-5). It also says that true wisdom comes from Heaven (James 3:17, NKJV), and someone who has been seeking to know God in a personal way for many years will have had times where they needed to seek wisdom from God and apply it to their own life situation. We would be fools to not invite older believers into our lives and decisions to hear what they have to say. I have personally been blessed by friendships with older women in my church. They have reminded me of God's goodness and faithfulness in my moments of doubt and shared with

“IN A BODY OF BELIEVERS, THE UNITY WE GAIN FROM OUR SHARED LOVE FOR JESUS BREAKS DOWN THE BARRIERS OF AGE.”

me how God has provided for them in their own lives. They’ve prayed with me for God’s direction in my life and pushed me to try new things.

2 DISCIPLESHIP IS A TWO-WAY STREET.

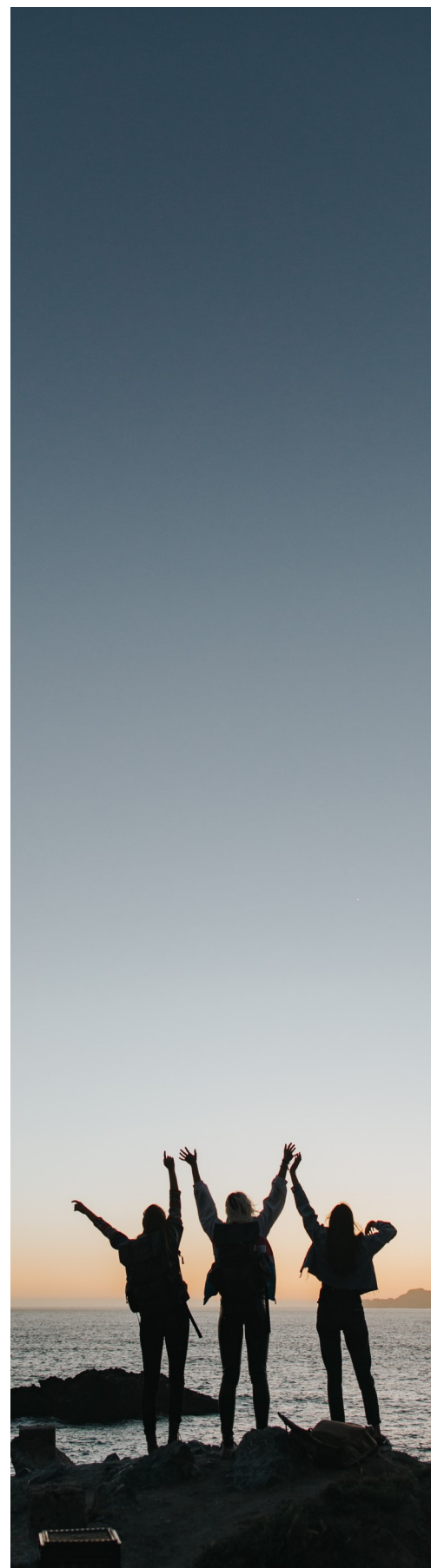
The definition of “disciple” is one who believes his doctrine, rests on his sacrifice, imbibes his spirit, and imitates his example.”¹ Christian discipleship, then, is both learning from those who are ahead of you in their walk with God *and* teaching newer believers about maturing in faith. Just as we look to those before us for leadership, we’re also called to be an example to those who come behind us. In the book of 1 Timothy, Paul writes to a young Timothy to not, “let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity” (NLT). Pray about how God might use you to be a friend to someone younger than you. Your account of who God is may be exactly what they need to better understand the Gospel. This doesn’t mean we stop learning for ourselves – we must mature and keep moving forward, but we also need to recognize that God saved us so that we might strengthen others.

3 BEING AROUND OTHER PEOPLE NOT EXACTLY LIKE US RELIEVES THE PRESSURE OF PERFORMANCE AND SUCCESS.

Ever noticed how you don’t really care what you look like when you hang out with a grandparent? The pressure to look good and be near perfect is typically felt most strongly around people our own age. We find ourselves comparing our lives to our peers and feel defeated when it doesn’t match the norm. Even more

dangerously, we look at what other people are doing with their lives and copy that instead of living out our own story, the one God wrote for us specifically. Try spending time with someone older or younger than you. You might be surprised at how freeing it is to just enjoy life together instead of worrying about having to “look good.”

Picture yourself standing alone in a room of total darkness. Would you be less afraid if you could hear the voice of someone you trust in the room with you? I know I would. An NBC News article titled *In Good Company: Why We Need Other People to be Happy* said, “...according to biology, neuroscience, psychology, and more, our bodies actually tend to work better when we’re not alone. Being lonely has been linked to worse physical and emotional health outcomes and poorer wellbeing. Plus, a lack of social support can directly affect our potential for experiencing happiness.”² Humans really are better together. Deep friendships, no matter the age, are essential to your wellbeing. God designed you for intimacy with Him *and* with other people. All this will take time; friendships don’t happen overnight. It will require vulnerability and effort on our part, but I can speak from experience that diverse friendships are a unique blessing. It’s pretty amazing what God can do with friends *not* like you.



¹biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/eastons-bible-dictionary/disciple.html

²nbcnews.com/better/health/good-company-why-we-need-other-people-be-happy-ncna836106

PURSuing PEACE:

HOW TO FIND REST IN AN UNSTABLE WORLD



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From the depths of a frigid sea beckons the challenge of a lifetime. If he succeeds, his name will be world-renowned as a Guinness record holder. However, anything short of a perfect dive could mean drowning in the dark abyss. On March 27, 2019, Anthony Williams crossed the frozen Norwegian sea by snowmobile to the location where his fate would be decided.

