

MOBILE LOAVES & FISHES | THE 9TH COMMANDMENT | IS THERE A CHRISTIAN DRESS CODE?

new identity

MAGAZINE

God in focus. World in scope.

Birth Control

CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES
ON THE EVER DEBATED
TOPIC OF BIRTH CONTROL

Turning Confrontation Into Closeness

HOW TO COMMUNICATE
AND RESOLVE CONFLICT
WHEN SOMEONE REFUSES
TO TALK

The Cold, Hard Truth

ENTERING THE WORKPLACE
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

PLUS
ECO-FRIENDLY
BACK TO SCHOOL
ESSENTIALS

An Eye for an Eye, and a Tooth for a Tooth

THE PEARLS OF JESUS:
UNDERSTANDING
MATTHEW 5:38



THE MAGAZINE FOR NEW BELIEVERS AND SEEKERS

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welcome...

MY TIME IN COLLEGE WAS WONDERFUL. I WAS BLESSED WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET AN education, make some friendships that I know will be lifelong, and soak in the Southern California sun. My college experience was particularly special because I met God there—I became a Christian.

As a new Christian I had many questions. I grappled with the new meaning in my life through Christ. I searched to understand how my life could matter and how I could make a difference in the world. I learned that I didn't have to live just for myself, which would ultimately be unfulfilling and lifeless - I could now live to love a God who loved me first.

No sooner had I accepted this new destiny for my life, when the identity questions started rolling as class continued and studying commenced. What parts of me and of my past was I supposed to keep? What parts of me were meant to change? Who was I supposed to be? What did it mean to be a Christian? I wanted to know.



And I still want to know. As Christians we are never finished loving God and learning the wisdom and ways of the life he has for us. For this reason, I desired to create a magazine that I could have looked to when I was a new Christian, a magazine that would help answer some of the foundational questions about what it means to be and live as a Christian. *New Identity Magazine* is now that place where you can learn about and share Christian perspectives in a non-threatening, unfiltered way. I hope as you read the articles in *New Identity Magazine* that you can grow to more fully understand the new identity you have in Christ.

In this issue we have a variety of topics that I hope will encourage and engage you. Some articles may help you learn more about yourself, such as "Turning Confrontation Into Closeness." Others we hope will help you better understand the Bible (God's Word) such as what the saying, "An Eye for an Eye, and a Tooth for a Tooth" means or learn different Christian perspectives, such as in our "Contraceptives Series Part 2 on Birth Control." I hope the articles in *New Identity Magazine* will serve you well and support you in your new destiny.

Cailin

CAILIN BRIODY HENSON
Editor-in-Chief

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International House of Prayer

If you are being called to ministry or looking for a way to reach out and give back, the International House of Prayer is an excellent resource for you. The organization combines 24/7 prayer with 24/7 acts of justice - from working with inner city youth to food distribution to ministering to victims of domestic violence. International House of Prayer, located in Kansas City, Missouri also coordinates domestic and international conferences, trainings, and e-learning opportunities for those who want to join their mission. For more information, visit www.ihop.org. —Rachel Gooneratne



The International Ecotourism Society

If you're looking for a green way to travel to your next vacation destination, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) offers a myriad of resources to help you plan. The Society gives a free basic membership to travelers interested in conservation, reducing their footprint, and respecting local communities. Members have access to travel agencies, travel trips, and special events such as online auctions on vacation packages. For more information, visit www.ecotourism.org. —Rachel Gooneratne



Donate Life

There are more than 100,000 people in the United States today who are waiting for a life-saving organ transplant. There are many myths and urban legends surrounding organ and tissue donation, and Donate Life America is the national organization committed to sharing the facts about being a donor. The website, www.donatelife.net has links about understanding donation, including multicultural perspectives, stories of hope from transplant recipients, and ways to get involved. —Rachel Gooneratne



NoiseTrade

NoiseTrade is an online community that connects emerging artists with fans interested in supporting new music. NoiseTrade provides "Fair Trade Music" which can be downloaded in exchange for providing contact information and promoting an artist through updates on Facebook and Twitter. Visitors to the site can also leave a tip for the artist - give what you can! Visit www.noisetrade.com or follow them on Facebook and Twitter. —Rachel Gooneratne

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

God in focus. World in Scope.

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MISSION STATEMENT

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

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

REFERENCING THE BIBLE:

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

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MOBILE LOAVES & FISHES

In the Bible there is no shortage of passages that address the problems of the less fortunate. Mobile Loaves & Fishes is one organization that addresses some of these problems by echoing Jesus' serving of the five thousand and feeding the homeless in communities across the United States.

Photo by Tom Baker. (@mylifeinhdn) | Flickr (CC)



MATTHEW HAMILTON

Matthew Hamilton is a published photographer and writer who 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.

Anyone who has seen recent television shows such as *America's Next Great Restaurant* or *The Great Food Truck Race*, knows that much of the current innovation in food preparation and delivery is not happening in laboratories and famous restaurants, but in portable kitchens right on the street. Gone are the days when a hot dog was your only option from a street vendor. More and more cuisines from all over the world are being offered to the on-the-go eater. But in Austin, Texas and in a growing number of other cities, there is a special truck that provides not only physical sustenance that can wear off after a few hours, but also spiritual food that has a much longer impact. Mobile Loaves and Fishes (MLF) started in a community of faith and has been using its resources to help those in need regardless of their religious beliefs. The organization fosters an environment where those receiving help may soon be a part of the group helping others. This is in line with one of the most important and most simple teachings of Jesus:

The way that [Mobile Loaves & Fishes] has expanded goes to show that the need for helping and feeding is just as urgent today as it was when Jesus met and fed his followers.

"Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them" (Matthew 7:12, The Message).

Started by six parishioners from St. John Neumann Catholic Church in Austin, Texas in 1998, Mobile Loaves and Fishes sought to help the homeless population that for one reason or another would not set foot in a shelter. The group's efforts were immediately received by those in need because it focused on the problems at hand, namely hunger and the lack of advocacy.

By modeling their ministry after the Feeding of the Multitudes story found in all four of the gospels, what started out as a small outreach project serving seventy-five meals out of the back of a pickup truck, has turned into a full-fledged charity working in six states and eight different cities providing over two million meals

to date.

The way that this ministry has expanded goes to show that the need for helping and feeding is just as urgent today as it was when Jesus met and fed his followers. What makes Mobile Loaves and Fishes so unique is that this small group saw a need and recognized an effective way to address it. It's simple beginning proves that a great idea can be multiplied to benefit people on a larger scale—much like the story that inspired it.

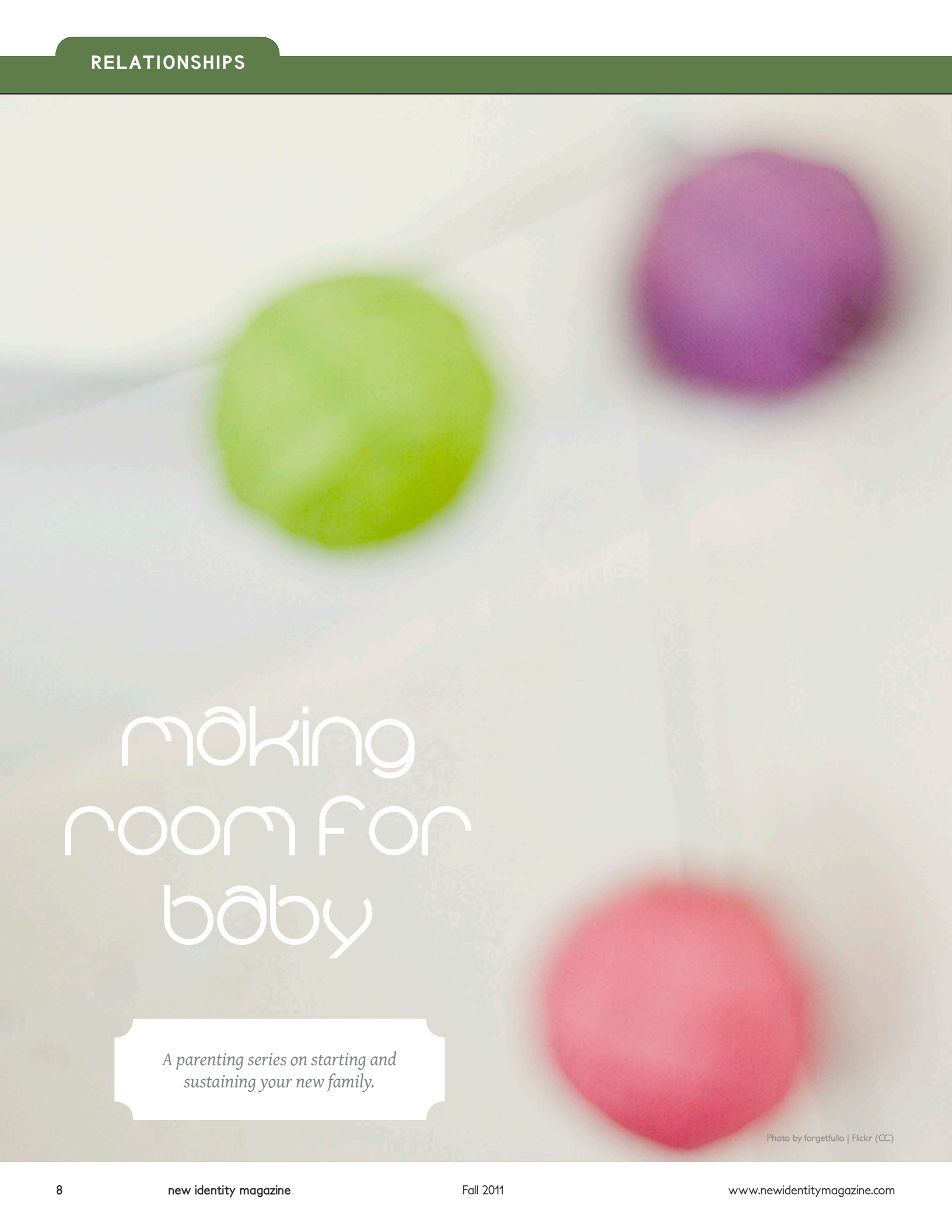
To address physical needs such as hunger, MLF uses catering trucks to provide meals nightly to those in need 365 days a year. Food is provided through donations and is prepared and served by over 14,000 volunteers throughout the organization. And by being a portable operation, MLF can change the locations for each truck to accommodate the movement of the homeless population of a certain area.

In addition to providing meals through the catering trucks, 2005 brought the introduction of portable housing as another resource to help the homeless. Originally called Habitat on Wheels, the Community First! initiative provided qualified applicants actual residences in RV homes located in local RV parks in Austin. Currently some 45 former homeless residents maintain the homes

and over 86% of those in the program remain successfully in the homes. The homes are occupied by all types of residents from single men to families with newborns. The MLF website is a good resource to get to know some of the residents.

As for the advocacy portion of the mission, MLF publishes an online periodical called *12 Baskets*. The articles bring to light many factors that are often overlooked. A recent issue contained a photo essay about two men and their belongings, bringing the difficulties of living a homeless life into perspective. Also profiled are articles about the financial impact of homelessness on the economy and what steps can be taken to address panhandling or begging. What makes this magazine so effective is that it tackles the issue of homelessness from many aspects but treats its subjects with respect. By acknowledging the problems and showing solutions, *12 Baskets* serves as a vital resource for anyone wanting to make an positive impact for those less fortunate.

Concern for the less fortunate is a consistent theme throughout the Bible. In the account of Jesus serving the five thousand with just five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus displayed not only concern for others, but also the faith that overcomes the limitations of resources. "Toward evening the disciples approached him. "We're out in the country and it's getting late. Dismiss the people so they can go to the villages and get some supper." But Jesus said, "There is no need to dismiss them. You give them supper" (Matthew 14:15-16, The Message). The story shows that people can serve as agents of God's provision, and in God, there is no limitation of resources. 



making room for baby

*A parenting series on starting and
sustaining your new family.*

Photo by forgetfullo | Flickr (CC)



ERIC LEE

Eric Lee lives in Orange County and is an active member of Converge Family Church. In his spare time, he enjoys rooting for the Los Angeles Angels, packing his mind with as much trivia as he can, and blogging. Eric is a stay-at-home dad of one.

I'm a stay-at-home dad with a twenty-month-old son, Elijah. He's a handful right now and sometimes he drives me crazy, but I wouldn't trade the position I'm in now for the world. I would love to share with you what my wife and I have experienced so far and what I've learned about being a parent in the process. In this first article, I am going to share how to prepare for being a new parent, the change that will come, things I wished I would've known before I had a child, and other resources to tap into when you're expecting or planning on starting your family.

Top Five Things You Will Want to Know Beforehand

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

There are harder things to prepare for, such as not getting pregnant right away, considering adoption, or struggling with infertility. There are easier things to prepare for, such as whether your child will be a boy or a girl, and what their personal preferences will be. My wife and I really wanted a girl. We had this mindset that we would have a girl. When we went to the doctor to see the gender of the baby, we were in shock when we found out we would be having a boy. Another piece of advice related to this was something one of my wife's aunts said, "Don't read the book *What to Expect When You're Expecting*. Your kid writes the book for you." What I got from this is that each kid is different. Your child will let you know what he or she likes or dislikes. So you can buy a really nice crib, but your child may not even want to sleep in it. Or as our friend Angela said, "I wish I would have known that not all babies like swings or bouncy chairs." If you can, borrow these items from friends that have older kids or buy them secondhand. My wife and I went through a similar experience. Early on, our son, Elijah, would always fall asleep if we put him in the swing. That stopped at about two or three months. After that, he didn't like it and hasn't liked swings since.

