

“You Are That Man!” Accountability and Confrontation in Action

There is a powerful story found in 2 Samuel 12 detailing the confrontation of King David by the prophet Nathan. I suggest you read it if you have not done so before. David had sinned. He had committed adultery and worse. Nathan tells him the story of a family with one special lamb that is taken away by a rich man. As Nathan relates the details, David becomes increasingly angrier with the rich man and his selfish and greedy behavior. At the conclusion of the story, Nathan asks David to offer his take on the story – his verdict. David wastes no time. He declares that the rich man is guilty and that he deserves to die. (He also needs to make restitution fourfold.) Nathan responds with some of the most powerful and damning words found in Scripture: “You are that man!”

Nathan handled this entire situation masterfully. He laid bare David’s sin, his potential for excuses, and any conceivable defense. He confronted David boldly but with wisdom. He did not kick down the palace doors, get in David’s face, and yell and scream. He did not point any fingers until it was necessary. We have a lot to learn from Nathan in how we confront fellow believers who are sinning.

Earlier this week, Gordy Cannon [wrote a wonderful piece](#) about biblical confrontation. I agree with his take completely. He outlines our responsibilities at every turn, using practical language. I cannot begin to add to what he wrote or to make it any clearer. What I would like to do today is to add some texture to the conversation. This is not necessarily biblical in the strictest sense, but I do think it holds to biblical teaching and examples. What I am going to relate to you today is a personal story – an anecdote from my life – that will

hopefully help provide a practical approach to a situation that is difficult and complicated.

Right before I started my junior year at Welch College, my girlfriend broke up with me. It was quite possibly the most painful and traumatic experience of my life. I loved her. Even then, after only a year of dating, I was convinced we were going to marry. That break-up sent me into a downward spiral of self-pity and sadness. To put as fine a point on it as I can, that next school year was awful. I hated pretty much everything. I hated school. I hated (or seriously disliked) most of the people at school. I was miserable. I was angry. (Obviously, I handled the break-up with class, style, and maturity.) My grades plummeted. I skipped class, chapel, and all sorts of other things. I did the bare minimum, just enough to keep a passing grade in most of my classes. My older brother, fellow REO contributor Michael Lytle, was a graduating senior that year. He would make comments from time to time, trying to get me to stop being so lazy and wasteful with my time. Nothing worked. I was enjoying my anger and slothfulness.

I have no idea how many people around me knew how miserable I was or how much I was slacking off my responsibilities. I doubt many people except those closest to me realized anything was amiss. I rebelled as quietly and as under-the-radar as I could. I was not depressed or hopeless. I was angry and that anger turned into apathy.

Back when I was in college at Welch, the graduates would give their "Senior Testimony" during chapel. The day my brother was scheduled, I made sure I attended. He did a great job. He was funny, sincere, and concise. (Too many seniors felt it was their duty to go on and on during their testimony.) During his testimony, he thanked me personally – for my "inspiring work ethic" or something very close to that. It got some good laughs, especially from those who knew me best. I laughed. I was to the point that I knew exactly what I was doing and I

did not care anymore. However, those words stuck with me. They stuck with me every time someone I barely knew from college would come up to me and make a joke about that line. They stuck with me when some teachers did the same thing. I smiled. I laughed. Deep down, though, it was starting to cut. I had become a joke. I was a punch-line to a lot of people. When people saw me, many of them saw wasted potential. They saw laziness. That did not sit well with me anymore. My brother's words said in fun and with love, stopped feeling like a joke, and more like a subtle and incredibly wise form of confrontation. His words brought back to mind all the lessons I had learned from Scripture about hard work, excellence, and all those other defining attributes of a wise and godly person. I was not living up to any of those ideals.