His friends cut an opening in the ice, creating the doorway to Williams' dream. Taking a large breath, he plunged into the darkness. Alone. If at any point fear or panic distracted him, the result would be disastrous. Holding his breath was just as important as keeping his mind focused. There was no room for entertaining the "what-ifs". He descended until he reached 230 feet below the surface and then turned back to the surface, claiming the world-record time of two minutes and twenty-nine seconds.

While you and I may not be record-breaking free divers like Williams, we each have a dark abyss of our minds where fear and anxiety lurk. Just like diving into the sea, the deeper we go into the recesses of our mind, the more the immense pressure pulls us further and further into its depths.

So, what do we do when we find ourselves in the shadowy cold, anxious and alone? How do we resurface with hope instead of giving in to greater despair? To answer this, we must uncover common sources of anxiety, realize the dangerous effects it has on us, and understand where we can find authentic rest.

INHALING ANXIETY

Anxiety, or worry, is the great equalizer because it's a condition that touches each human heart no matter what country or culture you live in.

Whether it appears as a minor affliction or wages war as a paralyzing enemy, it lives in us all because of our sinful nature. In Genesis chapter three, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, allowing

sin to corrupt the perfect relationship they had. Because they were the parents of the human race, they passed down sins like distrust, panic, fear, guilt, shame, and the need for control. These sins would reside in the hearts of each person that would ever be born. Thousands of years later, the effects of the fall can be seen when we stress out about being on time, worry about the last \$10 in our bank account, or lose sleep over relationships. Sources of anxiety are all around us.

“CHRIST DESIRES FOR ALL TO BE CONFIDENT IN HIM.”

The first, and perhaps most prevalent, source of anxiety is technology. Have you ever scrolled through Netflix only to waste time making sure you pick the very best option? If you're like me, you worry that you've wasted too much time searching or that whatever you do pick won't be the consensus of the group you're watching with. This is a petty example, but a more severe one is the life we portray on social media. When we don't get enough likes on Facebook or enough hearts double-tapped on Instagram, we start to doubt if people even like us anymore. We spend hours curating the perfect post, read into comments (or the lack thereof), and crumble when we haven't garnered the desired outcome.

Another source of anxiety is striving. We strive for the best test scores so we can get into the best schools. We strive to get our degree so we can get the best

job (immediately). We strive to find our spouse, our house, and so on and so forth, until we die. Jonathan Parnell, an author on DesiringGod.org, explains it like this: "...simultaneous to the endless churning and mulling and doing to be bigger, better, and more popular, is the insatiable buying and earning and trading to get bigger, better, and more popular things. The result is restlessness."¹ Regardless of what stage of life you're at, striving for what's next never goes away. If you're not careful, the restlessness Parnell speaks of will follow you into each passing decade.

Next, a popular misconception about Christianity is that once you begin a relationship with God, you're supposed to trust Christ perfectly and never doubt Him. In reality, Christians are not immune from navigating the treacherous waters of anxiety. If you are a Christian struggling with anxiety, take a hard look at your relationship with Christ to find the source. Are you spending time reading the Bible and in prayer to maintain a healthy relationship with Him? Are you part of a local church or are you trying to do this Christian thing on your own? Is there any disobedience to repent of? Though troubles like these will arise from time to time, it is no place to be content. Christ desires for all of us to be confident in Him, and this type of confidence and anxiety cannot coexist.

Finally, the fear of missing out (FOMO) is a heart condition that we often relinquish control to. It occurs when we feel excluded from social gatherings, desire to have what our friends do, or

make life decisions based on incorrect perceptions of others. This type of social anxiety leads to insecurity in who we are and what we have been given. Svend Brinkmann, professor of psychology at the University of Aalborg in Denmark agrees with the futility of FOMO: "We cannot possibly satisfy an endless craving for more and more, or say that enough is ever enough."² Our problem lies in the dissatisfaction with what we have and a gross misunderstanding of what would satiate our desires. When we chase the fear of missing out to its fullest extent, it leaves us burnt out and breathless yet convinced that we must keep going.

RUNNING OUT OF BREATH

Once we recognize what makes us anxious, we need to admit how dangerous it is. Because it's such a widespread phenomenon, we rationalize by saying, "I worry, but it's not that bad." If we're not debilitated in a psychiatric ward, we think we're doing alright. However, Pastor John Piper warns us of the path anxiety can take:

"Think about how many other sins are connected to the root sin of anxiety. Anxiety about money will cause you to hoard or steal. Anxiety about succeeding will make you irritable and impatient with those around you. Anxiety about relationships will make you withdrawn or indifferent toward other people. Anxiety about what others think about you will make you lie or stretch the truth. If anxiety could be conquered, a mortal blow would be struck to many other sins".³

¹ Parnell, J. Rest Because You Can, www.DesiringGod.com

² Brinkmann, S. Quit Indulging Your FOMO, and Embrace the Joy of Missing Out. www.nbcnews.com

³ Gear, J.D. Smoke From a Fire, www.summitchurch.com

⁴ Bloom, J. Talk to God About Your Anxiety. www.desiringgod.com



“ANXIETY DOESN'T JUST GO AWAY. WE MUST GIVE IT TO HIM.”

Because anxiety begins in our mind, we can let our emotions and imagination get out of control. Have you ever had an imaginary conversation with someone in your mind? Has it ever been so realistic you must pause to wonder if it actually happened? Author Jon Bloom describes the disastrous consequences: “Before we know it, we have engaged in a lengthy argument in our heads that arouses all kinds of sinful emotions and leads us to think and feel uncharitably toward the real person. But we haven’t talked to them at all. We’ve talked to our anxiety — we’ve talked to ourselves and sinned not only in indulging faithless anxiety, but in failing to love that person.”⁴ If we’re not careful, our anxiety will bleed onto the ones we love and we’ll damage our relationships.

