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FALL 2022

WORD ON THE STREET
Street Level Ministries' Magazine

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Word^{on the} Street MAGAZINE UW-STOUT EDITION

DISTRIBUTED AROUND THE GLOBE

— AN INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE MAGAZINE—



University of Wisconsin-River Falls | **River Falls, Wisconsin**

University of Wisconsin-Stout | **Menomonie, Wisconsin**

University of Wisconsin-Superior | **Superior, Wisconsin**

Campuses & businesses throughout **Cebu Island, Philippines**

A special edition is also distributed in parts of **South Asia**



WELCOME TO WOTS

Somehow you have stumbled upon a copy of *Word on the Street (WOTS) Magazine*. Maybe it was an accident, maybe you are just bored, but maybe it's because you want to know if it contains something worthwhile. We hope it does.

We exist as an outreach of Street Level Ministries, a college Christian ministry with groups in various cities. Check out how you can become a part of it by visiting streetlevelministries.com. This magazine is written, laid out, and printed by young adults

in cities around the Midwest as well as in the Philippines and parts of South Asia. What brings us together is our love for Jesus. Our desire is to write about topics focusing on God, life, and college. We hope this magazine is helpful, challenging, and thought-provoking as it encourages you to pursue a strong relationship with God.

WOTS has been published since 1999. All credit goes to God. We're not sure how else to explain it!



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So, You're Living With a Stranger?



7 OUT-OF-THE-BOX WAYS TO GET TO KNOW YOUR ROOMMATE

Let's begin with a poem:
Who is your roommate?
A sly snake, a beefcake?
Maybe, your best mate.

Trying to bond with your new roommate can be daunting, so here are some activities to break the ice a bit better than just regular shmegular get-to-know-you games.

- 1 COOK A RIDICULOUS MEAL**
Remember that one episode of iCarly when they made those iconic spaghetti tacos? Here's your chance at trying that epic recipe. If you don't know what that is, that's okay. All you need are hard-shell taco tortillas, spaghetti noodles, sauce, and meatballs to top it off. Another odd recipe you could try from an olden day cookbook is the ham and banana hollandaise dish! Yep, I know, gross! Search online for more wild recipes.

- 2 BUILD A LEGO SET TOGETHER**
This one's for the nerds at heart, or at least for those creative and hands-on folks. You can obtain many kinds of Lego sets from places like your local Walmart or a thrift/bargain store like Goodwill. Bonus if you get a set with all the pieces!

- 3 GO ON A HIKE AT HOFFMAN HILLS**
This state recreation area located on 740th Street in Menomonie is open daily, but consider going on a morning hike to get some crisp fresh air and possibly catch the sunrise from the tower. That would be a sight to see!

- 4 VISIT A GRAVEYARD**
This one is creepy, but think of all the emo poetry you could write together using the environment as a prompt. Honestly, these are great spots for picnics or chillin' in the car eatin' some Micky D's. There is a good one known as Evergreen Cemetery, which happens to be on an island! Just go left at Culver's like you are heading out of town and keep going until you see the sign.

- 5 RIDE THE CAMPUS BUS FOR ITS WHOLE ROUTE**
Seeing Menomonie from a bus is a free sightseeing opportunity you and your roommate can experience together. Take the community route, which lasts about an hour, or for a quick adventure, the campus route, which is about 10 to 15 minutes. For added fun, play I Spy, spot the squirrel, or even challenge each other to talk to a stranger and get to know their story along the way. The campus and community route schedule can be found on UW-Stout's website.

- 6 MAKE A DORM FORT**
Engage your inner child by gathering as many blankets as possible and draping them over the bunks to create a radical blanket building. Add throw pillows and maybe some Christmas or LED lights for some extra flavor.

- 7 DOCUMENT THE LIFE OF SOME OF THE CAMPUS SQUIRRELS**
Speaking of squirrels, they are quite intriguing creatures. You can find them in pretty much any trash bin near your local dorm. Capture the story with pics and video and narrate it

After all those funky ideas, let us end with yet another poetic piece:

*Dorm life is already a bore,
and trying to tend to a roommate is kind of a chore,
you gotta share a fridge,
and both manage the garbage,
but hey, maybe they don't snore.*

Alright, now go have fun getting to know your roommate by doing ridiculous things!

ONE GIRL'S *True Story*

JAIL BREAK: THE STORY OF A FORMER CRIMINAL'S DAUGHTER

This testimony is from Elizabeth, a member of Street Level Ministries in Menomonie.

To share my story, I first have to dig a little bit into my dad's. He found Christ on the floor of a jail cell after a series of events that included my mother claiming to have had a child that was his. At first my dad automatically dismissed the notion because he thought she was disloyal, regardless of their marriage. After all, it was primarily based on helping her gain residency in the United States after emigrating from Mexico. At least, that's how my father saw things until a family friend named Brenda came into the picture. She was furious that my dad would think so low of his wife, so she took the last of his money, about \$600, and paid for a DNA test. Lo and behold, I turned out to be his, and it changed his life from there on out. He realized raising a child was beyond his ability, and he cried out to God for help, finally accepting Christ into his heart. His prayers were answered and thus began my story.

I was saved at a Bible camp in Wisconsin. One night, a speaker shared his story of falling into the sin of watching porn and masturbation. It resonated deeply with me as I was experiencing the same addiction he described, which terribly affected my mental health. Towards the end of his message, all the camp counselors lined up against the stage to pray over those who wanted to be set free from their cycle of sexual sin. I was severely convicted but also terrified of what my peers would think. If I walked up there, they would know that I was dirty, unclean, and not the "pure girl" I portrayed. Though fear still had my heart, God pulled it forward anyway. He told me that my confession, a sacrifice of my deeply set pride, would have to mean something.



For that to happen, I had to tell someone I cared about, so I found my camp counselor, Morgan. I spilled my long-kept secret, ashamed of all I had done. But instead of disgust, she met me with loving arms and immediately began to pray over me. Instantly I felt this weight taken from my chest, as if a truck had been lifted off, and found I could breathe easier than I ever had before. That was my first true experience of Jesus' love and grace.