Here is where things get a little tricky. I have no idea if my brother was going for confrontation when he made that joke in chapel. Maybe he was. Honestly, it does not really matter. It worked as the perfect form of accountability for me. Gentle rebukes were not working. Encouragement was not working. Telling me to stop being lazy and go to class was not working. Making a joke about my work ethic in front of the entire school worked. It was a turning point for me. It was not the end of my laziness, anger, and misery, but it was the first moment of self-reflection and change. And don't feel too bad about the break-up. We got back together a year later and ended up getting married. We are still married – nearly 19 years later. [You can read more about that story here.](#)

Not to get too hung up on the particulars of this story, but I think there is a lot to learn from both Nathan the prophet and my brother...the prophet. When we live in a community of faith, we will need to confront sin. Scripture is very clear that we must approach these situations with humility, but I think the story of Nathan gives us another angle to our approach. We need to be wise. Blunt and in your face does not work with most people. Too much subtlety is useless. We have to walk a

fine line with being direct and bold but not to the point where we burn the bridge before real confrontation even occurs. Obviously, this will take on a new form with each confrontation. That is where prayer and wisdom come into play. Literally, no one else in my life could have made that joke the way my brother did without it making me more angry and resentful. It was disarming coming from him. That is why it is of utmost importance for us to develop strong, intimate relationships with other believers. We need to truly know them to know what works if or when they stumble.

Take this for what it is worth, which might not be much. It is a very specific example from my life. It might not apply to anyone else's life but I am very grateful that it applied to mine. I am glad my brother has a great sense of humor and that he used to it to such a powerful effect on me. He was Nathan to my David. I was "that man" and I needed someone to hold me accountable. I hope we can do that for each other as we walk this road of faith together.

An Open Letter from Maude, the Farting Cow

Hi, Maude here.

It's come to my attention that a few Democrats recently introduced a new bill called "The Green New Deal." It's full of all sorts of wonderful ideas, including retrofitting or rebuilding every building in the United States to meet with new energy standards. That doesn't sound too difficult to pull off. I mean, it's not like there are 100s of millions of buildings in the US...

Most of the stuff doesn't affect my life at all. I am a cow. I have simple needs. Grass. Water. Some room to roam. You know. The usual. If I say so myself, I don't really ask a lot from the world around me. Me, and others like me, are simple creatures. So, you will share in my shock and horror that this new bill specifically targets me and my, how to put this delicately, flatulence. This bill wants to eradicate, and I quote, "farting cows."

Excuse me! I will have you know that I suffer from a very common malady among my kind. I have a touch of irritable bowel syndrome. It's no laughing matter by the way. It can be a bit embarrassing from time to time, but the other cows understand exactly what I am dealing with, as so many others have this or similar gastrointestinal issues. It's not like we sit around and try to see who can pass the most gas every day. (Well, Henrietta does that but no one likes her and she is giving us all a bad name.) Sometimes, you just have to let one fly. Is that so wrong? Is this where we are as a society that we are going to not only shame cows that are passing gas but plan to get rid of them? That's a nice way of saying we are going to exterminate all gassy cows. I won't stand for it. (Well, I'll stand because lying down is really hard for a cow, but you know what I mean.)

So, this letter is for Ms. Ocasio-Cortez (or Ms. Ocasio-Cowhater as I am going to call her from now on) and her friends that helped write this new bill calling for my death. We reject it out of hand! We will have nothing to do with this blatant and offensive bovine shaming. We ask that everyone else, cow or human or any other creature that struggles with a rumbling tummy, stand with us! Say no to the "Green New Deal" and its ridiculous attempt to get rid of cows. Mooove over, sister and let the adults handle things from now on!

REO Radio

If you have paid any attention to REO, you know we love music. All kinds of music, in fact. I've lost track of how many articles we have published that revolve around music and song. We've published multiple [playlists](#), a series on the forgotten history of Christian rock, and many, many other [articles](#) that are inspired by our love and appreciation of all the [wonderful music](#) that has been and is being created.

I love listening to the radio. It's always fun to hear a song you love play over the airwaves. At least, it is for me. I love Christian music – CCM. I have since childhood. While I love secular music as well, my first love will always be grounded in songs that are infused with a sense of faith, grace, and redemption. You can find that kind of music in the secular world, but you might have to wade through a lot of garbage as well. So naturally, my heart turns toward music that is created by believers.