Jesus Himself frequently addressed the topic of worry and anxiety in the New Testament. He takes a very logical approach to its futility when He says, “Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?” (Matthew 6:27, NLT). When we’re in the midst of our anxiety, we assume that focusing on the issue to find a resolution is the best thing to do. But, if our solution doesn’t come, it only produces more worry. Jesus has to point out to us that worrying is not productive. We will not come to our solution faster or easier by doing so. Ironically, anxiety only breeds more anxiety. So, how do we stop the cycle? How do we successfully rise above the battle that rages in our mind?

COMING TO THE SURFACE

Many attempts are made to eliminate our anxiety. We numb it with entertainment, alcohol, and “trying harder.” We go from friend to friend to friend oversharing our problems, seeking a resolution from another sinful human. We get prescriptions to make it go away without facing the root cause. These methods are like trying to put a bandage over a bullet wound. How does Jesus tell us to deal with it? He says, “give it to me.”

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28, NIV).

Simply put, if we are the source of anxiety, we cannot possibly be the remedy. Jesus knew from the time Adam and Eve disobeyed that we needed a Rescuer. The events of the Old and New Testaments detail the course He took to come to earth, face undeserved crucifixion, and beat the power of death through resurrection all so that we would be spared the death *we* deserve. Because of His great love for us, Jesus *wants* to give us His rest


and take on our anxiety. Again, even in this scenario, our anxiety doesn’t just go away. We must give it to Him.

Paul, an apostle and writer of most of the New Testament, reiterates how we are to give our worries to God, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7, ESV). If we pray our anxieties to Him, thank Him for who He is and what He’s done, He says He’ll give us “*peace which surpasses all understanding.*” That is peace the world does not offer.

Peace and rest are things we must fight for. They do not come naturally because of our sinful nature, and we also have an enemy who seeks to destroy us.⁵ Therefore, when anxiety fills your mind, be on the offensive with prayer and petition, like Paul said. Also, keep perspective on the future. The battles we face now are momentary and not worth compromising our eternity over. Finally, when you are in a season of peace, *savor it* because more battles are coming. Log it in your mind for the future and the next time you are anxious remember how good God has been to you.

Because of Christ, we have hope to rise to the surface when we’ve sunk to the bottom of the deep dark sea. The pressure of our fear and anxiety cannot keep us down when we have the resolve in our minds and hearts to follow Him. When Jesus tells us not to worry, we shouldn’t brush it off as an impossible feat. Anything, in Christ, is possible.⁶ Jon Bloom puts it like this:

“In Christ, everything is going to be ultimately, gloriously, eternally, inexpressibly, wonderfully okay. Therefore, Jesus says to you and me, right now, right where we’re at, “Do not be anxious.” He says this knowing our past, our temperament, the seriousness of our current crises, and how intense we fear the possible dread may become reality.”⁷

Despite the dark, cold, isolation that surrounded diver Anthony Williams, he refused to give in to the panic that threatened his very life. However, he only needed to endure for a few minutes. Our anxieties can linger for a week, stick around for a month, or devastate us for a year, and sometimes longer. When we are in too deep to come up on our own, Jesus is our only hope to return to the surface. Cry out into the dark abyss; He’s closer than you think. 

⁵1 Peter 5:8, NIV

⁶Matthew 19:26, NIV

⁷Bloom, J. Talk to God About Your Anxiety. www.desiringgod.com

JESUS & WOMEN

HOW JESUS VALUES WOMEN



When Jesus was born, Judea was under the rule of the Roman empire.¹ In Rome, women were not considered equal to men before the law. They were also obliged to keep a male guardian unless they had three or more children.² Jesus broke the customs of society with His treatment of women and gave them value, and yet some people today view Christianity as oppressive to women. If we look at how Jesus treated women you might be surprised to find something different.

JESUS SHOWS RESPECT AND CARE FOR WOMEN

Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman at a well in John 4 and asks her for a drink of water. This surprised her because "... Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (John 4:9, NKJV). We even see that His disciples "... marveled that He talked with a woman..." (John 4:27, NKJV). Through Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman, she comes to the understanding of who Jesus really is and even brings other people to meet Him. We see that Jesus not only shows that He cared about her soul; He breaks the societal norms to do so, which is demonstrated through the woman and His disciples' reactions to Him.

JESUS HAD WOMEN DISCIPLES

We often hear of the 12 Disciples that were male followers of Jesus, but did you know that Jesus also had disciples that were women? We see an example of this in Luke 8:1-3. In this passage, Jesus brings the 12 disciples and women with Him while He "... went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1, NKJV). These women were not just following Jesus around, but they were ministering to Him. Jesus also discipled women by teaching them scriptures. Mary sat at Jesus' feet in Luke 10 "...and heard His word" (Luke 10:39, NKJV). Teaching women scripture was not something that was practiced by the rabbis in the time that Jesus was alive, so again we discover that He was breaking societal norms.

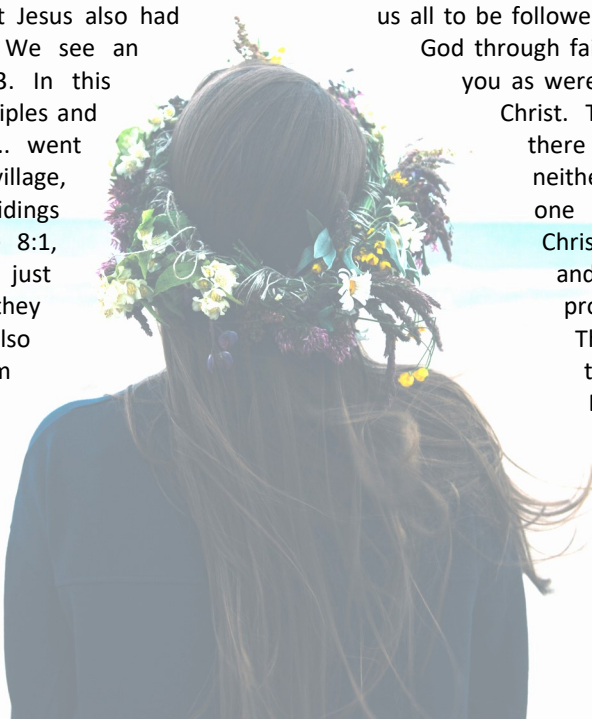
WOMEN WERE THE FIRST TO WITNESS JESUS' RESURRECTION

In John 20 Mary Magdalene discovers Jesus' empty tomb, encounters resurrected Jesus, and goes and tells His disciples about it. This is important because during first-century Israel, women could not testify in court because they were not "reliable witnesses."³ Even though the culture considered women to not be reliable witnesses, God still chose a woman to be the first to deliver the message of the empty tomb and of Jesus' resurrection. It would have been much easier for people to believe a man. This was another example of Jesus breaking the societal norms in His interaction with women.

