

For Tinakay and my boys and for all of the dreamers.

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## Disqualifying Jesus

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THE ONLY WAY HE CAN BE WHAT HE IS,  
IS TO NOT BE ABLE TO BE ANYTHING ELSE.

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I see these t-shirts people wear, “Jesus for President.” Of course the Republicans would expect Jesus to run on their ticket, but after the first debate they would probably beg Him to not run after all or ask Him to consider being a Democrat. The problem with Jesus being the American President is that I don’t think He would be very good at it. Oooh, I know that sounds irreverent, but it’s true. First of all, if He was the American President, he would have to be patriotic, which He is not. No, Jesus is not an American patriot and I don’t think He would say the Pledge of Allegiance whether it says “one nation under God” or not. I know, I know, you’re upset now, and just so you’ll know I do say the Pledge of Allegiance and am patriotic, but my patriotism is not part of my Christianity. (More on that subject later.)

Secondly, If Jesus was the President of America, He would have to view America as more important than other nations, He would have to work to make sure that the policies and interests of this nation would be enforced even at the expense of other nations. He can’t do that, however, because He’s bigger than America. Jesus is disqualified from American politics because you can’t be an American president and a global Savior at the same time.

We've tried and tried to do that as a nation, but we can't separate ourselves from our own agenda. I'm not saying that's bad, just human. The only way American politics could save the world would be to make the whole world American, that's assuming that being American is the best thing. Don't get me wrong, I love living in America and America has a lot going for it, but America is a man-made entity, and that negates the possibility of it being the best thing for the world.

I'm sure somewhere on the application to be Mr. President, you have to check the little box that says, "I promise to put America first above all other nations," or something like that. Jesus couldn't check that little box.

Thirdly, can you imagine the scandal, all of the dirt that could be dredged up about Jesus? Hookers and mobsters, swindlers, revolutionaries, His list of supporters would put Him on the cover of every national magazine, not to mention His background and the fact that He was born in Bethlehem (Israel) and doesn't hold citizenship here, which is definitely a major factor. Plus, He was always saying something that would damage Him in the polls and though He was very kind (most of the time) He was never diplomatic when it came to talking to politicians and when He got a big group together He never talked about the party He was a part of, never made big campaign promises of how He was going to fix the system. His speeches were always about how we needed to be changed as individuals and how we

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needed to put others before ourselves and turn the  
other cheek when someone offended us.

His kind of reform would be too radical and costly for  
any government.

Most importantly, though, He made it very clear that  
He wasn't a politician. He never shied away from  
political figures or their questions. He just never  
played the game. He isn't now nor was He ever  
Presidential material, He's a king, a monarch isn't  
elected, He is enthroned. America isn't ready for that.

Can you imagine the headlines: 'Presidential  
candidate, Jesus "Christ" to 'Do away with American  
governmental system and set up global Kingdom.'

Right. It'll happen someday, but not because we  
decided to do it.

I would elect Him to be the Most Potentate  
Generalissimo International Superintendent of the  
First Holy Non-Denominational Denomination of the  
World in the Name of Jesus, except for the fact that  
He did so many things (on purpose) that would  
disqualify Him from even getting on that ballot.

He wouldn't even come to see the election. I know  
the scripture says that if two or three are gathered  
together in His name he will be there in the middle of  
them, but that doesn't mean He's there for the  
election.

All the hoopla that we make about our religious politics is ridiculous. I've seen and heard men that would turn on their best friend over some political stance or position they hold within their religious organization. I've heard (and said) some of the stupidest things about the superiority of the particular persuasion of religion I subscribe to or even some dogma that is held within that persuasion. I've heard "godly" men spew hate and angry rhetoric against people who don't agree with them about their pet policy. Of course, Jesus knows all about it and is on their side, 100%.

Right.

There are men that are always looking to start a new party or a new sect and fly the Jesus flag over their idea as if Jesus is the one that gave it to them. If you asked Jesus He probably wouldn't know the particulars because He wasn't involved in the planning or the process. He's just the catch phrase that we use to justify our desire to be in control. We wouldn't make it in the secular political arena because we are too ignorant about what is going on in the world around us, but we want to bump chests and make declarations and control people so we just start us another political group and call it the church.

One religious group had a resolution they were trying to pass at their national convention a few years ago, it failed and a bunch of preachers got angry and left the organization to start their own party. The funny thing is that this year the same resolution passed and a

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bunch of preachers got mad and left the organization to start their own party.

It was kind of sad to see the hate mail that was sent out in the “name of Jesus” from some of these so called believers. It was more than sad, it was sickening. Of course, Jesus was on their side (both of them) and absolutely approved of their stance (both sides) and their behavior (both sides) and was going to lead their group to a glorious future (both sides) to infinity and beyond (both sides) and the other guys (both sides) were going to go to hell because they were W-R-O-N-G and E-V-I-L (both sides). How stupid.

No, Jesus would never do as the head of a religious entity, because he wouldn't be any good at it. If He was going to do it, He would have to do it right. He would have to check the little box that said He was 100% behind the agenda of the poli-church he was elected to lead and I seriously don't think He would be willing to do that. I don't think He would even be willing to sign our membership forms.

You know where it says, “I promise to obey all of the teachings of the pastor and do what is expected of me to uphold the image and traditions of the (insert religious entity here).”

What if the pastor teaches something I don't agree with and cannot substantiate with scripture? What if there are things about the religious traditions that are, gasp, wrong? Yeah, I think Jesus would have a problem with that, too.

The problem with elected officials is that they have a term that ends at some point and the majority picked them so the majority expects to be able to have some input into how they are governing in their elected office. Anytime there is an election process, Jesus is disqualified, because as earlier stated, you don't elect a king, he is enthroned, and religion isn't ready for that. We don't want a king, and we certainly don't want the King, we just want a catch phrase that makes us right.

Not happening.

## So Much About So Little

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WE KNOW A WHOLE LOT  
ABOUT A LITTLE BIT OF STUFF.

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**T**his thought came to me while I was watching Luther for the 100th time. Here it is: “We know so much about so little.”

Martin Luther at the beginning of the movie is in a crisis of spiritual identity and has come to a crossroad in his faith. He can't comprehend the God that he has been taught to believe in. In the movie Martin had performed (and botched) a religious ceremony. His father was there and ridiculed him for his mistake during the ceremony and even his choice to become a monk. The strain between them is very apparent and the idea that he projected his relationship with his father into his concept of God is definitely implied.

Later he was sent as an ambassador to Rome. On his return he was so disillusioned by his experiences there that his friend and mentor became very concerned. During their subsequent discussion his mentor asked a surprising question. He asked him if he had ever read the New Testament scriptures, Martin's answer was equally surprising, no he hadn't. He knew so much about the doctrines, concepts and theories of his religion and yet nothing about the scripture or the Savior it was supposedly based on.

We as believers and “Christians” have reached that place again.

A place where we know the doctrines, concepts and theories that have been handed down to us and not the scripture or the Savior it is supposedly based on.

### **Is it important to know doctrine?**

Absolutely, Biblical doctrine is the skeletal system of the body of Christ. I must make a distinction here, though, because there is a difference between *religious doctrine* and *Biblical doctrine*. The doctrine of Grace does not belong to the Baptists, no more than the doctrine of Jesus name baptism belongs to the United Pentecostal Church International. The identity of Christ, communion, holiness, speaking in tongues, the inerrancy of the Bible, these cannot be claimed by any “denomination” or religious persuasion, they are Biblical doctrine.

We know so much about so little, we think these doctrines are exclusive to a certain religion. We did not invent or develop them, they are Biblical. When we begin to claim these doctrines as our own or assign them to certain groups, we misrepresent them and devalue them. Some one who leaves the Baptist concept must not walk away from the doctrine of Grace, a person who turns from the UPCI cannot walk away from Jesus name baptism. Communion was instituted by Jesus Christ, not a religious scholar or council. Truth is not a religion.

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Even within each religious organization there are fractures and rifts. There are parties (usually called conservatives and liberals) that campaign against one another, rarely over Biblical doctrine, more often over internal religious concepts.

Their arguments are usually over hierarchy and not higher knowledge. The terms conservative and liberal are so misused. Most of the guys I know who call themselves ultra-conservative should really be called what they are, legalists.

I see the church, stumbling under the oppressive weight of the law they have re-instituted, suffering the stigma of religious persuasion... not the stigma of Christ. He said we would suffer persecution for His name sake, not for our religiosity. We have subjected ourselves to the ridicule of the world due to doctrines and concepts that are so ambiguous and usually based in church culture and/or traditions.

We must ask the questions, "Does the world know Christ more because of us and our rigid adherence to our philosophies and traditions?"

In the tabernacle and later the Temple the veil was meant to keep everyone out, not just the unbelievers. The only place to hang religion is on the outside of the Holy Place and it always separates man from God. When will we see beyond the dirty sheet we've hung in place of the torn veil and into the Holy Place? We're not on the inside looking out, we're on the outside, too.

I was sitting next to a friend of mine once, and he said something I have said in the past. He was referring to a preacher from a different group and he called him a “denominational” preacher. I pointed out that since he was licensed with a “denomination” he was a “denominational” preacher as well. That’s how we think, though, because that’s how we are taught. No offense to my friend, he’s probably reading this, that’s just how we are.

In fact, most of the preachers who are a part of a denomination are “denominational” preachers in the fact that they spend most of their time perpetuating their denominational positions and doctrines and trying to conform their congregants, and not preaching Christ. Or they’re afraid to preach or teach something that might be considered too close to what another persuasion teaches, not recognizing the difference between Biblical doctrine and religious doctrine. We know so much about so little.

I have dreaded the day when we begin to tell believers to leave the interpretation of scripture to those who are “qualified” and begin to develop literature to help people understand our position without comparison to scriptures. The day a man stands before a body of believers and declares that only the governing body and its representatives are qualified to understand and interpret scripture is the day that demands reformation. When I first wrote this chapter I ended this paragraph with, “That day is upon us,” but it sounded a little too melodramatic so I deleted it, so forget about it. The next paragraph,

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however, was pretty much completely written in that tone, so I just left it.

We are in a day of reformation where we must crumple and cast off the “indulgences” that the religious establishments have substituted with “holiness” standards or other inclusive rites and regulations, and then sold to the church in place of a true knowledge and relationship with Christ. In the era leading up to Luther’s protest, the Catholic church sold what was called an indulgence, which according to dictionary.com was “a partial remission of the temporal punishment, esp. purgatorial atonement, that is still due for a sin or sins after absolution.”

Basically the religious leaders preyed on their ignorant constituents by promising them freedom from purgatory, a place they invented I guess so they could sell indulgences. It’s kind of like the mafia coming in to sell you insurance to protect you from the mafia. Of course, we see the same things happening by religious leaders today.

Just like there has to be people who stand up against the mafia and risk everything there must come a revival of men and women willing to risk everything to declare the passion of Christ. What I mean by everything in this sense is their political or social standing in their religious organization.

Martin Luther’s unwillingness to accept the misguidance of the religious establishment and his contemporaries’ abuse of the uneducated populace sparked a reformation, though it cost thousands of

lives and splintered the religious community. It also developed into the Protestant movement and the translation of the German New Testament which was to become foundational in not only the spiritual but also the literary awakening in Germany. His desire to know Christ outside of religion literally changed the history of the world.

This type of thinking typically sparks concern in a lot of my more “traditional” contemporaries. They say “Are you saying we should just walk away from any kind of standard (code of conduct, dress regulations, etc.).”

My answer is this: Christianity is about balance. Moral and decent standards of living come from an outflow of a relationship with Christ. Modesty is a Biblical principle not a church doctrine. Standards of separation (as opposed to calling that holiness) are not “wrong” as long as we don’t substitute them for relationship. The code can never replace Christ.