Unfortunately, most Christian radio these days is stuck in an endless loop of recency bias. Christian radio stations play the same handful of songs, all of which have released in the last year or so, and they play them repeatedly. (We dealt with this idea in more depth on our Christian Rock series – you can read those starting [here](#).) Based on the popularity of those articles and playlists, I know we are not alone in our desire to hear songs from every generation and multiple styles and genres.

That is where this playlist comes in. We have been putting this together for some time. We've spent hours selecting the songs, sequencing the order, and doing our best to find the right blend of sounds, artists, and styles. If you are

familiar with secular radio stations that play hits from various eras and genres, this is that, only featuring Christian music. We tried very hard to include as much variety as possible. If you have any history with CCM, you will be familiar with a lot of these songs though I'm sure there will be some new songs to just about everyone – that is intentional. While we focused on including artists and songs that would be easily recognizable to as many people as possible, we also wanted to do our best to introduce our readers/listeners to some music that they might have missed. And for those that love the newest Christian music, don't worry. We included plenty of those songs and artists as well.

So, without any more delay, we present to you *REO Radio*. The playlist is 150 songs. We recommend that you follow it on Spotify and listen to it in the order we created – though that is not an absolute necessity. We think you could easily put this playlist on in the morning when you get to work and listen to it all day and you will not repeat a song. We hope it will serve as a journey through the varied textures, styles, and sounds of Christian music. We hope it's a journey that many of you will take and enjoy. We know we enjoyed putting it together. Thanks for reading and thanks for listening. Feel free to share this playlist with your likeminded friends. Oh, and this playlist will evolve over time. We will continue to tweak it, adding and subtracting songs as they come to mind.

Early Church Christianity in

2019 and Beyond

If you have a problem, a simple online search will present you with an almost unlimited array of solutions. Most of these solutions will be of the quick and easy variety. We look for shortcuts to save us time and energy. We call these things “life hacks” or “cheat codes” or “quick-fix schemes.” I am definitely not against finding more efficient ways to handle my problems. There is a catch, though, as these schemes and hacks are often fraudulent or ineffective and they end up creating more problems than they solve.

It can be difficult to navigate a broken and sinful culture. Often, we feel our Christianity becomes more about what we do not do and whom we are not as opposed to what we do and who we are. Instead of presenting the positive side of our faith, we feel that we are constantly labeled by the negative side. (By positive, I am referring to being salt and light to the world. By negative, I am referring to sinful behaviors we rightly avoid.) Our faith is reduced to going to church and avoiding sins.

Obviously, that is not the life Jesus calls us to live. That is not the life the Scriptures exhort us to cultivate. As I stated earlier, we are called to be salt and light – things that preserve, flavor, and shine. So, how can we do that? Is there a cheat code to get from where we are to where we need to be? Yes and no. We have clear directions in Scripture to help us but we either overlook them or ignore them. This is not a quick-fix scheme, but these are all practical things each of us can do to make our Christian walk richer, deeper, and more impactful to the world around us.

1. Love without hypocrisy.

This is the foundational piece. Our love needs to be real and authentic. It cannot be reserved only for those that love us in return. We need to love and bless those that curse us – our enemies or those people who hate and mock us. We should be known for our love – love for the church and for everyone around us. Our love should keep us humble as we constantly strive to prioritize others. Our love should spur us to greater acts of service, kindness, and generosity – showing hospitality to all. Love should be our defining characteristic.

2. Hate evil and cling to what is good.

This is easier said than done but it is what we are called to do as believers. The two-part idea here is clear: It is not just about avoiding evil. Our lives should be characterized by good. Clinging brings to mind holding on for our lives. We are drowning people and we are clinging to the hand of our Master who walks on the waves.

3. Be diligent and hard working in our service to the Lord.

This is where it hits me the hardest. It is easy for me to work hard if it is something I love. It is not so easy to work hard if it is mundane and boring. Often, my job is mundane and boring. That should not matter. My work ethic should point to Christ. If it does not, then I am failing in one of the key Evangelism tools I have at my disposal.

I fail too often.

4. Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice – even in difficult times.