TRAVEL AS MUCH AS YOU CAN

Whether it's a "babymoon" to Hawaii or going on a cruise; do it. My wife and I took a honeymoon in Jamaica, two cruises to Alaska, did a tour of Thailand and Vietnam, crossed the border into Cancun, and visited New York twice before our son was born. It is not impossible to travel with kids but it does take a lot more planning, takes longer at the airport, and could involve a crying child wherever you go. Even if you can't travel that much, getting away to your favorite restaurant or hangout spot can work too. Dining dynamics will change exponentially when you add an infant into the mix.

HAVE A SUPPORT TEAM IN MIND

This can be family members, friends, or your church community. I was fortunate and thank God that my wife has a large family! Her mom, brothers, sister, aunts and uncles were there for us from the moment we found out we were expecting. My mother-in-law stayed with us every Sunday night to help rock the baby, change him, and bathe him. That gave us a much-needed break and sleep. My wife's aunts and uncles gave us all sorts of clothes, toys, and other essentials. My sister, a mother of two boys, gave us breast milk pumps – a really important piece of equipment early on. I visited my mom and dad every week and they helped to give me a break as well. Oh how Eli loves to watch Elmo on the computer with Grandpa! Our church family also gave us clothes, toys, and all sorts of bottles and accessories. That saved us a bunch of money, time, and stress. Your support team can also help out with baby-sitting when you need to go on a date night, go to a formal function, or just get out with friends. Our support has been overwhelming from our family, but you may find your circumstances are different. Your immediate family may be less enthusiastic, you may be a single parent or working multiple jobs to pay all your bills and you just don't have the resources. Being connected and a part of a loving church community can be the greatest support team when you begin your family.

BE PREPARED FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SPOUSE TO CHANGE DRAMATICALLY

I can remember the days when my wife and I could stay out late and didn't fight about how to raise our baby. As my friend Josh put it, "I wish someone would have told me how hard it would be. Also I wish my wife and I would have discussed parenting styles, such as discipline. Marriage is a vision. Whatever you valued before you have a child should still apply. So if you went on date nights then keep that up." Even then, date nights are different. Instead of going out for dinner and a movie, a date after baby might be just having dinner for an hour or so and having an uninterrupted conversation. Being a stay-at-home dad, my role changed. My wife is a special educator and works full-time. At the time of my wife's pregnancy, I was substitute teaching very infrequently. We

decided together that I would stay at home and take care of our son. At first, this was a source of real stress and uncertainty on my part. Being the youngest of three, I wasn't used to this sort of responsibility. Just know that one of the sacrifices of having children is losing some of your freedom but that it is all worth it in the end.

GET CREATIVE IN HOW YOU USE YOUR RECREATION TIME

Before my son, I could go to the gym at least two to three times a week. After the birth of my son, it became only when my mother-in-law had her days off. Then by the time Eli was about five or six months old, it became whenever he would nap and my wife was home. Nowadays, it is maybe once a week if I'm lucky. So instead of going to the gym, you may have to go on walks, take your child to the park to play, or something else.

So what's up next? The next part in this series will be about things to watch and prepare for during the pregnancy. For one thing, the pregnant woman is going to be going through hormonal changes. These changes will affect her emotions and her body and her nutritional needs. She will also need support emotionally and physically from her spouse, family and friends. Last but not least, there will most likely be fears and concerns about matters such as the baby's health, miscarriage, how the baby will affect the marriage relationship, fear of the unknown, and other things. Stay tuned for more.



HELPFUL RESOURCES

www.babycenter.com

The Baby Center sends you e-mails each week/month on what milestones to expect and tips on things like how to get into bedtime routines, what to feed the baby, and other stuff.

Mayo Clinic Guide to a Healthy Pregnancy by The Mayo Clinic

(5/5 stars) - Focus of book: What to expect during and after pregnancy.

This book gives you a week by week breakdown of your pregnancy and tells you how your baby is developing. It also has several chapters dedicated to the different stages of labor as well as a reference guide to numerous pregnancy health concerns. Super informative without

being judgmental or biased towards any one view. Thanks to the Mayo Clinic for putting out a great book!

What To Expect The First Year by Murkoff, Eisenberg & Hathaway

(4/5 stars) - Focus of book: What to expect during and after pregnancy.

This gives a breakdown month-by-month on developmental changes, physical changes, and other important things such as breastfeeding vs. formula, registering for baby, and sleep patterns.

Your Pregnancy For The Father-To-Be by Glade B. Curtis, M.D., M.P.H. and Judith Schuler, M.S.

(5/5 stars) – Focus of book: How to prepare for fatherhood and how to support your wife during her pregnancy.

This is a great book chock-full of tips on how to support your wife. It also really speaks to the key issues of the expectant father such as anxieties of becoming a father, financial preparedness, and the changes in your relationship with your wife. I found this book very helpful because of its little sections called "Brownie points in the doghouse." These tips geared towards dads, got right to the point and gave some valuable advice on how to care for your wife. Also included a section on pregnancy and medical terms that were nice to know.

Babyproofing Your Marriage by Stacie Cockrell, Cathy O'Neill, and Julia Stone

(5/5 stars) Focus of the book: Relationship changes in marriage when having a baby.

Written by three wives and mothers, this book uses a lot of humor and stories from both the authors and many experienced mothers and fathers as well. I really enjoyed reading the quotes from longtime parents and new parents as well. The quotes and stories were so honest and helpful. I felt I could relate to the fathers point-of-view and since I'm a stay-at-home dad, sometimes the mothers. Really applicable topics such as how parenthood changes your life, the sex life of new parents, and dealing with in-laws.

God in focus. World in scope.

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MAGAZINE

Winter 2008/09

PREMIER
ISSUE

Art To Glorify

How artists reveal their faith through works

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



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Divine Love

*One amazing true story of God's
matchmaking.*



Photo of Nicholas & Melanie Sowell by Jessica Larson



NICHOLAS SOWELL

Nicholas Sowell has been involved in full time ministry since the age of 16. Having served as a lay minister, youth pastor, Christian radio DJ, Christian music production company owner, and surf missionary, Nick has used his love for writing to publish, inspire, educate, and most importantly, further the Kingdom of God. Now living in the South Bay, Nick enjoys staying active, and passionately seeking after the Lord.

It was around 8:00 am when I awoke naturally from my sleep, yet still lying in bed with a fresh “early morning stupor.” My eyes remained closed as I just relaxed and began my morning praise to the Lord.

At that moment God took me into a vision. In the vision I was holding a baby girl that I knew was mine. After smiling at her and looking at her, I turned to my left to hand her to her mother. At that moment I saw a woman that I knew, in my vision, was my wife, yet I had never seen this woman before in my entire life. And as quickly as it started, it ended and I came out of the vision. Even though it was quick and short, I remembered it all vividly. The baby girl was wearing a pink fuzzy jumper with footsies, and the woman who was my wife: I could describe her to a tee. I remembered the vision so clearly. She had sandy blond hair, beautiful green eyes, perfect pearly-white teeth, and the most beautiful cheekbones and dimples I've ever seen. The vision didn't just seem to be a dream or a passing figment of my imagination, rather, it penetrated me. It felt real; it felt like almost a promise from the Lord. This was rare, yet not the first time something like this had happened. As a matter of fact, dreams and visions are one of the main ways God has spoken to me most of my life; several times with clarity and specificity. God has a funny way of using dreams and visions to speak directly to me. I believe God speaks to people differently in the ways he sees fit, however, in this instance, God spoke clearly to me through a vision that was ingrained into my mind's eye. The kind of vision so vivid it would seem similar to a dream, where you're there and feel you're alive and present in that moment, but then come back out of it as if waking up.

Two days later, I packed my bags leaving Torrance and the South Bay in my rearview mirror. I was on my way to Redding, California as I had been accepted into a school of ministry earlier that summer and was moving my life to attain more education. With beautiful mountains surrounding me, tons of “on-fire-Christians” and a great new house and roommates, I couldn't have been happier. Willing and ready for a new chapter in my life, I was finally getting settled into northern California. A few weeks after having moved there my roommates and I decided to head to a local lake in the area where there was a small, make-shift beach. Surround by pine trees, mountains, and huge rock formations it was glorious. After a few laps out in the water and about an hour of

having fun with a rope swing we found, I headed back to the sand.

While talking with some friends I noticed a few more people had arrived and were with my other friends on the beach. Without trying to seem flirty or over-bearing I gave it a few minutes, eventually going up to two women and introducing myself. After going to lay back down on my towel I remember looking back up to look at one of the young women who strangely reminded me of the same exact cheekbones I remembered from my vision. However, I did not recognize her because she had on some huge “Hollywood” sunglasses covering most of her face. I did find it strange however. It was a great day, and the crew said our goodbyes and set up a hang out party for later that night.

So that night, I went over to my friend's apartment, walked in and saw the woman I met earlier in the day—without glasses. And, believe it or not, it was the same exact young woman from my vision! I thought to myself “no wonder those cheekbones looked so familiar!” Now on a side note: I have never been one to be nervous or feel insecure around women, but this time was different! It took quite a while before I gathered myself enough to walk over and talk to this woman that I'd seen in a vision before I even met her! Eventually I wound up at a coffee table with her and two others all sharing our backgrounds and how we got there to begin the school of ministry. It was a great way to get to know more about this mystery woman that still seemed like a figment of my imagination, even though she was sitting right in front of me. Before the night was out I got her phone number and walked her to her car. I had some praying to do! After that encounter I simply took it to the Lord asking him, “Lord, please bring direction and confirmation to this.” And with each passing day forward I just lifted it up to him to bring direction and clarity in the situation. About a week after the first time we met, I found myself in class, as another God moment would take place. I was sitting with classmates on both sides and almost drowned out into my own world. God came upon me and clearly delivered the message, “This is who I have for you, and this is the woman from your vision.”

I took the direction and handed it right back to the Lord. “Father, thank you for bringing clarity and confirmation to me, not that the vision wasn't enough, haha. You have my promise that I will be completely patient with this. I will build my friendship with this woman and not pursue her until you show me the right time and release me to share this vision with her.” And after that prayer I thought it would be case closed, at least for a season. I went home skipping, I was so excited about what happened. I told my roommate who was ecstatic for me but replied with, “Dude, that is awesome, just do not share that with her whatever you do, you will freak her out.” I laughed and assured him that was the furthest thing from my mind.

That same evening I decided to fill in my parents who I had not talked with in a few weeks but knew about the vision. I still wish the comical response from them could have been recorded. It went something like this, “Hey Mom and Dad, you remember that vision I told you about? Well... I met that woman and we've been hanging out.” Mom: “What?! Are you serious?” This is the same mother who's been pushing for grandchildren since I was a freshman

in college. My parents asked me if I was going to tell her, to which I quickly replied "Heck No!" I soon heard a case as they began to play the flipside and tell me that they thought if it was God's will and destiny for my life then there was no way I could mess it up. To which I swiftly whipped back "there's plenty of ways I could mess this up!" We finished our phone conversation as I told them I respected and honored their opinions but that it was only going to be about God's timing and His will. I literally got off the phone and walked into a worship service that night at church. My parent's opinion only had me more inquisitive about what to do. This led me to lay down before the Lord, literally.

I was in the back of the church on my face in worship and prayer. "God, I know what my parents said, and I know I've given it to you, but Lord, what do YOU want me to do?" As I was lying there it wasn't more than ten seconds before I got an answer back when God told me, "I release you to share it with her." Followed by, "Honor your mother and father." Having full confidence this was the furthest thing from my idea, now I was met with the challenge of putting this vision in someone's hands that I was only a friend with. Was I crazy? This was nuts! What would she think? How big could this blow up in my face? The flurry of questions bombarded me until I came back to my wits and realized that I needed to follow God's instructions and stop questioning the logic behind it. She happened to be in the same worship service that night, so I walked up to her and asked if we could meet after and that I had something to share with her. She obliged and we met afterwards.

Without the slightest idea of how I would preface such a weighty thing, I simply laid it at her feet. After sharing the vision with her, I put on my invisible war gear prepared for the bomb that was about to explode back in my face. But to my surprise she was smiling! Not only that, but after I had finished she proceeded to tell me that God had given her a dream of the two of us getting married! I also learned later that while I was in the worship service asking the Lord what to do, he had also gone to her at that very moment and told her, "That is your mate. That is who I have for you." We both sat there in complete awe of what had just happened and trying to soak in the reality of it. I eventually left my shock and awe to tell her, "Do you know how long I've been praying to meet you? I've waited my whole life for you."

It remains the most surreal moment of my life. From that day forward we started dating, honoring God and seeking him in every moment of it. And everyday has been nothing but an utter blessing. We are now married and loving every day together. I thought this was the first time something like this had happened, but as the story got out we've heard multiple accounts of people seeing their life partners in dreams and visions before meeting them. So you may be single, reading this and asking yourself, "Is this even possible?" The answer is yes, as I am a personal testament to it, even though I realize it's very rare and unique. God has a different plan for each one of us, and the beauty of it is, everyone is different. But this is one chapter I will never forget.



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Turning Confrontation Into Closeness



LINDSEY FREDERICK

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“You know what? Never mind!” Click. The silence was as swift and fresh as the wound it left. I sighed into the empty receiver. I called Norah back and got her voicemail. *How do I communicate with someone who refuses to talk?* I wondered, and hung up.

I had known Norah my entire life. Our lives were so integrated, I considered her family. When I cut my first tooth, Norah was there. When I fractured my foot, Norah went with me to the hospital. The first time my heart broke, Norah patiently helped me piece it back together. But when I moved two states away after college, it was our relationship that seemed to tear.