My passion for telling the world about Jesus grew from there, but I struggled to help my mom see Him for who He was: Healer, Redeemer, Savior. I couldn't help her as much as I hoped. I knew so little about sharing the truth with love while still figuring out how to forgive the hurt I held against her. Since then, that has been a relationship I have been trying to mend.

Today I am majoring in Arts Administration and Entrepreneurship and hope to assist a Christ-centered non-profit someday or even start my own. With each step of my journey, God has blessed me with a faith family everywhere I go: from my time in Minnesota with a close friend, to my in-state National Guard deployment in Madison and Milwaukee for the COVID pandemic, and now at UW-Stout. Here in Menomonie, I have found an addition to that family in Street Level Ministries and am serving with their *Word on the Street Magazine*. I aim to continue maturing my natural gifts to better serve and love those around me to give glory to God, who made all of this possible. This life is wonderful and continuously developing, and I get to do it all with my Savior and best friend, Jesus Christ.

— Elizabeth

STREET LEVEL MINISTRIES

Don't do college alone

College is hard.
Following Jesus is hard.
Following Jesus in college is... *really* hard.

The jump from high school to college is a big one. For most of you, heading off to college will be the first significant time in your life that you are away from home and family. Keeping a schedule, eating healthy, attending to personal hygiene, budgeting, maintaining your class workload, working part-time, going to church, etc., will all take on a new meaning when decisions about them are yours and yours alone to make.

Of course, leaving home like this is an important rite of passage into adulthood. But that does not mean it will come easily for you!

Becoming detached from the familiar protections and oversights of adolescence (whether wanted or not) is a test that many will struggle with. Everyone entering into this experience will simultaneously feel the excitement of being free to do (mostly) whatever you want to do, and the heaviness of having to make decisions that previously were made for you.

On top of that, the classic college lifestyle is very much at odds with the commands of Jesus. So, **IF YOU PLAN TO BRING YOUR CHRISTIANITY WITH YOU TO COLLEGE** you will be *double-challenged!*

You might currently feel anxious about moving into the dorms, meeting your new roommate, or locating your lecture hall for *Intro to Communications* class. But these things will be minuscule in comparison to the pressures of

wanting to fit in with the other 2,000 incoming freshmen who don't believe the same things about God, life, meaning, and purpose as you do.

This is understandable as the world can be a very lonely place. Strong and meaningful relationships take loyal friends who are committed to sticking around through the ups and downs of life. But sadly, often that is not how life goes. Many so-called "friends" will just move on when the friendship is inconvenient or



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Free dinner, Bible study,
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burdensome. All of this is why finding the right community is so important.

Street Level Ministries is a Christian campus organization that exists to help students know Jesus and follow Him in every area of life while at college and beyond. Street Level is made up of a group of college-aged individuals on campuses throughout the University of Wisconsin system, as well as on Cebu Island in the Philippines.

“**THE TRUTH IS THAT A PURPOSEFUL LIFE CANNOT BE FOUND IN THE PURSUIT OF A COLLEGE DEGREE ONLY. YOU MUST KNOW JESUS, FOLLOW HIM, AND SERVE HIM – EVEN WHILE YOU’RE AT COLLEGE.**”

We meet regularly to talk about what it means to follow God in college. We also strive to serve Him in real ways that make a difference on our campuses, in the community, and in the world. The truth is that a purposeful life cannot be found in the pursuit of a college degree only. You must know Jesus, follow Him, and serve Him – even while you’re at college. Street Level specializes in just that.

Street Level aims to be a group of people that genuinely loves and supports each other. Our community goes beyond a stale religious gathering that happens only once a week. We also hang out together. We live together as roommates. We work together and volunteer




together in various ministry outreaches. We help each other. We push beyond superficial relationships – both with our peers and with God. If you are college-aged and want to make a difference in the world around you for the Kingdom of God, I’d encourage you to check us out. Maybe that isn’t you, but you have some questions about God, the Bible, life, and how they all fit together. Come find us! We would be glad to answer them. Find out more about Street Level and how you can connect with us at streetlevelministries.com.



You don’t have to do college alone. Follow Jesus, together.

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STREET LEVEL RADIO - AN INTRODUCTION

Street Level Radio, formerly Burning Dog Radio, is a radio station based in Menomonie, WI, USA. Our station streams online worldwide at streetlevelradio.com. We are a college station led by volunteers that love great music. Our volunteers are located in Menomonie and River Falls, Wisconsin; Duluth, Minnesota; and Cebu Island, Philippines.

We play a wide range of music from indie, ambient, and rap, all the way to "theological tape pop" (coined by one of our featured artists this year: Zambroa). Our station strives to play all-around good music, emphasizing the indie, underground Christian, and the weirder side of things.

We are supported by our friends at Street Level Ministries, as well as Believers City Churches. Serving God through radio is a special privilege that we can partake in due to this support. As a station, we like to get out there and meet students and community members through remote broadcasts in our station locations. If you are interested in meeting us, drop us a line using the form on our website!

STATION PROGRAMMING & FEATURED ARTISTS

Our station programming includes music, Bible teachings, and live broadcasts from local events. Check out our website for an updated schedule of our segments.

Some of our featured artists this year include:

Darla Baltazar: She has been writing and singing songs since 2012 when she began producing content in her bedroom in Manila, Philippines. Since then, she's grown in her outreach and has touched countless lives through her inspirational, moving songs about Jesus and the Christian walk. Her most well-known single, "Search Me" comforts the listener with reminders about the truth of who God is:

*What am I doing
Hiding insecurities
Why am I straying
Away from who I'm made to be
There ain't no reason
To fear what people have to say
I'm gonna trust in You
I know You're gonna keep me safe*

Zambroa: Self-described as "theological tape pop."

Jervis Campbell: "Making music that helps me with hopes that it might help you too."

Victory: "Victory's music is a fusion between soul and folk music. Whether Victory is performing classics or original compositions, she has a way of tailoring each song with her voice and guitar to fit her unique style."

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

We are always looking for volunteer DJs and producers to join us at one of our campus locations. If you are interested in radio and/or are looking for a unique way to serve God, we would love to hear from you!