Idolatry is placing anything between us and God, anything that obstructs our view of Him and His love and purpose in our lives. Our standards and our outward appearance have become the idol that is worshipped by so many people. It’s easier to follow a list of rigid rules than it is to seek God and learn to balance your own life. Working out our own salvation with fear and trembling is more than just a theological concept when you step away from legalism. It becomes a passion to find the mind and heart of God and not the council (not counsel) of men. The councils of men have gathered together for the last

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two millennia, establishing doctrines and dogmas based on erroneous interpretations of the word of God and adding rules and regulations that keep ignorant people ignorant.

The beauty of the church is that older saints have the ability to balance a lifetime of experience and hopefully a wealth of knowledge about His word, not just church doctrine. At the same time, though, as a former 83 year old pastor of mine stated, they are more likely to “play it safe” as opposed to fighting for a reformation. That is understandable and necessary for the balance that we younger men and women need to stay grounded in Christ. Change for the sake of change is not healthy for the body, but shedding off the old skin of man to grow more into the likeness of Christ is not only healthy, it is imperative. Pray fervently for the generation of change that is rising up, that we can become the Church and affect the world around us.

In the words of Luther:

“We obsess...over relics, indulgences, pilgrimages to holy places. Yet all the time, all the time, there is Christ. Christ. Christ, here... in every corner, in every hour of the day.

He isn't found in the bones of (dead) saints... but here, in your love for each other, in your love for one another... in sacraments, and in God's holy word. If we, if we live the word, by faith... in love and service to one another, we need fear no man's judgment.”

He was speaking as a 16th Century Catholic priest to mostly ignorant peasants and yet he very well could have been standing today speaking to people who have begun to obsess over our own relics, indulgences and pilgrimages to holy places.

When we see the church “location” as the “church” and develop a “holy place” mentality, and we make our gathering together a substitute for a passionate daily devotion to Christ, we may as well make the journey to Mecca and walk around the Kabala. I’m not saying that we should be irreverent about the “house of God” but that we should not consider meeting in a physical location twice a week to be the sum total of our spiritual existence.

The reason the place we meet is “holy” is because we meet God in that place. God doesn’t dwell in the edifice, He dwells in the people. If we met in the backroom of a bar or in the theater of the local high school, that place, while we were there worshipping Him, would be a holy place, until we left.

We are the church.

# Inconsequential Christianity

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## CHRISTIANITY AS A THEORY CHANGES NOTHING.

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**C**hristianity as a theory is, for the most part, inconsequential.

I was driving in rural Kentucky one day and I came across this old run down store. The front porch had been hit by a large truck years before, (I was told this by an elderly gentleman who was working on the building) the roof was sagging, and there was an entire section of the wall completely knocked down. I stopped to take some photos and was struck by an image. There, in an old worn latch was a pin, locking the door.

There was an eight foot hole immediately to the left of the door (which I walked in through) where the cinder block wall had collapsed, but the door was locked. At some point that little pin was significant. A man or woman placed it there with all confidence that it would protect their stuff, and in theory, it worked, but in the context that it's in now, it has no application.

Some of my darkest days have been when I woke up with the knowledge that most of the things I believed and said I stood for were just concepts and theories that I was not actually living, and not only that I wasn't living them, but that I hadn't forged any avenues to apply them. The hardest days, for me

anyway, have always been church days. Don't get me wrong, I love the Church, but so many times I am frustrated with myself when it's all over, because I sing songs and make these incredible declarations about what I think and know about Jesus and His passion to reach the lost and help the helpless and the broken, but I haven't and I don't.

I have been a "professional" in the ministry field for a long time, years in fact. Those dark days were nestled right into this professional stage. For two years I lived in a church, literally, that I worked for. During the first half of that tenure I had absolutely zero impact on the world outside of the building, yet I was employed to be a "minister." I had to force myself to find ways to connect with people who weren't a part of our local church culture, to see people who weren't part of the staff that I saw and theorized with everyday.

The problem wasn't what I believed or the people I theorized with on a daily basis. The problem wasn't church days or any of that. The problem was that my Christianity, the truths that I believed and held were out of context. There was no relevance to the Christianity I wanted so desperately to be a part of and the life I was living as a professional minister.

I found that a theory left unproven becomes a doorway to discontent. I have a friend who was also a full-time youth pastor at the time that I was going through this period of disconnect, he called it the Summer of Discontent. It was almost bizarre how similar our situations were. We didn't sit around

Inconsequential Christianity bashing the church, that's never helpful. We had many conversations, however, about where we felt like the church was in relation to the world around us and how it seemed we were about the profession of Christianity as an industry instead of the possession of Christ as a lifestyle. We both felt deeply that church was about more than productions and events, but about the great passion of Jesus Christ to empower people to become who He made them to be by helping them remove (or at least control) the things that keep them distracted.

I was working for a group that was very image driven and he was working for one that seemed to be more driven by monetary gain. Image and money are important. If nobody trusts you as a spiritual entity and you have no finances to work with than you are going to really struggle to fulfill the purpose that God calls you to, but they are not the most important things.

I had a great conversation with a young Bible college student. We had lunch at Panera, which is actually a very spiritual place. There's something spiritual about bread for me, so I go there and work and feel close to God when I see people making and eating bread, yeah, I'm weird like that. Anyway, our conversation gives me hope for the future of the Church. He has questions, like me (and probably you) about why we hold on to so many things that have nothing to do with the Bible and why we have so many theories and concepts that have absolutely no connection to real life. What gives me hope is the fact that he (and people like him) is thinking, thinking about what he

believes and challenging its validity and, more importantly, its applicability.

It's not so much that we are trying to disprove anything, what we're trying to do is to prove that truth can be real in the context of our everyday lives, beyond a religious theory or a philosophical concept.

So many people think that Christianity is about going to church, but if it is, than it's not about much. I sometimes dread (and this is no reflection on the church, it's just me) going to another church service. I know we need Church and I'm not advocating that we stop having church, but I sit there and have to fight the urge to stand up and shout, "What the heck are we doing? We've heard all of this before, why aren't we feeding the poor or doing something about poverty in the Appalachians?" while I run screaming at the top of my lungs out of the building.

There is an inherent danger in thinking. I've read history books about communist regimes that overthrow the former government of a free society. One of the first things that they do is round up the thinkers. They kill the artists and the musicians. Why? The only way to control a large populace is to create a system that makes thinking a crime and takes away the ability of the people to put new ideas into the context of their lives. Then you redefine context, making the truth you propagate the only thing that fits.

And there is the rub. Religious people hold onto things that have nothing to do with the Bible and have

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so many theories and concepts that have absolutely no connection to real life because their context has been redefined by a system that is more about control than it is about thinking.

This is why we have such a tremendous loss of young men and women who step out of their parents' home and church into real life. They aren't able to fit what they have been taught for so long into their everyday lives, because it never was part of their everyday life. It was a very small segment of their week and their whole Christianity fit into the time slot allotted by the church.

Then they walk into the arms of a college professor who challenges them to do the one thing about their Christianity that they have been taught not to do, think. So, they begin to think and usually they turn away because in their "real" life, none of it fits at all.

The job of the Church, than, is not to try to build bigger buildings for larger congregations, but to empower men and women to think about what they believe and weigh it against how they live and what they do. If they can't fit it into the context of their lives, than maybe it's not really Christianity.

Jesus kicked over tables and whipped the money changers in the temple. Why was He so hacked off? Here's why, the religious leaders of the day had invented a new context so they could propagate their own version of "God's plan." They took what was meant to be a beautiful illustration of the salvation message and perverted it into a scheme where they

could take advantage of the people who were coming to the temple. On the surface it was about the money, but the underlying motive, the true motive, was, and usually is, about control.

The Jewish people of that day were required to make sacrificial offerings at the temple. They would come from miles, often taking days to make a dangerous and exhausting journey. The temple priests had complete control over the acceptance of the animal that was brought to be sacrificed by the believer. Many times the priests would refuse the person's sacrifice by citing some fictitious blemish on the animal (which was required to be blemish free by the Mosaic Law). Then they would point the weary, and typically angry, person to the acceptable and over priced animals they conveniently had for sale right there in the temple.

Not only that, but the only currency that was accepted in the temple was, you guessed it, temple money. The temple money was often valued higher than the currency the person brought from home. This translated into a loss for them monetarily as they exchanged their currency, before they could even buy the replacement animal. They had traveled so far to come to the temple that they would accept the reinvented context of the religious system and forgiveness from God became a burden and drudgery to them instead of the beautiful example He had intended it to be.

Jesus wasn't angry because people were selling animals in the temple, it was because they had taken

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His word out of its true context and they forced a new and erroneous context onto His people. Remember His words, it should have been a house of prayer, but instead they had made it into a den of thieves.

They had redefined the context and by doing so they made their “truth” the only thing that fit.

Religious institutions are as notorious about redefining context as communistic governments. Religion is really about resisting change. In fact the word religion comes from the Latin word “relegare” which means to “tie fast.” Many of the traditions that are accepted as normal within a religious culture can be traced back to a redefinition of context. Here’s a humorous example: during the 1960’s there was a movement of young men and women to protest and resist social convention.

I know some of these people were simply being rebellious, but I’m sure there were some very intelligent young people who had simply come to the place where they didn’t believe and/or agree with what they had been taught and were willing to stand up in protest. This was the heart of the civil rights movement and had some very positive implications.

For many of these people the church didn’t have an intelligent response to their questions. So the protestors left. Before we judge too harshly, we should stop to consider that most of us consider ourselves to be “Protestant” in our faith. Yes, protestors.

One of the things that happened during that time in most churches regardless of organizational affiliation was strong pressure for the young men in their congregations to refrain from growing moustaches and beards. The thought behind this, of course, was to keep their people from identifying with the rebellious “hippies.” Most of these organizations relaxed their stance on this subject after the decline of the hippie era, some however, adopted this practice into their permanent church culture and continued to teach and preach against facial hair for “their” men.

In fact, I attended a church for over a decade that taught against facial hair as a matter of doctrine. I remember seeing books in the church library about facial hair. I never did read one, but I’m sure I would enjoy it. I only bring this up to make a point. I was taught early into my religious training that the reason we were to be clean shaven was Biblical. In reality, if I want to preach against something I can, if I look hard enough, find some scripture, however obscure, to back up my position.

It’s true that the Old Testament is a type or shadow of the New Testament and many of its physical examples have spiritual implications for us today. What I was taught, using this true principle, was that Joseph, one of the sons of Israel, had been betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery. In what is one of the most incredible examples of God’s faithfulness he ends up becoming the second in command in the most powerful nation on the planet. During the transition from slave to world leader, Joseph is placed in prison for a crime he didn’t commit. I won’t go into all of

Inconsequential Christianity the details, but Joseph is summoned to appear before the Pharaoh to interpret a dream for him that his court of priests had been unable to explain.

As Joseph was being summoned to come before the “king” he shaved.

“Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh.” Genesis 41:14

This, as I was taught, with no other reference to a scriptural basis, was why we as Christian men should keep a clean shave, because Joseph shaved before going into the presence of the “king” and we are always in the presence of the “King.”

So I shaved everyday. The only reason that this teaching worked with me is because I was grossly ignorant of the Word of God and Biblical history. The way that this teaching was backed up was that we (Christians) should be submitted to those who were over us and to go against the teaching of the pastor was rebellion and rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and we all know what God thinks about those sorry witches. In effect saying that to have a different opinion or not agreeing with the pastor would put me or anybody else in hell with witches. “I’ll get you, my pretty, and your little dog, too.”

Now, I hardly think that the wonderful man who was my spiritual leader at the time did this with malice. He was simply perpetuating the teaching he had

received. You know what's funny, though, is that this teaching is ridiculously erroneous both in its basis and its enforcement.

Let's take the first part, Joseph shaved so we should. Joseph was in an Egyptian prison. When he was summoned to go before the Pharaoh he wasn't going before a king, he was going before a false god. Yes, the people of Egypt worshipped this man as "god on earth". The Pharaoh cannot be used as a type or shadow for God because that would contradict other scriptural principles. Also, when Joseph was called to the court of Pharaoh, he wasn't coming in as a believer of the one true God (in Pharaoh's eyes), he was coming in as one of the multitudes of other soothsayers and magicians. He was, essentially, coming in as a pagan priest, so in order for him to be acceptable to Pharaoh, he had to shave his face and probably his entire body. It's very likely that Joseph shaved his head, eyebrows, arms, legs and everywhere else, because many of the Egyptian religions required their priests to be completely hair free as a rite of their priesthood. Hair was considered unclean. In fact, according to BlueLetterBible.org's online concordance, the word used here for shaved is "galach" which means "to poll, shave, shave off, be bald."