The distance spanned more than the miles. While I was busy with a new job and life, Norah felt neglected. I struggled to express in a way she could understand, that I still cared about our relationship. But each attempt was more confusing and frustrating. Communication became difficult. Stifled. I felt misunderstood. Soon our unspoken issues hung between us like an old Christmas sweater; we only brought them out once a year and they were ugly. It would have been easy to let our fray wear through, but Norah was too important to let this continue. I knew if we didn't confront the problem, we would go on as if nothing happened. And I would feel resentful.

When conflict is mismanaged, relationships suffer disconnection and alienation. Resentment, bitterness and frustration weave a fabric of tension. This relational pattern can shroud our perception of conflict with feelings of fear, anxiety and danger. We wonder, is it possible to confront without wounding a relationship further? In their book *How to Have that Difficult Conversation You've Been Avoiding* (Zondervan, 2005), Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend affirm that healthy confrontation strengthens the bond between two people. But what, exactly, does healthy confrontation look like?

CONNECT EMOTIONALLY

I sighed once more and called Norah again. “I know you're upset,” I told her voicemail. “That's okay. But not talking won't solve either of our frustrations. Call me when you're ready to talk.” Conflict triggers strong, difficult emotions. Yet our ability to handle

*How to communicate and resolve conflict
when someone refuses to talk.*

conflict successfully relies on staying connected to our feelings. Cloud and Townsend assert that the ability to do this in confrontation is the very fiber of a good conversation. It also requires us to be gracious and understanding. We must not only be aware of our own feelings, but those of the other person. When we extend ourselves to another for the sake of the relationship, we create a safe environment for each person to be emotionally present.

Many times, however, our ability to stay connected and be understanding is only possible with the help of something outside of ourselves. We can pray and ask God for clarity, perspective and a “cool spirit.” “He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding” (Proverbs 17:27).

CLARIFY THE PROBLEM

After about a week of silence, Norah emailed me, apologizing. “I couldn’t talk to you because I was too angry,” she wrote.

Past hurts color our view of the present situation. But it is important to focus on the current problem. State the nature of the problem as clearly as possible. Be specific. Don’t say, “You’re such a slob!” Instead try, “Yesterday you left your dirty dishes on the coffee table, and this morning your dirty towels on the floor.” This ensures you are both on the same page so you can work toward a resolution together.

Next, *clarify the effects of the problem*. Include facts, as well as what it does to your relationship. Stay away from “you” statements, which place blame. Instead, own and state your feelings such as, “When you do _____ (behavior), I feel _____.” Addressing the effects of the behavior helps awaken the other person to problems for which he might not be aware.

“I appreciate your apology,” I told Norah. “It’s okay to be upset, but when you hung up on me, I was hurt and confused.” I told her I didn’t understand what I said that made her so upset. And when she didn’t answer my calls, I felt alienated and punished.

Finally, *clarify your desire for change*. At the heart of a conflict is a relationship that matters to us. Cloud and Townsend caution against only addressing the negative aspects of the problem. This can make a person feel attacked and abused. It is not productive or helpful. Instead, we can offer solutions or suggestions for what we would like to see change. This builds hope for the relationship.

I told Norah it is helpful to me when she communicates how she feels and why she is upset. Even if that means saying, “I’m too angry to talk to you right now.”

CONTINUE ON TRACK

A good confrontation has a clear and specific focus. However, focus can derail when defensiveness enters the conversation. Defensiveness takes place when the confronted person is not open to receive feedback or the truth. In their difficulty to accept their flaws or responsibility in the problem, they deflect attention away from themselves. In these instances, “you always” or

“you never” statements fly freely. If caught unaware, we could find ourselves in the middle of a slugfest of past offenses.

Cloud and Townsend advise to anticipate defensiveness and to lead with gracious understanding. The Bible says, “Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13). Leave space for the other person to express their feelings. They might have an important point we need to understand. Acknowledge the validity of their feelings and determine if their point is something that needs to be addressed at another time. Continue with the problem at hand.

“I don’t think you realize how offensive your tone can be,” Norah said. “Every time I call, I feel like you’re annoyed with me.” Her perspective was illuminating. I was unaware how I came across and that my tone caused many of our misunderstandings. I folded this information into my brain for future interactions.

CONFESS YOUR PART

It takes two people to create a conflict. Jesus once asked, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? (Matthew 7:3)” It’s essential to own our part in a problem. This is important for two reasons:

First, when we do not deal with our own hurt, it is difficult to see the other person clearly. We see them through lenses tinged by past experiences and fears. Second, when we approach someone whom we have hurt with a problem, it is difficult for them to hear us clearly. Our words pass through a filter of their invalidated feelings. Confess and apologize for your part in the problem. Humility nurtures healing change.

When I put myself in Norah’s shoes, I understood how she felt hurt. “I’m sorry you were hurt by what I said,” I offered.

COMMIT TO CHANGE

“I wish we were closer,” Norah said. “I want that too,” I replied.

Healthy confrontations help people grow emotionally, relationally and spiritually. They work through a problem toward a common goal. And they communicate care and commitment to the health of the relationship. This should be our first priority and motivation for confrontation.

Cloud and Townsend write, “The extent to which two people in a relationship bring up and resolve issues is a critical marker of the soundness of the relationship.” They assert that relationships are meant to be whole. The more parts of ourselves we connect to another person such as strengths, weaknesses, vulnerabilities, passions, desires, and failures the greater the depth and intimacy of the relationship.

Norah and I discussed some of our barriers to closeness and ways to communicate better both inside and outside of conflict. We still have a lot of holes left to patch, but we agreed to work together. And I already feel closer. 

IN PERSPECTIVE

Showcasing today's touchy subjects.



Contraceptive Series

Birth Control

Faith-based perspectives on birth control.

WENDY HARBOTTLE

Wendy Harbottle blogs about her journey at www.halfformedwish.blogspot.com and is currently earning her keep as Head of Production of a 24-hour Christian Music Channel in Johannesburg, South Africa.



What does the church say about birth control? Does the Bible provide any guidelines? What forms of birth control are acceptable for a Christian couple to use?

CONTRACEPTIVES & BIRTH CONTROL

The ancient Egyptians were among some of the first to create effective contraception using just honey and crocodile dung to create a barrier to sperm. A couple of centuries later Casanovas

memoirs record animal intestines being used as primitive condoms. In 1839, Charles Goodyear discovered how to vulcanize rubber and put it to use in the manufacture of condoms, intrauterine devices, douching syringes and “womb veils.” In 1950, clinical trials begin on the pill, and by 1965, six and a half million US women were taking the pill like they would vitamins. Less than half a century later, a male pill looks to be only a few years away, and women have more options available to them in birth control than ever before.

Despite all the technological advances available, no birth control is 100% effective. The fact of the matter is if a woman is having sex she may become pregnant no matter what she does, which is why even in this day and age some couples still choose abstinence as was discussed in the first part of this series (*New Identity Magazine*, Summer 2011). In this second part of *New Identity*’s series on contraception, the focus will be on birth control. Does the church condone it? What are the biblical grounds for birth control and what are your birth control choices?

CONTRACEPTION AND THE CHURCH

A lack of consensus about the use of birth control across denominations in the Christian arena has left many Christians unsure about which birth control honors God and which doesn’t. On the one hand, the Roman Catholic church declared birth control a violation of natural law in the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of 1965 and on the other hand, most Protestants have considered some forms of birth control morally acceptable. So where did the confusion all begin?

In Genesis 1:28, it says, “And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply...” This verse among others in Genesis 9:1 and 35:11, shaped the early church’s view of the purpose of intercourse. In the first two centuries of Christian history, the early church leaders found themselves having to defend the value of procreation and children in a society who accepted abortion as a way of life and who saw biblical counsel about virginity as commandments to abstain completely from sex. As a defense against these two early views of sex which the early church saw as unnatural, they turned to the Stoics who defined the nature of something by its purpose which resulted in the belief that if the ear is for hearing then reproductive organs are for reproducing. As John T. Noonan Jr. records in his book, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, by the end of the second century early church leaders like St. Justin Martyr were declaring, “We Christians marry only to produce children.”

The middle ages reveal much the same attitude towards sexual relations; many people still condemned marriage itself and had a poor view of sex in marriage and the value of children. Thus, the church’s stance on birth control remain unchanged. Martin

Luther, who lived between 1483 and 1546 wrote in his *Lectures on Genesis*, “...fertility was regarded as an extraordinary blessing and a special gift of God, as is clear from Deuteronomy 28:4, where Moses numbers fertility among the blessings. ‘There will not be a barren woman among you,’ he says (Ex.23:26). We do not regard this so highly today... Thus someone recently called his wife a sow, since she gave birth rather often. The good for nothing and impure fellow! The saintly fathers did not feel like this at all; for they acknowledged a fruitful wife as a special blessing of God and, on the other hand, regarded sterility as a curse.”

Up until 1930, no Christian church, Catholic or Protestant, accepted contraception, sterilization or abortion. It is unlikely that this would have changed if it were not for zealous efforts of Margaret Sanger (1879–1966) acclaimed by *TIME Magazine* to be the “mother” of Planned Parenthood and a key figure in the creation of the pill. After having been forced to flee from the United States to England under the threat of being convicted on charges of distributing pornographic materials (much of which was in reality, information on birth control and abortion), Sanger put the thinking of Thomas Malthus into practice.

Thomas Malthus believed that population control was the key to solving poverty, hunger, sickness, and crime. His theory held that for Western civilization to survive, the physically unfit, racially inferior, and mentally incompetent had to be eliminated. Dr. George Grant, author of *Killer Angel: A Biography of Planned Parenthood’s Founder Margaret Sanger*, notes after returning to the states and clearing her name, Sanger put theory into practice by opening her first clinic in an area primarily inhabited by Slavs, Hispanics, Italians, and Jews. In her first newspaper, *The Woman Rebel*, Sanger wrote, “Birth control appeals to the advanced radical because it is calculated to undermine the authority of the Christian churches. I look forward to seeing humanity free someday of the tyranny of Christianity no less than Capitalism.”

In 1930, the Anglican Church approved the limited use of birth control in a context where many churches still saw contraceptive devices as “immoral” and “impure.” Over the next two decades, as birth control gained widespread acceptance most Protestant churches changed their stance and left the choice of birth control up to each couple. When the pill was introduced in the 1960’s only the Catholic Church continued to prohibit all forms of contraception, except for natural methods under certain circumstances, and abstinence.

The struggle wasn’t over for the Catholic Church however; a 2005 Harris Poll found ninety percent of adult Catholics support contraception, just three percentage points lower than the general adult population. An interview in 2010, with Pope Benedict XVI recorded in the book, *Light of the World*, caused much furor when it appeared that the Catholic Church had relaxed their standpoint on contraception. In the book, the Pope answered when asked whether

“A lack of consensus about the use of birth control across denominations in the Christian arena has left many Christians unsure about which birth control honors God and which doesn’t.”

the Catholic Church was not opposed in principle to the use of condoms: “She [the Catholic Church] of course does not regard it as a real or moral solution, but, in this or that case, there can be nonetheless, in the intention of reducing the risk of infection, a first step in a movement toward a different way, a more human way, of living sexuality.” The Catholic Church later released a statement which can be found at www.bbc.co.uk, clarifying the quote, “The idea that anyone could deduce from the words of Benedict XVI that it is somehow legitimate, in certain situations, to use condoms to avoid an unwanted pregnancy is completely arbitrary and is in no way justified either by his words or in his thought.”

A LOOK AT BIRTH CONTROL IN BIBLICAL TEACHING

Like many other areas of modern life, birth control is not specifically addressed in the scriptures, which as can be seen from the various standpoints of Christian churches across the ages, leaves plenty of room for different conclusions to be drawn. Perhaps the best place to start when trying to develop a biblical view of birth control is with what the Bible says about children.

In today's modern world, it sometimes seems that children are often seen to be an inconvenience or financial burden that keeps people from achieving their goals and desires, but the Bible views children very differently. The Bible teaches in Genesis 1:27, James 3:9 and Malachi 2:10 that human beings are valuable because they are made in the image of God, and have been personally created by him. Thus, we are to believe that every child has value regardless of age, stage of development, or mental, physical, or social skills (Exodus 4:11).

Further, in Psalm 127: 4-5, the Bible says that children are a blessing from the Lord. The Bible also notes in Hosea 9:10-17, Exodus 23:25-26 and Deuteronomy 7:13-14 that barrenness and childlessness are unfortunate. Author Randy Alcorn, often asks his Bible college ethics classes, “If we believe the Bible when it says children are a blessing from the Lord, why are we so determined to be sure we don't get too many of those blessings? Financial provision is also a blessing of God—which of us is trying desperately not to get too much of that blessing?”

This view of children as a blessing may be why God commanded Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28 to go forth and multiply. In the Old and New Testament, married couples are given a number of guidelines for abstaining from sexual relations. In the New Testament, Paul cautions in 1 Corinthians 7:5, against married couples who avoid sexual relationships with their spouses for any reason other than for short periods of religious devotion.

But how does this pertain to birth control which does not necessarily inhibit intercourse but rather the consequences of intercourse? In order to answer this question scholars often use the story of Onan found in Genesis 38:8-10. After Tamar's husband dies her father-in-law, Judah speaks to his son Onan, “‘Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother.’ But Onan knew that the

offspring would not be his; so whenever he lay with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight; so he put him to death also.”

These few verses have sparked much controversy in the debate for and against birth control. Those for birth control claim that Onan was put to death because he did not fulfill the obligation to marry and bear children for Tamar. Other proponents for birth control interpret these verses to be about rebellion and not birth control saying that Onan was killed by God for disobeying his father, not for wasting his seed. On the other side of the argument are those who say that Onan was put to death because whenever he had sex, he removed the means to have children and was therefore put to death because of this contraceptive act.