The Moralistic Believer



THERE'S MORE TO BEING A CHRISTIAN THAN FOLLOWING A CHECKLIST

How Christian are you? Check off everything on the list that applies to you.

- Attends or family member attends church
- Prays before family meals
- Has a Bible app on your phone
- Has aesthetic Bible verses in your house
- Tells people you will pray for them
- Participates in Lent
- Follows Christian influencers on social media
- Sports Christian merch
- Posts "Jesus loves you" in your Instagram bio
- Reads the new bestselling Christian book
- Gives to charity
- Has faith tattoos
- Has Christian laptop stickers
- Has been baptized
- Has a rosary or cross necklace

What was your score? Would you believe me if I said you could do all these things and still not be a Christian? I bet there are more boxes with other "good" Christian things you could check, but that's not all there is to being a Christian. There is a lot more to being a follower and disciple of Jesus Christ than looking like a good person.

MORE THAN MORALS

Christians are simply people who love God. In *The Atlantic*, Ed Stetzer, president of Lifeway Research, says, "75 percent of Americans who self-identify as Christian are divided into three roughly equal groups. 'Cultural Christians' are Christians by heritage only. They do not practice a vibrant faith. 'Congregational Christians' have some connection to a church and may even occasionally attend, but like 'Cultural Christians,' they are not very faithful. Only the 'Convictional Christians' truly count as worshippers, for they orient their lives around faith in Jesus Christ." Adding on religion might seem like a practical and easy step, but in the Bible, Jesus calls those who would follow Him to "deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). However, being a Christian in our culture often looks like a weekend habit or a charitable belief that there is a God. Those looking in may distrust or even mock the professed believer because they act like everyone else despite their list of religious activities and views.

THE HEART ISSUE

My parents once sat me down and told me that I did all the "right" things, but there was still something wrong. They diagnosed me with a heart issue, saying, "Your heart needs to change before anything else will." My parents went on to tell me that I

laid down my love, time, and energy for my friends, but my attitude towards God seemed cold. Their warning fell on deaf ears because I did not want to hear their words. I believed I was doing everything and more that a Christian should be doing. Compared to my friends and those around me, I was a great Christian. The only problem with this picture was that my heart wasn't affected.

MORE THAN A CHECKLIST

Matthew 6:21 says, "Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be." When people place their hope in Jesus, their desires become aligned with what He desires. The Bible becomes more than a checklist of rules to follow. In the Gospel of Luke, a lawyer tried to test Jesus by asking how to gain eternal life and about Jesus' interpretation of the Old Testament law. Jesus responded with, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). God's desire for us is to know Him through our relationship with Jesus. He gives us new passions and purpose to love God with our lives through His Word.

When we desire to love God and follow Him, we have the freedom and ability to do His will when we have a relationship with Jesus. It's not a list of things that will make us look like a "good" person or a way to compare ourselves to others. Jesus simply tells us to deny ourselves and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). A Christian might do some of the things listed, but it's more simple than that. It's not about the stuff you do; it's about who you love.

THE HARD WORK OF GOOD FRIENDSHIP



WHAT IS A GOOD FRIEND?

Frankenstein once said, "Alone, bad. Friend, good."¹ We all want a friend in our corner, but what does it mean to be a good friend? Do a quick Google search, and you'll find our culture's take on the subject: "Good friends don't let you do stupid things...alone," "A friend is someone who understands your past, believes in your future, and accepts you just the way you are," "Friends are the people who make you smile brighter, laugh louder, and live better." We tend to believe that the best friendships are found in that elusive person who makes you feel good, does fun things with you, and doesn't confront you with anything uncomfortable.

God has a much different definition of friendship that He lays out clearly in the Bible. He says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy" (ESV, Proverbs 27:6). A true friend will wound you – yes, hurt you – when it's the best thing for you. Yes, a good friend will also provide enjoyment and companionship, but it's not always so rosy. That's because a real friend cares most about God's will being done in you and through you. Consider the second half of that verse, "...profuse are the kisses of an enemy." A person who conceals truth just to maintain peace is actually against you and actively working for your harm. When we choose friends who are always encouraging us and are never brave enough to gouge us with the truth, we surround ourselves with enemies. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a mid-20th century theologian, put it well when he said, "Nothing can be more cruel than the leniency which abandons

others to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one's community back from the path of sin."²

God not only tells us what it means to be a good friend, but He also came down here and became that Friend to us all. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be our ultimate Friend. Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times..." So, a true friend never withholds love. Jesus clarified what love is by proclaiming, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends..." (John 15:13). After living as the example of a perfect friend, Jesus died at the hands of the very people He came to befriend. He intentionally laid down His life so their sins could be forgiven. He loved us by telling us the miserable truth about our sin, remaining faithful to God when it didn't feel good, and training us to do the same.

THE INFLUENCING ROLE OF FRIENDSHIP

Have you ever had a conversation with someone with an accent, only to unintentionally imitate it back to them? Have you ever bought a piece of clothing because you saw someone wearing it? If so, you're doing what we all do: mirroring those around us. If we do this with strangers, how much more likely are we to become like those tightly woven into our lives through close friendship?

You've heard the phrase, "Bad company corrupts good character." That's actually from the Bible, but most pull quotes leave out the first part. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, "Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals." We're warned not to be deceived, hoodwinked, bamboozled...you

get the idea. That very warning insinuates we are gullible enough to believe we can run with "bad company" and remain immune to its influence. Maybe you've said those famous last words, "I would never [insert disapproved activity here]," only to end up doing that unfortunate thing later. Be honest – did it have anything to do with those around you?

God has much to say about the principle of imitation and the weight it carries for either a positive or negative influence. For example, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). Friends can sharpen us by exposing and cutting away character traits or habits in

“ A TRUE FRIEND WILL WOUND YOU – YES, HURT YOU – WHEN IT'S THE BEST THING FOR YOU.” ”

our lives that dull our obedience to God. But Proverbs 22:24-25 warns, "Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare." So there you have it: if you hang out with angry people, you'll inevitably find yourself worked up about something you didn't care about before. For better or worse, you're not above the influence of your friends. Do not be deceived.

