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NINETY-THREE



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ON DATING APPS

FALL 2023

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## 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.

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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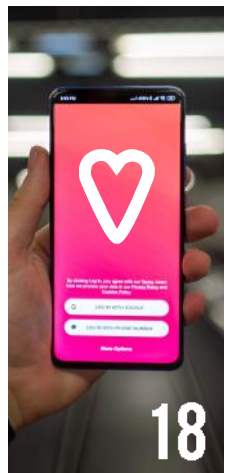


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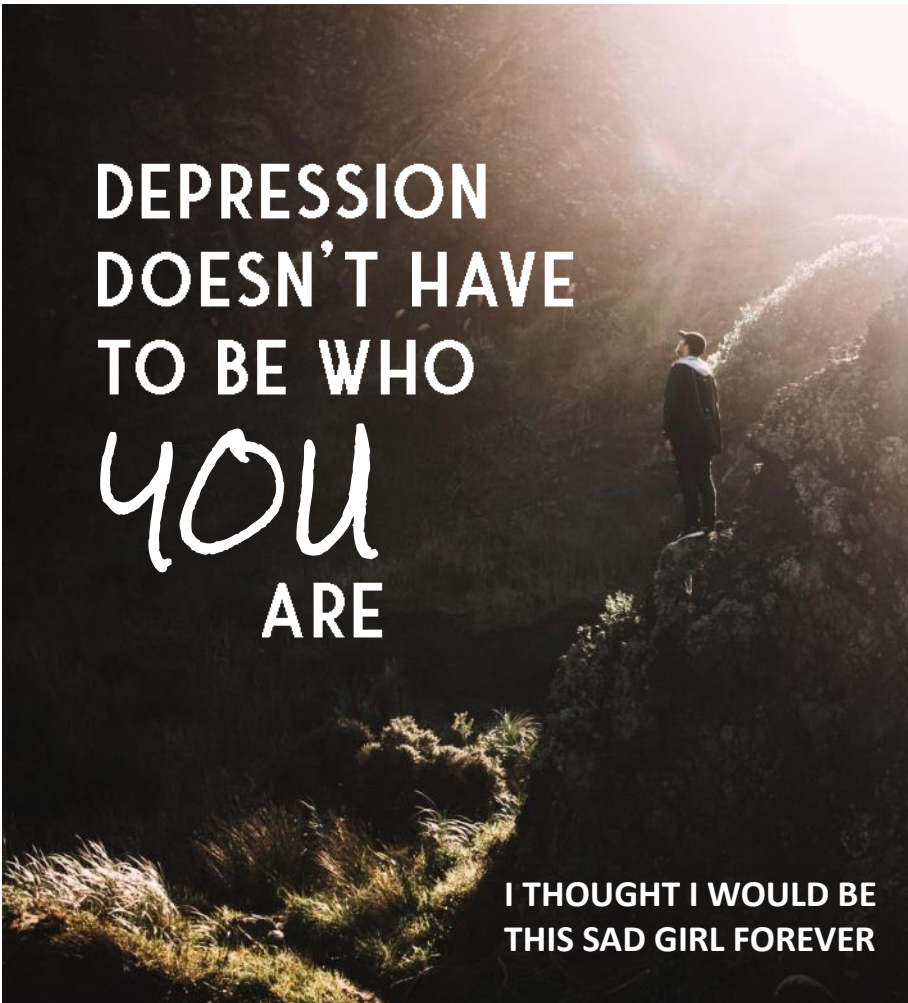
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# DEPRESSION DOESN'T HAVE TO BE WHO YOU ARE

I THOUGHT I WOULD BE  
THIS SAD GIRL FOREVER

I used to believe that there was no way I would ever feel happy again—not just feel happy—but to feel anything other than the constant, sad, dull ache that engulfed every waking moment. Nothing seemed to help: doing what was right by taking the lovely assortment of capsules and tablets and visiting a team of medical professionals every single week, and on the other end, doing what wasn't right by obsessing over my weight and food and using razors in ways they were not intended. Nothing ever worked. You get sucked into this black hole that goes further down with each passing day. You get stuck in your head no matter what you're doing or who you are with. I used to think that was life. I thought I was going to be this sad girl forever. That was until God proved me so wrong.

There was a time when people I met would casually ask what I did for fun or what things I enjoyed. That question was dreadful. What did I do in my free time? What did I enjoy? If I was honest

they would've realized how twisted I was. My life revolved around my mental state and trying to patch up the crumbling bits. But it seemed to be crumbling faster than I could fix it. It wasn't until someone was able to put it so plainly that I even thought about what was happening to me. It was the fact that even self-hatred is self-focus. Let that sink in for a minute. How could I be self-absorbed or self-focused? I hated life. I hated myself so much I wanted to die on a regular basis. I didn't deprive myself of food or cry myself to sleep because I loved myself. Yet, at the same time, if you really think about it, you have to be so focused on yourself in order to see how much you hate yourself. The only way out of that is to focus on others and to focus on God.