Whichever side of Onan's story you take, it is clear that God does want to be involved in the choices we make regarding our sexuality and contraception. Added to this is that while there is no specific guidance in Scripture about how birth control can be approached, the choice to use contraceptive should be prayerfully determined by each couple and choices made that allow for both the husband and wife to have a clear conscience before God.

WHAT TYPES OF BIRTH CONTROL ARE OKAY FOR CHRISTIANS TO USE?

Out of the world's one billion married couples, some 650 million plan their families. However, when it comes to decisions about which birth control Christian couples should use, it appears that not all birth control methods are created equal. Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle and author of the book, *Religion Saves: And Nine Other Misconceptions*, which among other topics, answers whether Christians should use birth control, suggests that in order to understand the variety of today's birth control methods, one should view them in five different levels which range from no birth control to abortive contraceptives. Levels one and two are considered acceptable by all churches including the Roman Catholic Church. Level three is considered acceptable in most Protestant churches. Level four is more complicated and requires careful consideration while level five is generally not condoned by churches.

LEVEL 1: NO BIRTH CONTROL

Not all couples choose to use birth control. Some couples choose to allow God to determine the size of their families and enjoy sexual relations trusting that if God desires for them to have a child they will. At the extreme of this level is the Quiverfull Movement who take their name from Psalm 127:5, “Happy is the man who has a quiver full of [children].” Quiverfull followers believe that all forms of contraception, all forms of birth control and any form of family planning goes against God's plan. While this form of family planning is not for everyone there is no scriptural problem with it especially if proponents feel no obligation to impose their decision on others.

LEVEL 2: NATURAL BIRTH CONTROL

Natural birth control refers to any method which requires a couple to abstain from sexual intercourse on days when the wife is possibly fertile. Unlike men who are fertile 365 days a year in most cases, women are only fertile for between 5 – 10 days a month depending on the women's individual cycle. Natural birth control seeks to help couples understand these patterns so that they can make decisions about whether to abstain from sexual relations or not. Advances in medicine and technology in the last few decades mean that couples now have more effective natural birth control choices.

One of the simplest and cheapest methods of natural birth control is the Billings Method which requires that a woman check her visible cervical mucus as an indicator of fertility. While it is possible to learn this method from books or the Internet, a greater success rate, as high as the pill, can be reached when an instructor is consulted. For the more technologically-minded, fertility computers like Lady-comp and Ova-cue, help track your fertility symptoms in a minute or two each day telling you when intercourse will most likely result in pregnancy.

Unlike most forms of birth control, natural birth control methods involve both the husband and wife, have no side effects and are easily reversible. On the downside, natural birth control does require 100% commitment from the couple and they require discipline and planning. In order to overcome this, many couples practices natural birth control along with other level 3 methods during fertile times.

LEVEL 3: NON-ABORTIVE BIRTH CONTROL

Non-abortive birth control works to prevent the egg and sperm from coming into contact with each other during intercourse and by so doing removing the opportunity for fertilization to occur. Temporary non-abortive birth control for husbands consists of condoms while for wives, it includes the diaphragm, contraceptive sponges, cervical caps and female condoms. Some couples may choose permanent non-abortive birth control which can be achieved either by female sterilization, also called tubal ligation, or vasectomy for men.

Driscoll suggests married couples need to consider two things when considering permanent non-abortive birth control methods. First, they need to examine their motives on the issue and not use it as a means to abandon the blessing of children. Second, Driscoll counsels that the decision should not be made too early in life as a couple may desire to have children later.

LEVEL 4 – POTENTIALLY ABORTIVE BIRTH CONTROL

This level of birth control pertains to all contraceptives which use hormones to override the women's normal cycle and trick the brain into believing she is pregnant which aims at

preventing an egg being released from the ovaries. The most common form is the pill but it can also be administered through patches, implants and injections. The pill is the term used to refer to more than forty types of oral contraceptives taken by more than 100 million women worldwide.

The pill has essentially three mechanisms of birth control. Randy Alcorn, author of the book, called *Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?* summarizes these actions as follows. In the first instance, the pill works to inhibit ovulation, which is its primary means of birth control. Secondly, the pill thickens the cervical mucus making it harder for sperm to reach the egg if ovulation does occur. Third, the pill thins and shrivels the lining of the uterus so that it is unable or less able to facilitate the implantation of the newly fertilized egg.

It is this third action, that requires, careful prayer and consideration for the Christian couple because while the first two actions are contraceptive in nature, the third is potentially abortive as it works to disrupt the life of a newly fertilized egg. Alcorn examined medical research on hormonal birth control and determined that scientific papers suggest that even while on the pill, ovulation occurs in 4 – 15% of all cycles. As a result there is a high chance that eggs may be fertilized but aborted early without a woman ever knowing she was pregnant due to the inhospitable environment in the womb. However, even amongst the medical fraternity there is wide debate about whether or not the inhospitable womb lining leads to less fertilized eggs being implanted than would usually be the case. As a result, each couple needs to decide for themselves whether they are at peace about using the pill.

Despite this controversy, hormonal contraception has become popular over the last half century largely because it is convenient, couples can have sex without planning and if in a committed relationship no barrier methods need to be used. However, many couples find the common side effects of the pill such as uncontrollable mood swings, headaches, weight gain and dizziness ultimately become unmanageable in their relationship and have to look for other forms of birth control.

LEVEL 5 – ABORTIVE BIRTH CONTROL

The final level of birth control refers to those methods which act on a fertilized egg. These birth control measures include medical procedures of various kinds such as abortions, as well as the morning-after pill. Other items that cause abortion are the intrauterine device (IUD) and Norplant, which do not prevent conception but prevent implantation of an already fertilized ovum. Almost all Christian churches agree that this is not an acceptable method of birth control since life begins at conception and that destroying a fertilized egg means taking a human life.

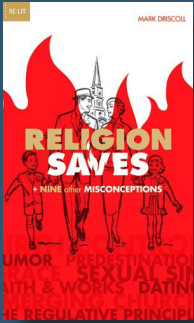
Ultimately, each couple must decide for themselves, after careful prayer, if they want children, if so how many would they like

and how, if at all, they would like to space these children. These questions are not always easily answered and there is no one answer that suits all couples. The same can be said for a couple's choice of birth control. What works for one couple might not work for the next couple and vice versa. Staying open to further conversation, talking to God and friends, and considering children a blessing, are all good steps in choosing a birth control plan that involves God in the choices we make regarding our sexuality and contraception.

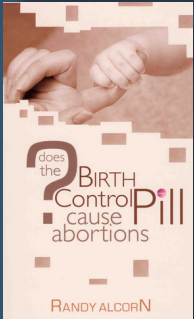


Next we'll take a look at the various Christian perspectives on Contraceptives & Disease Prevention in our Part 3 and final installment of our Contraceptive Series. What do you think about birth control? Join the conversation! Post your thoughts and ideas on the website at www.newidentitymagazine.com.

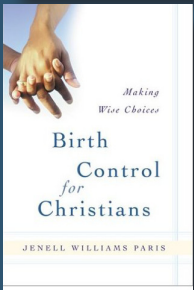
ADDITIONAL READING



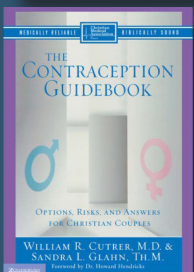
Religion Saves: And Nine Other Misconceptions by Mark Driscoll



Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions? by Randy Alcorn



Birth Control for Christians: Making Wise Choices by Jenell Williams Paris



The Contraception Guidebook: Options, Risks, and Answers for Christian Couples by William R. Cutrer, M.D. & Sandra L. Glahn, Th.M.

JARGON"ON FIRE FOR THE LORD"

Dictionary of Christian Jargon for the Ordinary Person

What does it mean to be on fire? It means that the object on fire is in danger of being consumed. When certain followers of Jesus say that they are "on fire for the Lord" they are acknowledging that their lives are consumed by a passion for Jesus. This passion consumes their thoughts and actions and permeates everything they do.

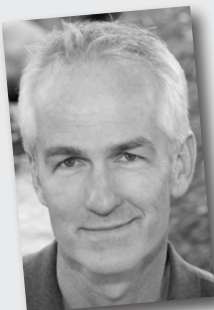
In no way does this encourage the religious fanaticism that we see advocated by certain Christian and non-Christian fundamentalist groups. No. To be "on fire for the Lord" is more similar to an old video game that my friends and I used to play called NBA Jam. After you made a few shots in a row there would be an exclamation from the announcer saying "He's heating up" and then if another consecutive shot was made the same announcer would declare "He's on fire" This was not a literal fire but a metaphor for the focus, drive, and passion that the player was putting into the game. This is what followers of Christ mean when they say they are "on fire for the Lord". It simply means that their focus, drive, and passion are centered on Christ. —Ramon Mayo

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. — Titus 2:11-14 (NIV)

THE COLD, HARD TRUTH

*Entering the workplace in the
21st century.*

Photo by catbagan | Flickr (CC)



TOM KOEL

Tom Koel became a Christian at 28, twenty years ago. He says they've been interesting years and that the Lord has done a lot of work on him. Tom has had several careers spanning manufacturing, teaching, preaching, and the motion picture industry and is sure there will be more. Tom has been blessed to have his sweet wife by his side through it all and has two fantastic boys, ages 10 and 5.

Summer is winding down. Vacation memories are reduced to the sand wedged in the back seats of the van. Youngsters are beginning to act weird (even more weird), twitching, changing up their vocabulary. They can hear the herd calling, assembling. School is about to begin. For many newly graduated young adults, school is distinctly not about to begin. The issue of employment has taken its place. Four years ago the pressure to find a job was conveyed by parents as a heart-to-heart classified conversation where the sentence, "It is time for you to grow up" hit the air several times. Three years into a worldwide recession no one is talking about maturing. The subject is about surviving.

The transition from unemployment to employment has a few key steps. On the time line, the first of these would be the unemployed perspective. What is it like to be in the job market? Next, there's the interview process. Employers interview you and you interview them (sort of). Finally, once you've made it from not working to working, what should you expect from the work environment? Weaved into each of these steps, as into each stage of our lives as Christians, is the issue of where we can expect our faith to impact this process. We will take a look at these steps and hope to offer some encouragement and perspective for job-hunters. We'll also pepper in a few tips for job-hunters, because everyone needs another list.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE IN THE JOB MARKET

These days, any article that hopes to offer encouragement for those entering the job market must start with those who were out if it and now find themselves in it. The worldwide labor market is in a dismal condition. Many people who have had at least one career have found themselves unemployed at a time when they and their families desperately need them to be working. These people should be the first on the mind of anyone speaking to the issue of finding work.

Many of these people are excellent examples of what it means to be living their faith, though they might not say so. They

are being pressed to the very limit of their ability to hope. They did not expect to be here. They did not expect their homes to be on the brink of collapse this late in the game. Many have given up the idea of retirement altogether. The best they are hoping for now is to get the kids through college, or perhaps just keep the home they are in and avoid moving in with their parents at the ripe old age of 40 or 50. Grandparents are pouring out their retirement savings, supplementing their children's meager earnings in hopes that the grandkids can make it through this recession without having missed the opportunities their parents got. Marriages are being pulled apart. Fingers are being pointed, blame is being handed out. Despite the failures, and the feelings of anger, desperation, and depression, they are wrestling with God and their faith daily, hourly.

Christians in this position are living their faith in ways they had never dreamed of. They find themselves confused about their very identity because so much of who we are in this American culture is based on what we do. Our professions have defined us. They have been the basis for our confidence. Now, as we try to find a job, we again wonder who we are. Every day out of work chips away at our confidence until we go numb and find it easier not to send out the resume again. We begin to wonder whether we were ever capable, and we begin to think no decent employer would ever think we were. The next job may be something we never thought we could do and come at a time of life when we thought we would not have to learn a new trick, much less a new career.

That is living on the edge of our faith. Christians in this position are not thinking about evangelizing around the water cooler. They are not wondering about whether the human resources guy across from them goes to church or not, or whether their foreman will care that they have a bible study on Tuesday evenings. They are not thinking about whether this job particularly fits. When you are in this position, you are praying with all your heart to get that job. Once you get it, you will figure it out, once again, by praying with everything you've got. This is what you are hoping for. Clean, uncluttered, desperate hope. No glossy illusions. No lofty goals. Just give me the job, please.

My desire to encourage someone in this position is tempered by a need to not be superficial. I have been in this position. It feels horrible. When we are here we are hoping for one quick action that will set the cart right, that will suddenly put us back in the groove. Get that one job, then everything else will fall into place. Even those who are trying to encourage us are waiting for that one bit of truly good news that they trust will be the end of all the bad news, to be done with the sad times, done with those sad prayer sessions. But that is not how it works. Life is complicated, and the road back is rocky and unsure. In fact, looking at it as a road back is misleading. We are not going back to good times, we are going forward to different good times. Usually there are several challenges that have to be met and overcome. You will find, when it truly is all over and your feet are firmly in good times again, that you were forced to exhibit more faith, endurance, and patience than you ever thought possible over a very long period of time. You will be amazed at how far you have travelled. So do not let your guard down. Do not let the bad times distort your perspective – losing

your job or home is not at all like losing your family or your loved ones or your life. Lots of people pick up and move and start all over. Lots of people humble themselves and have to accept charity from others. Lots of people improvise for a very long time. Living in a hotel, or a car, is not the end of life, it truly isn't. People who say they can't survive having experienced such a horrible circumstance have missed the point — they already have survived. And again, do not let your guard down. Do not let the good times distort your perspective. Rejoice in your victories but do not suppose that another challenge is not approaching. Celebrate tonight, because tomorrow is another fight, another obstacle threatens to overrun your progress. Pray for perspective as well as endurance. Be thankful that all these hardships are not the end of your life, or the lives of your loved ones, or the end of your family. These twisted, difficult experiences will become the very strong foundations of your life after the desert. But it is a long vast desert. We are survivors.