CHOOSING GOOD FRIENDS

Since we know friendship is important to God, how do we choose healthy friends? Our answer is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14, which says, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership

has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" For the Christian, our closest friends will be other Christians. Yes, you'll have acquaintances at work or school, but the people you share your most agonizing struggles and deepest joys with, the ones you go to for advice and comfort, will be those who also love Jesus. C.S. Lewis wrote, "True friends don't spend time gazing into each other's eyes. They may show great tenderness towards each other but they face in the same direction – toward common projects, goals – above all, towards a common Lord."³

If you want to find a good friend:

1. Look for someone who lives like Jesus.
2. Immerse yourself in a church with people who obey God.
3. Do the same yourself.

Since we become like those we befriend, surround yourself with those worth imitating. Take a moment to consider where your current path ends: who will you become if you follow your friends?

¹The Bride of Frankenstein. Directed by James Whale, Universal Pictures, 1935.

²Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*. HarperCollins, 1954.

³"C.S. Lewis Quotes." Goodreads. 2022, goodreads.com/author/quotes/1069006.C_S_Lewis?page=36





MADE ON PURPOSE

HOW TO LIVE OUT THE IDENTITY DESIGNED FOR US

It all started in kindergarten. Like many, I was fed the message that I could be anything I wanted to be when I grew up. For someone who has a tough time choosing their favorite food, deciding what and who I would be was a monumental task. Having so many options seemed like a good thing until the threat of making the wrong choice peered back at me in the mirror. Anxious thoughts plagued me: "Should I follow my natural talents?" "What social group do I fit in?" "What if I'm antisocial?" "What if what I choose doesn't work out?" "Will it be too late to start over?" The list of questions, as well as the pressure, only multiplied from there.

I'm willing to bet I'm not the only one. Formulating an identity and making something of ourselves is deep and daunting. Whether we take a traditional approach or rebel against the status quo, we feel the burden of getting it right. Thankfully, I'm not left to fend for

“ GIVE UP TRYING TO BE SOMEBODY AND INSTEAD CLING TO JESUS WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT. ”

myself, and neither are you. Jesus invites us to surrender what meager identity we've created in exchange for the one He established for us before the world was made.¹ We'd be foolish not to take Him up on it. Hear me out.

SCRAPS OF WHO WE ARE

Our identity is like a cut-and-paste collage, and many pieces make us, us. One mammoth-sized part of identity often placed in the center is education. Our choice to attend community college or a four-year private school says something about us. The program we choose also says something in the way a biology major assumes a much different persona than an art major. We make our education choices based on our interests, sure, but also because it comes with a certain status.

Another part of our identity is the carefully crafted version we curate for social media. We intentionally present what will garner the most likes and shares. And, it doesn't help that algorithms pick up on this and push our interests back at us. Consuming agreeable content is addicting to the point that it becomes contrary for the brain to view anything else. According to NBC News,

Essentially, processing new facts, ideas, and perspectives requires actual neural effort. In other words, it forces our brain to reconfigure its web of connections to understand, assess, and potentially incorporate the new knowledge it's being exposed to. In that sense, it's a neural bias to conserve energy, and hard to overwrite.²

Therefore, we are stuck in a cycle of displaying only what we want others to see and taking in only what we want to see. There is very little room for content or people that challenge who we are. Though we champion diversity and a variety of opinions, our social media use betrays us.

Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with education and social media. They are merely two examples of a never-ending list of things we gather to formulate our identity. Trouble comes, however, when we put too much hope in what can and will change. Admit it—it doesn't take long to encounter life's unpredictability. Discovering this fact of life at a young age throws us off, and it's easy to lose our I'm-determined-to-achieve-my-goals momentum. From the perspective of psychotherapist Tess Brigham, we enter a quarter-life crisis:

A quarter-life crisis comes about when you're faced with the reality that your life is not what you thought it was going to be. It's an emotional crisis of identity and self-confidence. You're faced with the feeling that maybe you're not being true to who you are, but you're not quite sure who you're supposed to be, either.³

Ironically, we enter young adulthood assuming we'll find ourselves, but if we're not careful, we become as lost as ever. Keep reading if you resonate with the quarter-life crisis and the search for true identity.

CONSIDER THIS

Thankfully, there is hope because Jesus understands the struggle. He intentionally left His perfect position in heaven and came to earth to love, serve, and save us, His enemy. Many people who interacted with Him thought He was absolutely foolish because of His authority and mission. Jesus was told what He should do and who He should be, yet He never wavered from His Father's plans. Everything He did was according to God's will, even His death. Therefore, Jesus is our example to follow—that we, too, would form our identity around what pleases God, not what pleases others or even ourselves.

Being a Christian in the 21st century does not mean taking on a brutish attitude that is morally superior to everyone else. Rather, it means humbly belonging to a group of other believers where you can experience God's truth and love. The Bible compares the church—the local and global collection of God's people—to a body. The diversity in the body correlates to the diversity in the church. God uniquely designs us to operate in a unique place within the context of the church. The Apostle Paul underscores the value each of us has, whether weak or strong:

But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body...So, God has put the body together such

CONTINUED —>

¹ Ephesians 1:4

² [nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/problem-social-media-reinforcement-bubbles-what-you-can-do-about-ncna1063896](https://www.nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/problem-social-media-reinforcement-bubbles-what-you-can-do-about-ncna1063896) 3. [forbes.com/sites/tessbrigham/2021/03/24/managing-a-quarter-life-crisis-in-the-midst-of-a-crisis/?sh=3fe6b6046393](https://www.forbes.com/sites/tessbrigham/2021/03/24/managing-a-quarter-life-crisis-in-the-midst-of-a-crisis/?sh=3fe6b6046393)

*that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.*⁴

If life feels out of joint and you don't know what your purpose is, perhaps it is because you are not involved with and connected to a biblical church. God's desire for each of us is that our identity would be cemented in Him as part of His body of believers.

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

The topic of identity spans back to the beginning of time. Yes, that beginning. During the world's creation, written about in Genesis, God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to Our likeness" (1:26, NKJV). Rather than any other created being, God chose humans to reflect Himself. This means that we have emotions because God has emotions. We are creative, intelligent, nurturing, innovative, loving, and humorous because God is those things. Regardless of our life circumstances, we all have inherent dignity and value because we were made by the same supreme God.