I'm not on a band wagon nor am I suggesting that everyone should grow a beard (especially not the women, but if you have one that's o.k.). My point in all of this is that this passage of scripture cannot be used to support a clean shave doctrine, but when taken out of context, any scripture can be used to

Inconsequential Christianity support any doctrine. All you have to have to make this work is ignorant people who are intimidated into not thinking contrary to the leader.

Which leads to the second point, you must agree with the pastor or leader because they are in charge. At this point some of my pastor friends are going to disown me and in earlier centuries this would probably add a few pounds of wood to the fire as the witch is being burned. As Nacho Libre said, “I smell cookies.”

The church does not own the people. The pastor is not the local demi-god who has complete control of the individuals in the congregation he pastors. I purposely didn't say “his congregation” because it's not the pastor's church. For anyone to say that you are a rebel because you challenge the validity of a man's opinion or stance is to take away one of the most fundamental ingredients of true Christianity.

I am not against pastors, I believe that I am called to be a pastor myself, and someday will do that, I am, however, against religious systems that take away the right (and obligation) of Christians to think and have a voice in their own lives.

Let me put it this way, each individual believer is the captain of their own ship. The job of the church leadership is to point in the direction that God is leading the church, try to remove the obstacles in the path of the believers or give them instruction on how to navigate around them, but we have no authority to grab the wheel and push them into the passenger's seat of their own lives.

If you don't agree with my opinion or my personal preference (which the facial hair issue and so many other issues are truly about) and I have no true Biblical basis for my argument than you pray and do what you think God is calling you to do. I am not authorized to override your relationship with God.

When we teach people we should welcome disagreement and invite them to discuss their disagreements and go to the Word of God as the ultimate authority, always striving to use the scripture in their true context.

Then, and only then will people be able to put Christianity into the context of their own lives.

Look, the captain of the ship in the control room and the passenger playing tennis on the upper deck are on the same vessel, making the same journey and in the same peril, but are worlds apart in their understanding.

The captain knows how to navigate the ship. He knows how to read the instruments and knows the location of the vessel in reference to its final destination. His job is to know.

The passenger knows when dinner is going to be served, approximately when he or she is going to get to the destination and that someone, somewhere is in charge of the ship. His or her job, in reality, is to be blissfully ignorant of most of the details. Even though he or she is on the journey, the context of everything

Inconsequential Christianity is different. If something happened to the captain and crew of this ship, or the passengers were suddenly placed at the wheel, they would be in serious trouble because they don't know how it all works and have never been instructed on how to guide the ship to safety.

If we are going to see young men and women continue to follow Christ when they leave their parent's homes and go off to college, when they take the wheel, so to speak, we are going to have to get rid of the cruise ship mentality. The church is not a cruise ship. It's a tightly knit group of individual rafts that are controlled by their single passenger. This is less controllable for a religious leader and there is less recognition for "Captain Pastor," but it is Christianity in everyday context.

As the church we exist in concert, like a choir. The leadership of the local congregation stands in front and leads the choir because that's his job, but the harmony of the song comes from the people who have equal access to the music and choose to sing, individually following the directions of the composer, as much or more, as the conductor.

Besides, I have a problem preaching against facial hair and keeping my eyebrows.



# Informed Resistance

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## THE OVERTHROW OF RELIGION.

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**S**piritually we all exist in one of three states, ignorant rebellion, passive acceptance, or informed resistance.

God has given us the gift of self-government. That means we as individuals create the internal laws that we use to control our own selves. (Self control is listed as one of the fruits of the Spirit, so rest assured, God is willing to help those who want to be helped.) For most of us our internal code is shaped by our environment.

If you grow up hungry in a home or neighborhood that is impoverished you can (to yourself) justify stealing to feed yourself or your family. If you grow up in a wealthy home with no lack you can justify (again, to yourself) a contempt for the poor and live in excess with no feeling at all for the hungry or the homeless.

When our internal code makes contact with an external one with which we are not familiar than we reach a crisis point. We are forced to choose one of the three above mentioned states in response.

Ignorance is the manger for poverty. Without knowledge the only perceptible savior is rebellion. Many impoverished nations have seen bloody

uprisings with thousands of men, women and children dying brutally at the hands of a civil war that replaces the current government with a new one that is, for all practical purposes, the same or worse than the previous one. Those in power continue in corruption because the masses are not educated to a better way.

Ignorance creates a cycle of bondage. Ignorant people are in a continual internal spiritual and mental war. They are constantly threatened by new and unfamiliar codes and will usually respond out of fear. Of course, ignorance makes a poor base to fight from and the ignorant rebellion usually becomes overwhelmed by their inability to overthrow the machine. Most often they fall into bitterness about their perceived injustices and pull others down and out with them.

“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” Hebrews 12:15

Ignorant rebellion chooses not to attempt to understand this external code and instead begins to rise up against it. Even though we are miserable (or perhaps because we are) we defend our internal code because our identity is so wrapped up in it. As obscure as this may seem, it does apply to our spirituality. True Christianity in many ways is diametrically opposed to the internal codes that we have carefully developed, especially for the affluent American who is bombarded with the idea that success is measured by wealth, possessions and/or social status.

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Jesus Christ brought a new internal code to a people who were wrapped up in external legalities.

The religious scholars leading up to His time of ministry had taken an ancient external code and internalized it to their own advantage. The common person was completely at the mercy of the Temple and its elite. The fact that the common man was ignorant was not the violation, but that they were instructed into ignorance by their teachers.

The common man had been taught that they had no direct access to God and were therefore inferior to the religious class. Remember, ignorance is bondage. Though the entire nation was in bondage to Rome, the people of the nation were in bondage to the religion of the Temple. The key to their control was in keeping the people ignorant. This same pattern was used by the Universal Church of the dark ages with much the same result.

We aren't able to see an entire panoramic of the culture of the day through the New Testament scriptures because they are focused on Jesus and then His followers and then on the churches they established. There were, no doubt, insurrections led by ignorant peasants bent on overthrowing the religious class as well as the Roman tyranny. When the disciples were brought into custody for resisting the established hierarchy one of the Pharisees named Gamaliel referred to two previous unsuccessful uprisings by Judas of Galilee and a man named Theudas. (Acts 5:34-39)

However, most people were content to be ignorant. This state will be referred to in this writing as passive acceptance.

Passive acceptance is as detrimental (if not more so) than ignorant rebellion. It is a place of death, where a person exists without a purpose to spur him into action. I would rather deal with one hundred zealots in the midst of ignorant rebellion than with one ignorant person placated by passive acceptance.

Passive acceptance allowed the death of thousands of babies on the whim of an insecure king, remember Herod? It allows children, six times the total amount that died in the Twin Towers on 9/11, to die everyday from hunger while wealthy religions and religious people content themselves with their piety and hide behind a façade of stained glass and “holy” living. It allows people to become commodities in the trade of human slavery called religion.

Let me interject this here, religion is as much about human trafficking as the hold of any slave ship. Religion looks at people for their economic worth, willing to place them in bondage to doctrines and rules for the sake of laying claim on the tithe and/or offerings that these people will be obligated to give. I believe that tithing and giving of offerings are Biblical mandates and a part of any healthy Christian’s life, but when that is the end purpose of the organization than that organization ceases to serve Christ and becomes the agent of Mammon.

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The moment a religious entity begins to function on the basis of economics it becomes what Christ came to end.

Passive acceptance leads to cold blindness. It is so much easier to sit in darkness than to gather enough wood for a fire. Truth comes in fragments, sometimes truth has thorns, sometimes it is heavy, and it rarely fits into our pre-made little fire ring, but rather than expand our ring we throw down the pieces that don't fit and wait for the one's that do, even if they are few and far in between. Passive acceptance preserves its internal code, but in a different way than the ignorant rebellious, it does so by merely allowing that which seems to be to be that which is. I hate to sound too philosophical, so I'll rephrase that statement. Passive acceptance does not fight what does not fit. It simply takes on the convenient shape necessary to be accepted by the status quo.

The inevitable result is a state of inactivity that leads to spiritual atrophy. In the past sixteen years of ministry I have seen the atrophy of passive acceptance bring great people to a place of complete spiritual ineffectiveness.

Atrophy is what happens when you completely cease to use a muscle. The lack of movement causes the muscle to shrivel and become useless. This is a preventative measure designed by God to protect the rest of the body from a perceived injury, disease or infection. The damaged limb is shut off to keep the healthy parts alive.

Passive acceptance requires no movement, and no resistance. Resistance however is the basis for strength. Why is there weakness in the Church? There is weakness because it seems easier to lead a group that passively accepts the doctrines and teachings that come from the establishment. Ask any hard questions and you'll be labeled as a rebel and treated accordingly.

This type of leadership creates a chameleonic group of shape-shifters. So, the passive acceptance that seems so appealing to those who want to control the trafficked, is ultimately what causes the atrophy and death of its constituents.

A weak nation, society, or church is the direct result of leadership that uses ignorance to control its populace. The people will fade into their surroundings and die the death of obscurity. That's why so many young people raised in a legalistic environment (who weren't destroyed by ignorant rebellion) so easily fall away from their "faith" when they become adults and get out from under the oppressive thumb of the legalists.

The code is completely external and they have been taught that the best response is no response. They are the epitome of chameleonicity with no identity of their own. Why are they like that? They are like that because of their leaders. They are a direct product of religion. They have no capacity for any other response. I say that men who keep their people in ignorance to bully them into submission will stand in judgment for becoming the enemies of Christ. We've

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looked for a man to call the anti-Christ, and there will come one who will embody the type, but we have overlooked the spirit of the anti-Christ that is at work amongst us already, speaking in places of spiritual authority and putting men and women into bondage for their own personal gain.

Studies have shown that well over 60 % of Christians leave their faith when they enter college. Religion shrugs its shoulders and points accusingly at the youth or cites the fact that prayer was taken out of schools in the 1960's when in reality this is the only possible outcome of a system that is about conformity.

The dove and the fish have been replaced by the chameleon as the symbol for modern Christendom.

The third response is the state of informed resistance. Christianity doesn't need a rebellion. The spirit of rebellion will never mix with the purpose of Christ. They are polar opposites, but there does need to be a generation of informed resisters, people who are willing to "know the Truth" so they can be set free. If ignorance is bondage, than knowledge is freedom.

The legalist will always hold as suspect the man or woman who dares to question the establishment. Young people are marked as rebellious when they aren't willing to "accept everything by faith" and play by the rules and yet this is the very thing that will make them strong. Ask, seek, and knock, study to see if these things are so and to show yourself approved. Search out your own salvation with fear and

trembling, be ready to give an answer for the hope you have. The truest Christian symbol is a question mark.

What is truth? If you take away the right to question you turn Christianity from a rushing mighty wind into a windowless room full of stale recycled air.

Are we willing to take everything that we believe and hold it in question and scrutinize it in light of the Bible? If we aren't than we forfeit our claim to be "people of truth." If there is any other document, manual, book or doctrine that takes preeminence over His word, than we must confess to the world, we are not Christians, we are just another stripe, shade or pattern that you are free to choose from among the many others that are available, we are not the flock of Christ, we are a group of chameleons.

Some colleagues of mine told me, tongue in cheek, that I am "the poster child for the fight against legalism." I'm o.k. with that. I'm not interested in being a part of a rebellion, but there is a difference between rebellion and protest. Christianity cannot be another pattern or shape that I put on when I'm at church or amongst a certain set of people. If I have to change who I am depending on whom I am with, than I am not being true to Christ or His call, there should be no duplicity.