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S ROLES

I don't want to ignore that the Bible does give different roles to men and women, which could be another entire article in itself. God has given men and women unique roles in some areas to help bring order. Just like in the workplace there are defined roles and order, the same logic applies in the Kingdom of God in order for us to succeed. One resource that may help you understand this is *A Beautiful Design* by Matt Chandler.⁴

Ultimately, Jesus allows for us all to have equality through Him. We may have different roles in our lives, but He wants us all to be followers of Him. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29, NKJV). There is so much more to say about this topic, but by looking into the Bible we can see that Jesus radically values women.

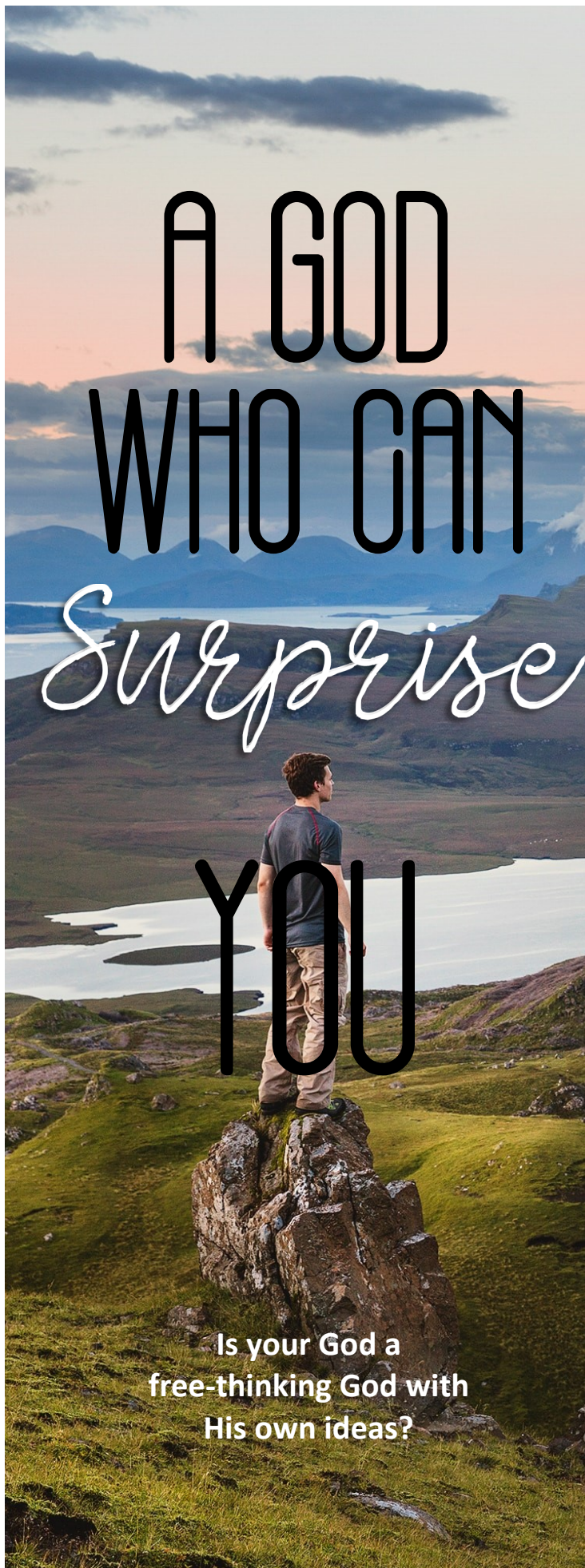


¹ ancient.eu/Jesus_Christ/

² pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/women.html

³ ccel.org/j/josephus/works/ant-4.htm

⁴ tvresources.net/resource-library/sermons/by-series/a-beautiful-design



Is your God a
free-thinking God with
His own ideas?

M

Many different ideas about God exist. Many religions. Many philosophies. Many opinions.

In your hands you are holding a Christian publication. You should not be surprised to learn that the writer of this article and his friends take their views about God from the Bible. It may seem old-fashioned that anyone still does... But there are lots of us - tons - almost 2.5 billion, in fact.


This fact was a surprise to me ten years ago. I had a stunted understanding of the world (read: "shallow", "naive", "highly judgmental"). It's not that I didn't know facts about people, places, and religions. It's just that my over-confidence in what I believed completely eradicated any and all value of their traditions, character, and intelligence. They were stupid. I didn't agree with them... so they were stupid. Including Christians. I wasn't one at the time, and didn't know any, but I knew that they were wrong and I was right (but I digress...).

Within this near-majority of the world's population that identifies as "Christian", you will find a variety of ideas about God.

Some take their scriptures literally and believe Him to be exactly as He is described in the Bible. The good stuff ("God so loved the world"), the bad stuff (the Wrath...), the confusing stuff (God is three people?), and the uncomfortable stuff (God does whatever He wants to do...). Even when God proves to be so complex of a character that it is confusing or uncomfortable - these people accept that God as their God.