Being God's creation is significant because He wants to relate to us. God not only wants a relationship with man in general, but He wants a relationship with you in particular. His foreknowledge and love for you go way back. According to Ephesians, "He [God] chose us in Him [Jesus] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself" (1:4, NKJV). God knows our identity and we find it by living in relationship with Him. He as the master blueprints. He formed us, and chose us before we had any say in the matter.

Our priorities shift when we choose to follow Christ and trade our old identity for the new. Author Sara Barratt explains,

Culture understands purpose mainly through the lens of external success...But look at purpose through the lens of a biblical worldview and the perspective diametrically shifts. Scripture offers us a life purpose far beyond the

*transient things of this world: to enjoy and exalt God in all of his glory and to spread his glory among all people and nations. This isn't a purpose we select for ourselves, but it's one we either accept or reject from God's hand.*⁵

That's just it. We can accept this new identity and purpose from God. Or not. If we'd rather keep working on the hodge-podge scraps of our self-made identity, He'll let us. Maybe we'll need to try adding a few more pieces before we realize that it's not eclectic, it's a mess. Through it all, God is incredibly loving and patient. Even in our rebellion, He kneels to our level and extends His arm to draw us close.

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”

Unfortunately, I can't go back to tell my kindergarten self all I've learned about life, but I can tell you: Give up trying to be somebody and instead cling to Jesus with all your might. This is God's story, you are His artwork, and you were made on purpose, for a purpose.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10

CAN CHRISTIANS DRINK ALCOHOL?

The answer is not as simple as you think.

If you wonder if you can drink alcohol as a Christian, the answer isn't simple. Some people say that drinking is a sin, some people think they can have as much as they like, and some churches offer wine during communion. It's confusing, but what does the Bible really say about drinking?

First, let's make something clear right away. Romans 13:1 clearly instructs us to obey the laws of the land: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (ESV). So, if the legal drinking age is 21, then there's your answer. But even if you are legally allowed to drink, should you as a Christian? As you page through the Bible, you will find passages where people are specifically told not to drink. In Leviticus 10:9, God instructed Aaron: "You and your descendants must never drink wine or any other alcoholic drink before going into the Tabernacle. If you do, you will die." In Numbers 6, God told people who take the Nazarite vow to give up wine and other alcoholic drinks. They can't even eat or drink anything that comes from a grapevine. God also directed Zechariah that his son, John the Baptist, is never to touch alcohol. If you read these verses alone, you might conclude

"DRINKING ALCOHOL IS JUST ONE OF MANY THINGS GOD DOESN'T EXPLICITLY GIVE US A YES OR NO TO IN THE BIBLE."

that to please God, it is probably safest to stay away from it. I mean, He told Aaron and his descendants that they would die.

But if you look a little further, you'll find passages where people are encouraged to drink. Paul instructs Timothy not to "...drink only water. You ought to drink a little wine for the sake of your stomach because you are sick so often." (1 Timothy 5:23). Jesus, at the last supper, passes a cup of wine to His

disciples and says, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it." (1 Corinthians 11:25). And don't forget that Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). If you read these verses alone, you might conclude that God does not oppose drinking, so let's go out and party!

Not so fast. God instructs all of us not to be drunk and even warns us why. Ephesians 5:18-19 warns us not to be "...drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life." Proverbs 20:1 says, "Wine produces mockers; alcohol leads to brawls. Those led astray by drink cannot be wise."

So, what's my point? In some situations, God clarifies when to drink, and for some people, God instructs them never to drink, period. In some cases, it is okay to drink, but in moderation. Here are some other Bible verses that might help you decide what God wants you to follow:

- Paul states, "I am allowed to do anything'—but not everything is good for you. And even though 'I am allowed to do anything,' I must not become a slave to anything." (1 Cor. 6:12)
- "But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble....And when you sin against other believers by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong, you are sinning against Christ." (1 Cor. 8:9-12)
- "And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." (Matt. 5:30)

Drinking alcohol is just one of many things God doesn't explicitly give us a yes or no to in the Bible. God gave us the Bible for instruction, but He also wants us to have a relationship with Him. Being a good student of the Word (the Bible), being willing to dig into what God says about Himself, and how we are to live out our faith in Him is how we can begin to answer these questions.



LETTERS



SKEPTICAL WANDERER,

WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD CREATED ALL THINGS TO WORK TOGETHER FOR A PURPOSE? WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT THE CREATOR OF THE WORLD SENT HIS SON TO DIE FOR YOU SO THAT YOU MAY HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM FORGIVEN OF SINS? I GET IT. I'VE BEEN THERE. IT SEEMS UNREAL, BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO KNOW OR UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING THAT COMES ACROSS YOUR PLATE. AND THAT IS OKAY. BEING CERTAIN ABOUT EVERYTHING AND FIGHTING FOR SECURITY WILL (TO NO SURPRISE) LEAD TO MORE SKEPTICISM AND WANDERING. BUT YOU KNOW THAT, RIGHT? NO AMOUNT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SEARCHING WILL SATISFY THAT. YOU'LL FEEL MORE LOST THAN YOU EVER DID BEFORE.

Through that searching, you'll have to trust and believe there is something more than what you see in front of you. You'll start to wonder if anything is secure.

You can know this for sure: God is constant, never changing, and He is the most secure truth you could ever have. You don't get to have all the answers, but Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." Hold on to that. It's freeing to know that He is your constant. Trust in His promises; it is worth it.

LOVE, TRUSTING WONDERER

TO MY DEAD SELF:

EMPTY AND LONGING,

How long will you go on like this? Each day you try to fill every instant with momentary pleasure, hoping no one will uncover your secret and your chase of lesser dreams. A dulled sense of guilt and shame seem to lurk at your side. I know you've tried a million times to "be better," but it never stuck. You wonder if it will always be like this, but there is a persistent and unexplainable desire for something more.

