

Five Ways to Wage War on the Ego

“He must [by the very nature of things] increase, but I must decrease.” (John the Baptist)

One of the most clever things I’ve read in any fiction work is in *The Screwtape Letters* with the uncle advising the nephew to get his Christian to realize he’s being humble because then – voilà! – he’s automatically prideful. Countless Christians I’ve spoken to have picked up on this irony in joke form by declaring, as if they are the first to ever do so, “I’m so proud of my humility!”

I start with that because I fully confess that by sharing thoughts about how not to be prideful that when people put them into practice, they can absolutely be proud of their effort and ruin the whole thing. Humility and pride are so unique and tricky that way.

So no, I’m not trying to advocate ways to appear humble while you get a big head in your heart of hearts. But the Bible at various times and in various ways tells us to be humble. So I think a strategy is prudent. Here are five to consider:

1. Keep your good deeds private

I have spoken to this one before. Yet Facebook is such a constant assault on this, I find myself wanting to shout this from the rooftops. Making your good deeds known to others can be (and probably is) in direct violation of Jesus’ command to not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Yet on social media, we act like this isn’t an issue. We brag

about something we accomplished, the likes and affirmations come pouring in and it all seems like a normal part of our culture.

Granted, I will not cast stones on this because I have learned, like others, how to creatively do it where it doesn't look like bragging. Just post a picture of some great deed you are doing. People love pictures, right? Then you don't have to brag with words. But people still know how great you are. Yes, I've been there.

Until we get to the place where we are secure enough in our identity as a servant of Christ who works for an audience of one, we will live in direct disobedience to Christ's command to keep our good works private. Especially on social media. And myself included.

2. Overwhelm complaining with thanksgiving

Here is one I really struggle with. My wife and closest friends will confirm this. Everyone on Twitter is an idiot. Our extended Winter this year is just the worst. Chicago traffic turns me into an ogre of rage and criticism. Even the woman who leads the workout videos my wife does is not safe from my ire, even though she is a successful woman, in much better shape than me, and doesn't deserve my insults.

It's all an ugly manifestation of how proud I am. Because I'm either only thinking of myself or I'm putting myself above others. By contrast, outside of November, my attitude of thankfulness is anemic. Yet of the two things, only one is commanded as something we are to do in all circumstances.

Criticism is at times warranted in Christianity. And we all need to vent at times. I am not advocating to avoid it completely. I just think some of us could stand to have our comments and actions of thanksgiving outnumber our complaints

and insults about 10 to 1, or some similar percentage. Maybe getting specific will help: Trying to open our day by thanking for ten straight minutes or by handwriting thank you notes often or by showing a person how thankful you are with a simple gesture. It will choke our pride at a very sensitive point.

3. Associate with people who know more than you

The Bible warns that knowledge puffs us up. This can be seen so clearly when people attend college or grad school or seminary, or even when they are educated in any way on any subject. If we are knowledgeable in some way and proud as a result, it makes sense to me that exposure to those who know more than we do will help keep us in a more sober and humble state of mind.

A few years ago I began studying textual criticism, the art-science of trying to scour through nearly 6,000 Greek manuscripts and countless other sources to determine the original wording of the New Testament books. I have learned quite a bit about it. But I also belong to a Facebook page on the topic, where some of the world's foremost experts post. And I have to admit: they can talk circles around me and some have written hundreds and hundreds of pages on it. And some of what they say in their books I do not understand.

It is similar with the languages and cultures around us. I have little doubt it is easy to get frustrated with how other people think and behave and what language they speak when it is different from ours because it annoys us. But God taught me a few years ago that exposure to and appreciation for what I don't know keeps me from being proud of what I do. So when people speak Russian on the Chicago bus, by God's grace I hope this reminder of how big the world is and how small my knowledge is will keep me humble.

4. Associate with people who have less than you

I have also written about this before, but Jesus once taught to throw parties for the crippled and blind instead of for your own family and friends. In that same chapter, Jesus talks about people making excuses as to why they cannot follow him and then concludes the chapter by saying that if anyone wants to follow him they have to forsake everything. What I take from that is that our richness in material possessions and relationship cause us to forget how badly we need God. And the antidote is to rub shoulders with people who do not have much in the way of material possessions and relationship.

Why? Because part of our social makeup as humans is to become like whoever we are closest to. This is why my dad always told me "You are who your friends are." And so I think Jesus wants us to learn humility from those who live humbly by little to no choice in the matter.

5. Daily choose forgiveness over bitterness and vindication.

This one is crucial because it is a potent weapon against the "proud of your humility" threat. If you are forgiving because of how much Christ forgave you, as he taught in Matthew 18:21-35 and other places, then you are not confused by how bad a person you are. And yet you are not wallowing in your sinfulness but being proactive in trying to live out the grace that has been given.

Bitterness and vindication are the opposite. They take no account of how bad we as the victim are and do nothing productive or proactive in living out grace or mercy. Retaliating also manifests a spirit that trusts self over God, who vows that revenge only belongs to him.

To be clear, when a person is wronged in the worst ways, I will be careful (especially soon after the event) in counseling them on how and when to forgive. Yet, in reading stories like Joseph in Genesis and Corrie Ten Boom in more modern times, I think there is an authority in their words to teach that even those abused in the worst ways can forgive by the grace of the Christian God. And the worst act of injustice in human history – an innocent man being humiliated, tortured and killed for the very people who killed him – is the message and heart of this humble way of living.

So by trying to live out biblical forgiveness daily (which is indeed more a process than an event in my experience because I often think “I forgive that person” and then the memories come back one day and I have to do it again) I will disintegrate my ego. Because I can’t think on and react to God’s grace and be proud at the same time. And by forgiving because I’ve been forgiven, that is what I am doing.

What do you think? Comments are welcomed below.

500WoL Reviews: “Tyndale, The Man Who Gave God An English Voice”

“And the Lyght shyneth in the darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not.” (*John 4:5, William Tyndale New Testament*)

I'm coming up on 40 years of life this Summer and it has me all self-reflective and evaluative. One thing I absolutely need to change is that I need to read more biographies. As someone who has championed fantasy-fiction as reading that captures the imagination, I have woefully underestimated how real flesh and blood human beings with real lives can accomplish the same thing. And in some ways, in a deeper sense, since they are actual history.

Enter this book, written in 2012 by David Teems. It is cleverly written, packed with history down to the small players in Tyndale's life and absolutely edifies the English-speaking Christian reader with a life worth dissecting.