Jesus gives two commandments in Matthew 22. The first is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. The second is to love others as you love yourself. He's not telling us to learn to love ourselves, we already do a good

enough job on our own. Despite the increasing talk of mental health days and self-care and self-love, we really do take care of ourselves. We make sure we are dressed and fed, and we give ourselves time when things are rough. We make sure we stay hydrated, and we find ways to comfort ourselves whether good or bad. What He is telling us is that He knows we love ourselves, more than we even realize, so we should be loving others with that same amount of love. And loving Him above it all.

When we are able to turn our focus to other people and to Jesus, He really does begin to change us. Using all that energy I put into hating myself and being willing to use it to love other people, I no longer loathe the question about what I do in my free time or who I am or what I enjoy. I no longer think of myself as the sad girl because I'm not anymore. God has given me a new life. I can genuinely find enjoyment in so many things and real friends who are willing to bear my burdens and love me even when they see how nasty I am inside. Don't get me wrong, I do still have days when my thoughts start to dim and my mind shuts off, and I feel the slow, steady spiral down.

Depression is such a drain in so many ways, and unfortunately, when you are really struggling with it, you aren't able to flip the switch and turn it off. But you also don't have to be stuck in it either. It's not that you're back into that hole, but it's where you go from there. Do you turn back to the darkness, or do you look towards Him?

It's not like when you go to Him you'll be cured in an instant. You shouldn't expect that He'll make you all better the first time you pray or talk to him—you'll be disappointed. But go to Him and cry out. Tell Him that you are in such deep pain, and you want to die, and you have no clue what you're doing. He is there. He is waiting for us to go to Him instead of trying to fix it ourselves. We can't fix ourselves—whether you take a good route or bad one—you cannot do it. Yet He can. Your brokenness is not too broken for Jesus.



RESHA IS A STUDENT FROM STREET LEVEL MINISTRIES IN MENOMONIE, WI

# ALL THE OTHER gods FAILED: JESUS DIDN'T

## MY FAITH JOURNEY FROM NEPAL TO THE UNITED STATES

**G**rowing up in a Hindu family in Nepal, I was accustomed to visiting temples on various occasions, making offerings, and worshiping different gods according to different festivals. Following the teachings and path of my parents, I believed that connecting with God meant going to the temple. We would stand in long lines for hours, and when it was our turn, we would have to quickly perform the religious rituals in front of the deity so others in the line could have a chance. This is what we did until I was 18 years of age. It never occurred to me that I could have a personal relationship with God.

However, everything changed when I discovered Jesus. I learned that He is not just a distant deity. He is a loving friend who desires to be intimately involved in our lives. I discovered that I could talk to Him about my insecurities and worries, as stated in Philippians 4:6. Through Jesus, I realized that God is not limited to specific temples or places of worship. Rather, He dwells within us. While some say you can find God anywhere, few truly believe or act upon this truth.

In 2014, I tragically lost my aunt. My aunt was battling breast cancer at the time, and we tried various treatments, including traditional medicine and herbal remedies. My father, being her elder brother, stood by her side throughout her medical journey, but sadly, her health got worse after surgery.

As I mentioned, my family followed the Hindu religion, and my grandmother worshiped multiple gods and goddesses, a total of 32. When she learned about my aunt's breast cancer, she sought the help of shamans (like a Hindu priest) in hopes of finding a cure. She followed their instructions, performed sacrifices, and visited different temples. The shamans claimed that my aunt's illness was a result of her not fulfilling a promise to visit a particular temple. They said her suffering was the wrath of that specific god. Believing the shamans, my grandmother faithfully carried out their rituals and prayers, but sadly, nothing improved my aunt's condition.

Then, one day, my father's best friend came to visit my aunt. He spoke to her about Jesus and asked if he could pray for her. My aunt agreed. After he prayed, she expressed feeling a sense of peace, and her pain lessened. The friend continued to visit and pray for her. One day, during a prayer session, my aunt felt something leave her body. This experience strengthened her faith in the power of prayer and in Jesus as her Lord and Savior. Although my aunt is no longer with us, in her final days, she urged my father to believe in Jesus as the true God. Over time, this led to the salvation of many members of my family.

Witnessing how Jesus transformed my aunt's life, even amidst her pain, my family began attending church regularly. As we each grew in our relationships with Jesus, my grandmother



abandoned her idols, realizing they had no power to answer her pleas. Instead, she embraced Jesus as her true guide.