Oh, how alone and helpless you have felt. What if I told you that Someone already knows about your secrets? Every one of them. He knew you would give in, compromise, make mistakes, and hide, but He still desires to have an intimate, loving relationship with you. His name is Jesus, and He wants to give you a new life of victory, love, and direction. And yes, there will be suffering, but the reward is great. In this new life, you will be totally changed. There is only one hitch. You must give up and let go of everything.

You once said you would try harder tomorrow, but will you admit weakness today? If so, you are in great company. True change starts with the confession of weakness and the need for help. After that, only faith in and relationship with Jesus can truly transform your life and give you deep satisfaction.

LOVE, FINALLY SATISFIED

BROKENLY DESPAIRED,

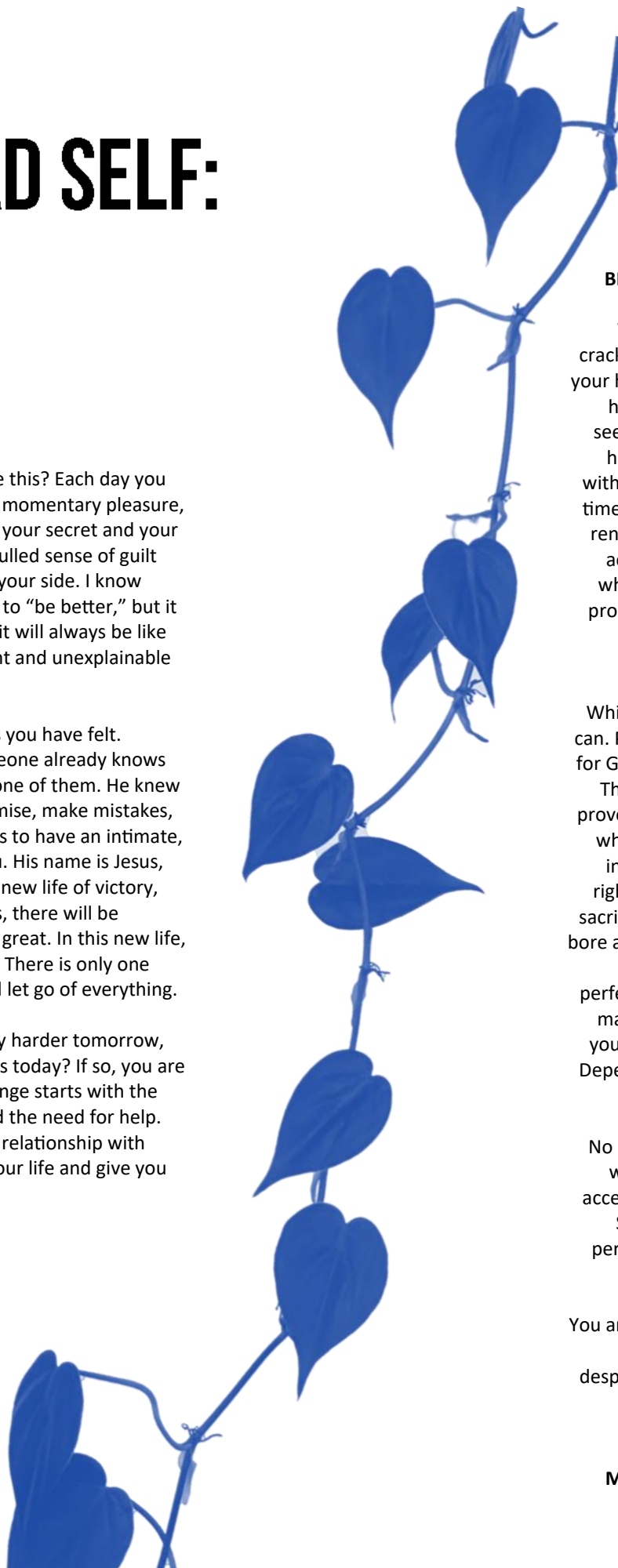
When will you see the cracks that have formed in your heart? That you are so heavily distressed from seeking acceptance? You have been strung along with false objectives. Each time you are distracted by renewed hope that being accepted will make you whole again. Things that promised to put you back together only cut you deeper.

While you can't fix it, God can. Psalms 18:30 says, "As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him." God's intentions are pure and right, not destructive. He sacrificed for you when He bore all of your brokenness, died, and emerged in perfection so you could be made whole by Him. Put your hope in Jesus Christ. Depend on His actions and not any of your own.

No longer do you need to waste away striving for acceptance. Trust that the Son of God makes you perfect and not the goals you pursue.

You are accepted. Let God's mercy consume your despair and replace it with joy.

LOVE, MERCIFULLY REPAIRED



A JOURNEY OF FINDING BETTER THINGS TO DO

Examining the Life of an American in the Philippines

If you grew up in a country full of opportunities, a better educational system, cold weather, and a financially stable family, would you ever think of living in a developing country and staying there until your last breath? Probably not. It takes a lot of courage to move to a foreign island far from your comfort zone. There are too many adjustments and changes that you will face in culture, food, weather, and the way of living.

Jim Young was born and raised in Pennsylvania, USA. After graduating high school, he joined the U.S Air Force and served there for four years. Towards the end of his service, he was assigned to Clark Base in Pampanga, Philippines, and experienced the life of the Filipinos for the first time. His heart was overcome by the beauty of the people and the calmness of nature of the foreign island. Little did he know that his fate would be changed totally, and God would use him to expand the kingdom of the Almighty.

After he finished his service in the military, he went back to the USA but prepared his papers to return and live in the Philippines. He stayed in Mindanao, Philippines for three years and bought land to cultivate and fulfill his childhood dream of becoming a farmer. He discovered that with not a lot of money he could be both a farmer and experience living in simplicity with the Filipino people. In fact, he said that there were no hardships in adjusting to the foreign soil.

BETTER THINGS TO DO

Before Jim became a Christian, he didn't know who Jesus Christ was. His family regularly visited church every Sunday during his childhood days, but he only enjoyed listening to the hymns of the worship songs. He was not aware of how Jesus Christ saved him from the death of sin. Though attending church didn't feel significant to him during those times, God still used it to build upon His call to be His servant later on. After staying in the Philippines for three years, he returned to the USA. During this stay, he heard a

simple and clear message on a Christian radio station: "What better things could you do with your life than serve God?"