I confess that Tyndale's life is fascinating to me on the big story arcs because I am a pastor of a bilingual ministry, an ESL teacher and a subscriber to *Voice of the Martyrs*. Translation is my life's work, though not nearly to the significance that his was and to the cost that his gave. Persecution and martyrdom are horrific in a human sense, yet biblically we can see how God exalts it. William Tyndale literally gave his life to give people of my native tongue one of the most precious gifts there is, the readable Word of God.

Christian history is indebted to countless people for the Bibles we have today, many of them nameless and faceless, like the Masoretics of the Old Testament and the often maligned scribes and copyists of the New Testament. Tyndale thankfully is a name we can know and celebrate. He wasn't just a translator. He was a noble man, an educated yet humble man, and a great man. He is a hero. All of us who hold a KJV, or NASB, or NIV in our hands should know his name and his story.

Beyond the major and more well-known plot lines of his life, Teems gives other details that are equally as important. Like how much of the KJV was influenced by Tyndale and how many

phrases we find in our Bible, and hence our popular culture, that can be traced back to Tyndale. Like “Am I my brother’s keeper?”. Tyndale used beautiful, easy-to-memorize, poetic English. And we owe our ability to recall many verses so easily to him.

Teems also speaks over several pages to how much Erasmus and Luther affected Tyndale and how much he affected them. These men were not friends, yet God used them all in their own way to greatly affect how we do church and bible study today. It is a testimony to how no one can do anything on their own. Not just without God’s grace, but without Christian community. Even from a distance.

I recommend this book to all Christian teenagers and adults. It’s not just an inspiring story, but an illuminating one. In 500 years, this story will still matter. Yet let us read it today.

La Himnodia Latinoamericana

Hace un mes, una amiga aquí en Nashville que fue bibliotecaria en Welch por más de 30 años, puso una sugerencia en su pared de Facebook. Hablando de la bendición que son para los hijos de Dios los himnos y otras canciones cristianas, pidió que todo aquel que quisiera pusiera el nombre de alguna canción favorita y que incluyera porqué le gustaba tanto esa canción. ¡Muchísima gente respondió! Viendo los nombres de aquellos himnos y leyendo los testimonios fue de mucha bendición y edificación espiritual para mí, y según los comentarios que leí, para muchos más.

Ahora, yo quisiera poner algo en español, pidiendo prestado el concepto de mi amiga.

En mi opinión, en ninguna parte del mundo hay mejor himnodia que en América Latina.

Comenzando con los himnos que llegaron a Centro y Sudamérica de América del Norte y de Europa, las iglesias evangélicas han cantado "En La Cruz," "Cuando Allá Se Pase Lista," "Oh Tu Fidelidad," y "Cuán Grande Es Él," y mil himnos más, llenando sus cultos con alabanzas al Todopoderoso. Traducidos del inglés, han enriquecido la vida espiritual y la adoración congregacional del pueblo hispano por más de cien años."

Autores hispanos como el famoso Alfredo Colom de Guatemala escribieron canciones inolvidables para el pueblo latinoamericano. "Manos Cariñosas," "Pero Queda Cristo," conocido popularmente como "Por la Mañana Yo Dirijo mi Alabanza," "Canten con Alegría," y "A La Victoria Jesús Nos Llama." Colom nació en 1904. En su juventud era mujeriego, alcohólico y pecador perdido. Cuando conoció a Cristo, su vida fue transformada.

El himnario "Celebremos Su Gloria" destaca dos famosos músicos, himnólogos de antaño: Alfredo Colom y Roberto Savage. Savage era norteamericano pero durante muchos años de su ministerio sirvió como misionero en Ecuador en la emisora HCJB, y dio a luz a proyectos musicales que incluían la serie "Adelante Juventud, himnos, coritos y cánticos espirituales que guió al pueblo latinoamericano en sus alabanzas al Señor. Hizo compilaciones de música de varios países y arreglos que eran fáciles de cantar. El impacto que se sentía por los esfuerzos de estos dos siervos es incalculable.

Otros nombres destacados de otra generación: Santiago Stevenson, el trovador panameño (A La Casa de Jairo Iba Jesús), Danny Berrios, Stanislao Marino, y Juan Romero ("Visión Pastoral," o "Eran Cien Ovejas") entre muchos de las décadas de los 70 y 80. Más recientemente, Marcos Witt, Juan Adrián Romero, Marcos Barrientos y Marcos Vidal nos han dado nuevas canciones, muchas, y el pueblo sigue alabando al Señor.

Pero los Latinoamericanos también crearon una multitud de coritos y canciones en español. No he visto ni conocido otro continente u otra cultura que haya producido más música original. Canciones espirituales, salmos abundan. (Piensen en "Si Fui Motivo de Dolor," ""Más Allá del Sol," ""Alabaré,,," y salmos como el 145, 3:3-4, 25, 92 ("Bueno es alabarte oh Jehová") La lista es interminable.

Me impresionó mucho cómo la gente respondió al blog de mi amiga en inglés. Me gustaría invitarles a ustedes que respondan a este blog, indicando su canción, o canciones favoritas, y diciendo por qué le gusta esa canción en particular. Estoy seguro que será de mucha bendición.

Termino con una canción – una de mis favoritas. No es necesariamente mi favorita absoluta, pero es linda, y la letra expresa grandes verdades. Muchos de ustedes la conocen – "Día en Día."

*Día en día Cristo está conmigo,
Me consuela en el medio del dolor.
Pues confiando en su poder eterno,
No me afano ni me da temor.
Sobrepuja todo entendimiento
La perfecta luz del Salvador.
En su amor tan grande e infinito
Me dará lo que es mejor.*

*Día en día Cristo me acompaña
Y me brinda dulce comunión
Todos mis cuidados él los lleva;
A él le entrego mi alma y corazón.
No hay medida del amor supremo
De mi bondadoso y fiel Pastor
Él me suple lo que necesito
Pues el pan de vida es mi Señor.*

Oh Señor, ayúdame este día

*A vivir de tal manera aquí.
Que tu nombre sea glorificado
Pues anhelo honrarte solo a ti.
Con la diestra de tu gran justicia
Me sustentas en la turbación.
Tus promesas son sostén y guía
Siempre en ellas hay consolación.*

A Path of Truth: How the Doctrine of Biblical Authority Has Come Down to the American Church

The authority of Scripture. It is a subject rightly viewed as a fundamental truth by a large percentage of today's Christian world since its origin. The official doctrine might not have been formed until much later in history, but it is very clear in Scripture that God's Word is the final and supreme authority. Among many other things it tells us that God's Word is true (John 17:17), that it is complete and that we are forbidden to add to it (Proverbs 30:5-6), and that it is more than just a good book with good advice; it is God-breathed and sufficient for teaching, correction, rebuke, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). And those are just examples. If I were to list and adequately discuss everything the Bible says on the subject, the end result would be much longer than this article. The ecclesiastical discussion of biblical authority has appeared with several different faces throughout the centuries. It is a discussion that has seen many faces all over the world. There are many. For space reasons, I will just

be looking at the line leading up to the American church.