If this generation is to become what Christ called the previous ones to be than we have to let them ask the hard questions that make us uncomfortable and peel away the layers of religion that we have added to the

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faith. We have to be able to help them find an identity that is based on the never changing word of God. If we do this right, we will see them shed the chameleon skin and not die a death of obscurity in the land of darkness.

Christianity has never been about blending in. It has always been about coming out from among the darkness of Babylon into the light of Christ, no matter the cost, or better said, because of the cost.



## Outside

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THERE IS NO AMERICAN CHURCH.

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**W**hat if we approached ministry outside of the modern American Consumer Church mindset? What would we do different?

**Our focus would not be on making good church members.**

The qualifications of a good church member are faithful event attendance and financial input to maintain the staff and facility. The qualifications of a Christian are to be born again and live, everyday, a life that follows the principles of Christ. The bottom line is you can be a good church member and not even be a Christian because the qualifications are not the same.

So much of what we do in American church culture is about perpetuating our own local “church plant” and “service event.” When we make the event and the facility the primary focus our people end up with the concept that “church” is just a segment of their life and use the allotted church service time as a weekly prescription to medicate their carnal symptoms. They become event driven, simply surviving from event to event, not living for Christ.

We should focus on helping people see the significance of Christ in their everyday life. Let me give you an analogy.

Let's say your child develops crooked teeth. There are a couple of different methods of correcting this problem, the event method and the process method.

The event method is to take the child, have him smile real big and hit him in the mouth with a 2 x 4 or other heavy object. There will definitely be a rearranging of teeth, but the risk is high that the teeth will not reattach straight.

So, the next scheduled event will be another whack with the 2 x 4. Yes, change is made but it is unpredictable, ineffective and uncontrollable.

The process method is called braces. It's a slow process of small changes that affect the teeth everyday until they are straight. The results are intentional, effective and measurable. Braces are still painful and the process can be long and frustrating and many times requires a life long retainer to help maintain the change, but it works!

Christianity that works is a process driven life that changes slowly, everyday, and is maintained by Biblical principles that are followed for the rest of our lives. Otherwise we live in a series of incredible life changing events that have no long-term effects.

**We would see the church as a spiritual entity not as a possibly lucrative business proposition.**

I'm often asked, "Whose church do you go to?" Of course they want to know what congregation or local assembly I attend, but they see the church as a business and the pastor as the CEO and/or owner of the church, which has no Biblical basis. So, where, if not from the Bible, does this concept come from? It comes from the consumer culture around us and our own misconceptions about Biblical government.

Because most Americans (or modern believers globally) have never experienced a monarchy we automatically assume that God's kingdom operates like our own government and/or market place.

The word kingdom, though, is literally "king's domain."

King - a male sovereign or monarch; a man who holds by life tenure, and usually by hereditary right, the chief authority over a country and people.

Domain - the territory governed by a single ruler or government; realm. Further, thank God for Latin, the word domain has its roots in the word "dominium" which means complete power to use, to enjoy, and to dispose of property at will. The root concept is Domin(us) which is the word Lord. From [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

Jesus Christ referred to the church as the kingdom of God and the Kingdom of heaven and as His body, but

never as a man-directed or man-owned entity. He did however make a very forceful (if not controversial and mostly ignored) point about the market-place mentality that had become normal in the Temple when He drove the tradesmen and money changers out with His self-made whip.

This doesn't mean that we should be flippant about finances or stewardship, Jesus spoke often about both. We definitely need to have good business practices and manage the resources that God blesses us with *for His purpose*. That is the distinction, though, that all of our resources and finances are for one purpose, to proclaim and advance the Kingdom of God and not our own.

Another danger of seeing the church as a financial opportunity is that pastors and leaders can easily begin to see the church as a herd instead of a flock. It's easy for the pastors and leaders of churches to shift into the mode of cattle baron, which is completely contrary to Christ's nature, instead of thinking as a shepherd. We then begin to see people as commodities and make our decisions based on what produces economic gain rather than what is best for the Kingdom, which sometimes are distinctly different.

I know that in many of our larger churches it is not financially feasible to scale back on the amount of church services they have, not because the congregation needs to come together more or less, but because the cost of maintaining their impressive

Outside facilities or staffing the offices has preeminence and the loss of an opportunity to take up an offering is too critical. If the cost of the facilities dictates the direction of the church then it may be that the focus of the ministry is wrong.

In the American religious culture we have succumbed to the same ideology that pervades our surrounding secular culture, bigger is better.

If, however, true Christianity is about relationships, than the mega or even “corporate” church (500 or more) is not necessarily the best scenario. Granted, you have a larger pool of talent and financial resource to:

1. Put on bigger productions.
2. Have larger facilities and
3. Have larger staffs.

Is that truly the purpose of Christ?

In Malcom Gladwell’s book “Tipping Point,” Mr. Gladwell writes that the largest group of people that can maintain sustainable and meaningful relationships is 150. After that number is reached and surpassed, the ability for the people to stay connected meaningfully is diminished because the complex levels of relationships makes it impossible to truly know each other.

Many churches try to overcome this relational deficit by orchestrating an elaborate system of small meetings and “home fellowship groups.” There are a

few churches that have been successful in these endeavors, but many more that shy away from them because of the inability to control these “outside” environments. With large congregations that are disconnected there are always men and women who feel like the church isn’t going in the right direction and lead a small group away from the control of the pastoral staff and into their own small church. Though this may be considered unethical, it is indicative of the disconnect felt by many church members of mega and/or corporate sized churches.

Acts speaks very plainly that the disciples were going from house to house, breaking bread and fellowshiping. They were a body of small groups that were connected not by a large edifice (the only large edifices in town were the ones that Jesus had spoken strongly against) or an allegiance to one man (other than Christ, of course) but by their mutual love for God and one another *in their everyday lives*. They sat down facing each other at their supper tables, not next to each other in padded pews. Jesus commanded us to make disciples not mega-churches filled with good church members. Jesus was a firm example that you don't disciple the masses. He chose twelve of the masses and three of the twelve.

Paul’s own methods should be examined more closely. He was a pastor of pastors. Instead of staying in one city and using his influence and amazing testimony to construct a mega church where he was the wealthy star player, he went around to other areas, some close and some far away, raising up pastors who were teachable and would faithfully teach others also.

Paul wasn't an American Church Superstar, he was a Christian who understood that Christianity was neither about his persona nor charisma, not about his abilities nor his talents, but about getting people connected to Christ and to each other, everyday.

He didn't have the perfect hair and the fancy clothes. He was a simple man who had the powerful message of the cross and of a Savior who was accessible. He was touchable and connected with men and women who were suffering for the sake of Christ like himself. They were celebrating a life of beauty and freedom, struggle and misfortune, poverty and wealth, just everyday, run of the mill people, who were seeking and serving the risen Christ outside of the acceptable confines of the religious organizations of their day.

One other point that bears mentioning is the tendency of American pastors to see "their church" as a dynasty that can be passed on at their own will to their children or heirs. So many people see the family of the pastor as elite and their children as princes or princesses in the royal lineage of a local king. This is not Biblical leadership. The pastor is not the king of the church, he is an over seer of God's kingdom. Truthfully he is more like the royal gardener who is advised not to see the lucrative possibilities of the kingdom for himself or to lord over the people of God, but to care for the kingdom like a garden and treat the individuals with the care of a shepherd for his sheep. (See 1 Peter 5.)

We've got to be careful that we're not trying to build our own version of Trump's tower and amass a

beautiful kingdom that we can pass on to our own family instead of using God's wealth and abundance to promote His kingdom, care for His people, and alleviate the suffering of the poor among us.

My friend Lowery said it best one day over a Quizno's sub. "I want to be like a clear coat finish on a piece of wood. If the clear coat is done right, nobody notices it. All they see is the wood beneath it. Its whole purpose is to make the wood beautiful. If I am who God called me to be, than the only thing people will see will be the cross."

So, whose church do I belong to? Why, Jesus' church, of course. Is there one that belongs to some one else? Not according to the book of Acts: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the *church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*"

Acts 20:28 KJV

**We would recognize the church as a Body of individuals that each has an equally significant place in ministering to the world around them.**

One of the by-products of a competitive consumer mentality is that the leadership can begin to see other people with leadership potential as a threat. I know of a man that was in a conflict with his local pastor. As the conflict was coming to a close and a somewhat shaky finale, the pastor qualified his actions by stating that he was simply asserting himself as the alpha male. There is no alpha male in the church because the church is not a pack, it's a fold. The alpha

Outside male concept is more applicable to wolves than sheep. I'm not saying that this pastor is a wolf, but that if we're not careful we begin to emulate the world and its method instead of Christ and His purpose.

A shepherd is never concerned that one of his sheep is going to take over his position, it's not possible. Not anymore than a flower displacing a gardener.

The problem stems from our idea that the pastor of a church is somehow elite, something that many pastors I know (and I know quite a few) seem to think themselves.

Everyone else in the church is somehow expendable and replaceable. This is absolutely untrue. There are no expendable parts in a body and there are no replaceable parts, either. I know you can get a kidney transplant, but you don't replace the kidney that was removed. You transplant a kidney from another place and hope that the body will accept it and create a new relationship with that kidney. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. There are no replaceable people in the Kingdom of God, either. We move within the Body of Christ, fulfilling our purpose in Christ. We mistake a move from one local congregation to another as replacing people, when in fact we've never left the body by moving within it.

The concept of the pastor and/or leadership attaining celebrity status is not new. Any time that God's Spirit and/or word were strongly displayed in an individual people begin to almost deify them. That's our

superstitious human nature at work. That's why God hid the body of Moses, so the people wouldn't set him up as a demigod and worship his dead carcass. The power of influence can have a strong allure to it and the office of the pastor has been the springboard for all kinds of ridiculous posturing by good men who didn't understand how to balance fame (however small the circle) and began to see themselves as more than what they should have.

In many church buildings a platform is built to elevate the preacher so he can be seen by the congregation. Somehow, we have come to view this small segment of the meeting facility as the holy place. What a ridiculous thing it is for us to draw a line across the front of a building and say it's holier than the rest of the building. It makes me think of Les Nesmith, on WKRP in Cincinnati, a mid-eighties sitcom about a radio station in Ohio. Les was obsessed with having an office of his own so he used masking tape to mark a boundary around his desk. When someone came up to the tape line he had to knock on an imaginary door before Les would acknowledge him.

The platform isn't holy by default. The building isn't holy, for that matter, it's the people and their intent on assembling. If they have assembled in the name of Jesus to worship and proclaim the Kingdom of God, than they can meet in the backroom of a bar, brothel, school building or stained-glass church building and it's a holy place.

We have to have a healthy respect for the office of the

Outside

pastor with an understanding that it is a part of the plan of God to help shelter, instruct and comfort His flock. If we are truly the Church, than we will have to see each other as members of the Body. Think of it this way, Jesus Christ is the Head of the Body. The Pastor or maybe the Evangelist who is speaking is the voice box in the neck, speaking to us. There are others, though, who make the Body work. Maybe an elder who has prayed passionately and is operating in the Heart of God, or the intercessor that has plead the blood of Jesus or the minister who has prepared a meal for the hungry or a singer who leads in worship bringing a fresh breath into the Body like the lungs in your chest.

To consider the leadership team as somehow more significant and/or the children or the poor as somehow less significant is a perversion of the Body of Christ. We are commanded to submit to one another, pray for one another, and love one another, this includes the pastoral staff.

We as leaders and staff members of local congregations must submit to others within the body, even among the congregation, in humility and love. That's how the world will know we are His disciples.

**We would see the church as a group of diverse individuals and teach them at their depth level instead of according to their age bracket.**

Discipleship is not nor can it be an age appropriated process. In other words, there are twelve year old children that have the mental and spiritual capacity to understand deep theological concepts as well or better

than adults and we have some 40 year old men and women that need a simple style of discipleship that they can grasp.

The trouble that we have with discipleship is that we approach it the way America approaches everything, from the standard. We try to standardize everyone's experience. It can be according to race, gender, age or (especially) socio-religious traditions. The tragedy of the standard is that it caters to the average, but if we saw people as individuals, the way God sees them, we would be more deliberate in our approach to making them disciples.