How often are we commanded to be filled with joy? To look pain, suffering, and loss in the eye and rejoice? Too many to count. We live with hope, unlike the world that has none. So even in times of great trial and loss, the hope that is in us should shine out the brighter.

5. Be peacemakers.

How easy is it to “hate” that person on the news (a person you do not even know) who is espousing some insane political/social/ethical stance with which you completely disagree? How easy is it to dismiss your neighbors who are boorish and loud? How easy is it to lose your temper when driving in horrible traffic, yelling at the drivers around you? These are not the actions of a person of peace – a child of peace. So far as it depends on us, we should be at peace with everyone. It is not a suggestion. It is a command.

Bonus: We should be devoted to prayer. This one is self-explanatory. We all need to pray more often and more fervently.

For what it's worth, these are not my ideas. I did not come up with this list on my own. I repackaged the second half of Romans 12. We read that passage this Sunday morning in small group and it hit me hard. I have not been able to take my mind off of it all week. I figured God was keeping it in my mind for a reason so I decided to share it with the REO audience. Go read the passage yourself. There is much more I barely hinted at. If we start living this passage every day, everything would change. I am 100% sure of that. I do not live

this passage out, as I should. That changes now. Will you join me?

Visionary! Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Nominates Hank Pym, Tony Stark, and Shuri To Science and Energy Board.

Washington, D.C. – On the steps of The U.S. Capital Building, surrounded by supporters and members of the press, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, newly elected Congresswoman and rising star in the Democrat Party, officially offered three names to head the newly created “Climate Change and Renewable Energy Board.” Based on the three people she submitted, she is not afraid to think out of the box. “We have to get off fossil fuels and we have to do it soon. Our planet is dying and the time to start is now. I looked around and these people are the most qualified to lead us into a bright and clean future. I mean seriously, who is smarter than these three? As we all saw in *Ant Man*, Hank Pym invented the “Pym Particle” for crying out loud! And everyone knows all the great stuff Tony Stark has done – The Arc Reactor and he even helped create a new element! How awesome is that!?! We just need him to give up that whole warmongering, Iron Man stuff. And what can I say about Shuri other than she is a fierce, independent, minority woman who just so happens to be the world’s expert on working with Vibranium. Plus, getting her would allow us to open more channels for trade and information exchange with the thriving

nation of Wakanda and it's wonderful ruler, her brother T'Challa, or Black Panther as most people know him. It's definitely a win-win."

Representative Ocasio-Cortez's office has reached out to Pym, Stark, and Shuri but has received no response from them or their representatives at this time. "We'll get in touch with them soon. I'm sure they understand how important it is for us to fix this massive environmental mess Big Oil and their Republican cronies have created. They'll want to be on the right side of history and that side is fighting for renewable energy and a clean environmental future."

When a reporter from Fox News pointed out that all three of these "people" are fictional characters in recent Marvel films, Ocasio-Cortez simply danced around the steps and said, "This is not the time to get hung up on specifics and 'facts.' We have been called to do the impossible so that is exactly what we will do." The crowd full of her constituents, supporters, and press exploded in cheers and joined in the dance.

It is clear that we are in very good hands indeed.

500 Words or Less Review: Watership Down (Netflix/BBC)

Watership Down, the novel written by Richard Adams, is one of my favorite books of all time. When I try to explain why I love it so much, words tend to fail me. It is a book about rabbits, after all. How could a book about rabbits be something an adult man would love? Easy. Think of it less as a book about rabbits and more as an epic story about friendship,

survival, and hope. The ties that bind these heroic rabbits are easily identifiable and relatable.

That's the book. The new Netflix/BBC series is a different thing. Fortunately, it's not different enough to significantly lessen its impact. A few caveats about the new series: First, the animation is not up to the big-budget *Pixar* or *DreamWorks* standards. That might be a deal-breaker for some. Trust me and be patient with it. The story is worth it. Second, if you are a book purist, try to set that aside as much as possible when watching this series. Stuff gets changed. Know that going in and it might save you some frustration.