Let's turn to the recent graduates or those who find themselves for the first or second time attempting to enter the job market with the hopes of establishing a career. The American middle class mentality behind the graduation season and that last effortless summer stand opposed to our current reality. Graduation is promoted as a celebration of the hard work of school. In fact it is the way we fill up our young adults with encouragement, confidence, enthusiasm, and optimism for the coming challenges of working for a living. It hopes to give the graduate a good running start at what will be a challenging job interview process and a more challenging entrance to the work place. A lot of fantasies will be shattered in those first few years and one needs some optimism before heading into that battle. A wedding does the same for those entering a marriage. It is not that marriage is not what it is cracked up to be, it is just that it is not easy. It is fantastically rewarding, but it is never easy. In the same way the birth of the baby provides the excitement and optimism required to begin facing the challenges of actually raising a family — although it should be said that at least for the mom the big moment is much different than walking across the stage to receive the diploma or saying "I do."

THE JOB INTERVIEW

In those months leading up to the first round of interviews, knowing young adults as I do, it is common to fantasize about the work place, with its quick promotions, its grey haired bosses cornering you for your opinion, and, of course, the cute girls and guys at nearly every cubicle. And even in the young adult groups at church, equal time is given to visualizing all the great work for Christ that would be accomplished by eager young Christians as they stepped through the large glass doorways of twenty story office buildings in slow motion. A force to be reckoned with, a young, well-taught Christian would be normal if he or she had put a list together of requirements expected from a hiring company that would properly align with both faith and good intentions.

When I was young, I had it in my head that entering the workforce was like entering society, like a rite of passage, as if

the workforce wanted me in there, and was better for having me. Without me there would be a weakness in the force. This idea works very well for institutions like the family, and the community. It was quite a shock to be told at the first job interview that I had no experience and that my schedule wasn't going to work. "Bye, good luck." Well, that wasn't very much like a family at all.

This is why I thought it would be best to hit the note of reality hard at the beginning. You can imagine that a lot of the lofty ideas we have regarding finding the perfect job simply evaporate in practice. This is really the best thing, though, as I will explain later. The important thing to keep in mind now is a clear concept of what it means to work for a company.

All that said, here are some practical tips. I don't pretend to be an expert in this. I'm just *old* and have had to do it more than I'd like to say.

MAXIMIZE YOUR STRENGTHS

Don't feel you have to get a job outside of your strengths. Lean toward your strengths. Some say you need to stretch yourself and get out of your comfort zone. Any job, if taken seriously, especially because of the people in it, will get you out of your comfort zone. In terms of being valuable to others, lean to your strengths. If you hate long tedious work, don't take a job as a programmer. If you are really not good with strangers, don't take a job where you have to cold-call people. And don't over spiritualize this. I'm not talking about picking companies based on your spiritual gifts of mercy, love, etc. We are just talking about those things you are good at, those things that everyone gets a sprinkling of just for being alive in the world.

GO WITH YOUR GUT

Though I've said a lot, and will say a lot about sucking it up and dealing with the work environment, I am not suggesting you tolerate racial prejudices, sexual harassment, discrimination in any way, or a work culture clearly dangerous to your own. I had a sister-in-law interview at a place that kept a keg of beer on hand in the break room. I know many of you might be emailing me to death about where that job can be found, but for her it wasn't the right thing.

If a place feels wrong and you've been praying about it, then don't work there. Remember, the interview process is two-sided. You should go into the interview with questions about the company. Find out for yourself what they do and how they think.

GET THE MONEY GOING IN

If you have a bottom line number you *have* to make, don't let a smooth talking manager suggest there are *real growth opportunities*. There aren't. You may get to be a manager in a year, but you'll just be earning \$0.15/hr more. Raises come very, very slowly. Almost certainly your biggest raise will come when your

current employer refuses to give you one and you find another job with your new resume that the old employer helped you build. This is probably the tip you will be most tempted to disregard if you find an otherwise fun job and a very charismatic person wooing you about all the great possibilities, but mark my words, get the money going in or you won't get it at all.

PUT UP A GOOD "FIGHT"

When you go in for your interview, go in prepared. Take it seriously. Get the resume sparkling. Get dressed. Get cleaned up. Shave. Don't go in there looking like you think you are doing them a favor. Something that really bothers me these days is our tendency to say "if it's God's will..." when we have not done all we can. If you want the job, fight hard for it. If you don't, then don't put it on God.

KNOW WHEN IT IS APPROPRIATE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR FAITH

Remember that those hiring you don't care about your Christianity. They don't hate it and they don't love it. Mentioning your faith in the interview could only be helpful if the human resources person was educated, because it is taught in business school that persons of faith, any faith, are more likely to fulfill obligations and behave ethically. However, you will find plenty of Christian managers who will be the first to tell you that some of the worst employees they have had were professing Christians. Remember, we don't live in a culture that hasn't heard about Christ. They are not going to be blown away by the Gospel story. Some of them will actually know the Gospel and the rest will think they do even if they think that just because they've seen a Bible on Grandma's nightstand.

BEING A CHRISTIAN ON THE JOB

Primarily, your job, all jobs, come down to you, the worker, earning a lot more for the company that you are being paid. That is the nuts and bolts of it. They agree to pay you after you make them lots of money. Furthermore, they have a very good idea of how you will do this for them, and they will show you. They are not asking you to show them anything. And, it is arrogant to think otherwise. After all, they have built a company and are so successful that they can afford to hire someone. You have not built a company, are not expert in their field, and it is you that need to be hired.

Probably all this seems harsh, especially when you may have so many graduation cards telling you that great things await. Great things *do* await. The great adventure of your life awaits. Many, I suppose most, of the middle-aged Christians who are out of work in these economic times but otherwise would not have been, are finding out that God intends for our lives to be an adventure from start to finish. And the adventure they are living, trying desperately to hold their lives and families together, is more unpredictable and dangerous than any Hollywood could have

penned. Great tragedies go with great victories. You are being thrust into life, thrust face to face with people you do not know and would not have chosen to know. In all probability you won't be evangelizing in the break room, you'll probably be trying to avoid the insanely obnoxious co-worker who *never* does any work who hangs out there.

The way that you will show your spiritual beliefs at work will almost certainly be like this: You will show up on time every day. You will never ask someone to take a shift for you. You will finish all your work at a very high standard no matter how excruciatingly boring or pointless it is. You will not talk at work, but only on breaks. You will never forget that your duty is to make this company money by doing exactly what they say, over and over again. Act like you want the place to succeed and be the most successful, lucrative business in the county. That's for starters.

Don't be a push over. Stand up for what you think is right, but keep a check on your anger and always realize you are the employee, not the boss. When the disagreement is over, let it go. Whether your point is recognized or not, go back to work and pray for a cheerful heart. When you have trained yourself to do that, you will, through lots of prayer, silently, without them knowing it, pray for those around you.

Then, one day, if you are lucky (it may be years down the road), someone there will ask you how it is that you stay so cheerful in such a challenging place.

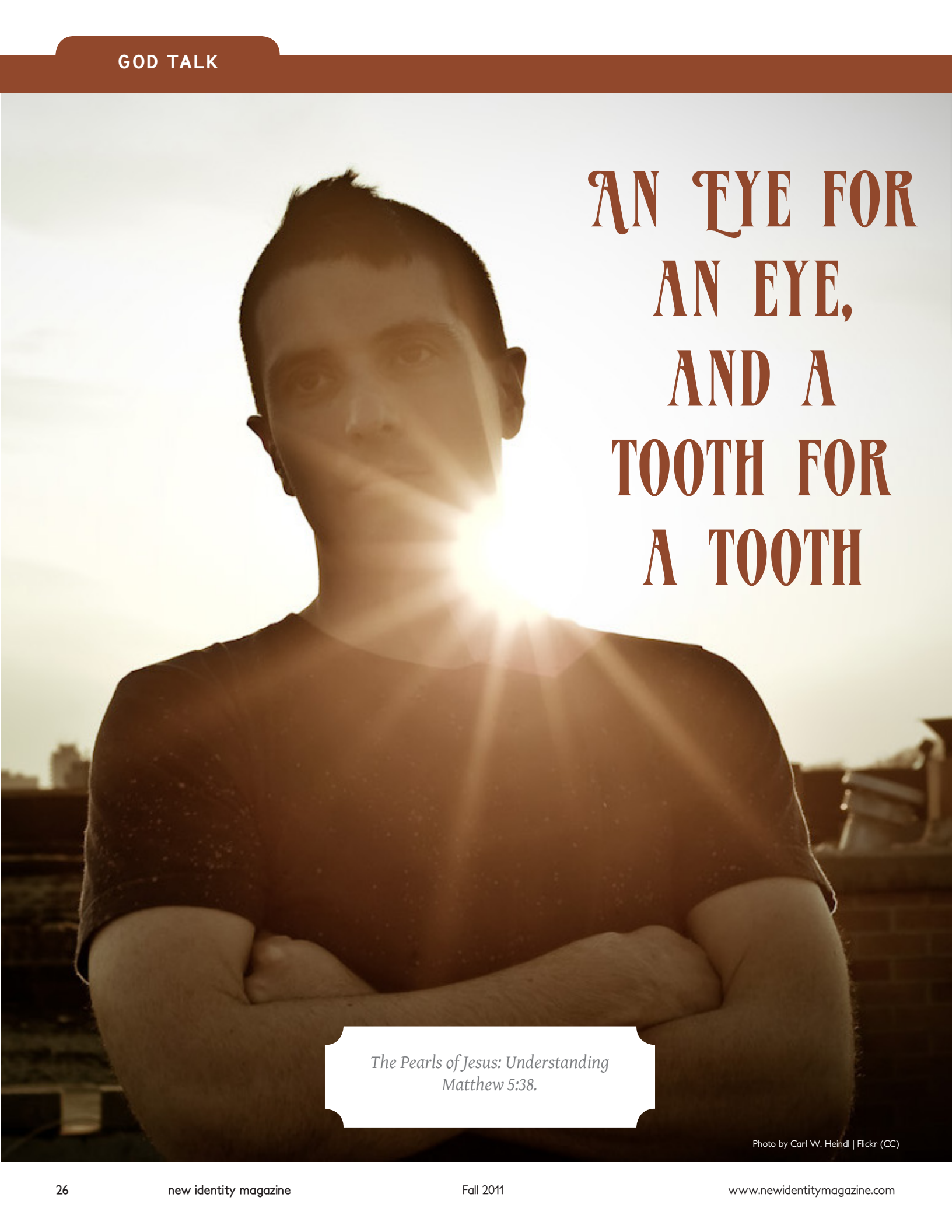
This is a tricky point. I do not believe in pretending to be cheerful. I've tried it and I usually fail before the hour is up. Sometimes we Christians think that by masking our real feelings and being all fakey, we somehow fool people into thinking we're nice. We don't. Being cheerful in the workplace - or anywhere - is a work that Christ does in us, and, like all his work, can only take place when we are honest, not pretending. I said this is an adventure. You'll have to wrestle with these people. You will be wrong much of the time, but this is Christ working on you.

The irony is that the workplace will work on you far more than you will work on it, like all close environments. The same and more can be said about the family. Whoever said the family was a place of peace and harmony never had one. It took G. K. Chesterton in his book *Heretics* to point out that very obvious fact to me. The family is a fantastic institution, the best, and it is where you learn more about life and people than anywhere else, if you will stay in it and face all that tension and stress.

If you want to create a stir in the workplace, then treat that dungeon like the adventure it is and give it everything you've got. That kind of enthusiasm will freak everybody out. But you can't fake it.

My tough-love advice is meant to temper the worker that has an exaggerated sense of where they will enter this process and a conversely understated sense of just how big the adventure will be for them personally. We forget that a real adventure must have an unexpected challenge at every turn, it must be risky and it must be hard.

So with that in mind, go forth young - and old - Christian soldier. May God bless you, and I hope you get that job! 

A man with short dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark t-shirt, stands with his arms crossed. He is looking directly at the camera. The background is a bright sunset or sunrise over a city skyline, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a strong lens flare effect that partially obscures his face. The overall tone is warm and golden.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH

*The Pearls of Jesus: Understanding
Matthew 5:38.*

Photo by Carl W. Heindl | Flickr (CC)



NATHAN RUTAN

Nathan Rutan is a recent graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. In his spare time Nathan enjoys keeping up on technology, spending time with his family, exercising and working on a math-less theory of gravitation which he developed on a napkin many years ago.

I was reading a news article the other day about another country in which a criminal case was to be settled according to the maxim “eye for an eye.” I started thinking about the scripture in Matt. 5:38 where Jesus says “You have heard it said an “eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth...” The more I thought about this scripture, and the phrase “eye for an eye,” the more I realized that this scripture is misunderstood for a variety of reasons.

It's not just that this particular scripture is misunderstood in the sense that people think Jesus is endorsing violence, the misunderstanding is really deeper in that many people simply dismiss this particular scripture and the cluster of scriptures that it's found in altogether. Of course, there are some that very simplistically use this scripture as a proof-text for violence to say something like “see, Jesus says ‘an eye for an eye...’” But reading a few more lines one quickly realizes that Jesus is refuting this kind of thinking.