No matter where you go with this the discussion starts in the Mediterranean area. For a long time after the start of Christianity, the exact doctrine wasn't truly set in stone. A more concentrated definition was found to be needed by the third to early fourth centuries to combat the increasing gross misinterpretations and false teachings of God's Word that were infesting the church. In A.D. 325 the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea met and began the practice of condemning heretics who went beyond the accepted teaching of Scripture. In many ways, such meetings were a good thing because they fostered communication among church leaders and the formation of accepted biblical doctrine. However, these councils, while they met to defend biblical authority, were ironically devaluing it by placing more value on what the human church leadership thought than what the Bible itself thought. The Protestant Reformation would put a stop to the Catholic Church's growing pride and corruption. It put complete authority back in its proper place: The Word of God.

By the 1700s God's written Word was beginning to become subordinate to science and human intelligence. And by the 20th century, fundamental-minded Christians recognized that they desperately needed to band together against the growing modernism to defend the authority of the Scriptures. The battle over biblical authority revealed itself on several important stages inside the fundamentalist movement from 1900 to the present.

The Battle of Biblical Authority in America in the Modern Era

In 1889 Charles Briggs wrote *Whither? A Theological Question* for the Times in which he launched a particularly vicious attack against the doctrine of inerrancy. Briggs' well worded but misled criticisms caught on and would give rise to liberal Christianity. This, in turn, led to the birth of neo-orthodoxy with its emphasis on individual connection and interpretation

of Scripture. Neo-orthodoxy was actually a negative reaction against liberal theology. It was formed by the German theologian Karl Barth. Neo-orthodoxy held to traditional orthodoxy but was new (neo) in that it was adapted modern thought to the orthodoxy. It also held that the Bible only became the revealed Word of God to individual readers.

The ever-rising popularity of liberal theology and neo-orthodoxy alarmed traditional, conservative Christians. Some leading scholarly Christians took steps to sound the alarm. The most influential was a book series published between 1910 and 1915 called "The Fundamentals." It was so influential that it played a pivotal role in giving rise to the fundamentalist movement.

Fundamentalists and the Specter of Anti-Intellectualism

There was much genuine sincerity and passion in the fundamentalist camp when it came to defending biblical authority, but unfortunately early on many people in the fundamentalist movement started becoming increasingly anti-intellectual. This de-emphasis on the intellect backfired on them, particularly at a very important time. This was in March 1925 just after the Tennessee legislature had passed the Butler Act, which banned the teaching of evolution in Tennessee schools. Hoping to make their small town more known, the citizens of Dayton asked a volunteer named John Scopes to be willingly arrested and put on trial for supposedly teaching evolution in class.

Although he was not learned in theology or science, a fundamentalist leader named William Jennings Bryan was called to the stand as a defense witness. Clarence Darrow, the lawyer for the evolutionists, succeeded in making a fool of both Bryan and fundamentalists.

But not all early fundamentalists were so anti-intellectual. There were fundamentalist scholars who pushed against this

ethic. Probably the leading of these scholars was J. Gresham Machen. Although Machen considered himself a fundamentalist, he harshly disapproved of the fundamentalist movement, mainly because of the anti-intellectualism. His thoughts concerning fundamentalism as a whole as expressed in his famous book, *Christianity & Liberalism*.

Machen also worried that fundamentalists were allowing the liberals to associate with and therefore influence them too much. In this book, Machen gave a logical, biblical defense of fundamentalism and called for a complete separation from liberal theology. At the time, he was teaching at Princeton Theological Seminary. An important turning point in the seminary toward a more liberal theology came in 1914 when they hired the liberal-minded J. Ross Stevenson as president. This did not sit at all well with Machen. He left and founded Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. At the same time, he started the hyper-fundamentalist mindset.

The Birth of New Evangelicalism

The fundamentalists had a very good founding intention which was to defend the inerrancy and authority of Scripture against encroaching liberalism. Unfortunately, anti-intellectualism wasn't there only big problem. From the 1920s onward there continued to be increasing intolerance coupled with argumentation within denominations and between denominations. Denominations split, and then those groups split, and on and on.

Some fundamentalists got fed up with the fundamentalist movement for what they saw as totally unchristian rigid intolerance. So Harold Ockenga, Carl Henry, and Billy Graham led the charge to begin a complete separation from fundamentalism. In 1942 a number of discontented fundamentalists began the National Association of Evangelicals.

The most influential of these three in instigating this new movement was Graham. Graham said the turning point for him came in 1955 when he came to New York to hold a revival. The fundamentalists there required each Christian in attendance sign a paper saying they agreed with the fundamentals. While Graham certainly agreed with them, he harshly objected to this and refused to sign.

The evangelicals were clear that they were still fundamentalist in belief. In fact, several leading characters in this new movement started Fuller Theological Seminary based on fundamental doctrine. But they were also very clear that they were no longer affiliated with the fundamentalist movement.

During the 70s Fuller began to get lax on biblical authority. In 1976, Harold Lindsell, one of its original founders, verbally criticized Fuller and many other Christian institutions across the country for minimizing biblical inerrancy and authority. During that year he published the very influential book, *The Battle for the Bible*. In its pages, he loudly proclaimed that both of these things were the most important theological subject of all. The book that was so influential in the Christian world that it started a movement that took its name.

From that point until about the mid-1990s there was something of a revival of biblical inerrancy and authority thought among evangelical churches. Throughout much of the 80s, the climate of the American the evangelical world was relatively confused on this issue with many of them not entirely sure where they stood. By the 1990s, most of the evangelical world was kind of lost and unsure of its own beliefs on such matters. Carl Henry, who was still active in the evangelic movement at this time, urged evangelicals to take a stand on the authority of the Bible. Many evangelical churches listened and heeded, taking a firm stand once again on biblical inerrancy and authority.

As for fundamentalists, since the 1960s one biggest debate has been how much they should embrace separatism. Doctrinal debates have continued to rage between various fundamentalist denominations. However, the clear majority of fundamentalist believers still fully embrace the complete authority of Scripture.