There is good news, though! While liberties are taken the filmmakers prove they have a deep love for the source material and do their best to maintain the spirit and the tone of the book. The series is divided into four 51 minutes sections – each with their own title and focus. I loved this format because it gave the filmmakers a chance to really dig into the story – more time than a two-hour film – but not too much time which would have tempted them to really mess with the key dynamics. It's a good balance and makes for a mostly focused story.

For my money, the two standouts in this version are the voice actors and the music. The cast does great work in bringing these wonderful characters to life. We get to know Hazel, Fiver, Bigwig, Kehaar, General Woundwort, and the rest. James McAvoy and John Boyega are particularly good in their key roles. And the original score by Federico Jusid is in turns epic, subdued, and poignant.

One of my favorite aspects of the novel is that while these characters are relatable, they also operate on very non-human levels – driven more by instinct and need. For the most part, the series gets this right. There are attempts to shoehorn in a few modern points of view, but they wisely avoid making those things the focal point.

I highly recommend this new series by Netflix and the BBC. It is entertaining and moving. There is a beautiful melancholy that hangs over most of the series, which is also true for the book, and that made my heart very happy indeed. A word of warning: neither the book or series are intended for young audiences, even though they are about rabbits. Older children should be fine but be aware that the story goes to dark places and there is some bloodshed as these brave rabbits fight for their futures.

REO Presents: New Year's Recommendations

We write reviews often. We've also had a semi-consistent book review/recommendation series. (We really need to update that...) This will be a little different. Instead of focusing on one thing: movies, books, music, etc... we are going to try to paint a broad view of things we love that we think you should check out. These blurbs are going to be fast and furious – all around 200 words and all about things we think are pretty great. Consider them our New Year's gift to you.

Gowdy Cannon



TV Show – Chuck



This is not a popular show but my wife and I watched it this year on Amazon Prime Video. I was blown away. It's not like any other TV show I've watched. It defies any genre box. It may be a comedy at its heart but it has extremely well-executed action scenes and its most important story arc is romance. In a world full of Ross and Rachels it dared to give us Bartowski and Walker. This show reached deep and pulled wonderful emotion from me often.

Levi, Stahovski, Gomez, and Baldwin are unforgettable as the main players and like any TV show worth watching the role players are dynamite, highlighted by Jeffster! and their hijinks and musical concerts (which were basically the same thing). It is also replete with unforgettable guest stars and if you loved the 80s as much as I did, you will probably get giddy with their choices.

It can be a tad campy and goofy at times, but that never bothered me. It is exceptional at its strengths and it was fantastic entertainment for five seasons.

Food – Bojangles



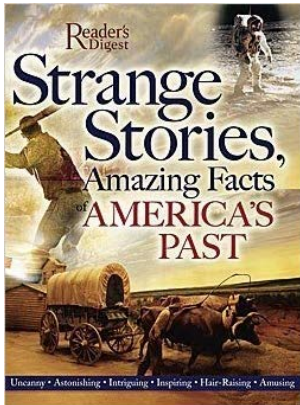
It's a shame that so often in America if you claim you like something, people sometimes interpret that to mean you do not like other similar things. I love Chick-Fil-A and think it is blessed by God, but I also eat and thoroughly enjoy KFC and Popeye's. And to me, the second best chicken place I've had in my life is Bojangles, which seems to be less known than these other three. Probably because it is so regional (though its regional fans are pretty passionate from what I can tell).

Whether sandwiches, strips, sides, or those glorious biscuits, Bojangles has excellent quality in taste. There used to be one in Turbeville, SC and any time I was down there visiting family and someone said, "Let's just pick up some Bojangles for lunch" I would get quite excited. No place has equaled CFA to me but this place is close. And it deserves a huge fanbase.

Ben Plunkett



Book – Strange Stories, Amazing Facts of America's Past



Throughout most of the second decade of my childhood (about 11-18) I was obsessed with what I called fact books (Most people know them as books of trivia, but I prefer fact books. I suppose they might not be useful for a person's day to day life, but is any information actually useless? I think not.)

Anyway, when I was 16 my parents got me this particular quality hardback fact book for Christmas. While I am no longer consumed with fact books and have sold most of them, I still have this one and still read portions of it now and then. This book does not attempt to cover all the important basics of American history. What it does do is to highlight fascinating stories about its history that are not discussed much or at all in history class. My edition was published by Reader's Digest in 1989. They published a new edition in 2007. I cannot comment on that edition since I have not read it yet.