Now, what about those that simply skip over the Sermon on the Mount, the section of scripture where this verse is contained? It's a difficult issue to tie up in just a few pages, but the problem can be outlined by looking at a few key areas of thinking regarding our scripture in question, and the Sermon on the Mount.

For much of the earlier history of the Church, the gospel of Matthew was considered the gospel *par excellence*. Although Matthew was *par excellence* of the “Synoptic Gospels”, which consisted of Matthew, Mark and Luke, it was John that was most widely read and used by the church for more than a thousand years. Recently, as a result of more rigorous scrutiny of the biblical texts, most scholars understand Mark to be the earliest gospel and partly the inspiration for the book of Matthew. Even though this is the case, the gospel of Matthew really stands alone in both its scope and presentation of the ethical teachings of Jesus.

But much of what Jesus admonishes in the Sermon on the Mount seems so unattainable, so difficult indeed that many just

assume that Jesus is simply pointing out that we can't possibly live up to the standards that he sets forth. Actually, this idea has been offered many times throughout the centuries as an explanation for why we can't possibly adopt the ethics of Jesus as laid out in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' teachings have routinely been dismissed as simply “high ideals” or “hard sayings” by many theologians, writers and scholars.

The problem with dismissing the Sermon on the Mount and the ethical teachings of Jesus, is that we end up filling the void with some other ethic. But what if the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount weren't really such high ideals after all? What if the teachings of Jesus were meant to be practical and applicable to everyday life? There are a growing number of scholars that think this is the case. I'll take a quick look at some of the more recent developments in how to potentially see the Sermon on the Mount in a new light. In order to do so, we need to refer to Matt. 5:38 through Matt. 5:42 as a unit. After introducing the old saying “an eye for an eye...” in verse 38, Jesus moves toward his own teaching in verse 39 by saying that even though the previous idea may have been the norm at one time, he commands that we should “...not resist an evil person.” Furthermore, Jesus says that if we are struck on the right cheek we should turn and offer the other one, if we are sued for one piece of clothing, give an additional one as well, and finally if we are asked to go one mile, go the second too. It's not hard to see why some would think this kind of teaching impossible to maintain.

Recently, a scholar named Glen Stassen has proposed that our reading of these sections of instruction in the Sermon on the Mount have been misdirected. Stassen says that, in effect, we have grouped some of these verses together in the wrong way and misunderstood some of the grammatical mechanics of the Greek.

According to Stassen, much of the ethical instruction in Matthew comes in “triads” or groups of three with the final climax of the instruction in the third section. The problem with the way we've been reading and translating Matthew comes in the way many scholars have grouped the teachings in the sermon on the mount into “dyads” or groups of two instead of three as is the norm throughout the book of Matthew.

Though not all scholars agree with Stassen about how scripture should be grouped, it's something interesting to consider. When we group the blocks of teaching in the Sermon into threes, Stassen says we find something that he calls “Transforming Initiatives.” In other words, we find not “high ideals” or “hard sayings” but something that starts out with a “traditional teaching” then moves to a “vicious cycle” and ends with a “transforming initiative.” Let's take a look at our unit of scripture for an example. In verse 38 we are given the traditional teaching “You have heard it said ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” In verse 39 we see the “vicious cycle” if we take a deeper look at the underlying Greek.

What if the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on The Mount weren't really such high ideals after all? What if the teachings of Jesus were meant to be practical and applicable to everyday life?

A number of different scholars have pointed out that this particular verse would be better translated as something closer to “do not retaliate revengefully by evil means...” rather than “do not resist an evil person.” This is due to the translation of the Greek term *antithemi*, which is where we get the word “resist,” as primarily a military word which carries the idea of violent military conflict. The same term in a different form, *antistenei*, can be seen in Ephesians 6:13, which is full of military themes as the writer exhorts one to put on the spiritual armor of God and “stand” (*antistenei*) against the enemy and so on.

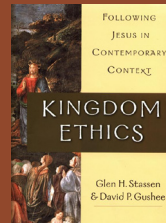
So, if the “vicious cycle” is understood as violent conflict against an evil person, the “transforming initiative” can be seen in Matt. 5:40-42. Here we are shown what to do. We are to turn the other cheek, to give our clothing, to go the extra mile. But some point out that this almost seems like an invitation to lie down and become the victim of an abusive situation. And again, a closer look at the text will reveal some interesting insight.

Here, a look at the background of this particular section is helpful. In an article titled *Beyond Just War and Pacifism: Jesus’ Nonviolent Way*, Walter Wink, a biblical scholar and author, says “part of the confusion surrounding these sayings arises from the failure to ask who Jesus’ audience was.” Wink goes on to explain that from his research into the culture of Jesus’ time, he interpreted that to be struck on the right cheek implied a backhanded blow from the right hand since the left hand was considered perpetually unclean and never used. Furthermore, the idea being that a blow from a backhand strike did not happen in a fistfight, but was rather something that a superior did to a subordinate.

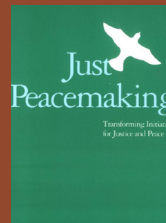
So, let’s take a closer look at what Jesus is saying and who he is talking to. If Jesus is speaking with subordinates, those without power, he is instructing them to actively and *non-violently* make the statement that they are also human beings worthy of dignity. To turn the left cheek after being backhanded on the right was a statement of human dignity according to many scholars. In essence, many believe that Jesus was instructing the powerless on how they might assert their God-given dignity in the face of a power system that was looking to dominate and subordinate them. It’s like Jesus was telling the powerless to *non-violently* stand up and say “Hey, I know you just asserted your power over me with a backhand to the face, but I’m a human being made in the image of God just like you...and we’re actually both equals.” The key here is that the powerless are making a stand and transforming the situation, but not with violence so they are not perpetuating the vicious cycle of violence.

In conclusion, I wonder if any new light has been shed on the scripture in question for you. What do you think about the possibility that Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount might be practical and useable in a daily setting, rather than esoteric “high ideals?” I certainly think it’s possible, but it may require a little effort on our part. We may have to dig a little and be willing to get a little uncomfortable at times. But if we do start to dig, we may just find some pearls out there in the field worth enough, and transforming enough, to trade everything for. 🧐

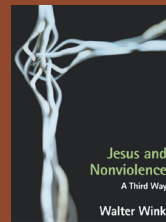
FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION ON THIS TOPIC, CHECK OUT SOME OF THESE RESOURCES:



Glen Stassen
Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context



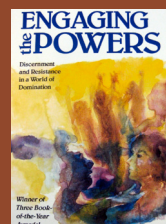
Glen Stassen
Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War



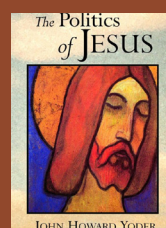
Walter Wink
Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way



Stanley Hauerwas
The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics



Walter Wink
Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination



John Howard Yoder
The Politics of Jesus

Firm Foundation

A story about one couple's desire to help in the aftermath of Japan's recent tragic earthquake and tsunami.

Photos by Alexa Wan



A team of engineers solemnly collect measurements for a restructuring effort at Miss Veedol beach, the historic 1931 take-off site of the first non-stop trans-pacific flight.

With well over an estimated and still escalating 300 billion dollars worth of infrastructure loss, the March 2011 Miyagi Quake has become the most damaging natural disaster ever recorded. Here, a local farm woman surveys her land as dozens of volunteers sort through heaps of rubble and mangled debris.



MICHAEL & PANDORA WAN

Michael and Pandora Wan are an American couple living in Misawa; a small beachside town in the Aomori Prefecture of Northern Japan. The U.S. military base that Michael is attached to received an enormous flux of international aid after the 9.0 quake, serving as a major access point for aircraft landing and distribution to the surrounding area.

If you've ever had a medical scare where your life flashed before your eyes and you didn't know if tomorrow was guaranteed, or if you've grieved at a funeral and vowed to live life with more urgency and gratitude, you can probably relate to the emotions my wife and I recently felt after living through Japan's worst earthquake and tsunami in its history. When a terrifying disaster strikes and the "firmness of life" literally shakes beneath your feet, or you're getting "washed away" in an overwhelming torrent, urgency toward life is not difficult to muster.

For the Japanese, however, firmness of life seems to be an especially temporary notion. Their island nation sits astride huge plate tectonic faults, which has created stunning natural beauty with mountains, lakes, rugged coastlines, and many natural hot springs; but along with this natural beauty and its wild spirit comes a steady reminder that life is unpredictable at best. Perhaps because of this, we've noticed the Japanese take natural disasters almost in stride with a stoic resignation. They show a collective mindset for enduring suffering, which is why so few looted, why so many stood calmly in line for hours to buy rationed groceries, and why the Fukushima nuke plant workers received empathy from the public, and were viewed as "doing their duty" in spite of near certain suicidal odds of surviving.

A global collective mindset for relief and recovery was also felt by many around the world, as international aid poured in from concerned governments and citizens from many places. U.S. military personnel took the heavy-lifting role in so many areas through sustained efforts that continue to this day, and Americans should be proud of their country's contribution - especially that from religious organizations - so we can say with confidence and without a self-shaming conscience we understand that "to whom much has been given, much will be required." All in all, it's been an experience of a lifetime for us.



“The challenge is to spread the energy and intensity over time so that love for and interest in others is sustained.”

The obvious application for me is a reminder that life is unpredictable and I should live more like today could be my last. I should keep short accounts with people, speak the truth boldly, and regularly tell those I love and care about how important they are to me. Another less obvious application is that I want to be energized for sustained operations (evidence of my military background) in all of life so my urgency has endurance. I say this because another understandable, yet curious reality is also present here in Japan: disasters provide a *raison d'être* for sacrificial good will and religious evangelical zeal. The challenge is to spread the energy and intensity over time so that love for and interest in others is sustained in practical authenticity. In other words, what will my good will and

zeal look like over the coming months, next year, or over my lifetime? Of course it might moderate, but if it does subside, I want to have a “new normal” level that’s up at least a notch or two. The fun and encouraging part of this is all of us can use God’s energy to sustain us! “He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:28-29). Nothing like working hard with someone else’s energy....

One last thought: Charlie Sheen’s opinion, NATO’s bombing of Libya, and America’s own unfortunate natural disasters quickly shifted the spotlight of interest away from Japan, though of course the disaster was, and is, far from over. In my own life, I want to act in trust and faith in all I do, and I also want to act with proper urgency when God graciously puts something obviously in front of my face to do for his kingdom. I don’t want to be distracted from bold action by wrongly “loving the things of this world” (1 John 2:15) so I can have a clear view ahead, whether it’s just for today or for years to come. And most of all, I want to venture out each day sustained by God’s strength and energy. May your adventure be similarly blessed. 

LiNK

*An organization helping to rescue, house,
and resettle oppressed North Korean
refugees.*

Photo by Mait Jürjado | Flickr (CC)

STEVEN BUTWELL



As a pastor and missionary, Steven's zealous ambition in life is to preach the Gospel message of Jesus to anyone and everyone he sees or knows. A former atheist, Steven came into relationship with Jesus at age 19 as a result of a vision where he met Jesus face to face. Since then Steven has devoted his life to serving Jesus wholeheartedly. Steven's passions include reading the Bible, writing, travelling and public speaking.

God created humanity perfect, but we disobeyed the command of God not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and because of this sin, we could no longer be in the presence of a perfect God (Romans 3:23). The consequence of our disobedience became the continuation of sin in the world and the reality of death, both eternal and physical. By God's grace and love for us he sought to change the fate of humanity by giving his perfect son Jesus Christ as a free gift, with a desire that everyone be saved from death and reunited with him (John 3:16, Romans 6:23, 2 Peter 3:9). This gift was a perfect Jesus who took our sin upon himself, died for all humanity, defeated death and became the only mediator between God and people (Romans 5:8, 1 Timothy 2:5-6). If one wants to receive the gift of eternal life rather than death they would confess with their mouth aloud that they too have sinned, and believe in their heart that this Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9) and turn from their selfish ways to ways instead that glorify God (repent), accepting the forgiveness of their sins through Jesus' sacrifice, and receive the Holy Spirit who works within us to help us conform not to the ways of this world but instead to imitate the perfection of Christ. (Acts 2:38, Romans 12:2)

Our relationship with God is not reconciled apart from Jesus. The Bible teaches that it is by grace we have been saved through faith, and not by our own doing - no amount of works, rule keeping, or list checking can repair our relationship with God. John Calvin, a theologian and pastor during the Protestant Reformation said, "It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies is never alone." A person who has accepted the gift of Jesus should never cease in speaking about him and sharing the gospel of grace and love that he has extended to us, but there can also be ways of expressing our gratitude and adoration of Christ in physical and tangible ways to bless others and mirror his care and compassion.

"The cry for mercy fell on two passionate hearts determined to shout from the rooftops what was whispered in the inner rooms for so long; the North Korea tribulation."

It says in James 2:14-17, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." One organization that puts these words into action is LiNK, and the work they are doing to liberate North Korean refugees.

It started with the broken cries of countless North Koreans. An earnest plea for freedom, food, money, and protection they never knew were obtainable. An underground filled with slaves waiting in uncertainty of their future, only to emerge from the darkness to be met with family separation, capture, slavery, sex trafficking or even death. An untold number of mothers torn from their children, their future almost certainly in bondage. There was no hope. In a ruthless country, these families sought refuge by whatever means necessary. A decade slowly crept by. The cries of sorrow and affliction continued to fall on deaf ears until their laments were heard and a LiNK established.

The cry for mercy fell on two passionate hearts determined to shout from the rooftops what was whispered in the inner rooms for so long; the North Korea tribulation. The crisis refused to remain in North Korea. In determining to be heard, the crisis lodged itself in two hearts. In hopes of raising more awareness and gaining more momentum, the two returned home and immediately shared with a group of young students. As a result, an organization fervently seeking freedom for North Koreans had its genesis. This is LiNK.