Some will pick and choose which parts to believe based on what makes the most sense to them, what appeals to them the most, etc. Often times this is a good place to start. But do you see the error in this? They are choosing their own designer god.

Imagine that your romantic pursuits followed the same process: you have an idea of who/what you would like for a partner to be, you meet a nice girl or guy, and a lot of who they agree with you, but not all of it. There are things that you don't like about them. So what do you do? Be honest. Many of us will try to change them.



Movies have been made about this. Re-makes starring Nicole Kidman have been made about this. Have you seen *The Stepford Wives*? The men of a small town in America had grown tired of their wives having contradictory views to theirs, so they turned their wives into robots who serve them and never disagree with anything the husbands say, do, or think, giving them the “perfect relationship”.

But that’s not romance; it’s not even a relationship. It will never take their breath away or sweep them off their feet. Nothing their robot wife says or does will ever surprise them after being programmed to be the spouse their husband wanted them to be.

Imagine if this is how you chose friends. They always agree with you, never challenge you, and always support your decisions. How would you grow as a human being? You wouldn’t. You couldn’t. You don’t...

Remember when I said the version of myself ten years ago was a stunted, judgmental, know-it-all? Yeah, that guy didn’t have any friends. The people he knew had to agree with him AND be as up-to-speed as he was on how the world worked to deserve his time. So he gradually spent more and more of it alone. He didn’t learn anything new, or have his worldview stretched to new heights. He wasn’t surprised by anything because he already knew it all.

Now, imagine if you did this to the form of god you believe in. You have ideas about who God is and how He is supposed to operate. You pick a religion that agrees with your existing viewpoints. Or, you pick out some facts and characteristics about this god that agree with you, and reject the ones that don’t. But nevertheless you decide on who you want God to be.

I assume that if you are choosing to have “any” God there is a spiritual factor of life that you

are attempting to experience. It’s not wrong to have expectations of how it might go. But I don’t believe that your choosing who God “is” will ever take you to the place you’re seeking.

Will this god—your created god—open your eyes to new truths about the world? Not if you choose your god based on your existing beliefs about the world.

Will this god make you into a better person: more forgiving, more generous, more loving? Not if your definition of love determines whether the god you choose is loving enough, or loving at all.

Will this god ever surprise you? No, and he will be a boring god to follow...

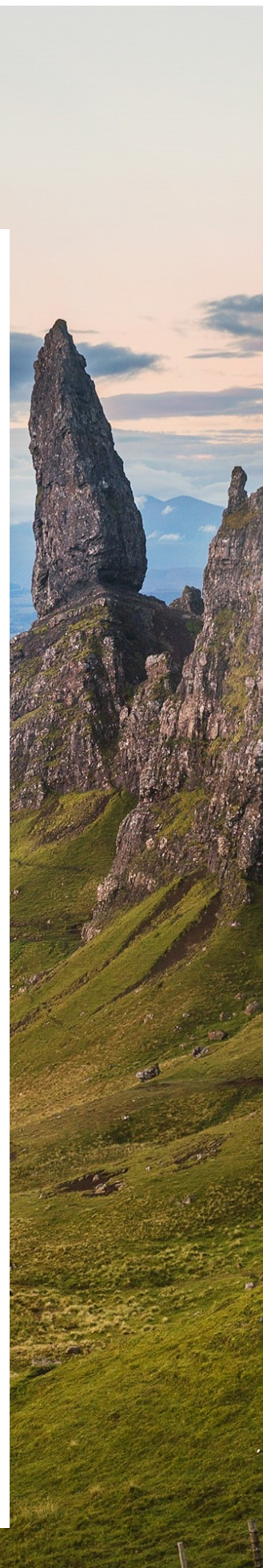
Many people languish in their faith as they attempt to follow a god. And I know many who currently are... This is not a deep truth or a gem of wisdom through analysis of their lives, but here is my assessment: they seem bored. God is not exciting to them. He never surprises them. He doesn’t captivate their imagination or satisfy their desire for adventure.

I don’t have an exact answer for any of them.

But I am one of the people who believe the Bible literally. And my experience learning to know that God—the one, true God—has been anything but boring. He surprises me often. He constantly challenges my views on life, who I should be, and what I should be doing.

And this does not make me insecure in my convictions. It hasn’t changed me into a drone of a person. It has actually unlocked for me the entire purpose of life and set me onto an adventure far beyond my dreaming.

Oftentimes I get in the way of this process, like a stubborn house cat ignoring her owners’ calls. But my God surprises me as often as I let Him. Does yours?





WHY THE WAIT?

TANGLED IN THE WEB OF
WANTING EVERYTHING NOW



It was game seven of the NBA finals. My teammates and I had easily taken the first three games of the series but hastily dropped the last three. Now, with a grim .7 seconds left, the ball was passed right to me. Everything depended on this moment. I tossed up a three, and it was nothing but net! Victory was sweet! This was the tenth championship in a row I won, and it came just in time because right then my mother called me for dinner. Nowadays, making a dream a reality isn't as simple as "getting there in your mind" like it was when I was eight-years-old playing in my backyard. Instead, as we grow older, these ambitions change and morph into something more realistic. As

adults we understand that reality likely doesn't include becoming a sports superstar, but we do assume a nice, quiet life will be ours with a little hard work. However, when life doesn't give us some version of that sensible dream (job, spouse, decent social status), what's our reaction? More often than not, we're impatient people who just want what we want. So, what exactly is God's desire for us when it comes to the contrast between what we want right now and what *He* wants for us?