The Many Paths of the Truth

The Bible is abundantly clear that there is only one God and that there is only one way to Him. But history has seen many paths of the truth throughout the world as Scripture has traveled through history. Each area of the world touched by the biblical message has its own stories concerning the passage of the doctrine of biblical authority. The story I have summarized here is one of the paths in America. It is not the only one. There have been many paths. And these paths, wherever they may be, continue on. Isaiah 40:6-8 says humans are like grass and our faith like flowers. It says that grass may wither, and its flowers may fall, but it says the Word of God endures forever. The battle over biblical authority continues. People may fail. Human faith may wane. But no matter what the Word of God and its authority will endure forever.

Turning the Stranger Into Family

Every week at my small group, I pray the same prayer: “God, thank you for friends who’ve become family.”

There is no doubt that to me, after 16 years and being a thousand miles from home, my church is my family. The amount

of people I could call in the middle of the night if I had an emergency is long. The number of people who drove six hours in the heavy rain to see me get married is almost the same number of people who come to an average Sunday service. I share no blood with any of those people, but we share something even deeper in unity of Spirit.

I'm sure many Christians all over the world could say the same things. Which is appropriate, since the Bible absolutely teaches us that Christians are family. God is our Father and we are brothers and sisters in our faith. It's beautiful, Psalm 133:1 says, when we live like we are.

Yet the Bible gets specific in how we are to practice this in a way that is extremely counterintuitive. Hebrews 13:2 states it this way: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."

Similarly, Job claims, "I have never turned away a stranger, but have opened my doors to everyone." Jesus makes it personal when he says, "I was a stranger and you invited me in."

I want to point out two things that are crucial to understanding and contextualizing these verses in 2018 America. First, the word "stranger" every time means someone from a different country who lives among you. That can be easily seen in both the Hebrew and Greek words used as well as how "stranger" was defined in Israelite law (Exodus 23:9, Leviticus 24:22). This group was often mentioned with the orphan, widow and poor as people to whom great compassion should be shown (Deuteronomy 24:17). God knew something back then that we can still see today: when you are a new immigrant, primarily because you have fewer resources, you are extremely prone to be a victim of injustice.

Secondly, all of them teach that we are to have strangers (and especially fellow Christians) in our homes. The word for "hospitality" in Hebrews 13:2 literally means love of

strangers while the word for “entertain” literally means to receive a stranger as a guest. And the ideas of “inviting in” and “open doors” are specific as well. Having someone in your home is an intimate event in any culture that I have experience with. It is an act reserved for family and closest friends.

I say this is counterintuitive for obvious reasons. The very fact people from other countries have been historically and biblically called things with negative connotations in American English now like “stranger” and “alien” in some way proves that parts of our culture bend against treating immigrants (a more modern and less demeaning word) like family. As I have written before, we often tend to do church in a homogeneous way, where we are similar in culture and even in our coded language and preferences in things like music. And my guess would be that we are even more limited in whom we share our homes with than whom we share our church with, since there is research that indicates that only a tiny percentage of people have other races and ethnicities as a part of their circle of friends, and especially their inner circle friends[1. Christopher Ingraham, *Washington Post*, August 25, 2014. Information accessed at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/three-quarters-of-whites-dont-have-any-non-white-friends>]. Yet biblically we are to share our homes for meals (and whenever possible, more intimate and longterm events than that), with Christians who look and act quite differently than we do.

This is an issue of the Gospel. In Ephesians 2, I find it impossible to separate salvation by grace through faith with how we accept immigrant brothers and sisters. In political discourse, it is completely understandable that we use words like “Immigrant” to describe those who have moved here from other countries. But Paul taught in Ephesians 2 in the church this terminology is obsolete. The Hebrews had many laws that commanded them to treat the stranger among them with love and

compassion, like Leviticus 19:9-10 and 19:33-34. But in Ephesians 2:19 Paul says to Christian Gentiles, "So then *you are no longer strangers and aliens*, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." So I tell the immigrant believers in my church, "The world may call you an 'immigrant' but at Northwest, we call you 'family'." And unless I truly treat people like family, which includes having them in my home, then I'm just a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

In his sledgehammer book, *Generous Justice*, Tim Keller drives home the point about eating with the stranger as being a Gospel issue by referencing Paul's confrontation with Peter in Galatians. Peter had stopped eating with Gentiles out of fear of man and Paul rebuked him that he "was not acting in line with the Gospel[2. Tim Keller, *Generous Justice*, 124]." The Gospel has never ended with man's reconciliation to God. It has always included people groups' reconciliation to each other, as evidenced by Ephesians 2 and also by nearly 20 different languages present for the beginning of the Christian church. How can we be truly reconciled from a distance? We must invite them in. As Hebrews taught. As Job lived. As Jesus said we should treat him.

So my question for you today is: Are you acting in line with the Gospel? Are you practicing Hebrews 13:2 hospitality? Let me be plain that this is not a series of question with a political angle. I'm not writing this only to conservative white Christians. The truth of the Bible transcends that. I ask them to all Christians who read this. Because the familial nature of Christianity, and our Gospel, demand it.

Forgiveness

“Cutting someone a little slack.” “Showing grace.” “Giving a second chance.”

All of these phrases interest me a great deal in terms of relationships.

There is a difference between cutting someone some slack or covering a multitude of sins, and forgiving wrongs done to us or others. The latter involves a definite transgression, a sin, a crime, even, and most of the time only those who are resting in their forgiveness in spite of the enormity of their sins against a Holy God, can extend forgiveness to others who neither deserve it or in some cases even want it. The former is more of the nature of overlooking, not making a big deal of others faults and frequent mistakes. Both are marks of a Christian who walks in fellowship with God, as is also our subsequent treatment of people we've said we forgive. Hence, the following simple outline for this devotional thought:

- 1. Overlooking faults (I Peter 4:8 – “love covers a multitude of sins.”)**
- 2. Forgiving (Matthew 18, Luke 17, Colossians 3:12-13)**
- 3. Treating others as forgiven.**

Overlooking faults

I personally have come to the conclusion that I want to stop saying “I don't like... (fill in the blank with whatever: genre of music, style of preaching, sports team, etc...). If it's in the realm of preferences, not biblical and moral values, I want to say “I prefer,” or “I like,” and not run down others' opinions. Most things do not rise above the level of simple preference (Think: musical tastes). Some things do, obviously, and must be defended, refuted, fought over, but even there, in

the right attitude. Other things are just what one person likes better, and another person likes less.