TV Show – Better Call Saul



I realize this show is *fairly* popular but I don't understand why this show isn't more popular than it is. My guess is that people were disappointed that Better Call Saul, which serves as a prequel to Breaking Bad, wasn't a clone of its predecessor regarding its how the story plays out. It is true that the two shows have the same basic outer feel and framework. It is also abundantly clear that the two are part of the same universe (if you are familiar with both, that is). But the individual stories themselves are very different. Better Call Saul is less dark, intense than Breaking Bad. It is also basically an extremely well fleshed out legal story with multiple intriguing plotlines and angles. The show stars Bob Odenkirk who plays Jimmy McGill AKA Saul Goodman but also stars an amazing

ensemble cast. Odenkirk and every one of his co-stars bring it every episode. Forgive the hyperbole but most of them deserve every acting award in the history of mankind.

I will probably be destroyed for saying this, but I believe Better Call Saul is better than Break. In fact, it is in the running for my favorite show of all time. It had an extremely good first season and has been greater every season (It recently finished its fourth).

D.A. Speer



Board Game: Dropmix

One of the most off-the-radar board games right now sounds like something right out of the future. DropMix (created by Harmonix studios...you know, the same team that created Rock Band) has players placing cards onto an electronic, Bluetooth-powered board with six spaces for cards. Each card in the deck has a chip inside of it, and each card space is equipped with a wireless chip reader. When you place a card on the board, the game (which runs on a tablet or phone that sits at the front of the board) reads it, syncs it to BPM and the set key, and then incorporates the loop into the mix. There are cards

that have drum loops, vocal tracks, instrument tracks, or even custom-designed effects.

You can DJ your own set in “Freestyle” mode, go head to head in a VS mode, or even play a new Puzzle game based on a surprisingly interesting card game that is incorporated. The music source material is all over the place (electronic, rock, country, pop), and more expansion packs are coming out all the time. You can find the base set on sale frequently...I bought a new one for \$30! At the very least, check it out on YouTube and marvel at the technical genius:

Phill Lytle



Food – Aldi “Journey to India” Tikka Masala Simmer Sauce



In the past few years, my wife and I have fallen in love with Indian food. Unfortunately, it's cost-prohibitive to get it as often as we would like. Enter: Aldi and their amazing sauce in a jar. I was skeptical it would taste anywhere close to restaurant quality, but I was wrong. We keep things simple with some seasoned chicken we sauté in olive oil and some steamed veggies added to the sauce to make it a bit more “healthy.” We serve it over

white Basmati rice and we are good to go. It's moderately spicy so if that's not your thing, you shouldn't be eating Indian food anyway.

Comedian – Nate Bargatze

Maybe you've seen him on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. Maybe you've seen his special on Netflix. Perhaps you've just seen clips on YouTube. Or maybe, sadly, you've never heard of Nate Bargatze. Well, be sad no more! If you like your comedy clean (yet not lame), dry, and just a little bit odd, then Nate is the man for the job. He holds a special place in my heart because he graduated from the school where my wife teaches and my children attend ([Donelson Christian Academy](#)). If Nate came from DCA, then there is hope for my family as well.

Five Lame Christmas Ornaments You Should Never Make Again

Hey kids, Mr. Lytle here. It's almost Christmas and just about everyone has their trees decorated and displayed. My guess is, if you are like most kids, you probably haven't thought of anything to get your mom, or dad, for Christmas and just might be considering throwing together another homemade ornament for the tree. "They'll love it, right?" No, no they won't. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but no parent at any time or any place has ever loved a homemade ornament from one of their children. (The only exception is if the child that made the ornament is an artistic prodigy of some sort. They have a shot...barely.)

Let's take this a step further, though. While all homemade

ornaments are terrible, there is a handful so awful and so pervasive, that it's my duty to warn you specifically about them. Here are the five lamest Christmas tree ornaments you should never make again.