It was a turning point when he understood that God was calling him for another service, not in the Air Force anymore, but in winning souls. The Holy Spirit transformed his heart, and he continued listening to Christian radio. After six months, he attended a church, but this time it was not merely about the enjoyment of listening to worship songs. It was about knowing Jesus Christ and serving Him for the rest of his life. He was born again at the age of 49.

THE PRIZE OF THE SACRIFICE

In 2006 after he retired from working for 34 years as a construction worker, he went back to the Philippines, not just to have a vacation or to plant vegetables, but to plant the Word of God. For some, being a foreign missionary or a Christian pastor in a different country is an ultimate sacrifice, but Jim is different. When asked what





the weirdest things he needed to adopt culturally after migrating to the Philippines were, his response was, "Nothing." He didn't view it as a sacrifice because he was overwhelmed by the love of Christ, and he wanted to share it with other people, especially Filipinos.

Left: Jim Young (center) with members of Sagay Christian Church

Above: Jim and his wife, Lydia Young

Right: Jim and his brother Bill with two members of Sagay Christian Church

He served the Lord by attending the Church of Our Savior in Bato, Toledo City, Cebu Island for more than five years. Then, he decided to give up his properties in California to officially move to Toledo City to continue building the Kingdom of God. Every decision he made was not just for his own sake but to help other people by using the Word of God. You might think his destiny is to be stuck in the Philippines, but no. It was God working in Jim's life and moving him to a better place so he could influence hundreds of Filipino youth. Instead of a comfortable retirement, he sacrificed stability, reputation, and security to love his adopted neighbors trapped in the shadow of sin.

LESSONS ARE SWEET AS HONEY

For many years he was just a passionate Christian serving God in the Philippines, but he officially became an appointed pastor in 2018 to serve and mold young people in Barangay Sagay. In this small mountainous area in Toledo City, he continues to build the foundation of faith through his church members and surrounding rural communities. His message to the youth especially is that chasing your dreams is not wrong. However, maintaining a tight relationship with God must be central because He is the one that outlines the right path for you.

We may think of God as if He were Santa Claus, so when things don't pan out, we desperately try to take control of our lives. Jim initially just wanted a typical, comfortable life. Still, he always dreamed of becoming a farmer, and he even did

“TO CHASE YOUR DREAMS IS NOT WRONG BUT MAINTAINING A TIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD MUST BE CENTRAL BECAUSE HE IS THE ONE THAT TRACES THE RIGHT PATH FOR YOU.”

it for a while, but it didn't ultimately fulfill him. When he finally figured out that God was the answer to what he had been searching for all his life, He used his desire and made him a farmer of men.

It is not wrong to seek great things in your life or plan something for your future, but let God be the artist who paints your future like Jim. Now, it's your turn. Are you going to be the solo artist of your life, or will you let God do His art?



AS A MATTER OF FACT : WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

For many, we've heard the whole Sunday school spiel, "Jesus loves you and died for you." While this is true, it sometimes gets overlooked as a mere "get-out-of-jail-free card," which misses the point of the Gospel. It's a personal, divine encounter and action to restore a severed relationship so that we can be wholly His.

THE GREATEST NEED

We all can agree that nobody's perfect, but this doesn't excuse us from God's standard of perfection (Matthew 5:48, James 2:8-11). Plus, only acknowledging imperfection is an understatement of the root of the problem (Romans 3:9-20, Psalm 14:1-3). It's not just that we've acted wrongly, and we can simply flip a switch to something more desirable. It's intricately rooted in our hearts (Jeremiah 17:9). We can't say that we're for God when our hearts are turned against Him.

Here lies the fundamental problem of all humanity: our foolish absurdity to refuse God to be God. It's rebellion against God, with every generation being born on the enemy's sides, each encouraged to build up their tiny kingdoms, giving rights to anything but Jesus to rule over their lives. In this state, it's reasonable to conclude that we are His enemies and rightfully condemned. Like being sentenced for treason, we are held fully accountable (1 Thessalonians 2:16, Ecclesiastes 3:15). Because God is perfectly righteous, just, and holy, He must deal with sin because it simply cannot exist in His presence. It requires judgment, and it is the death penalty (Romans 6:23).

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HIS GREATEST LOVE

Because justice must be served according to God's perfect, immovable standard, we are in a hopeless situation indeed. We're like convicted criminals without recourse to vindicate ourselves from the death penalty. But God did something so radical and powerful that it fundamentally altered the course of history, and the effects are still felt worldwide today. He came, lived the perfect life, and then, "At just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly...But God proves His love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8).

Jesus extends an offer. He'll be your attorney but unlike any other attorney would, He'll take your death penalty upon Himself. And then He did what no one has ever done before or since, He defied death and rose again from the grave. Because He now lives, He can justify us and intercede on our behalf (Romans 4:25, Hebrews 7:25), exchange our spotty record with His perfect one, and remove the condemnation of our past, present, or future sins (Romans 8:1)! There's no longer a barrier between God and us in this life or the next. We can have complete access to God without shame or fear (Hebrews 4:16). But the "catch" is that we have to accept His offer before it can be a reality in our life. You have to want Jesus.

THE GREATEST OFFER

Acceptance is as simple as repentance and belief in Him as Savior and Lord. Repentance means stopping, turning around, and walking toward Him. In other words, it's by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) that we can be saved and established in a life with Jesus. A life transformed by Him will then unfold as it's aligned under God (Matthew 22:37). It's now a life beautifully intertwined with His (John 15), and we're no longer enemies. Instead, we are finally free to enjoy Him as wholly His in this life and then into the afterlife. This is the good news of the Gospel.

90 Issues but Puns Aren't One

WHAT BETTER WAY TO CELEBRATE 90 WOTS ISSUES THAN WITH TOO MANY PUNS?

What do animals, life, WOTS magazine, sports, food, holidays and nature have in common? You can make puns about them. We at WOTS appreciate a good play on words. So, to celebrate this beloved moment of 90 issues, we compiled a list of 90 puns. Don't just read these to yourself but read them out loud with friends to maximize the effect. Well, how about we get to those cringe-worthy puns!