When Peter reminds us that love covers a multitude of sins, it's as the ESV Study Bible states: "Where love abounds, offenses are frequently overlooked and quickly forgiven." (1 Peter 4:8)

Going beyond negativity in the area of preferences and offenses, I want to be Christlike in the matter of forgiveness. I want to overlook minor faults, and gently address major ones after having gotten the beam out of my own eye (Matthew 7). I am convinced that my dealing with myself first, a firm attitude with self, in which my own weaknesses, sins, and hangups get the most attention, will enable me to be more accepting of my brother. I must learn to move past minor differences, letting love triumph over them, and bring us together.

Forgiveness (Matthew 18:18-35, Luke 17:1-4)

I want to forgive from the heart, as I have been so graciously forgiven, undeserving though I am. If Matthew 18 doesn't stop us cold in our tracks as far as forgiveness is concerned, I don't know what will. We who have been forgiven the thousands of talents – an overwhelming debt – by our loving Lord, must forgive wrongs done to us, even as we've been forgiven. Peter thought he was really going the distance when he spoke of forgiving seven times until Jesus said it must be seventy times seven.

Pastor Daryl Grimes writes of his brother who was murdered more than 30 years ago, and of the man who killed him. "Forgiveness is important. I don't know when it happened but there was a time in my life that I had to let go of the bitterness and hatred I had for this man. Hating him will not

bring my brother back nor will it do anything but destroy me...Jesus died for him, too.”

Consider these examples from Scripture:

- Joseph and his brothers. – “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good...” (Genesis 50)
- Stephen and murderers. “Lord lay not this sin to their charge.” (Acts 7:55)
- Jesus and those who crucified Him. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

A couple of examples from modern history, one from 50 years ago, and the other from recent weeks. First, the Vietnamese girl who was burned by napalm. Her remarkable story can be found in *Fire Road: The Napalm Girl's Journey Through the Horrors of War to Faith, Forgiveness & Peace*. For those of us old enough to remember the Vietnam War, we will remember Phan Thi Phuc, running down a street with her body on fire from a napalm bomb.

Against all odds, Kim lived—but her journey toward healing was only beginning. When the napalm bombs dropped, everything Kim knew and relied on exploded along with them: her home, her country's freedom, her childhood innocence and happiness.

The coming years would be marked by excruciating treatments for her burns and unrelenting physical pain throughout her body, which were constant reminders of that terrible day. Kim survived the pain of her body ablaze, but how could she possibly survive the pain of her devastated soul? Kim says she was following the religion she grew up with, but didn't know “the real God.” She says God still knew her, though.

“The real God, He knows my heart. Ten years later I was just seeking the truth and looking for the answer, ‘Why me?’” she says.

“I found a Bible in the library in Saigon. At that time I

wanted to die, I was so full of bitterness and anger and hatred," she says.

But that's when she found Christ. After a lifelong battle with physical and emotional pain, she says, "God gave me peace and joy."

Fire Road is the true story of how she found the answer in a God who suffered Himself; a Savior who truly understood and cared about the depths of her pain. *Fire Road* is a story of horror and hope, a harrowing tale of a life changed in an instant—and the power and resilience that can only be found in the power of God's mercy and love.

More recently, the story of gymnast Rachel Denhollander, sexually abused by Dr. Larry Nassar, who both challenged him to repent and also forgave the man who abused her. Her words to her abuser:

"In our early hearings, you brought your Bible into the courtroom and you have spoken of praying for forgiveness. And so it is on that basis that I appeal to you. If you have read the Bible you carry, you know the definition of sacrificial love portrayed is of God Himself loving so sacrificially that He gave up everything to pay a penalty for the sin He did not commit. By His grace, I, too, choose to love this way.

You spoke of praying for forgiveness. But, Larry, if you have read the Bible you carry, you know forgiveness does not come from doing good things as if good deeds can erase what you have done. It comes from repentance which requires facing and acknowledging the truth about what you have done in all of its utter depravity and horror without mitigation, without excuse, without acting as if good deeds can erase what you have seen in this courtroom today.

The Bible [speaks of] a final judgment where all of God's

wrath and eternal terror is poured out on men like you. Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the Gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you.

I pray you experience the soul-crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me – though I extend that to you as well.”

Treating others as forgiven

I want to treat others as forgiven, not just say the words. How we act toward others speaks volumes. The fruit of the Spirit that includes gentleness, goodness, and meekness are so indicative of our relationship with Christ and whether or not we are led by His Spirit. Truly forgiving will involve a change in our attitude toward others. Paul reminds us in Colossians 3 that we are to “put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also are to forgive.” I think that treating others as forgiven flows from resting and rejoicing in our own forgiveness. The three points are interrelated and joined firmly; if I am able to cut others some slack, to forgive a multitude of sins because I’m loved by God and know that I am, and can, therefore, accept and tolerate differences and even disagreements, I have taken a huge step toward a joyful, balanced life. Going beyond that, if I can truly forgive even major sins against me because He has forgiven me all my sins, I truly live in freedom. Treating others as forgiven then means that I treat others on the basis of forgiveness and acceptance. That’s freedom and release!

So how do we want to live? It really is up to us, to a great extent. We have the Guidebook, the Scriptures. We have the Inner Guide, the Holy Spirit. And we have a Savior who models this for us, and encourages us on to victory.

Biblical Outrage in a Twitter Outrage World

#JusticeforHarambe

His name has become a joke to so many people, including in [one of the more hilarious Babylon Bee entries](#), that I wonder how many people seriously expressed outrage over the killing of a gorilla in the Cincinnati zoo.

Regardless of the actual number, that incident is like the poster child in my mind for social media outrage era. I do not think anyone who uses Facebook or Twitter or Instagram can deny that these websites have given us a venue to show people just how upset we are by major and minor injustices in the world.

I'm not going to try to sort out the differences between major and minor here. There is no doubt that some events are worthy of mass outrage and social media posts, including things like shootings and sexual abuse. What I am going to do instead is look at a significant passage of Scripture that deals with appropriate outrage and then try to contrast how we filter and practice this passage in our modern day.

I have and will likely always teach that biblical truth is the

intersection of what the Bible meant to its original audience and what it means today. Culture differences make applications to Bible texts akin to mining for gold and when the culture around us changes significantly in a short period of time (as it has in the U.S. with the extremely recent and prominent rise of social media sites), we are prudent to constantly evaluate how we apply the Bible.

The story in Ezra 9-10 is simple enough in its conflict. God's people were kicked out of their homeland for 70 years for idolatry in actions like marrying from among the surrounding pagan nations. After they were mercifully allowed to come back, a report came to their spiritual leader, Ezra, that some had begun yet again to commit the same violations of their law that got them thrown out in the first place. Ezra's reaction is one of outrage. Ezra 9:3 says:

When I heard this report, I tore my tunic and my robe and ripped out some of the hair from my head and beard. Then I sat down, quite devastated.