The popcorn garland strand



In my mind, this is the gold standard. The king of the mountain. The cream of the crop. There are some who actually think this decoration/ornament is capable of looking pretty. I question their sanity. You are literally stringing food together and then wrapping it around your tree. Let that sink in for a few seconds. It might look okay for a few days but then the popcorn starts to shrivel and wilt a little, it loses a bit of its color – going from a bright white to a faded eggshell – and it turns into a pitiful sight altogether. Do you really want that corpsified looking edible arrangement clinging to your beautiful tree? I don't think so.

The soda-tab-picture frame



I understand what you are trying to do here. I really do. How could your parents be unhappy with a picture of you to hang on the tree? Easy. You framed it with soda can tabs. There has never been a pretty version of this ornament. They are all ugly, misshapen, and shoddily constructed. And the pathetic little ribbon at the top is an embarrassment to everyone involved. If you give this ornament to your parents, it is their legal right to disown you. That's the law.

The construction paper links



The biggest problem with this travesty is that it takes so stinking long to actually make it. Scratch that. The biggest problem is that it looks stupid. Or maybe the biggest problem is that it's fragile and will fall apart before Christmas Day even arrives. In summary, there are many problems with this decoration and you should have nothing to do with something this problematic. There is no upside to this one at all.

Anything with glitter



I've made my views about glitter very clear. It's evil. Altogether evil. I fully believe glitter is a direct result of the Fall of man. Adam and Eve sinned and glitter was born. No theologian will be able to convince me otherwise. So to be clear, do not use it in any way, shape, or form. Do not use it on, in, under, above, within, without, baked in, cooked in, glued on, brushed on, or any other way you can imagine. It is literally the worst. If someone comes up to you and says, "Hey, I have this great homemade ornament we can make for your parents. We just need a little glitter to make it absolutely perfect." You are well within your rights to slap them and then run away. No one of sound mind would blame you.

**Any ornament using a combination of Popsicle sticks,
cotton balls, or yarn**



You are really scraping the bottom of the barrel at this point. If Christmas Day is quickly approaching and you have nothing to give your parents, do not reach into the junk drawer hoping that you can rig together some masterpiece using the above items. You can't. No one can. These are the hand-tools of the lazy – have nothing to do with them. Giving your parents nothing is better than whatever monstrosity you create using what basically amounts to poorly-glued-together garbage.

I know what you are thinking. “If we can't give our parents one of these, what can we get them for Christmas on such late notice?” I'm glad you asked but unfortunately I cannot help you. I'm not the one that waited until the last minute to think of a gift for the people that love, raise, shelter, teach, and guide you. That's your problem, chief. Maybe next year you will be a little less selfish and come up with something good to give them in a timelier manner.

BREAKING: Christian Music

Fans Can Earn a Masters of Theology by Listening to Their Favorite Radio Station

Nashville, TN – Bolstered by the unprecedented success of *The Most Enormous Small Group in the World*, WayLOVE (99.3 FM) is ready to introduce their latest spiritual growth innovation: The World's first Christian Radio Masters of Theology*. "We are very excited about our new program," said WayLOVE's director of programming, Edward Barry. "Seekers and life-long learners will find that our program is incredibly comprehensive, robust, yet flexible enough for their busy schedules."

How does this new Degree program work? Easy. You simply listen to your favorite Christian Radio station as often as possible and the music, the spiritual nourishment, and the unquestioned profundity of biblical truth will do the rest. "We knew we struck gold when we landed on this idea. Our music is many things: It is positive. It is encouraging. It is safe. Yet most importantly, it is also full of rich spiritual instruction and wisdom. What better way to study Soteriology than hearing Jeremy Camp's monumental theological examination, "Jesus Saves?" Or how great is it to learn about the doctrine of Hamartiology by listening to "Fear is a Liar" by Zach Williams?"