In the consumer church setting the clutch point of our dysfunctional approach to educating people is the fact that most pastors want the congregation as a whole to be wowed by their preaching and/or teaching. They (the pastors) are the product, so the church becomes "their church" because it is based on the salability of the pastor's preaching style or charisma or even his good intentions, instead of on Christ, His word and His purpose.

If our preaching and teaching is to try to achieve a "Wow!" from our congregations or listeners then we aren't preaching for them, we're doing it for ourselves, for our ego. We need them to have an "Aha!" moment that reveals a truth they can understand and apply. We cater to the ego of the leader instead of seeing the congregation as a group of incredibly diverse individuals who may or may not be able to grow in a congregational setting with a shotgun preaching approach where we shoot at the

Outside middle and hope there is enough overspray to affect the margins. Our churches are limited by the untapped potential of leaders among the people who aren't taught at their depth level.

Jesus didn't use the same method most of us use. He did speak to the masses, teaching them things they could grasp and either accept or reject. His true and in-depth teaching was given to a few close men that were at a different place in their application. He spoke to them at their depth appropriate levels, taking the twelve aside and teaching them deeper and then taking three of the twelve and teaching them deeper still. He multiplied Himself in them so they could, in turn, multiply Him in others.



## What The Heck Are We Doing?

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LIVING SLANG CHRISTIANITY.

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**P**eter declared, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you.”  
**Matthew 26:33 NLT**

One of my favorite movie scenes is when Ralphie beats up the bully in *A Christmas Story* and he’s using all of these terrible cuss-words, only they use all of this made up stuff so they could show it on television and still get a family rating.

We use all kinds of words. We make up words to say things that we mean that aren’t acceptable to the people around us so we can still say them, without saying them, well, it’s complicated. I would type up a list of what we say instead of cuss words, but it might be offensive, of course you don’t ever say anything like that. Mmmmm-hmmmm.

Oh, come on. Don’t pretend like you haven’t said razzle-frazzle or something else. My friends Michael and Jesse back in Odessa would say “Junk!” in place of a variety of four letter words. I still use that one. Why do we do that? Why not just say what we mean? I’ll tell you why, it’s not because it’s right or wrong, but because we’re not willing to pay the price it would cost if we used the real word.

If you're a Sunday School teacher you can say "shoot" but I don't think the Children's Ed. Director would be too happy if you said what you meant, what do you think? And we live like that, too.

We live slang Christianity.

It's called religion, it's not the real thing but you can use it as a cheap substitute because it doesn't cost near as much. Giving a little extra in the offering to help reached the "disenfranchised" gives you a nice warm fuzzy feeling but it's not the same as touching a leper. Coming to church isn't the same as coming to Christ, but people use it as a substitute every Sunday. Sometimes we do a heck of a job living for God.

Really, we aren't Christians, we're church people. That's a darn shame isn't it?

We don't identify as much with Christ as we do with our doctrines and standards, that's acceptable, right?

Why don't we do this instead?

Let's live what we mean, get our hands dirty, stain the knees of our fancy suits washing the feet of the world.

Instead of just inviting someone to your church on Sunday invite them into your home and feed them from your table. Instead of just giving an extra couple of bucks to the local food bank, why don't you make some sack lunches and go find some homeless people and share the love of Jesus?

## What The Heck Are We Doing?

Several years ago my wife and I started a little church in an old bar behind some projects in Texas. One day, I met Jesus there, face to face. He was following me around while I was trying to set up a sound system so I could preach to people about the Kingdom. I had substituted ministry with having a place to talk about what I knew.

Since I had never really met Jesus I didn't recognize him. He was about two and a half feet tall. He was barefoot, no shirt, dirty, so dirty, filthy even. He was crying, he had mucus smeared across his face. He was black. He was a little dirty barefoot black kid, with a dirty pamper, crying, reaching for my hand, getting in the way. He was making me miserable. I didn't have time for Jesus, I needed to set up the sound equipment so I could teach people about the King and about being holy.

I looked around, annoyed. I saw Jesus' sister standing nearby and asked her, "What does he want? Why does he keep following me, why is he crying?"

She looked at me and said, "Mister, he just wants to hold your hand."

The scales fell from my eyes. I wasn't struck blind, I had been blind. I took Jesus by the hand, picked him up, the dirty little black Jesus, his feet smeared grime on my clean white shirt. His tears and mucus stained my collar. He wrapped his arms around my neck and laid his head on my shoulder and he became still and quiet, except for the little shuddering breaths that kids do after they've been crying.

I never knew Jesus was a little black boy before that day, but since then I have met Jesus a lot.

He was a scared Hispanic man I was in jail with. I prayed with Him. Let me tell you, that was quite an experience. Two years earlier I had gone camping with my wife and my boys. We had purchased an inflatable raft and a couple of life jackets for the kids and we went out on the lake. After about an hour a game warden pulled up to the shore of the lake and motioned for us to come back in. When we got to the shore he asked if my wife and I had life jackets, we didn't. I didn't know we needed them and had only purchased two for my kids (Brian had yet to come along) and none for my wife and me. He proceeded to give me a lecture and two tickets, he said he was going to give us just one, but he lied. I tucked the tickets in my back pocket and completely forgot about them. Two years later, I really did forget about them, a game warden walked into my little digital copy center and asked for Armando Heredia.

I thought, "Cool, I'm going to do some work for the parks and rec. department." Boy, was I wrong. I said I was Armando and he handed me a warrant for my arrest. Junk! Yeah, I know, I should just say what I mean, but then you would be offended. Anyway, I asked him to come back the next day and I would pay the fine, I just needed to make some deposits to write a check. So, to my surprise he agreed and came back the next day. He walked in and I was ready, I had a check for the amount of the ticket and the warrant fee.

## What The Heck Are We Doing?

As I handed it to him with a smile I asked him how his day was, “Better than yours is about to be,” he said knowingly as he produced another warrant for my arrest. What the heck? He said that since he had my name he just went ahead and ran it through the system and I had an old warrant from a bad check that I had written a few years earlier (we had some pretty tough times for a while) it seems I had paid the check but not before they had put a warrant out for me.

I couldn't believe it. Here I am living for God and being a minister and I'm getting arrested. Beautiful. Well, I shut down the shop and the warden let me drive my car to the house for my wife. Man, was she surprised to see me. I told her I was being arrested and she thought I was joking, but the nice warden stepped out from behind a bush and said it was true.

He said he should handcuff me, but he didn't since my kids were looking out of the window. We got in his truck and drove to jail. We had a fantastic conversation about Jesus the whole way. He said he never had a conversation about God with one of his “clients” before. That was cool.

When we got to the facility he apologized but said he was required to handcuff me. As I walked in I was met by my brother in law, who I had been trying to introduce to Jesus Christ. That was funny. He was like, “Armando?” and I was like, “Angel?”

They booked me and took my photo and did the other very embarrassing stuff that they do when you get arrested and I was put in a holding cell with several

other inmates. One was a skinny black guy who was crazy, literally. He was stripped down to shorts and was doing exercises and was shouting about something. I think it was a protest, but I'm not sure. There were a few other guys and this really big Hispanic guy who looked at me funny when I walked in. I prayed under my breath. I was angry about being there and concerned about my reputation as a "minister" in my community.

They brought us our lunches and I since I figured nobody else was going to pray for our food I said a simple blessing for everyone. I didn't stand up and shout it, but I said it loud enough for everyone to hear, "Jesus, thank you for this meal, bless our food," or something like that. I ate the food and it was bad. School food is bad, jail food is worse. Don't go to jail if you can help it.

After I ate I found an empty bunk and sat down. I put my head in my hands on my lap and just sat there praying and basically letting God know that I was kind of upset with Him about the whole thing when I heard someone, someone big, sit down on the bunk in front of me. I looked up very slowly and there, not three feet in front of me was the big Hispanic guy. He was staring at me. He said, "Do you pray?"

"I'm praying right now."

Then he said, "I've been in here for seven days. I was only supposed to be here for two days. The last three days I have been praying that God would send

What The Heck Are We Doing?  
somebody in here to tell me what to do with my life.  
I'm tired of everything and I don't know what to do."

He said the last part with something of a sob and I began to see what all of this was about. I asked him his name, it was Santos. I told him that God was very interested in him and that the only thing that could keep us from having a relationship with God is sin.

There's only three ways we can sin, by what we do, what we say and what we think. I lead him in a simple prayer, "Lord, forgive me for the evil things I have said, the evil things I have done and the evil things I have thought. Wash me with your blood and make me clean on the inside."

He prayed that and then I told him that God didn't just want to cleanse him but he also wanted to fill him with His Spirit. He said he wanted that and so I told him to raise his hands as a sign of surrender to God. I was sitting in a bunk in a jail cell and he was sitting in the bunk across from me, I laid my hand on his forehead after we prayed and God filled him with the Spirit. He started speaking in tongues for the first time in his life. We were so excited and our cell mates were looking at us like we were crazy. Santos just kept praying and I was crying and it was really cool. About fifteen minutes later a deputy came and called Santos' name. It was time for his release. Santos jumped up and grabbed me in a bear hug. It's kind of a weird feeling to be hugged by a big man you don't know very well in a jail cell.

He gave me his number and left. I called him the next day and he came to church. I baptized him in Jesus name that night. I got some strange looks from the congregation when I told them I had been in jail, but I felt like Paul or one of the other Bible characters, except they went to jail for preaching and I had gone for a bad check. But if it hadn't been a bad check it would have been something else, because God listens when hungry people cry out to Him.

I didn't want to go to jail and I don't recommend it, but it was really an answer to prayer. Santos' of course, but mine, too. I had prayed then, as I do now, "God, whatever, however, whenever, use me for your kingdom." He took me literally, thanks God.

I met Jesus other times. He was an elderly lady in a nursing community that held hands with me and some teenagers in Odessa, Texas as we sang choruses on a Saturday morning. I bought Him lunch with Darrin Jansen's money at the Fishery in Louisville, Kentucky. He thought I was Italian, but I bought Him a fish sandwich because He was hungry. He was a lonely runaway girl sitting outside of a coffee shop. I talked to Him and bought Him a sandwich. He almost cried when I gave Him a bowl of soup on a bench in front of a big Ladies' Conference in downtown Louisville. All of the holy people were walking back and forth in front of Him, but nobody recognized Him because he was a homeless black man with a messed up eye, but He was hungry so I bought him some soup.

## What The Heck Are We Doing?

My idea of Jesus was a stained glass substitute for who He really is. I realized that so much of what I was doing in the name of ministry was a substitute for really serving the world around me. So much of it was really about me trying to redeem myself and find people who would validate me by agreeing that I was right.

I've watched people for years that live frustrated, dispassionate lives. Why? They have access to the same Holy Ghost, the same Bible, the same everything as anybody else. Here's one reason, because we're not willing to pay the price to go from theory to application, from idea to action. The theory of Christianity is not enough, in fact, Christianity as a theory is of no consequence, a subject we'll explore in depth later.

The other reason that many people are cold or even deny Christ is that they have brought everything that they are and offered themselves but have been neglected or rejected because we haven't really understood how to be the Church.

Look at Peter, we judge him so harshly. When you think of him the first thing you think of is the fact that he denied Jesus three times. In the story that culminates up to that moment, Jesus tells the disciples that He is going to be betrayed and handed over to the Romans for execution and that all of the disciples are going to abandon Him. Peter, in what we all have considered to be an act of empty bravado stands and declares, "If every one deserts you, even if I die I won't." (Paraphrase)

Then we hit the skip button and go right to the moment where Peter denies Him, not just once but three times. What a loser. He gets in the game and drops the ball. Of course,

we like that because it gives us a great person to point at and justify ourselves when we do something stupid.

“And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.”

### **Matthew 26:73-75 KJV**

But wait a minute. Back up to the garden:

Jesus said, “My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for.” Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him. But one of the men with Jesus pulled out his sword and struck the high priest’s slave, slashing off his ear. “Put away your sword,” Jesus told him. “Those who use the sword will die by the sword. Don’t you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?”