ANIMALS

1. I was going to tell a joke about dogs...but I felt it was a little far-fetched.
2. I think cats are a purr-fect lap warmer.
3. Don't play Koi with me!
4. The best way to communicate with fish is to drop them a line.
5. Owls are a real hoot.
6. Pig puns are really boaring.
7. I used to have many fish, but I had to scale back.
8. I don't like playing with big cats; they are such cheetahs.
9. I just watched a documentary about beavers...it was the best dam show I ever saw.
10. It looks like my cat's sick...he doesn't seem to be feline well.



SPORTS

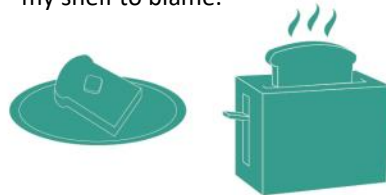
11. I dropped the ball on that one.
12. I finally got my golf game down to a T.
13. I couldn't remember how to throw a boomerang and then it came back to me.
14. I wondered where the ball was. Then it hit me.
15. Basketball sued tennis. Now they must go to court.
16. Why did the basketball player visit the bank? His check bounced.
17. Why does an octopus perform poorly on a basketball court? It's always getting tentacle fouls.

18. Why are cats so bad at basketball? They shoot too many hair-balls.



WOTS (WORD ON THE STREET)

19. Tell that printer to toner down.
20. We have WOTS of issues.
21. My pen knows how to make a point. It gets write to it.
22. We at WOTS know how to be pun-tural in our writing.
23. We will, we will, Wots you!!
24. The past, present and future walked into a bar. It was tense.
25. I recently got crushed by a pile of books. But I suppose I've only got my shelf to blame.



LIFE

26. All the toilets in New York's police stations have been stolen. The police have nothing to go on.
27. The rotation of the earth really makes my day.
28. The husband told his wife that he was impressed by the garlic press.
29. I'm glad I know sign language. It's pretty handy.
30. I slammed my hand in the rent-a-car door. It hertz.
31. I go down by the river to skip rocks and catch up on current events.

32. "I will iron out all the details later," said the man pressed for time.
33. I went to a seafood disco last week and pulled a mussel.
34. My doctor said I had type A blood, but it was a type O.
35. I don't always surf the Internet, but when I do, eyebrows.
36. My friend's bakery burned down last night. Now his business is toast.
37. I don't trust stairs. They are always up to something.



BIBLICAL

38. Who was the biggest financial whiz in the Bible? Noah. He was floating his stock while everyone else was in liquidation.
39. Moses had the first tablet that could connect to the cloud.
40. God answers knee mail.
41. At what time of day was Adam created? A little before Eve.
42. Aaron and Moses came from the tribe of Levi because they had the right jeans.
43. Atheism is a non-prophet organization.
44. Boaz was Ruth-less before marriage.



OCCUPATION

45. The librarian did things by the book.
46. The electrician was revolted when he found a loose wire with his hand.

47. The locksmith had a turn-key operation. He was very good with the door-to-door service and had a handle on most situations.
48. I would have been a farmer, but it wasn't my field.
49. I used to work for a company that made submarines, but they went under.
50. I've been to the dentist many times. I know the drill.
51. The chef's assistant asked for a rolling pin but was told to not be so kneady.
52. If a short psychic broke out of jail, you'd have a small medium at large.



NATURE

53. The tree said it is time to embark on a new journey.
54. Water will go back up in the sky in dew time.
55. What kind of coffee grinder does a snowman use? A burr grinder.
56. Mother nature can be snow flaky this time of year.



EDUCATION

57. I can hear music coming out from my printer. I think the paper's jammin' again.
58. Don't trust atoms, they make up everything.
59. I would tell you another chemistry joke, but all the good ones argon!
60. The sun doesn't need to go to college. It already has 28 million degrees.
61. I show up to my science class periodically.
62. What do you get when you throw a bunch of books into the ocean? A title wave.

63. No matter how much you push the envelope, it'll still be stationery.
64. Parallel lines have so much in common. It's a shame they'll never meet.
65. For the class trip to the Coca-Cola factory, I hope there's no pop quiz.
66. The difference between a numerator and a denominator is a short line. Only a fraction of people will understand this.



THINGS

67. My television is paranoid. It feels like it's being watched.
68. I had a dream that I was a muffler. I woke up exhausted.
69. Coffee is the silent victim in our house. It gets mugged every day.
70. I gave all my dead batteries away. They were free of charge!
71. A friend of mine was given an acoustic guitar for free. Of course, strings were attached.
72. I heard there was a new store called moderation. They have everything there.
73. Two hats were hanging on a hat rack in the hallway. One hat said to the other, "You stay here, I'll go on a head."



FOOD

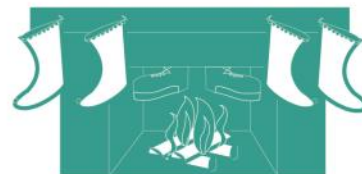
74. That omelet looks like an egg-cellent choice.
75. Being a vegetarian is a big missed-steak.
76. I hate jokes about German sausage. They're the wurst.
77. Some people say popcorn is hard to chew. There's a kernel of truth to that.

78. I tried to finish the leftovers, but my plans were foiled.
79. Do you want to come to my tea party? At least give it a chai!
80. Double stuffed. Either you like it, Oreo you don't.
81. A melty ice cream cone is a problem, but I'm sure I can lick it.
82. Yesterday I accidentally swallowed some food coloring. The doctor says I'm ok, but I feel like I've dyed a little inside.
83. I just burned 2,000 calories! That's the last time I leave brownies in the oven while I nap.



PLACES

84. England doesn't have a kidney bank, but it does have a Liverpool.
85. The Irish are wealthy since their capital is always Dublin.



HOLIDAY

86. Jokes at Thanksgiving can be so fowl.
87. Don't forget to put out the fire in the fireplace. Otherwise, you may end up with a krisp Kringle.
88. The Christmas spirit really soots you.
89. Do you like Christmas trees? Fir sure you do!
90. There's snow place like home for the holidays.

**Are you inspired?
Write your own and
share them with us
via social media.**

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