WayLOVE's listeners could not be more excited. Becky Culpepper is working on her third Master's degree through the station even though the program has only been active for two weeks. "I am so totally thrilled about this, ya'll! Not only do I get to listen to my favorite songs, which are 100% safe for my kids to listen to as well, I can get my education on while listening to Jamie Grace sing about 'getting her worship on!' It's a win-win!" Scott Maroon, who is currently working on his

dissertation, adds, “I had no idea that I could learn so much about the Incarnation or the Hypostatic union or even a little bit about Pneumatology by listening to what I thought were the pretty hackneyed lyrics of “You’re Not Alone” by Owl City and Britt Nicole. Evidently, you can, though. So that’s cool.”

If this new program is well received, WayLOVE hopes to roll out their Doctoral Program* in the fall of 2019.

*Neither program is accredited in any way, shape, or form.

A Review of “The Wingfeather Saga” by Andrew Peterson

Once again, and to my everlasting shame, I am late to the Andrew Peterson party. Andrew Peterson has been creating beautiful, inspiring, and challenging music for over 20 years. For reasons that I have yet to completely figure out, he was always on my periphery. I knew about him. I even knew a few of his songs. Nevertheless, I never took the time to sit down and really listen until about five years ago. Of course, I fell in love with his work. He is a gifted songwriter and musician and his music speaks more deeply to my heart than just about anything else out there.

You would think that having completely missed the boat for so long on his music, I wouldn’t have made that mistake again when it comes to his fantasy series, *The Wingfeather Saga*. You would be wrong. I knew about the books. I have friends who read them and loved them. My oldest son and my wife read them and loved them as well. Still, I ignored them. I have no excuse for that, mind you. I knew better than to doubt Peterson’s ability as a writer. I will admit a part of me was

scared I would not enjoy the books and it would cloud my view of his music. I know how preposterous that is, but it's the truth. For better or worse, I put them off, thinking I would eventually get around to them. Eventually, I read *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* (the first book in the series) and enjoyed it, though I would hesitate to say I loved it. In a weird way, it confirmed some of my fears. I thought the series was going to be a witty, quirky, somewhat silly thing and I just didn't have a lot of desire to read something like that. So I stopped reading after the first book.



Finally, in the fall of 2017, I decided to read the entire series. I started again with the first book, as I am a completist of sorts, and worked my way through the next three books over the period of a few months. It blew me away. Completely. In every way. Yes, the books can be silly and quirky, but they are also epic and emotionally rich. It will come as no surprise to anyone who has read my stuff for RE0, but I cried a lot reading this series. I cried because while the setting and the world is fantastical and whimsical, the characters are living, breathing people. They are spiritual and emotional creatures and their struggles and triumphs matter. They leave a mark. I'm never going to forget the time I spent with Janner, Tink, Leeli, Podo, Nia, and all the other wonderful characters that populate Peterson's story. I eagerly await the time when I visit them again.

Peterson is a gifted and natural storyteller, as his music and lyrics attest. He writes with a love of poetry, of song, of food and cheer. He writes from deep places of pain and loneliness to deeper places of joy and belonging. Perhaps most importantly, beyond the artistic skill on display, these books work because they are more than just good stories. They are a reflection, a bright and glorious reflection, of the great Story that underpins all of Creation. *The Wingfeather Saga* is

a story infused with light, love, grace, mercy, hope, and redemption. And it's funny. Incredibly funny.



When we got married, my wife and I had less stuff than we do now but we were able to care for that stuff a little better than after we added three somewhat rambunctious boys to our lives. Back then, I had a shelf where I displayed some of my favorite movies and books. (We had other bookshelves and CD shelves where the less important stuff was relegated.) The preeminent shelf held my greatest treasures – *The Lord of the Rings* (Movies and books), *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Star Wars*, and Lawhead's *Pendragon Cycle*. Things like that. If I still had a shelf like that in my house, *The Wingfeather Saga* would find a place there. Maybe that is the highest compliment I can give it. It would fit seamlessly next to books like *The Hobbit*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Harry Potter*. Andrew Peterson has proven that he takes a backseat to no one. *The Wingfeather Saga* is a modern day classic, comfortably existing in the same conversation with the great stories by Tolkien, Lewis, L'Engle, and Rowling.

I don't know if Andrew Peterson will ever write another series like this. I hope he does. I promise that I won't be late to that party. I know better now.