However, when I attended church, I initially doubted whether I was in the right place. For a few weeks, I attended without truly knowing who Jesus was. But one day, during a worship session, I suddenly felt His presence for the first time. The lyrics of a song proclaiming His immense love and sacrifice moved me to tears. In that moment, I experienced His love for me and understood why He had sacrificed Himself for my life. From that day on, I pursued a closer relationship with Jesus, fell more deeply in love with Him, and committed to following Him wholeheartedly.

Encountering Jesus transformed me from the inside out. He taught me to love strangers and to forgive those who have hurt me. Gradually, He freed me from my pointless worries. Previously, I would obsess over my future, fearing how my studies and goals would unfold. Yet, through His words and promises, I found a sense of security that surpassed my worries. That does not mean I will not have problems anymore but through all situations I see Him walking with me. I trust that my future is secure in His hands. I see myself changing because of Jesus. Because of Him, I can love my enemies and forgive people.

Now I am in the United States as a master's student at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, studying Food Science. I never imagined leaving my family and friends behind to study in a foreign country, but God made it possible. He gave me strength and courage through His Word when I was unsure whether to go. I had some people telling me not to go, but God brought His Word to my mind when I was in prayer: "This is my command - be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9, NLT). I trust that God has a purpose for my life, and I am eager to discover it.

Before arriving in the United States, I worried about finding genuine Christians and friends who shared my faith in God. I always thought that the U.S. was a country where people had the freedom to pursue whatever they pleased, unlike my own country and culture. However, upon my arrival, I searched for an authentic church that worshiped the true God.

Surprisingly, I stumbled upon The Blind Munchies Coffeehouse during a friend's birthday celebration. That day, I witnessed a group of friends engaging in a Bible discussion through Street Level Ministries. I sat among them, listening to the Word of God. I was overjoyed to find a community of young people who shared the same love for Jesus as I did. Through them, I learned more about Street Level and Believers Campus Church. I began attending church services at the Street Level House, just behind Jarvis Hall, on the UW-Stout campus.

I found friends in unexpected places, and their support has helped me remain steadfast in my faith despite being far from my home and loved ones. Though it hasn't been easy to be separated from my family and focus on my studies, the presence of these friends has made the journey much more bearable. I finally found a place where I feel like I truly belong.

I am not sure where God will send me next, but no matter where I end up, I am committed to seeking His will for my life. I want to keep building a close relationship with Him. I am driven to serve others and share the blessings God has given to me with those around me. Wherever I go, I know that God desires me to walk closely with Him and show His love to others.

**“WHEN [MY GRANDMOTHER] LEARNED ABOUT MY AUNT'S BREAST CANCER, SHE SOUGHT THE HELP OF SHAMANS (LIKE A HINDU PRIEST) IN HOPES OF FINDING A CURE.”**

**- RESHA**



# NOT YOUR CHURCH'S YOUTH GROUP

## THERE'S NO TELLING WHERE COLLEGE MINISTRY WILL TAKE YOU

**M**any who attend a truly biblical college ministry after attending years of youth group find the change jarring. I know it was for me. Hopefully your time in youth group prepared you for what being a Christian in college could look like. But if you plan to plug in because *church is what you do*, the challenge is on. It's time to set aside the days of games, snacks, and lock-ins, and get serious about your faith. Here are three reasons college ministry is not an extension of youth group.

### 1. COLLEGE MINISTRY ASSUMES DESIRE.

Those of us already involved in a college ministry generally assume you're coming because you have some knowledge of God and want to learn more about Him. We assume you love Jesus and want to serve Him, or that you have questions about faith and an interest in a discussion. That doesn't mean those who don't believe in God aren't welcome (*come hang out!*). What it means is there's little room for those who are comfortable with showing up to a weekly social club with few strings attached. Don't come out of obligation. Don't come out of routine. God is clear in Scripture about having a lukewarm faith (Revelation 3:15-16). We want to WAKE UP and take our faith seriously. Come because you're serious about God and want to see Him become real to you like never before.

*"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water." Psalm 63:1, ESV*





# “THE TIME HAS ARRIVED FOR YOU TO DECIDE IF JESUS IS IMPORTANT TO YOU.”

## 2. IT'S AIMED AT MATURITY.

Lock-ins are great for children you need to keep tabs on. They're not so cute when you're 20. Now that you can make your own decisions, it's not just about fun and games. It's about the sincerity of your heart to know God. The time has arrived for you to decide if Jesus is important to *you*. Jesus made it clear what it means to be a follower of Him. He's looking for a full surrender, someone who lets God call the shots in their life. Therefore, any college ministry worth attending isn't just focused on fun but on making sure you know where you stand before God. It should pose the question: "If I say I love God, does my life show it? In what ways?" College ministry should *develop* your faith and challenge areas of your life you don't let God touch, just like your church should. College ministry isn't a replacement for church, but both places work together to help you grow in your faith and hear from God.