LiNK redefines the North Korea crisis through creative storytelling while concurrently providing emergency relief to North Korean refugees and pursuing an end to the human rights crisis. LiNK illustrates kindness and mercy to the countless refugees by protecting, educating, and assisting them to freedom. The end result: *empowerment to live new lives.*

LiNK's mission is straightforward: *Rescue, house, and resettle oppressed North Korean refugees.* The mission is straightforward, the process is tedious. The endless flow of refugees from North Korea is enough to tempt anyone to lose heart. LiNK perseveres, knowing the words of Jesus can be trusted as truth; *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

Only in knowing Jesus can we have peace. Only in Jesus do we find strength to overcome trials and tribulations.

The reality of the situation in North Korea is this: *there is no freedom.* An almost unfathomable notion for my American mind. A life devoid of freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, physical movement or religion is not merely a notion for the North Koreans, it is reality. A natural reaction for us would be to flee. The same is true for our brothers and sisters in North Korea. LiNK's reaction: *rescue and provide for until lives are resettled and freedom*

is realized.

In response to the countless number of children that are lost or abandoned in the escape to freedom LiNK offers shelters of refuge in both China and Southeast Asia. LiNK's shelters provide protection along with opportunity for an education, food, transportation to school and necessary paperwork that enables them to continue living without risk of exploitation or being sold into bondage. The shelters are resettlement sensitive, meaning wherever the refugee is to be resettled they are educated in the practice of that specific culture.

The increasing number of rescued refugees needs are met via LiNK's Liberty house. The housing provides secure passage to resettlement for rescued refugees. Resettlement anywhere is difficult and the volunteers of LiNK know this. Included at the Liberty house are: *case management services, micro-grants, scholarships, translation training, tutoring, mentorship, and rehabilitation with career counseling services.* In addition, LiNK offers fellowship and internship programs which provide refugees coming out of North Korea an opportunity to aide fellow countrymen in need.

Their stories must be told. The outlet of creative and social media coupled with their stories of oppression are the driving force behind raising awareness of the North Korea injustice. LiNK hosts a national awareness tour to ensure the stories of oppression be told. The desired outcome is that countless more people would board this already moving locomotive with aspirations to end the North Korean struggle against tyranny.

A united voice against the continuing struggle in North Korea is crucial. As a non-profit organization LiNK functions solely on the income of private sponsors. It is always helpful to donate. If you are led further, the next step would be to contact LiNK and see how your voice can become part of a collective one wherever you are. A number of different opportunities are available. If you are committed to one place, join a chapter. If you are a road warrior and love the sense of adventure, become a nomad. If you like to host or speak, take a national or corporate tour. If you express yourself through art, become a street artist or raise awareness through local fundraisers. Regardless of what your niche is, there are several different ways to raise up volunteers, awareness and financial support for LiNKs work with the North Korean refugees. The most effective way to begin would be to contact LiNK through their website: www.LiNKglobal.org. Here you can gather all the information necessary to begin.

The truth is that nothing any organization or person can physically or tangibly do will last. Only Christ can bring that kind of peace and reconciliation. I know if Jesus is the focal point in LiNK's efforts it will prove eternally fruitful. The rescue, housing and resettlement of battered North Koreans will take great patience and endurance through many hard trials and tests. I encourage you to be praying for our brothers and sisters in need overseas. The volunteers at LiNK and the refugees they are rescuing need your prayers and they need Jesus in their lives. Please pray they would receive both, in abundance.



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ERICA MONGÉ-GREER

Erica Mongé-Greer is a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary with a MA in Biblical Studies and Ancient Near Eastern Language and Literature. She teaches at Vanguard University and Life Pacific College, while writing occasionally for freelance publication. Erica lives in Pasadena with her husband, Joshua, and two children: Caleb and Emma.

The Ten Commandments, found in Exodus chapter 20, come before a long list of legal texts intended to provide a base of just activity for the Israelite people. The Israelites were only just freed from generations of oppression under the powerful Egyptian dynasty at the time they received the Ten Commandments. They were instructed to build a community of their own, one in which God was worshipped exclusively. For the Egyptians, the Pharaoh was a god-king, he was considered a son of a god, born from human and deity both. The idea that a nation's king was also connected to a god was very common in the world of the Bible. God desired a different type of community for the Israelites. He wanted them to work together in a more egalitarian societal structure. This meant that everyone would contribute to the community; everyone had an equal share in both giving and receiving.

In the first article, we looked at the tenth commandment and learned about God's vision for people to live in a community wherein everyone shared freely and no one was jealous. In this second article of the series, we will examine the ninth

commandment, which says: you shall not testify against your neighbor as a lying witness. This commandment is worded in such a way that it refers to a trial. A witness is a person who gives a testimonial that certain events took place in a certain way. What value is there in a witness who does not speak honestly before the rulers of a trial? None! All members of a community must act properly according to the same standard. Honesty is part of a higher moral code that exists in God's community.

SO WHAT IS HONESTY?

Many of us have grown up in a culture that acknowledges and teaches the virtue of telling the truth. This is a principle that agrees with, may even have its foundation in, the ninth commandment. It seems though that truth telling does not always mean the same thing as "do not testify falsely." While truth is an excellent virtue, this commandment is more likely related to this old English proverb: "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." This proverb presumes a mutual understanding of what is nice or good, that is, what is right. If we look at this from the primary value of building community together, the ninth commandment encourages us to do right in our words toward those in our community. Doing right by our neighbors is also consistent with the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. For Christians, the value of community cannot be underestimated.

The virtue of this commandment that instructs us through the story of the Israelites is not found in the act of lying. While our neighbor may be difficult to identify, each one of us must strive to live honestly before God and before others. Jesus told a parable once in answer to the question of "who is my neighbor?" and those who heard realized that the answer was more difficult to swallow than they could have predicted. The answer was that even those they considered an enemy to their culture and values were their neighbors. We are called to live honest lives so that our community, God's community, may prosper. 

THE 9TH COMMANDMENT

Erica Mongé-Greer looks at the 9th Commandment – You shall not testify against your neighbor as a lying witness and how it applies today.



Back to School Essentials

Eco-friendly tools for your new semester.

Photo by Jason Verwey | Flickr (CC)

Whether you're starting a new semester after a long break or just finished summer school, you can go back to school better than ever - as a better caretaker of God's creation and resources, and with a lighter footstep on your campus. The best way, of course, is to reuse what you already have from last semester, but if it's worn out and needs replacing, here are just a few eco-friendly school supplies that can really make a difference. -*Cailin Henson*

Light Green

1. Energy Star Laptop



Prices vary, Energystar.gov



\$5.29, Officedepot.com

2. Biodegradable Pens



\$9.95, Rei.com

3. BPA-Free Nalgene Bottle



\$9.00, Ecojot.com

4. Recycled Paper Notebook



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5. Ecogear Recycled Backpack



\$6.29, Staples.com

6. Recycled Plastic binder



7. Bring Your Own Breakfast/Lunch with reusable utensils

Light Green VS. Dark Green

Dark Green

1. Refurbished & Energy Star Laptop



Prices vary, Energystar.gov



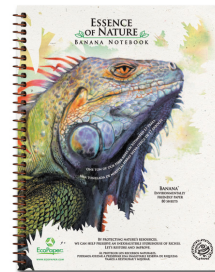
\$2.49, Pilotpen.us

2. Recycled & Refillable Pens



\$17.95, 27oz, a variety of colors and sizes, Kleenkanteen.com

3. Stainless Steel Kleen Kanteen



\$9.79, Ecopaper.com

4. Recycled Treeless Banana Paper Notebook

5. Sun-Plugged Bag to recharge your phone/ipod while you're walking to class



\$159, Sun-plugged.com



\$3.49 each, Rebinder.com

6. Recycled paper binder



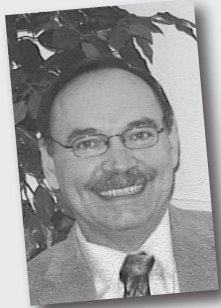
7. BYOB/L in reusable Lunchskins

\$8.95, Lunchskins.com

God the Gardener

*A look at the pruning and cultivation
techniques God uses to guide us in
goodness.*

Photo by Caillin Henson



DELBERT TEACHOUT

Delbert Teachout has been married for 35 years. He is currently retired from military and civilian careers. Ordained into ministry in 2002, Delbert is now pursuing freelance writing as a ministry.

In John 15:1 Jesus says that God is the gardener and he prunes every branch that does not produce fruit. A person stuck in his or her ways of sin is like a prickly shrub growing a lot of branches with no fruit. These branches must be removed so good fruit can grow. In the same way as a bush is unable to prune itself, a person who is living in sin is unable to remove all the unfruitful branches in life. Paul described this condition in chapter seven of Romans when he called himself a wretched man and realized only Jesus can change him.

Jesus provides the essential elements for growth; he gives us his Word (the Bible) for fertilizer, other believers for sunshine, and the Holy Spirit for water. When our roots begin to receive this new water, sunshine, and fertilizer, new branches begin to grow. This time the branches are not prickly bushes, but beautiful new branches adorned with the fruit of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self control," (Galatians 5:22). Our old acquaintances will marvel at who we have become. When we allow God to be the gardener, he will shape us into his design.

In our old life there are branches of pride, anger, shame, and guilt. There is isolation, procrastination, and intoxication. These branches do not produce nice fruit. There is the memory of all the broken lies, alibis, and all the times we were sincere in promising to never sin again, only to sin again a few minutes later. We can never remove those hurtful branches with our own strength.

God has to get out his clippers and start chopping. As he sheds branch after prickly branch, there is great pain in our heart and mind. Our pain seems unbearable. We may feel that the pain is not worth the results. Our mind seems dull. Our heart hurts so badly we want to shout, or cry, but no words come and neither do the tears. We wonder when this will ever be over. It hurts so badly because we grew these branches for our entire lives. We let them grow, untrimmed, and ugly. We have branches of hatred, resentment, lost opportunities, broken relationships;

branches mixing with branches mixing with branches into a jumbled mess of prickly, spiny, repulsive, bits of personality. Let's face it, as an unrepentant sinner we are ugly!

The emotional state of a sinner is ambivalence. On one hand our self esteem is at its lowest while on the other hand our pride is at its highest. It's hard to describe the feelings. A part of us wants to change, but the sinful part of us wants more of the same. That is why we pass on so many opportunities to give our lives to Jesus. The only time we have fun is when our minds deceive us, yet we know deep in our souls we are totally miserable. What a horrible way to feel. Can we break away from the thing that has a hold on us? Despite the pain and guilt, deep inside is the desire to sin again, and again. What a poor lost soul!

Despite all our thoughts, words, and behaviors that are displeasing to God, he loves us so much that he desires us to spend eternity with him. He gave us the only way to get to heaven: belief in Jesus. When we begin to think we are so bad there is no hope, we need to remember that God loves us. There is not a weed or branch that can escape the pruning shears of the master gardener. He who died on a cross does not want anyone to go to hell.

God's love offers more joy, more peace, more pleasure than can ever be obtained by any sinful gratification we can experience or imagine. When we let go and allow him to trim, to prune, plant, and perfect us, we grow to full maturity with much fruit.

"The Lord watches over all who love him" (Ps.145:20). This verse means he is not giving us a sideways glance. Nor is it a casual glance. It is a determined look. He has all his attention fixed on us. It means that he is aware of everything we do, everything we think, and everything we say. It means more than he knit us together and formed us while we were still in our mother's wombs. It means more than before we were born he knew us (Ps.139). It means he loves

everyone he has made. It means he is near to those who call on him. It means he fulfills the desires of those who fear him. It means he hears the desperate, pleading, cry of the sinner and saves him or her.

God is awesome. He will give us wisdom when we do not know what to do. He will give us direction when we do not know where to go. He will give us hope when we are down and out. He will pick us up when we fall. He will forgive us when we sin. He has his eye on us. He knows our faults, our weaknesses, our triggers. He knows who we have been, who we are, and who we will be, and he loves us anyway. When he is finished

with us, we bear large beautiful hibiscus-like flowers that grow into juicy delicious watermelon-like fruit.

Our reasonable response to his love is to let ourselves be set free from those branches that bind and confine us. But in order to be set free we have to let go. Letting go can cause grief and pain as we get rid of all the ugly, unfruitful branches. We will have to give up those friends who are no good for us. We will have to give up

"Jesus provides the essential elements for growth; he gives us his Word (the Bible) for fertilizer, other believers for sunshine, and the Holy Spirit for water."

going to the old familiar places. We will have to stop doing some of the things we used to.

There is great news. New branches will grow! We will make new friends. We will find new places to go. We will find new things to do. Gardeners know that when growing beautiful flowers it becomes necessary to prune the bushes back, add water and fertilizer, and allow in sunlight. When the branch is pruned, the bush grows prolific petals next season.

How much do we have to give up? Everything. We need to allow God to prune back the old branches until there is nothing left but the root. We can't cling to a single branch. As He chops off our guilt, our shame, our pride, and our old beliefs we can begin to change. He removes our desire for sin. He gives us a new reason to live. He gives us new life as he removes every branch that has kept us in bondage.

God removes our shame by making us face it. The same is true of the other branches. He removes the branches by making us face the things that are growing on them. We can't trim the tree ourselves. Once we submit to him, he begins the process of change. That is why the hurt is so painful. We have to come face to face with who we are.