The expression "quite devastated" here could very well be rendered "horrified". A few verses later in 10:1 we read:

While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself to the ground before the temple of God...

He had no keyboard and didn't direct himself to an audience. But Ezra was clearly upset in a similar way we see people attempting to communicate on the internet. And how he reacts beyond the outrage has a lot to say for us in the United States that will help us know how to react on Social Media and beyond. Here are a few things Ezra did that we would be wise to consider doing when dealing with injustice around us.

Ezra's Outrage Was For His Neighbors

Probably the most important thing I have gleaned from the Social Media Outrage Era is that we can be very selective about it. We tend to react to whatever we see based on the people we've friended or what news sources we follow. And if we wanted to, we could find something every single day to be upset about.

I've often feared that I am getting desensitized to much tragedy news. Because tragic events are constant in a 24 hour and social media news cycle. And then I wonder, why do we express outrage over things we see on Facebook that are hundreds or thousands of miles from us when every single day there are certainly terrible injustices and people hurting in close proximity to us? That perhaps we are missing something because social media outrage is easy and convenient while dealing with real people in real messiness, as Ezra did, is hard?

What if we were proactive with our outrage instead of reactive? What if we were so involved in our communities, churches and neighborhoods, that we were aware of injustice for people we see face to face and as a result, we had less time for outrage over things and people we know far less about?

I've heard several people say that social media gives us a broad but shallow audience while the local church gives us a more focused but far deeper impact. Our outrage supports that claim.

Ezra's Outrage Included His Own Sin

Here is something I do not see very much of on social media: Someone expresses outrage over some act of injustice and then includes pronouns like "we" and "us" when referring to who

needs forgiveness. Yet, that is exactly what Ezra did even though he was not guilty of intermarrying with pagan nations.

This is a pattern you see in the Bible. Isaiah (6:5), Nehemiah (1:6-7), and Daniel (9:4-17) all did the exact same thing. They were righteous men yet did not exempt themselves from corporate confession and repentance.

I can't help but wonder if social media outrage makes it easy to see the problem as "them" instead of "us".

Ezra's Outrage Was Tempered By Confessing God's Grace

Outrage can be healthy to experience and express but if a person is a follower of Christ, eventually they should be just as likely to express how gracious God is. Keep in mind, if a Christian victim of something like sexual abuse makes a social media post shortly after the event and doesn't mention God's grace, I am not going to judge that person. But on the whole, social media outrage is far out of balance in our expressions of gloom and doom, despair and bitter judgment.

Again, Ezra teaches us that we can be viciously angry over things people do to harm others. But if we need a theology of still proclaiming God's grace manifested in our past, present and future.

Ezra's Outrage Was Profound, Lasting and Meaningful

Ezra essentially fasted for many hours over the news he got. He mourned boisterously. He prayed with humiliation. What he expressed was so powerful, it caused others to join him.

I wonder how often we express outrage over some Twitter trending hashtag and then 15 minutes later are eating lunch

and laughing with friends? Please understand I get that not all outrage has to be this significant. But I sincerely worry that we have replaced deep, personal grief that shakes us to our core with a wimpy anger that is a mile wide but an inch thick and leaves us about the same as we were yesterday.

Ezra's Outrage Was Followed By Practical Action Steps

Outrage is a part of the human experience. If you are an emotionally healthy human being, you will feel it. But feeling anger is not enough. Confession and Repentance are the heart of Christianity and Ezra guides the people to swiftly do something to undo the horror they had committed. And when we have dealt with those things in our own lives, we need to get out and follow up practically, even on social media.

If I feel that some people are victims in the DACA conflict, I could write up a post telling people how I feel about it. Depending on how I expressed myself and if my post is based on what is true biblically and factually, then that could be good. But I could also post a link to help teach people where they can go to get help if they are in the mess. That's where I have felt conviction and where I want to change.

And then there is plenty to do outside of the internet. But I want to be clear that social media, like fire, is something that can be productive or destructive and there are ways to use it with wisdom. Even with our outrage.

Comments are welcomed below.

Calvinist Constantly Using Romans 9 Argument Stunned to Read Verses 30-33

Local Calvinist Ezekiel Owens, after years of pulling out Romans 9 as his invincible weapon in discussions with Arminians, was taken aback today to read the last few verses of the chapter, according to sources.

“Yeah, for years he would get in lengthy discussions about what ‘all’ means in the Bible, but he always knew that if they got bogged down in details that he had a theological bazooka in his hip pocket,” confirmed his neighbor and aunt, Alice. “He was always going on about ‘God has mercy on whom he desires and hardens whom he desires. Who are you to question how or why God saves people?’ Bam! Gun to a knife fight. Now that he’s read Paul clarify by saying God has mercy and hardens based on whoever puts their faith in him, he seems lost. There’s even talk of him looking on Amazon for Arminius’ three-volume work. It’s that serious.”

Ezekiel’s old college roommate and unabashed Arminian, Joel, added, “I’ve been trying for years to use Romans 10:9 and the obvious choice of ‘if you confess’ to convince him of free will in salvation, but apparently he could not be convinced from chapter 10. Had to be 9.”

There have also been rumors of Ezekiel shaving his beard, but as of this writing those rumors are unconfirmed.

Five Lies Temptation Tells About Sin

Years ago I was driving down the interstate headed home. As I navigated my vehicle on the road, I saw something up ahead. From my vantage point, it appeared that there were thousands of papers scattered all over the road. When the cars that were preceding me reached that spot, my guess was confirmed as the papers scattered and swirled with the wind produced by the passing traffic. I realized there was no danger so I continued driving at the speed limit until I reached the seemingly endless pieces of paper. Just as I was plowing through the mess, one "sheet" flipped up and stuck to my windshield. It was then that I realized my guess about it being paper was woefully wrong. Clinging to my windshield and staring me in the face was a picture of a nude woman from a pornographic magazine. I frantically used my wipers to dislodge this most unwelcome guest, but that did not work. I slowed down and then sped up again hoping that the change in velocity would remove my new passenger. Also unsuccessful. Finally, through no skill on my part, the page slid off my windshield and floated along the road behind me. There in my wake were thousands of pages from pornographic magazines twirling, spinning, and attacking drivers all over this unsuspecting Nashville interstate.