QUESTIONING GOD'S GOODNESS

As a child of God, doubt will inevitably creep in when life doesn't take off as expected. Make no mistake, the Christian is at war with himself. Divisive thoughts and feelings of mistrust aimed at God can occur when we don't trust Him with every aspect of our life, including the disappointing ones: when the tenth interview still yields no job offer, when the fiancé breaks up with us, when our parents get sick and we're still financially dependent on them, etc. It's hard to remember in the middle of this that God loves you, and that He alone knows every variable of your circumstances. He ultimately knows the best route for you through this life, and you don't. "The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight for living. Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair. They are more desirable



“INSTEAD OF FOLLOWING WHAT YOU FEEL, CONSIDER A PLAN THAT IS THOUGHT OUT AND LIVED WITH PURPOSE.”

than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb” (Psalm 19:9-10, NLT). Scriptures like these can either be comforting or unnerving. Is the LORD more desirable than gold, or do we just want the gold?

The problem with believing “life will go the way I want it to because I’m a Christian and I worked hard for it” is that our idea of success is tainted. Success isn’t the state of your bank account, how hot your significant other is, or how healthy you are. Success is having the highest confidence in God and the strongest faith *no matter what happens*. “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15a, NKJV). We have to remember that He never promised an easy, breezy life, but He promised to be there with us, and He really truly is the greatest treasure we could ever possess. Can you imagine what would happen if He instantly gave you everything you ever desired? We would have no relationship with God because we wouldn’t recognize our need for Him! It’s exactly because He loves you, He will never bless you so richly that you forget about Him.

HIS WAYS TAKE A LONG TIME

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV) A beautiful verse. When considered, it surely makes you feel like God’s about to give you what you want. It sounds like no matter what our desires, God is looking to bless us in pursuit of them. But our desires are quickly challenged when you back up and read verse 10 in that same chapter. “For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place” (Jeremiah 29:10, NKJV). Captivity? Probably not what the Israelites had in mind! These Israelites really wanted to go home and here God was saying they surely would... after 70 LOOONG years.

Much like the Israelites, God wants to take you to places unforeseen and unimagined, but it won’t be through the channels you had in mind, or in the timing you expect. There is a Christian adage that says God gives three answers to prayer: yes, no, or later. It’s true. It’s wonderful when God

says yes and we move forward into that promise. It’s also somewhat easy to accept when God says no; at least you can mourn it and get on with your life. It’s really, really hard when God says later. It’s through an answer like this that we are to learn more about God and apply His ways, thoughts, and actions to our life because as Christians, we are always in progress. God is working in us and on us, which is a process called sanctification. We have been set apart, and this work continues until we die and the work is made whole. God is interested in developing our character and our faith in Him, but because we’re fixated on instant gratification, it can feel like the worst answer in the world, especially if in the end that later becomes a no. Will you trust Him even then? You won’t if you waste your waiting period by ignoring what He’s trying to do with you in the meantime.

WILL YOU WAIT FOR HIM?

Even many professionals in the world with little to no regard for the Almighty can see the benefits of delayed gratification and the destruction instant gratification brings. Dr Ilene Strauss in her article “The Benefits of Delaying Gratification” featured on psychologytoday.com states, “The way I see it, there are two paths we can take in any given situation: one is the path of avoiding pain at the moment, and the other is the more difficult path of delaying pleasure for a bigger purpose. Our cultural norms encourage us to seek Band-Aid solutions and temporary comforts – basically, whatever it takes to ease our discomfort for now.” She goes on to write, “Regardless of what our developmental stages dictate, most adults have a complicated relationship with pleasure. We spend considerable time and money pursuing pleasure now instead of delaying gratification for a greater reward later.”

Life is short for a human, so it’s only natural that pleasure drives our motivations. But, it’s worth the wait. Take time to recognize that you’re susceptible to being ruled by instant gratification. If we’re honest a few things come to our minds, right? Examples include grabbing fast food instead of shopping for groceries, lusting after someone we literally just met, or buying more clothes when we really should be saving up our cash. Oftentimes we’re knee deep in whatever it is

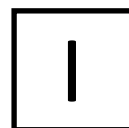
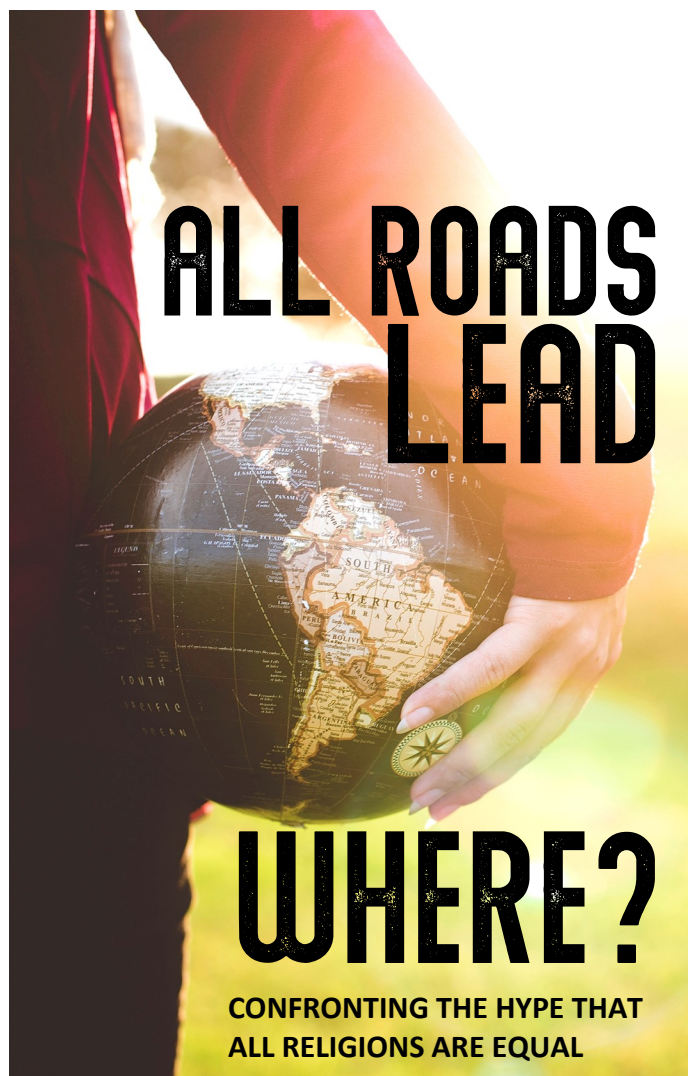
before it clicks in our heads and hearts that we're *going that way again*. Work towards keeping your conscience alive because giving control over to these things will dull it into ineffectiveness. Before you know it, you'll be spending your energies wallowing in guilt and shame or working hard to justify our actions with false truths that give only temporary relief. "That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24, NKJV).