### **Matthew 26:50-54**

A WHOLE TROOP OF SOLDIERS comes to arrest Jesus and Peter, old sorry chicken-hearted, afraid of little girls asking questions, loser boy Peter steps in front of Jesus. One man, with one sword against armed

What The Heck Are We Doing?  
soldiers, while everyone else is running away, stands there, just like he said would, cutting off ears.

I am absolutely convinced that Peter would have died that night with blood on his sword and made his words true, but in his eyes Jesus rejected him. Peter wasn't talking smack at the dinner table, he meant every word of it. He was willing to pay the price for his words.

Peter's denial at the fireside was the only response that he had the capacity to make. He had already offered his unconditional, at all cost, loyalty to Jesus. He said "I'm a man and all I can offer you is my life. That's it. Here it is." And Jesus said, "No thanks." What do you think you would have done?

It was the same Peter on Pentecost, he wasn't a cowardly braggart, he was a man that had offered his all at a time and place where there was no applicable avenue. He denied Christ to the point of swearing because at that moment it didn't matter to know Christ. He was lost not because of his motive or intent, but because he was caught in between two testaments. I would have probably done the same thing. Maybe you would have, too.

"Peter died years later, crucified upside down, his heart over his head, refusing to deny the Christ who had saved him."

-Pastor Bobby McCool

Well, if Christianity is all about a church building and us getting together two or three times a week, we'll

have a whole lot of fireside denials and a lot of slang Christianity, because the application is too narrow.

If ministry has to be something you do when you've reached a certain level or if you have to be a singer or a speaker, than what do you do Sunday when you aren't on the platform or Monday when you aren't with the church crowd?

I have seen so many Christian teenagers that don't feel like they have a place in God's kingdom because they don't fit some fictitious mold that we've created. They have brought their gifts and talents to the church building and been turned away because we don't know how to be the Church and maybe even more to the point, we don't know what the church looks like outside of the confines of our religious structure.

When we get to the place where we are outside of the box, we will be able to, like the first astronauts, look back at the box with a different understanding and perspective. It could be as different as thinking the world is round and actually seeing a round earth suspended in space with our own eyes.

## What If We Were Christians?

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CHURCH PEOPLE AREN'T  
ALWAYS CHRISTIANS.

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**W**hat is God's intent for the church?  
"His intent was that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known..."  
Eph. 3:10

Christianity is not an American concept, Jesus is not a conservative republican and the gospel's focus is not about making people into good, law abiding citizens or even good church members. The gospel is the good news that God has made an avenue for us to become what we were originally created to be, His friend.

The problem is not with "Christianity" the problem is that we have become church people instead of Christians. We are focused on developing "good" church members and "good" church services, but what does the world see in us?

I can't say that I subscribe to Darwin's theory of evolution in the human species, but I think being a church person is about the "survival of the fittest." We try so hard to be the "best" church in town. We say we have the most "truth", the "best" worship services, and we'll use every gimmick available to have that little bit of edge over our "competitors." We make Jesus our exclusive "product" that we're trying to sell to the world.

Don't get me wrong, our gathering together for worship should be the best we can do, but compared to what God has given us, not compared to the group down the street can do.

We make so many promises for God about how much of a benefit people will get if they become a member of *our* church, but I thought Jesus was the benefit. What if God never gives us a new car or a fat bank account? What if we don't get healed from cancer or our dog gets hit by a car or if our families are having problems? What if things go bad and we're still poor?

When my wife and I were first married we spent a lot of time at her sister's trailer house in a low income area helping her care for her two sons. A woman that spoke very little English lived across the alley. She knew my sister-in-law and came over one day, and I'm not making this up, asked her if she thought I would get her pregnant because the governmental benefits she was receiving were about to expire for the child she had. What?! We recoil at the thought, but we present Christ in the same way. Not sexually of course, but what more can you give than to bare your soul to God in complete vulnerability, to give yourself to Him, but for benefits? That is a perversion of His intent.

Are we pimps, selling a cheap one night stand with God so we can say we had one more person on the plan and they can get in on the insurance program? Jesus isn't a cheap thrill, something that we try to make attractive and sexy and put out on the corner, He's a holy God!

## What if we were Christians?

The gospel isn't a fling with a sugar daddy. It's a bridal engagement with a King. It's not about the benefits, it's about Jesus.

Are there benefits? That depends on whose perspective you use. Paul was whipped, beaten with clubs, stoned, shipwrecked and left for dead more than once. Hebrews talks about people who wore animals' skins, who were destitute people and homeless people and were killed as entertainment by the pagans of their time. (**Hebrews 11:36-40**) There are people that make the decision to follow Christ today who may have to decide to die for that decision tomorrow.

Remember, God is not an American in a fancy suit and He doesn't use the same standard that we do. For the most part, we are millionaires compared to our brothers and sisters in foreign countries that are lucky to get a skimpy meal every other day. I dress better to go to sleep in my climate controlled house than they do to brave sleeping on the ground outside in the harshest of environments. I used to say that if I ended up with nothing, living under a bridge, as long as I had Jesus in my life I would have more than I could ever earn, that seems so foreign to me now.

I am so unsettled by the words of Jesus. I sit up at night thinking and praying, "***Is this it? Am I what Jesus has called me to be? I sure hope not.***" If I disappeared today would anyone outside of the church group I'm a part of even notice? If you

skipped town tonight would anyone outside of your immediate family go hungry tomorrow, would there be a hole in the community around you?

The salt has been trapped in the shaker so long that it has become a rock that will not flow out. Bang us on the table, God, until we're broken enough to fit through the opening.

I'm a good church person, but what, if anything, does that have to do with God and how is that different than being a good country club member or a good customer at Wal-Mart? You and I, our neighbors and friends have to come to a place where we fall in love with Jesus, no strings attached (on Him), and follow Him.

How would you have responded to the command to sell everything you own and give it to the poor and follow Jesus? That is diametrically opposed to our Benefits Program.

Can you stop being Hispanic, Asian, Anglo or Black? Can you see beyond being American or Canadian or French and become "one in Christ Jesus"? Can we get beyond being Baptist or Methodist or Pentecostal and come to a place where it's all about the Lamb and not the label? We are so about us, so about what we think, so about me and you and our differences and our denominations and Jesus is rarely even brought into the circle except when we want Him to prove that He loves us more and validate our doctrines, opinions and concepts. All of us have to be willing to change to fit His word and become what He is calling us to

What if we were Christians? be and do what He says to us through His word. To abandon doctrines that cannot be substantiated through His word, outside of religion.

Isn't it time for us to stop being led by our blind ambition and religious zeal and let the scales fall off of our eyes so we can see again, maybe for the first time.

How long has it been since we walked through a park full of homeless people and wondered if they had eaten, have we ever wondered? When was the last time you looked at a teenager, baggy pants, headphones, probably listening to music that glorifies violence and sex, and cared for him, saw him as a soul and not a menace or a nuisance. When was the last time we saw a woman, dressed immodestly, flaunting herself and were able to look beyond the façade and see a hurting person that needs a God of love to validate her worth. When have we ever seen like Jesus?

We haven't because we're not Christians. We're church people, but what if we were Christians? What if we really became what Christ spoke about? What if we became the salt of the earth? What if we were known by our love for one another instead of how we look or what we say? What if we so loved the world that we gave away ourselves, like God did? What if we went from "What if..." to "Why not..." and then to "When do we start...?"

So, when do we start, why not today?



# The Danger of an Invisible Kingdom

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THE DIRT ON CHRISTIANITY.

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I was sitting in the window seat of Starbucks when I saw him. People were walking on the downtown sidewalk, busy and preoccupied. They didn't see him because he was small and insignificant. I couldn't see the look in his eyes, but I was sure he was out for blood, his kind always are. He was right outside of the window, tapping on it, trying to make contact without arousing suspicion. He kept tapping the window, confused by his inability to connect, over and over, furiously, but nobody paid attention to him. I watched him until he finally left, following someone on the sidewalk, I knew there would be blood, with his kind there always is.

He was a mosquito. Sorry, I know that must seem so anticlimactic, but it makes a clear illustration. I had been sitting there in that Starbucks on a hot summer day, the elements and the street noise, the pollutants and the mosquitoes were all held at bay by a clear, thin sheet of glass. The world was there, I could see it, but I was "safe" from it, sitting in my window seat thinking about Jesus. The thing that separated me from the world was invisible, like the kingdom of God. I started looking at the glass, not focusing through it, but focusing on it.

That was what Jesus came to do, to help man stop looking through the kingdom and start seeing it, right in front of their faces. He had contempt for the hierarchy that covered the kingdom in blue robes and gold shutters. That's what we do. We cover the kingdom with fancy covers and scrub it squeaky clean on the inside, maybe that's why people call clergy "men of the cloth."

There is a movement abroad, though, to take the covers off of the kingdom, to make the kingdom clear to everyone, but I have to warn you about the danger of uncovering the kingdom and leaving it clean.

When I was in the fifth grade I lived in Odessa, Texas. That summer I took a road trip with the local Boy's Club. We drove about two and a half hours north to Lubbock, Texas to go to a boxing match. It was great! Everyone was excited and we met the boxing champion, Sugar Ray Leonard. He signed the back of my Boy's Club member card.

We left there and on the way home we stopped in a little town called Seagraves at a Dairy Queen. I jumped out of the bus, racing the director to get inside. Neither of us saw the glass enclosure. It was so clean it was invisible. I never slowed down, not even a slight pause, and I hit the glass at full force. Just before I reached it I sensed it was there and threw my hands out. Both of my hands busted through the glass. I remember looking up, confused and scared. I yanked my hands back instinctively and eight feet of clean jagged shards of glass rained down on my face. The noise was incredible, the blood was terrifying,

The Danger of an Invisible Kingdom people were screaming. I had fallen backward and was covered in glass and blood. It was all over my face and both of my arms and hands were lacerated.

I was in a state of shock. Both of my lips are scarred and I have a scar on my right forearm and just above my left elbow. They are there, permanently reminding me of the danger of invisible enclosures.

Jesus came proclaiming a kingdom but He didn't allow it to be so clinical, so sterile and clean that people could look right through it. No, he smeared it with mud (literally in the blind man's case) and blotched it with prostitutes and tax collectors and dead people and Romans and demoniacs. You can see glass, even clear glass, but only when it's dirty. He wants the world to be able to see the kingdom, but the church has been so busy trying to rub out the spots that it's still invisible.

We seem to think that we have to represent the church as perfect, spotless with no messy smudges or smears. The Pharisees of Jesus day spent most of their time washing the window and never seeing the lost and broken humanity walking by and being pursued by the enemy. We're still employed as Holy Window Washers, doing the same thing. We pay each other with knowing looks and airs of self righteousness as the holiness challenged common man walks by outside of the window. (That's politically correct speak for low-down and dirty, good for nothing sinner man.)

The danger is when the world tries to come to God, they come running, not slowing down, not even a slight pause and hit it at full force. They are wounded when it comes crashing down on them because they think everything is going to be perfect. Here in America they think they are going to get a fancy car and a big house and a perfect marriage and all of their blemishes and imperfections are going to clear up, and they don't.

Their life keeps grinding on and they still get diagnosed with cancer and have to live with aids. We tell them that God will multiply their offering ten times and they give ten bucks and then go spend \$90 on a new shirt and tie and get their electricity cut off. I've watched them walk around dazed at church, ran into them at Wal-Mart and seen the scars on their faces and arms and hands. They're in a state of shock and it's our fault. We're trying to make the church transparent, but we can't keep pretending everything is perfect once you give your life to God. We are promised abundant life, not abundant perfection. Life is life. Sometimes it's incredibly good, sometimes it's incredibly bad, sometimes it's incredibly routine, but it's life. The beauty isn't perfection, it's the blend of the invisible kingdom and flawed humanity.