I tell this story for a few, somewhat contradictory reasons. First, temptation rarely works like that. It is not often that we are smacked in the face in such an obvious manner as my windshield porn. I have given in to temptation's lies more times than I care to admit, but I am happy to report that this was not such a time. The example above is absurdly over-the-top, but that is not to say that we do not face some versions of in-your-face temptation. I will deal with one such example

in a bit. Most often though, temptation is subtle. It is tricky. It is deceptive. Here are five of the most common lies that our temptation tells us about sin.

It is not a big deal.

In Acts chapter 5, we find the story of Ananias and Sapphira. It is a complicated and difficult story to deal with in modern-day America. First, God's judgment on this couple seems too severe. Second, the idea of selling all of our possessions and handing the proceeds over to someone else goes against most of our natural instincts. Fortunately for me, I am not dealing with either of those particularly troublesome issues today! Instead, I want to focus on the sin involved in the story.

At that point in the life of the early church, the first members were renouncing their own possessions, giving all they had to the church, and allowing everyone to live without any financial needs. It was socialism at its very best because it was driven by pure motives and clean hearts and guided by the Holy Spirit. That's where Ananias and his wife Sapphira enter the story. They too sold some property they owned. They too presented the profits at the feet of the Apostles. But together, they conspired to withhold a portion of those profits for themselves. Keeping some back did not seem like a big deal to them. They convinced themselves that they were still handing over enough. Why would anyone object since it was obvious they were giving to the work of the Lord? They were tempted to lie and they fell to that temptation. It cost them their lives.

Sin is a big deal. Always. Let's stop acting like it's not.

The outside is what matters.

Going hand-in-hand with not seeing their deception as a big deal, Ananias and Sapphira were also primarily concerned with the outward appearance. They wanted to be seen giving to the church. When Ananias went alone to place the money at the feet of the Apostles, he wanted to look committed to the cause and righteous, all the while he was lying to himself and to the church. I am not convinced that withholding the money was even that big of a deal. It was their money, after all. They could have just as easily brought a portion of the proceeds and presented it to the church. They did not do that. Instead, they chose to claim something false. They chose to lie because it mattered to them how they were perceived by others. In the end, their internal sin was exposed to the light and their judgment was swift and severe.

The outside is important as it can reflect what is happening on the inside, but do not deceive yourself into believing temptation's lie. If you harbor internal sin, it will destroy you in the end.

We have it under control.

One of the most well-known examples of succumbing to temptation found in Scripture is the story of David and Bathsheba. At this point, I doubt there is anyone reading this story that is not aware of the particulars, but in case there is just one person out there that is not, allow me to give a brief summary. As king, David was the most powerful man in Israel. Scripture calls him "a man after God's own heart." He was married – to more than one woman by this time. At this moment in Israel's history, things were good. We find the story of this great fall in 2 Samuel chapter 11. Early in the chapter, there is a key phrase that is used to set the context of the scene, *"In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight*

the Ammonites.” For whatever reason, David decided that he did not need to go out to war. He chose to stay home. Perhaps I am reading too much into this, and that wouldn’t come as a shock to some, but this feels like a man that believed he had his life under control. He was confident, self-assured, and in control. That is a very dangerous place to be for any Christian. That’s not to say we should walk around scared and paranoid. Yet, based on David’s actions in the next few verses, it is clear he was not where he needed to be spiritually speaking. He was vulnerable to attack. He was open to temptation.

So David stayed home when he should have been off to war. It is late in the afternoon and he decides to go up to his roof to look across his city. It is then that he sees Bathsheba taking a bath. That was his porn on the windshield moment. That was temptation slapping him in the face with all the subtlety of a sledgehammer. David should have walked away. He should have averted his eyes and fled from that temptation. But he didn’t. He chose to look. He chose to admire her beauty. And then he chose to find out who she was, invite her to his house, and convince her to sleep with him. The story only gets worse from there but that’s probably enough for my point. David let down his guard because things were good. That sense of self-satisfaction and being in control doomed him.

There will be times when things in our lives are humming along nicely. Everything seems to be working out for us. Cling to God during those times. Seek His face with more fervor than ever because it is exactly in times like that when temptation will approach you and trip you up.

We can hide our sin from God.

Ananias and Sapphira. David. All great examples of people thinking they could hide their sin from God. Scripture is full

of these examples because humanity is very, very dumb. We constantly convince ourselves that what we do in secret cannot be seen by anyone. We forget or choose to not remember, that God sees everything. The story of Achan is perhaps the best reminder of this.

The Israelites were conquering the promised land. They were given specific instructions on what to do with the plunder. Achan violated those instructions. He took a robe, 200 coins, and a bar of gold and buried them in his tent. He thought he could steal those things and no one would ever know. And if God had not been involved, he probably would have been correct. He and his family paid for his sin with their lives. All for things he had no use for because to use them would have revealed his sin.

That secret sin you think is hidden is not hidden at all. God sees it. God knows. You might be able to keep it hidden from everyone else, including your spouse or your children but you will never keep it concealed from God. To make it worse, that sin you hide is slowly killing you. You are cutting yourself off from God and His blessings and that sin is doing you as much good as Achan's buried treasure. Expose it to the light and let it die.

We can handle it on our own.

I have given enough examples of what not to do to. For this, I will use a positive example of overcoming this lie. When Daniel and the other Hebrew young men were taken to Babylon in the first chapter of the book of Daniel, they could have easily fallen prey to the new culture and customs. Most importantly, they could have chosen to rely on their own power to survive in a hostile nation. Instead, they chose to commit together to not drink the wine or eat the meat. They found fellowship and accountability. They were not an island to

themselves. They were united in their rejection of temptation.

If you are struggling with sin, seek help. Confide in someone you trust. Find an accountability partner who will be a voice of wisdom, encouragement, and if needed, rebuke. I know there is nothing novel about this, but our culture values independence and that is stifling to the Christian walk. We are made for community. We are made to walk this road with others. We are not islands. Find your support group and rely on their strength in times of temptation.

Hopefully, this will be a help to someone out there. I know I have listened to all of these lies at some point in my life. They are very alluring. Temptation works that way. It tells us that what we are doing is not a big deal. It lies that as long as we put on a good front, that is all that matters. It tricks us into believing we have it all under control. It tells us that no one, even God, can see. And it convinces us to handle things on our own.

Sin is serious and we need to take it more seriously than we do. We need to stop listening to temptation's lies.

We welcome your comments below.

In What Way Are You A Genius?

I doubt my wife knows the names of the two men who ran for the open Alabama Senate seat back in November. I'd be surprised if she could name even half of the sports teams that won major championships in 2017. I'm positive that she doesn't know who

is nominated for what at the Oscars this year.