We have to learn to manage our anger, control our impulses, admit our feelings of guilt, and end our ceaseless obsessions and compulsions. We have to be careful to not be fooled by those who would say those things do not matter. They do. Praise God we can face Jesus in prayer, wash our pain in the love God speaks through the Bible, and be refreshed in worship, and God will remove those behaviors from us.

The process sometimes takes longer than we want to wait. But when we allow God into those areas, the result is worth the effort. In our age of instant gratification we sometimes want instant sanctification. But, it takes time for new branches to grow on a bush. Likewise, it takes time to remove our old branches. When we wait on the Lord, he will renew our strength. Instead of being cast out with the weeds; we will be harvested with the fruit.

Fruit-bearing Christians have gone through the metamorphic process of changing from sinners to Christians, who unfortunately continue to keep sinning, but *do* seek to change. They allow God to remove the ugly, prickly branches in hopes of growing good fruit producing branches.

How is your garden growing? Does it have thistles and weeds, or dandelion seeds? Do sand burrs and crab grass grow side by side? Do vines twist and snarl without any fruit? In other words, does sin control your life? If it is sin, call on the master gardener and allow him to begin trimming away the old stickers, to make way for the new fruit.

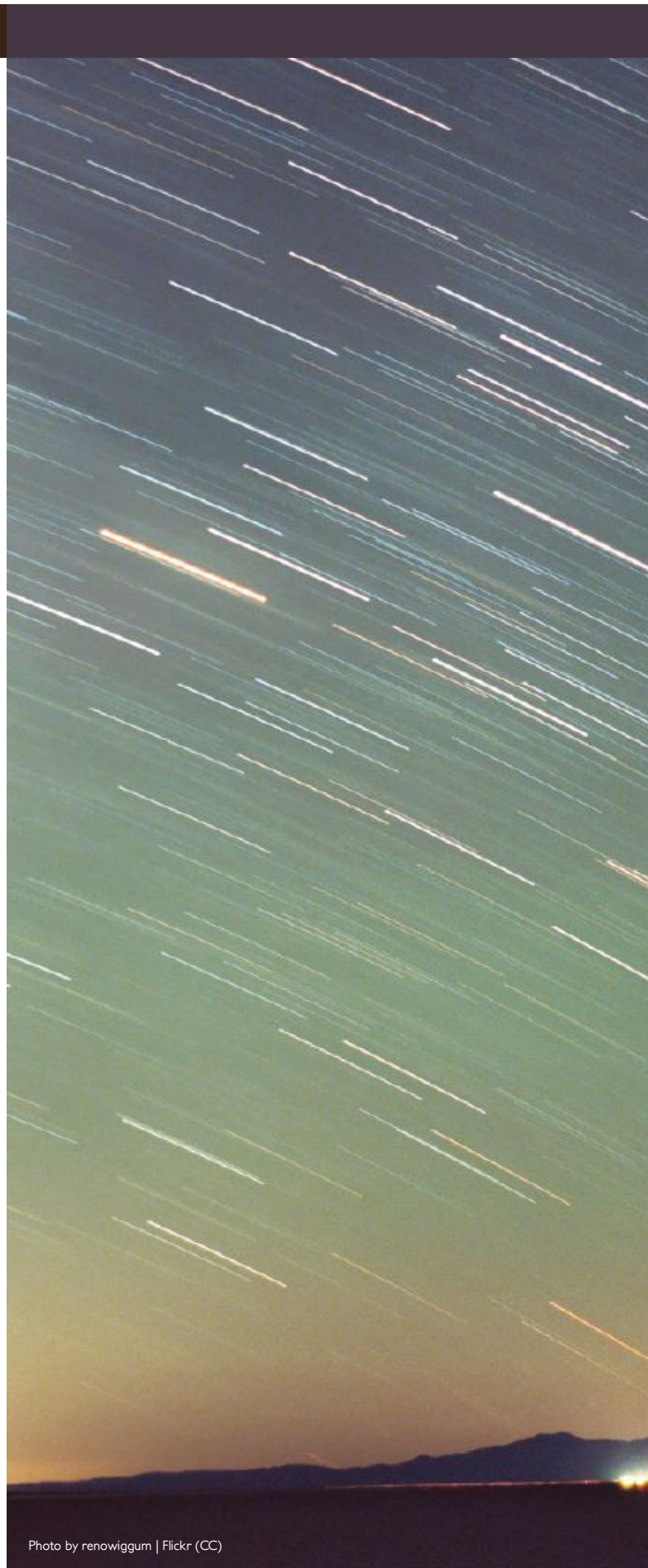


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Unexplained Phenomena

How do Christians explain the unexplained?



GUSTAVO VAZQUEZ-LOZANO

Gustavo Vazquez-Lozano is a writer from Mexico. He was born in 1969. He has written about the historical Jesus and the critical-historical method for reading the New Testament. He made a translation to Spanish of the gnostic gospel of Judas. He has published several fiction books: novels and short stories. He is living in Mexico and is starting as an independent publisher.

Visitors from other planets and UFOs? Mind-reading and telepathy? Prophecy and bending spoons with the power of the mind? We have all heard the stories of ancient civilizations who built pyramids with the aid of extraterrestrials; or of the possibilities of time travel. The list goes on with the monster of Loch Ness and the statue of the Virgin Mary that cried tears of blood. Scores of us have also heard many people talk about ghosts and alien abductions. Some of these things “really” happened to a friend’s friend. Some of us may have even experienced something ourselves for which we have no a good explanation—something that is unexplained.

Does any of this make us un-Christian? Is it un-Christian to believe in such things? Is there an “official” Christian attitude to “the unexplained?”

By being Christians, we are not asked to leave reason aside, or doubt, or scientific curiosity. And of course, nobody is free, or supposed to be free from error! Not even a Christian.

In fact, a solid faith does not have to be in conflict with scientific thought. Christianity is not based on myths or mystic experiences. For the most part, Christian belief is based on the public revelation and deeds of Jesus Christ and his apostles recorded in historical records, in addition to the present reality of God and a resurrected Jesus.

To place the conversation in a global context, within vast areas such as the continents of Africa and Asia, the unexplained, particularly in the areas of ancestors, ghost, haunts, and other phenomena, are rooted in a worldview in which the realm of the spirit and the material is but a thin veil, if at all separated. Unlike the Western, scientific, so-called “rational” approach, where the material and spiritual are completely separated if even believed in at all. These world views contribute significantly to what we “see” or in some cases “refuse to see.”

There are three things to have in mind when dealing with the “unexplained.”

1. First and most importantly, “the unexplained” is an industry, a business run from Madison Avenue, meaning that there

are strong economic interests supporting it. Therefore, there are many people interested in maintaining the belief in the paranormal. There are, indeed, dedicated TV channels, publishing houses and a whole film industry that live off the unexplained. This very fact demands that we are a little skeptical about UFOs and ghosts.

2. Second, the Christian person can and should be a skeptic about the “unexplained.” Unexplained, to begin with, doesn’t equal inexplicable. Sometimes the strange lights in the sky, the ghostly apparitions and the spoon bending can have a perfectly valid explanation (most of them do). Science is always making progress and physical laws are continually being revised. Quantum mechanics, for example, has opened a new understanding of how the universe works. The fact that we still don’t know how the great pyramids or the ancient statues of Easter Island were built, doesn’t mean that there is a fantastic explanation.

3. Third, and most importantly, even if the unexplained were “real,” that is, that there are things beyond this reality, or things that break the known laws of nature, there is a great truth above all this: God is the Lord of creation, of everything that is known and unknown, the visible and the invisible. (Gen 1:1) If there is life beyond the limits of the solar system, if some people have miraculous gifts to heal, if we hear reports of a ghost (and the Bible itself reports assumptions about the reality of ghosts in Acts 12:15) the message of the Bible resounds bright and clear: God is the Lord of everything. He created every marvel and wonder, and God’s creation is very, very good. (Psalm 89:11, Psalm 8:3) The mere possibility of the “unexplained” (life on other planets, for instance, a real possibility) also means that we humbly recognize that we don’t know and can not know everything that there is in the universe (Job 38: 16-18). As Christians, even if we can’t explain everything, we should continue to interpret everything through the lenses of God’s word.

What does all this mean? This means that our faith is compatible with any model of the universe, with the paranormal or without it. God is not restrained or contained in a specific vision of the universe, not even the one in which we, humans beings, are the only reason for his creation. (Job, 38:4-7). God’s final transformation will be, in the last term, over all the universe.

Ultimately, many times “the unexplained” is not as important as the effect it has on people. We can choose to believe or not in time travel or UFOs. Being a Christian doesn’t mean to shut down (every other area of) our brains. There can be room for experimentation, learning, and scientific curiosity. Why not marvel at the things that remain unexplained?



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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE
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Photo by Angelo González | Flickr (CC)

Is There a Christian Dress Code?

Kelli Ward investigates the culture of wearables.



KELLI WARD

With an intense love of and for the Lord (which didn't manifest itself in her until her early 20's), Kelli wants to share her experiences in being a Christian with the world in a down-home-direct way. As an aspiring screenwriter living in Los Angeles with an M.F.A. from USC, Kelli has also most recently decided to devote her writing talent to educating the masses about the Christian walk.

My mother grew up in the old school Southern tradition where women were not allowed to wear pants to church or even outside of church. Also, they had to carry around a handkerchief to cover their legs when they sat down. To me, that tradition seems a little dated, although Deuteronomy 22:5 reads, "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing..." Once again we see the tricky task of interpreting some Old Testament scriptures from the law to our current circumstances. What if a Christian woman is a construction worker, can she not then wear pants? Must she always wear a skirt? This raises the question, is there such a thing as a Christian dress code? And if so, should we still follow it today?

As we grow and learn more about being a Christian, many things change. Some smokers quit smoking, some cursers quit cursing, and maybe negative thinkers take action to combat their negativity. Can I be blunt for a moment? Before becoming a Christian, to make it plain, I used to dress rather provocatively. Short skirts, tight, tight jeans, with an attitude to match, but the moment Christ came into my life, I was, as the scripture says, "a new creature, old things are passed away, behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Does this mean that I began to only wear skirts? No, but I did begin to realize which things were acceptable and unacceptable to God.

My jeans got a little looser, and my attitude got better, and in all this, I was reminded of 1 Timothy 2:9-10, "I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God." Notice that in this scripture, Paul does not mention dresses or skirts only, but he says to clothe ourselves modestly, which by definition means neither boldly nor assertively. Each generation must reinterpret these texts for their own times. Gold, pearls, elaborate hairstyles, and expensive clothes are not necessarily immodest in our contemporary society. Paul is not trying to regulate women's dress but speak to the heart and attitude of whether they want the attention of men or God.

As new believers we are thirsty for more knowledge of

God, which comes over time, and we may have told everyone in our circle and beyond about our shiny new relationship with Christ. In doing so, we are now ambassadors for him and must present ourselves as such. Our outside should not distract or take away from the good work we are doing for and with God in the world. Basically, do not let your clothing choices steal God's thunder or misrepresent God. Also, we must always remember that beauty is on the inside. "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:3-4). Ideally our lives reveal things about God to others. So what does our clothing say about God?

Let's stretch our minds for a moment. There is an old song by Whodini called *Freaks Come out at Night* that details the events that occur during a wild night out on the town. Keep this song in mind when reading this next scripture. "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy" (Romans 13:13). One can imagine what kind of clothing both men and women wear in such a scene at night. This scripture urges Christians to dress in the night as they would in the day. Now, we may jazz it up a bit by throwing on heels, bejeweled jeans, or an extra starched shirt at night, but we should always carry the same attitude, demeanor, and grace in the night as we would in the day.

Another scripture that further clarifies the topic of dress for Christians is Matthew 5:28; "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." This explains why one should dress modestly. Just thinking lustful thoughts is a sin in and of itself, so why in a world that is full of sin, would one dress in a way to create more sin? Not limited to dress only, in order to avoid the trap of lust, a new believer may decide to stop going to clubs, bars, drinking heavily, and engaging in any such behavior that might be against God.

Matthew also says, "Do not worry about what you will wear." (Matthew 6:25) Here, the assumption is that people ought not worry about having clothes to wear. It's telling of our social context that most of us even have a choice about what we will wear. In this sense, some Christians desire to remove focus from wearing clothes as fashion items and to emphasize simplicity in a countercultural way. Yet, even in the ancient world, one's clothes said something about who they were. So there is a tension here. How much do we use clothing to express who we are, while not being overly particular about styles, brands and designs? In some

social contexts clothing is something the body needs, in others, because of abundance, clothing is seen as merely decoration.

Romans 13:14 reads, "Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." This scripture helps us realize that it's not just about what the believer is wearing, but it's about the very foundation of his or her belief. Clearly, there is not a Christian dress code per se, but there is a command to always "put on" Jesus Christ. In doing so we will understand how God wants us to dress, talk, look and be.

More importantly, God understands what we need when we need it.

"Ideally our lives reveal things about God to others. So what does our clothing say about God?"

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith" (Matthew 6:28-30).

He would not command a woman who works in construction to wear a skirt instead of pants, knowing that wearing such would put her in harm's way. "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful, all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify" (1 Corinthians 10:23). I encourage

you to continue to study God's word, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you in what is appropriate to wear, and for all of us, that our outside would look just like our inside – holy and acceptable.





prayer plan

If you have an unresolved conflict with someone - perhaps it's time to revisit it. Pray and ask for God's guidance and maybe try some of the techniques described in *Turning Confrontation Into Closeness*.

Pray that you may find ways to use your gifts, talents or free time to help those in need - in whatever large or small capacity.

Pray that Jesus would speak through you, work in you and help you to be fruitful.

new identity

MAGAZINE

"Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." 2 Corinthians 7:1 (NIV)