Instead of following what you feel, consider a plan that is thought out and lived with purpose. Yes suffering, yes heartache, but nothing outside of what a person will face with or without Christ. The difference? It's a life of calling and meaning that cannot be for anyone else because His call is for you and you alone. Salvation comes from grace alone, but if there is no effort on your part to keep in step with God's will, then your love for God should be called into question. Living a life of faith in God is incompatible with any form of "quick fix." There is no "just add water." There is no righteousness in a onetime altar call and then a life lived no differently than the general population.

"THE THINGS YOU HELD IN SUCH HIGH ESTEEM WILL BE FORGOTTEN, AND THAT'S WHY GOD IS SO GRACIOUS FOR NOT GIVING US EVERYTHING WE WANT."

LIVE FOR THE END GAME

It would be so much easier if we could just work on being thankful for all the things God gives us instead of striving to remain faithful through all the things He doesn't give us. However, the irony about the legacy of a Christian is that it is not our legacy that is to be pursued, it's His! How much of Christ will people remember because of you after you're dead and gone? The things you held in such high esteem will be forgotten, and that's why God is so gracious for not giving us everything we want. There's no high score for stuff achieved that will make us more accepted in His Kingdom. It's a willing, shapeable heart that God is after. That's an honorable legacy. Will people look at your legacy and see Christ? Or will they see a self-fulfilled person? God has never changed once, and in fact, He never will, but He does expect us to learn and change and grow as we become more and more like Him. If you trust Him, that is more valuable than a life lived in pursuit of the next quick fix. Slow down, and learn to enjoy what He's doing.



If you were asked what you believe about God, could you answer? Did you grow up in one of the major world religions or did you grow up void of religion? Regardless, you have stories and experiences of what you believe in. We all do.

But, if you were asked why you believe what you do, could you answer as quickly or with as much meaning? A common answer to why we have certain beliefs is "because of my parents," or "because I was born in a certain part of the world." While these answers may be true, they are not that deep. Surely matters of the soul, the sincerest of our beliefs, have deeper roots in us than that. Yet, many of us have a tough time articulating, or even knowing, why we believe what we do.

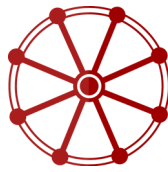
With help from National Geographic, we've compared the major world religions on their views of the origin of man, the topic of good and evil, notable leaders, and their views on eternity. When laid out in black and white, it's easy to see that all of these religions are very different and they are not "many paths that lead to the top of the mountain."



CHRISTIAN



ISLAM



BUDDHISM



HINDISM



JUDAISM



SECULAR
HUMANISM
(ATHEISM)

	OVERVIEW	IS MAN GOOD OR EVIL ?	NOTABLE LEADER	AFTERLIFE
✝	God created people to live in harmonious community with Him. Today mankind is separated from God and in need of His rescue.	Adam and Eve, having free will, chose to sin against God. From then on, Man has been inherently evil and wicked.	Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, was perfect and sinless. Through His undeserved crucifixion He took our place and the punishment for our sins.	If we believe the truth about our need for a Savior, we will spend eternity with Jesus and other believers in Heaven.
☾	Allah is viewed as the source of all good and all evil. He is a powerful judge, who will be merciful depending on the sufficiency of a believer's good works and religious devotion.	Muslims reject the doctrine of original sin and believe people are responsible for their own deeds.	Allah's message was given to numerous prophets, including Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, and other prophets common to Christianity and Judaism. Muhammad, is the most revered.	The Koran teaches a glorious afterlife for the righteous or hellfire and destruction for anyone else.
⦿	Buddhism has no origin story for creation. It is indifferent to traditional gods and believes that only the individual is responsible for truth.	Man's actions can be evil, but through righteous living can be overcome.	Buddhists follow the instruction of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, who went on a quest for enlightenment around the sixth century BC.	Reincarnation into another person or animal happens continually until the state of Bodhi (true enlightenment) is reached.
ॐ	33 million gods are worshiped. The main three that work in a trinity are Brahma (creator), Vishnu (sustainer), and Shiva.	Karma teaches that what one has done in a past life (good or evil) will manifest in the next.	Mahatma Gandhi preached "ahimsa" (nonviolence to living beings) and was assassinated in 1948.	A Hindu's goal, through successive rebirths, is to gain spiritual ascent and nearness with Brahman.
✡	Jews believe in the Yahweh of the Old Testament and believe Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are the patriarchs of the faith.	Practicing Jews agree that we are born with a sinful nature.	Jews heavily revere the prophets of the Old Testament. Most do not recognize Jesus as God who came in the flesh.	Jewish ideas of the afterlife can vary depending on which camp they fall in and how close they keep with tradition.
Ⓐ	The origin of man is found through science and the theory of evolution. The Big Bang Theory is readily accepted.	Man is born neutral and his genetics and choices in life determine whether he is good or evil.	Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens are prolific writers that have been influential in the last century.	There is no life after death. We cease to exist.