Yet, if you ask my wife about Guided Reading, or Classroom Management, or the names, personalities, and personal struggles of her 29 third grade students, she could talk all day. And you'd probably be blown away by how developed her thoughts are, how deeply she thinks and how passionate she is about it. I know I am. When it comes to what my wife does for a living, she sounds brilliant when she speaks. She comes across as an expert in it, even though she is young.

To say it another way, she sounds like a genius. And at least by one broad definition, she is.

It's a funny thing about our culture that we tend to reserve the highest semantical praise for those whose intelligence is in specialized academic areas like math or science. When in reality there is an abundance of other topics that serve our world in crucial ways and in which people are educated and constantly learning, all the while in the trenches of the practical reality of using their knowledge. They're out there doing it. Their specialized intelligence, creativity, and passion make them geniuses to my mind. Even if they don't know much about math or science.

I think most of us (all of us?) have an area or two in which we can accomplish the same thing my wife does with teaching. I think we all can sound like a genius on a given topic.

Why do I write about this? Because I think one of the greatest parts of the Christian life is finding these passions and using them to serve God's kingdom. When I give devotions to teenagers I always talk to them about this. I do not think or try to teach them that they have to figure out their lives before they are 18 years old. Or that God's will is some mysterious super specific thing they have to do when it comes to college major career. I simply teach them that God inspires us to be passionate about particular subjects and that can

guide us in decision making. And there are few things I am convinced we are created for more than to throw our lives into the things that matter to us, constantly learning about them, figuring out how to use them practically and communicating their importance to others in an appropriate way.

Some people find passions at an early age. My brother Jeremy loved farming from the time he was old enough to pick up a tobacco leaf. Others find passion based on life circumstances. I know parents with children with special needs who hold what I would call “life doctorates” on those needs because they have poured their minds and energies into them on behalf of their kids, learning and doing everything they can. Other passions come with time and very gradually, as I would say happened to me and the bilingual ministry of my church. I didn’t move to Chicago with that focus in mind and other than a brief time of working with migrant workers on Cannon Farms in the ’90s, it was never something I felt strongly about. But at about 29 years old and over the span of several years, God stirred my heart about it and now between language learning, reading books, teaching/preaching and living out church community, I spend dozens of hours a week in the messiness of it. I know little about science. I know nothing about several political issues. But when people ask me about my church ministry, I can talk for hours.

With that in mind, here are a few things I think Christians should keep in mind about the passions that can make them sound like a genius on a given topic:

Creatively Use Them To Love God and Love People

As I mentioned, my brother Jeremy is a farmer but he is not just knowledgeable about crops. Because of this job and his natural bend as an extrovert he interacts regularly with hundreds of people. Every time I’m home he blows me away when

I ask about someone we went to high school with twenty years ago and he knows what they are doing today. Not because of Facebook, but because he saw them last week. And all of those people know him as a man of integrity and hard work ethic. He touches more lives every week as a farmer than I do as a pastor. And he has used his job to witness to people, including Spanish-speaking workers in their heart language.

It would be easy for him to think he's "just a farmer". But he uses that genius-level passion to love God and love others.

Never Stop Being a Student About Them

Life changes quickly. Culture changes without us realizing it. And a good steward of passion and knowledge will keep up. My senior pastor, David Potete, is a marvelous example of this. He is a genius at servant leadership in our Chicago neighborhood. You can't be around him for two seconds without feeling his passion for it. And the amount of knowledge he has is vast. Yet he is constantly reading articles about our neighborhood and city, getting involved in the community and figuring out new ways our church can serve people based on what the needs are. Our church is not doing ministry the same way we did in 1998, or 2008 or even 2013. He is exceptional at keeping us on our toes and being learned and willing to adapt. As a church, we are intent on reflecting our neighborhood even as it changes and his passion and knowledge drive that. We no doubt believe truth is absolute and Christ never changes. But how we do ministry does.

Be Humble

Passion can come across as arrogance if not presented correctly. I'll never forget getting an email from Dr. Robert Picirilli once after I asked a question about a passage in Revelation. Dr. Picirilli, who sounds like a genius based on

his knowledge of Greek and the New Testament, told me that the more he studies Revelation, the less he feels like he understands it well. I was stunned by that. It was a humble statement.

Sometimes when you are passionate, even if you are humble about it, it still can make people uncomfortable. Maybe out of insecurity on their part or just because they misunderstand. We need to risk that for the sake of communicating what God has blessed us to know in important areas of life, but we still must be actively fighting against human haughtiness. The Bible does warn that knowledge puffs up. And it helps to remember that there is a great big world outside of what we are doing with our lives.

Do Not Be Afraid to Take Risks or Think Outside the Box

In a recent phone conversation with a friend, he was dealing with a huge decision about where to live with his family. One of the choices meant doing something extremely out of the common way for Americans. As he talked about it, I could feel his passion for the reason he would consider an outrageous change in lifestyle radiating through the phone. The more he talked, the more genius he sounded on the topic. When he asked me what I thought, I could not help but wonder how much he would have to offer his own family and others by taking the crazy step. He would have a platform to really challenge how we think through Christianity in America, and how comfortable we get sometimes in how we live. I could not make the decision for him, but I think risks are definitely worth exploring when you are a follower of Jesus Christ. And not just random, foolish risks, but those that fit our creative genius passions.

I've heard of churches having small groups where some members were passionate about running, so they ran three miles during the group together and then talked about the Bible. I've heard

of churches with members passionate about filtering movies through their Christian worldview and using that a topic for a Wednesday night class. If there is anything the church needs more of, it's people willing to shake up the status quo and question why we do church community or home life the way we do them. And to challenge the reasons—again, not randomly, but based how our passions can be used most effectively and wisely to help disciple God's people.

One of our favorite phrases at my church is “This is the hill that I'm willing to die on.” I want all of our people to be willing to die for Christ, but on a secondary level, I want all of our people to find their subject that they are so passionate about it that when they speak, they sound like a genius. And that they will charge that hill with everything they've got as well, until the day they die. I am quite proud that my wife spends far more time studying learning disabilities and working on pronouncing her students' names than she does thinking about the Twitter outrage of the week. God wants us to use our minds and our behaviors to glorify him and serve his church. I'm willing to die on the hill where English and Spanish speakers come together in worship and community every day. And I want to laser focus a huge part of my life on it because God has called me to love it with my whole heart. But I also want to encourage others to do the same, in their own unique way that Gos has gifted them to be a genius.

Comments are welcomed.