I was sharing this with my friend, Lowery Stallings, and he made a great point. When the world comes crashing in and they're wounded and lying on the floor covered in blood and glass, we don't reach out to them, pick them up and hold them, or render aid. We stand there in our self righteousness, with our arms crossed or our hand on our hip and index finger

The Danger of an Invisible Kingdom in their face and berate them for breaking the window! “Hey, stupid, you must not have repented right or you would be able to see the invisible kingdom. Let me teach you some doctrine.”

That’s it, really. It’s kind of like the old story of the emperor’s clothes. In his story the swindlers convince the emperor that only the smart people can see the invisible cloth, in ours the swindlers say that only the “holy” people or the ones that give more in the offering or have the right denominational affiliation can see the invisible kingdom. **YOU CAN’T SEE SOMETHING THAT’S INVISIBLE!** That’s what invisible means. It doesn’t matter how smart or holy or righteous or indoctrinated you are.

On the sixth day of creation, God took dust and covered man’s invisible soul blended with His Spirit. When man sinned he was kicked out of the garden and Adam and Eve left the garden, dust without Spirit. Jesus came to bring the invisible kingdom back to the dust and on the day of Pentecost God finally reunited Spirit with dust. Religion is pretending that you can combine Living Water with dust and not get dirty.

Of course, God knows that in our self-righteousness, we have an aversion to the dirty. He knows that we use the kingdom as our insulator instead of making it a refuge for the hurting, so He has enacted plan A.2 (there’s no plan B, right?) You know what plan A.2 is?

Signs. Yep, signs.

You hang a big fluorescent green sign in the middle of a clean window and even though you still can't see the glass, you know it must be there. There are some incredible moves of God in churches and sometimes it's not because of the ministry staff, but in spite of it. When we rub out the blemishes and run off the dirty, God will post a sign on the kingdom for the sake of the people walking by. We thought it was all about us, huh? Tongues and miraculous signs, all of these things are done for the unbeliever to have something to believe in, because they can't see the kingdom in us.

The kingdom of God will declare itself when the prostitute's life is transformed and the demoniac is delivered and the drug addict is cleansed. Jesus said that His works declared His identity. He prayed that the kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven. In other words, what He did among humanity, the healing and the serving, the restitution and reconciliation, these things were his proof of the kingdom. They were signs so we knew where the kingdom was. He came to bring the human element into the eternal kingdom and the eternal kingdom into the human element.

On a good day, when the Son is shining just right, the Light will reflect off of the Kingdom so brilliantly that you won't be able to see past it. The only thing you'll see, of course, is the Son.

The trick to it all is really just to change your idea of what God is trying to do. He didn't call us to be

The Danger of an Invisible Kingdom perfectly transparent. He called us to be translucent. The difference is just allowing the light to shine through, minus the perfection.



## In The Image of God

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### THE UNCARVED CHURCH.

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**A**s you look at different governmental structures you might notice that many of the strong handed regimes of the world employ a very simple yet aggressive means to control the populace, bigger than life images of their leader everywhere you go. From Stalin to Hitler to Hussein, these men kept a strong presence amongst their people to keep them intimidated.

God didn't give us a picture of Himself. He could have easily made a rendering of Himself on a third tablet and handed it to Moses. He could have drawn a picture of Himself on the wall when He wrote that "mene mene" thing in the book of Daniel. There are all kinds of places that He could have posted a big picture of Himself to keep us on our guard. Yet, He didn't do that, have you ever wondered why?

In fact, He gave explicit instructions not to make any graven (carved or sculptured) images of any god or pseudo-god. He didn't want a fierce or condescending image of Himself plastered on every wall of downtown Jerusalem or New York City or Wickett, Texas. Instead He did what He does best.

He created avenues of beauty to whisper or even shout His presence to the world.

To make it all complete though, He created His Church, men and women over time that have individually been the threads in the tapestry that illustrates the image of God. When the world sees the church, they see the reflection of Him. The difference is that we are reflective while He radiates. We hold and reflect light, He emanates it.

The church, no matter how glorious or beautiful is not an edifice or building that was designed or constructed by man.

I'll probably be a pastor someday. I guess I already am in some regards, if we use the Biblical perspective. I had a conversation recently with a pastor who was instituting a policy manual for the congregation he pastors. He invited me to be a part of the meeting and was really excited about the policies and all. I went into the meeting very pessimistically. I'm really afraid of multi-hundred page policy manuals that can so easily hamstring the creativity of the Church. I was pleasantly surprised by his sense of balance, though. I spend a lot of time pushing the boundaries so I can see the value in having some things that are anchors.

During the discussion, though, the idea of pastoring a large congregation came up. I think that has to do more with the image of man than the image of God. We have been infected with what Martin Judson, the lead character in Charles Mercer's book "The

Truth Is Irrelevant  
Minister” called “the American success syndrome.” He describes it as “The belief in growth – in making small things become larger as a virtue in itself.”

Instead of focusing so much on the status that a mega-church pastor would have we should simply focus on leading people with whom we can have meaningful relationships. It would be really hard to be a pastor to a group of strangers whether it’s fifty or five thousand.

One of the buzzwords of Christianity is “accountability.” All of the pastors I know are really big about the people in their congregation being accountable, but really, you’re only accountable to your friends. If I, as a pastor, can’t be close enough to the people who are a part of the group I am leading for them to consider me a friend, than I can’t really expect those people to be accountable to me.

I’ve had some really interesting discussions with pastors when it comes to this topic. Some feel like the pastor must keep a separation from “the people” and not become close. That may be so “the people” won’t be able to see behind the curtain and realize that the wizard is really just a little man with a loudspeaker.

Jesus wasn’t afraid to get close to people. He was always mixing with “the people” and not just the “good” ones. The difference between us and Jesus is that He was complete and not afraid of what people would think about Him if they found out who He really was outside of the lime light, outside of the

scripted sermon or away from the hurrah that our church productions can be.

That's it, too. We have created this image that the pastor is somehow elite, like royalty, but he's not. There is nothing inherently different about him. Pastors struggle with sin, doubt, temptations, etc. just like everybody else.

This elitist image creates incredible pressure on pastors to be performance driven. Church becomes a production instead of a passion. I do believe we should give honor to pastors, they have a big job. There must be a balance though, just like in everything.

I've met some guys that pastor that have really bought into this elitist mentality. They have the entourage, expect the spiffs and treat the "little people" like (I was going to use the word crap, but my wife thought it was a little too strong.) It's all really kind of silly. They can be very territorial, too. I've seen some people with great potential squashed by these guys because they became a threat to their kingdom.

It's not as important what I think, though, as what the world sees. In us the world must see the promise of Christ, the beauty of today, and the hope for tomorrow. If they never hear our doctrines, never come to our meetings or subscribe to our unique philosophies, they must see Him. What is the image that they should see?

Truth Is Irrelevant

Humility. Love. Selfless passion.

These are the character traits that will lead people away from themselves and to Christ. This is what God imagined when He started the Church.



# Truth Is Irrelevant

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WHEN TRUTH MATTERS.

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**T**ruth doesn't change because of relevance. Truth is truth. Culture can be relevant. Truth is contextual.

You know for the last year God has lead me down some pretty dark corridors and given me messages that have really stretched my thinking and made me search the way that I have conceptualized God and religion and so many other things. One author that has affected me profoundly is Donald Miller. If you can skip two meals at Mickey D's and head over to the book store and buy any one of his books you will be challenged, insulted and inspired all at once. Sorry I'm rambling.

One day my son Benjamin asked me a question that I believe was the catalyst for a change in my own thinking. About Benjamin, he's a deep thinker. He was only nine when he asked me this. He was reading in Exodus and he came upon the place where Moses is turned aside by the burning bush. Just as Moses is about to walk into his life changing encounter, God told him to stop and of all things, take off his shoes. "Why did he do that, Dad? Why did God ask him to take off his shoes?"

God was asking Moses to place himself at His mercy, to have complete faith in His motive. That translates beautifully in the life of a believer. When you really

scrutinize what it means to have faith, it's also about making yourself vulnerable.

Vulnerable's root word comes from the Latin, *vulnerā*, it means to wound. Vulnerable literally means "woundable." When I am staring at a blank white page or canvas I have this initial fear that what I am about to attempt will be a failure, but if I am not willing to convey what's inside, then I already fail.

God has placed this gift within us, earthen vessels, to glorify Himself in us. Through our lips in speech or song, our hands on canvas or sculpture, our body and feet in dance, every member is designed to create praise from vulnerability.

Think about what Jesus said about prayer. He said not to make vain repetition like the heathen, right? Well, why not? That's a valid question, don't you think? Here's my opinion: He's looking for His reflection as the Creator in you. Reciting a list of memorized words can be beautiful, no doubt, but they're not your words. Be creative in your approach to Him.

Be willing to be wounded by people who don't understand you or your vision. In the end nobody will know what you thought or felt unless you expressed it. Even God, the Creator, manifested, or made Himself visible, to the world as the man, Jesus Christ, the express image of God.

That's a beautiful illustration about what God is trying to do through us, but here's the point, God told Moses to take his shoes off in the desert and then told

## Truth Is Irrelevant

the Hebrew slaves to make sure they had their shoes on before they left to go to the desert.

The fact that God told Moses to take off his shoes was irrelevant to the Hebrew slaves the night they were fleeing Egypt, even though it was true. Why, because it was out of context. The truth here didn't have to be relevant, it had to be contextual.

If we are going to express the truth of God's word today, it won't be because we change it to make it relevant, truth doesn't have to be relevant, in fact most people are getting tired of the watered down stuff we're pumping out today.

“Jesus is my Homie.” Yeah right, Jesus isn't your Homie, He's God.

So much of what we are doing in the name of being relevant just becomes fodder for the next cliché.

Truth, though, needs to be presented in a way that can be put into the context of the lives of the people you are reaching for.



# The Church Has Left The Building

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THE BEGINNING OF THE END  
OF THE BEGINNING.

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**G**etting this far into this book has been a mountainous struggle and accomplishment for me. There has been months that I simply walked away from it because I felt like I was getting to the end, to the completion of the final chapters.

Somewhere along the way as a child I developed a critical flaw, I do not finish things. Another thing that I struggle with is finances. I am incredibly inept at finances sometimes. I think these two things are related and have started several times on the right journey to discovering the problem only to abandon the quest as I got close to the end.

Now, I'm no martyr and there's a reason I'm telling you this (as well as a reason why it's here towards the end of the book, so you wouldn't write me off too early.)

The truth of the matter is that I developed these character flaws before I came to God. They were apparent from the onset of my beginning into ministry and for 14 years thereafter in a small church in West Texas. I traveled across the country with the pastor teaching seminars and worked long hours, day on end as a full time employed "minister", preaching and teaching, developing curriculum, graphics and

websites, videos and ministry tools to put in the hands of people that were trying to do the work of God.

These shortcomings were never more than a bump in the road or a sarcastic remark from the pulpit until I felt called to relocate. Then he called the pastor to where I was relocating with the news that I didn't finish projects and had a hard time with finances which he knew because I had already told him. In fact, he even called a district official to let him know I was coming and to watch out for me.

If he knows I'm coming to see you or speak to your group you may even get a call from him. He is not unique in this, I have been involved with several ministries and pastors who (and here's the catch) for the sake of "*their* church" are willing to "use" people to promote their agenda, even people that aren't ready or able to balance spiritual principles. The point is that while my skills were available to be employed in "his kingdom" my inadequacies were overlookable.

Here's why this is important. **Ministry is not (or shouldn't be) about the development of the entity.** It should be about the development of the individuals entrusted to us. So many times people with skills or talents are ushered into a place of "ministry" because the entity needs their skill or talent, not because they are spiritually qualified.

I developed into a full-time on-staff paid ministry with these inhibiting factors firmly and very publicly rooted in my life. What if, and this is obviously a theory (I use myself as the example only because I

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The Church Has Left The Building know my own story) but, what if, I had been encouraged to grow and develop in these areas *before* I was ushered into ministry?

What if the pastor had been more concerned about me as a person and had taken the time necessary to help me overcome these flaws instead of seeing my skill set as a commodity to be used at his discretion for the sake of building his local kingdom?