A common thread among many of the world religions is the idea that we can achieve personal morality on our own, that we can be a kind person and that's good enough. Christianity is unique because it vehemently insists that we can't. We are wicked at heart, and there is nothing we can achieve on our own that will bring us closer to God. Jesus is God, and He is the

only god who came to us. Furthermore, hHs coming was motivated by the purest love this world has ever known. We are only capable of loving God, or anyone else, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Knowing the basic facts about each religion is only the beginning. The rest is up to you. Dig deep, find the answers to your questions, and

realize what motivates your beliefs. It's one of the most significant things you could do because, in the end, we'll be responsible for what we choose to believe or not believe.

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15, NKJV).

"CHRISTIAN NICE"

THE LIE OF TOLERANT LOVE

A

A number of things might come to your mind when you read the word "Christian." Maybe when you see the word, you think *hypocrite*. You know enough to understand that Christians are supposed to be "nice people", and you're understandably shocked and/or offended when someone who claims to be a Christian does something contrary to their beliefs. To you, Christians are not nice people.

To many others, Christians are viewed as "good people." They go to church on Sundays and don't smoke, drink, or sleep around. They're the kind of people you want as neighbors because they won't cause too much trouble or make too much noise. They're the Christians: good, old-fashioned, moral people. Somewhere along the way, the world developed the idea that if you're a Christian, you're supposed to be nice.

WAS JESUS A "NICE" GUY?

It depends on your definition of nice. A simple Google search explains "nice" as "pleasant, agreeable, and satisfactory." Jesus was "nice" in the way He approached the untouchables of His time. He sought out those the world felt were reasonable to overlook. During this time in history, Jewish people did not associate with Samaritans, and in John 4 we see Jesus, a Jew, ask for water from a Samaritan woman, and an adulterous woman at that. In Luke 19, we read of Jesus seeking out Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, picking him out of a crowd of people to stay at his house, even though everyone around him probably despised Zacchaeus for being the man who took their money. Jesus healed sicknesses, cured blindness, and made the lame to walk. His miracles were nice. And His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead? *Very nice* - the best news for sinners like me and you.



which are evidently the opposite of agreeable. Jesus was always truthful and always right (the Bible tells us He was without sin¹), but His actions to stand up for those truths were sometimes, well, *unpleasant* to those being accused or watching from nearby. When Jesus found people selling oxen and sheep in the temple, He took the time to physically make a whip of cords to drive out the money-changers, not to mention flipping their tables over.² It appears that acting justly is not always going to be viewed as acting “nice.” In Matthew 12, we read about a conversation between the Pharisees (the religious elite of Jesus’ day) and Jesus where He actually says, “You brood of vipers!” Just a few verses before, He says, “Anyone who isn’t with me opposes me, and anyone who isn’t working with me is actually working against me” (Matthew 12:30, NLT).

If we’re not convinced that Jesus didn’t come to be Mr. Nice Guy, we can look to Luke 12:51 (NLT) where He explicitly says, “Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I have come to divide people against each other!” I’d encourage you to read more into the chapter to find what Jesus means by this. Jesus wasn’t concerned about what people thought of Him, and He didn’t come to compromise. He was about His Father’s business.³

THE LIE OF TOLERANT LOVE

In a society where absolute truth has become debatable to some, it’s not hard to come across sensitive political topics. Some Christians will not state their opinion about a current social movement in order to play it safe, fearing they’ll hurt or offend someone. They shy away from the truth of God to protect their reputation. When asked, or confronted, they answer lightly or incompletely. In response to their silence, the world can be as loud as it wants in promoting its own truth. On the other end of the Christian response, are those labeled as bigots because they’re intolerant of people with differing opinions.

Society’s version of love preaches “tolerant” behavior. It claims that love offers complete acceptance of and agreement with anyone’s lifestyle and beliefs. It says that if my viewpoint differs from yours, I am unloving to tell you that you are wrong, but this is contrary to *real* love. Why? Because if I’m doing something to hurt myself, I’d hope the people around me tell me so. True friends see our blind spots, and call us on them.

If we, as Christians, are to reach the world with the honest, loving truths of God, we must find a middle ground between these two stereotypes. So, how would God have us tackle these difficult conversations where a biblical truth differs

from the opinion of the world? Can we share in a way that is both loving and truthful?

TRUTH IN LOVE

Like anything else, we need to look to Jesus as our example,

“ACTING JUSTLY IS NOT ALWAYS GOING TO BE VIEWED AS ACTING ‘NICE.’”

including the way He approached societal issues and people. Jesus spoke the truth in love, utilizing the power of one-on-one discipleship. There were times when He addressed the masses, but there were also times where Jesus spoke directly to one person. Jesus also didn’t force truth on those who didn’t ask. He answered those who addressed Him directly. We can avoid unnecessary conflict when we are honest with those who are seeking an answer, not by confronting individuals out of nowhere.

The way we live our lives as Christians says something about the God we follow. To misrepresent Him is to show people an inaccurate view of who He is. When we attempt to be “nice” and say nothing when God has asked us to speak up and declare His truths to the world, we are not showing the world who God really is. Addressing difficult topics will require intentional biblical study on our part so we know what God loves and what He doesn’t, what He commands and what He forbids. It will require reliance on the Holy Spirit to give us the words we need for the moment, as He promises He will in Luke 12:12. Having these difficult conversations will take discernment and trust in God to come through.

Desiring God author Jon Bloom says that humble people are “disagreeable when truth must be valued over relational harmony.”⁴ When we are tempted to shy away from conflict, we should consider the words of the Bible when it says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend”⁵ and “Let a righteous man strike me – it is a kindness.”⁶ It is a kindness to speak up when God prompts you to be brave and stand up for something in the moment. When we live bold, obedient lives (resulting in joy now and eternal), we show the world that God is good and worthy of following. Trust God to help you share His truths with others. We can trust that God is glorified when we clarify to the world what He is like.

¹Hebrews 4, 2 Corinthians 5:21

²John 2:14-15

³Luke 2:49, NKJV

⁴desiringgod.org/articles/humility-is-not-always-nice

⁵Proverbs 27:6, NKJV

⁶Psalms 141:5



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