This type of thinking comes from some concepts that are very ingrained in our religious mentality.

1. **The building is the church.**

We say we go “to church.” We don’t go “to church,” the church gathers. We call the church building “the house of God.” The building is not “the house of God,” it may be a “house of worship,” but we are the house of God. He said he didn’t dwell in a house built with human hands. I was having a conversation with a pastor recently who was lamenting the fact that the youth don’t have a reverence for the “house of God.” The generation coming up does not see the building as holy and the departure from this concept may actually play a positive and significant role in the future of the church here in America. If we were to lose the privilege to gather publicly as the Church, our people must understand that the gathering is holy, not the location. In fact, the “house of God” concept as a distinct physical location can not be found in the New Testament. It is a later concept

brought in by the hierarchal edifice focused religion of the third century. The early church met in homes and on the side of the road. When we read the letters Paul wrote to the Church about how to conduct themselves in the “house of God” we read it from the perspective of the modern edifice centered church. The house of God wasn’t and still isn’t a fixed location in the New Testament, it’s wherever we are, the Body not the building.

2. **The local work is God’s kingdom.** Typically a person leaving the local congregation is seen as leaving the “Kingdom of God” even if he is moving to work in another congregation. I learned this harsh lesson personally when I left West Texas, but I also had hammered some good people and lost the opportunity for long lasting relationships because I adopted this thought process from the leadership I was under.

We have a tendency to suspect and even look down on other congregations, especially those in the same town or vicinity. I’ve seen pastors treat each other with contempt and even as enemies. I’ve heard some pretty harsh stuff come across pulpits and harsher things in closed door sessions from pastors who were trying to impress *their* staff of *their* own claim to the “kingdom” and the inadequacies of the moron across town. We are like middle age

The Church Has Left The Building feudal barons guarding our kingdoms. I'd call it silly if it didn't fly in the face of what Jesus called us to be and do. While in Odessa for 14 years I had a negative view of the church across town. I helped spread the feeling amongst our local congregation even though I rarely spoke to the pastor of that group and actually knew and liked some people who were a part of that congregation. My stance was based in ignorance (on my part) and the feudal mentality that my pastor had when it came to the "kingdom of God" in "our city." I also had people from that group look at me with disdain when they found out I was from "that church." It was pretty sad. The same issues were apparent in several other churches that I worked for in different cities.

We have to realize that God's kingdom is so much bigger than what we are doing in our local church. We are so finite in our thinking and so narrow in our approach and effectiveness that we are threatened by the idea that something could be happening somewhere outside of our control.

These examples may seem petty and I know on the surface most pastors wouldn't admit to this type of thought process, but small things that we say are usually indicative of big things that we think and feel.

So, with these things in mind, what should the church be or do? I don't think Jesus' purpose was ever to just replace a religious organization with another religious

organization. That would not have been a difficult thing to do if you think about it. The Jews of His day were trained for thousands of years in the art of religiosity. That's what seemed to tick Him off the most. They had their edifice, their building, to center everything around. They had their ministry team and their high priest, their in and out clubs, everything.

The Old Testament high priest is not the equivalent of our modern day pastor. He held a position created by God as a type of something that was to come. He alone had the authority to enter into the Holy Place where God's presence was approachable to stand in the place of the people. This office was fulfilled by Jesus Christ and ended with His crucifixion.

The pastor is instructed to teach and exhort and pray for the people he has been entrusted to lead and care for but never does he circumvent any person's right of access to the throne of God, nor their obligation to hear from God personally. This concept is more a hold over from the papal doctrines of the third century, which are a misapplication of Old Testament scriptural concepts, than from any of the letters of instruction to the church about how the ministry should operate. The Holy Place has ceased to be a location where only one man has the right to enter. When Jesus died on the cross the veil was torn from the ceiling to the ground and the "holy ground" beneath it was broken by an earthquake.

Also, the office of the New Testament pastor is not the only conduit that God uses to speak to His

The Church Has Left The Building Church, it is one of many including teachers, evangelists, prophets, apostles, and others.

The reason we have become so pastor focused is because our Christianity is so tied to the building and as mentioned before our tendency to adopt modern American business practices for church leadership instead of basing it on Scripture.

The purpose and effectiveness of the Church has been diminished by our own human ambition to have a church of “our own.” If the Church is going to truly be what it is called to be, it may need to walk away from the idea of building larger buildings, amassing more wealth and basing its success or failure on an individual pastor.

Instead it should focus on developing a core of leaders. We are quick to reference the “five fold ministry” but I don’t know many (if any) pastors who would be willing to concede any control or leadership to four other men (or women) of “their” church as equals. Second, we should worry less about building the entity into a mega-church and develop the individuals to their greatest capacity. That may mean developing several smaller congregations that give the leaders a better ability to lead those who are born into the Church, which necessitates the most crucial and most easily ignored role the Church should play: To engage the world around us with the love of God and create a sanctuary, or a safe place, for individuals and families to have the chance to reach their potential in His kingdom.

“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? *Won’t he leave* the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn’t wander away! <sup>14</sup> In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father’s will that even one of these little ones should perish.”

*Matthew 18:12-14 NLT Emphasis added..*

Jesus said that the reason he was always with sinners was because the well don’t need a physician. There is the possibility of having a “well” and “whole” group of people that are not lost to the world. The job of the church is to be the safe place that tends to the ninety-nine and keeps them healthy and well fed.

In verse twelve Jesus said that He would leave the ninety-nine and go after the one that had strayed. **He didn’t say He would leave them alone.** In verse ten the ninety-nine are in the care of other shepherds because in verse eleven the lost sheep is in need. This is how He set up the Church, we are under-shepherds, working with and for Him with His sheep, not our own.

**The world needs Jesus and we have Him,** but not in the sense that we own Him or are exclusive. It would be more like we own the property that a river runs through. We have access to the river, we can swim in it, drink the water, we can invite people to it and we can even bottle it and take it to

The Church Has Left The Building them. The bottle may be ours and the label may be about us and what we do, but the water came from upstream.

Did you know that the world doesn't have to pray to get Jesus' attention? They just have to be hungry. When He fed the five thousand the Bible never mentions anyone praying. Somebody's stomach growled and Jesus responded. The Disciples were instructed to carry the food (provided by Jesus, like the upstream river water) to the hungry people. It's the same today.

Our job, as a church, is to fulfill the will or intention of God. His intent was that the world, **through the church**, would come to know Him and become His disciples. A disciple is "one who embraces and assists in spreading the teachings of another."

The question is not if we should go to church it's how can we go "be" the church? It may take some cardboard astronauts that are ready to leave the box and forge out into the unknown to discover new possibilities for the Church.



# Cardboard Astronauts

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EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS  
NOT ABANDONING HOME.

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**O**n a fuzzy black and white screen the world watched as Armstrong bounded off of the ladder onto the surface of the moon. His words “one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind” will forever memorialize the accomplishment of a group of dreamers trying to expand the kingdom of man.

There were those who vilified NASA and the space program. They claimed that the whole trip was a farce and there never really was a trip to the moon, nor was it truly even possible. The idea that we could travel outside of what they thought and knew was unacceptable. It must be some sort of conspiracy. Every mission and exploration party has had to endure the same criticism, even in the kingdom of God.

The church is afraid of and at the same time attracted to people who think outside of the box. A Cardboard Astronaut is someone who isn't willing to be discontented, unwilling to simply remain in negative neutral wishing that there was more to living for God than the stale, flat mentality that so many have accepted for the sake of conformity. They are willing to push the boundaries at great personal risk to deviate from the accepted norms.

Throughout history we have both celebrated and vilified these deviants amongst us. Of course, because we're mostly perverted we automatically think of a deviant as a person doing gross things. The word in its true sense according to dictionary.com is "a person or thing that deviates or departs markedly from the accepted norm."

Of course the accepted norm isn't necessarily the best course. In fact the world would be a totally different place if there weren't out-of-the-box thinkers who were willing or compelled to try something different or new. Jesus Christ was the ultimate deviant and a great example of a true Cardboard Astronaut. He stepped way out of convention and pushed the boundaries of a religion that was centuries old and entrenched in not only the religious system but also the social fabric of His culture. There were others aside from Him like King David in the Old Testament, Paul of the New Testament. Martin Luther, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr., there were many nationally and internationally recognized people who pushed the boundaries, trying to find new ground or shed old ideologies for the sake of moving forward.

The most important part of being a true Cardboard Astronaut is about connection. The goal has never been to destroy the box, but like an astronaut, to move outside of its confines and explore new ideas and concepts.

## Cardboard Astronauts

We breathe the air we brought with us from the box, we develop and maintain an open communication with those in the box, and we reach further with an eye on the gauges that keep us from drifting too far.

Just like those early space explorers, the journey begins way before we actually step out of the box. It usually starts with a sense of wonder. I'm sure that the idea of space exploration was much more than a scientific quest for the man that laid out the plans for the first space flight, it was probably more about the possibility that there could be something more to life than what we can see or experience stuck to the earth by gravity. Was there something more? Was there life out there, somewhere?

Years before, that man was a boy lying on his back in the backyard staring out into space, hoping. It may be that you've had that same experience, a dull ache that makes you long for more than what we have. I've lain awake at night, hoping that the life I was leading as a full-time "minister" was not all there was to this thing called Christianity. I've traveled all over America and seen so many church people that were lifeless and bored. I had a conversation with a pastor down south that was upset about the state of lethargy in the congregation he pastors. He asked the dreaded question, "Is it me? Is the church I'm leading dead because of my ministry?"

Yes...

If you are the leader and your group of followers is at the wrong destination, then I'm sorry to have to point

out that you lead them there. That seems harsh, but it's true.

Most people who go to church do what they have been led to do. Here it is, in a nutshell:

1. Attend church faithfully
2. Pay tithes and give offerings
3. Don't rock the boat.

That is what is expected of most people in most churches. So really, the pastor of the above mentioned church and most other churches that are frustrated by the congregation's lack of enthusiasm have been wildly successful.

In Arthur Gordon's book "A Touch of Wonder" he says, "Enthusiasm – from the beginning, a remarkable word. The ancient Greeks used it to describe an inspired person: en meaning in, and theos meaning god. The enthusiastic person, they thought, was one who reflected the presence of an indwelling god. And the more you ponder this, the more convinced you become that the Greeks, as usual, not only had a word for it, but the right word."

The reason church people seem lethargic and unenthusiastic is not because we have or haven't preached hard enough or straight enough. In fact, if you were to ask them how they thought they were doing most of them would honestly say they were 100% behind the pastor and the mission of the church.

They are not and can not be fulfilled as true

## Cardboard Astronauts

Christians if their Christianity is summed up in their attendance and monetary support of the church as an institution. There is no life in that, they may as well join a good country club and at least attend with the true intention of just being part of a social club.

Discovery is not about coming up with something new. To “dis|cover” something is to find something already there but hidden from view by ignorance, obstruction or distance. When Columbus “discovered” the Americas he didn’t make them or invent them, he simply went further than the people he knew were willing to go. Of course, there were other people there already so it’s arguable whether he actually “discovered” anything. He was just one of the first people from the “known world” to venture that far. The same holds true with the church today.

A cardboard astronaut is not looking for some new truth(s) he or she is looking for truth that has been obscured by ignorance, obstruction or distance. When we push the boundaries it is for the sake of the Church not to forsake it.

Maybe you’re a cardboard astronaut. If so, be aware that you are both admired and scorned by the people around you. Take the risk to move the kingdom of God forward. Be informed so that your resistance to things accepted as normal isn’t for the sake of rebellion. God has placed the desire for more in you and is stirring you and others but rebellion is not, nor will it ever be, sanctioned by God.

Go, but remember where you came from because your goal isn't to get away from the Church, it's to broaden the understanding of those not willing to believe until they see, to bring them to the places you've been to and to help them dream about the possibilities.

Look for others who share the passion you have for the new, the edge can be a lonely place. Be bold, live passionately and move forward.