*"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it..." Matthew 16:24-25, NLT*

## 3. IT IMPLIES GIVING.

College is a time where you're sharpening your skills, learning how God made you, and what He might have planned for your life. It's an appropriate time to do so. But Jesus still says it's better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). College ministries provide opportunities to serve to balance out the introspection. Take them up on it! If you fear the burden it may place on your already-busy schedule, it's only you who misses out. The rest of us are busy living in God's Kingdom, where we're seeing God show up. I thank God often for the purposeful evenings that make up my life thanks to Him, like writing for this magazine on Thursday nights. Even if it's tiring sometimes, I wouldn't trade it for a life spent on a couch in front of a screen. It's also at a college ministry that you have a chance to build friendships that



will help you fight against all the temptations that come along with college. You're a fool if you think you're strong enough to stand alone and live for God. Plus, how will other Christians stand strong without you helping them, too? We need each other.

*"Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others." 1 Corinthians 10:24, NLT*

I hope you have an increasing desire to read the Bible, to know what God says, and you see that He's good. I hope you grow to surrender your whole life to Him. College ministries are there to show you how to do all these things, and they'll give you friends to do them all together. Don't worry, my friends and I still play kickball most summers...but we're also sold out for Jesus and serious about our commitment to Him and each other. Any fun and games that come are bonus blessings of following Jesus radically together, not the main event.



### LOOKING FOR SOMETHING LIKE THIS?

**We are Street Level Ministries.** We are a radio station. We are a magazine. We are a coffeehouse. We are a creative studio. We believe that the purpose of life is to follow Jesus. Our goal is being Christians with our life and commitments - doing tangible things that grow our faith and make a direct impact on the kingdom of God. Our purpose is to provide opportunities to college students to commit their time, talents, passion, and abilities to the work of God. Find us at [streetlevelministries.com](http://streetlevelministries.com)



HELLO  
MY PRONOUNS ARE  
— / —

## THE REMARKABLE POWER OF PREFERRED PRONOUNS

By Daniel McCoy | Guest Writer

Originally published for Renew.org  
USED BY PERMISSION

I told myself I wouldn't brag about this publicly. For years, it's been a bit of a Clark Kent-Superman dilemma: should I tell people about my secret power? Should I keep it under wraps? At the risk of sounding vain, I'm going to go ahead and tell you.

I know a lot about pronouns.

Like, a lot. When it comes to pronoun mastery, I might be in a percentage-of-a-percent kind of percentile. As a former grammar/writing teacher, in seconds I could scrawl out a white board chart of every personal pronoun in its nominative, objective, and possessive form. What makes a pronoun who or whom, whoever or whomever? I'm glad you asked. Demonstrative pronouns. Interrogative pronouns. Relative pronouns. Exciting!!! (For those who actually are excited about such things, I am trying to joke here.)

And when it came to those elusive indefinite pronouns? I could rattle off the list of plurals and the list of singulars and the ones that function as either singular or plural. If you're curious which indefinite pronouns function as singular OR plural (Who am I kidding? Of course you're interested!), the acronym misspells the word "salmon": **Some. Any. None. All. Most.**

### WHAT THE WHO?!

Yet I can honestly tell you that, of the dozens of students to whom I taught pronouns (it's "whom" because it's the object of a preposition), no student—and I mean no one—ever registered any interest. Maybe the glazed eyes and rolled eyes and closed eyes were concealing a deeper enthusiasm for pronouns from the students underneath. But no, I'm pretty confident that, although I tried, pronouns for my students remained profoundly boring.

So imagine my shock when, in the last few years, of all things, pronouns are—making the news?! Middle school's biggest nerd has grown up to become talk of the tabloids? What?!

Yet, that's precisely what's happened. Of all the parts of speech, pronouns have passed up adjectives, adverbs, nouns, conjunctions. Verbs are lagging behind—as pronouns are now where all the action is. Pronouns have even surpassed interjections as all the rage.

### "IMAGINE MY SHOCK WHEN, IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, OF ALL THINGS, PRONOUNS ARE— MAKING THE NEWS?!"

A sampling of headlines: Biologically male musician comes out as transgender woman and uses the pronouns she/her/hers. Person coming out as nonbinary can use the pronouns they/them/theirs. Person coming out as gender neutral can use the pronouns xe/xem/xyrs. Human identifying with fairyhood can use the pronouns fai/fairy/fair. Human identifying with demonhood can use the pronouns dem/demon/demons. Human identifying with cathood can use cat/cats/cats as pronouns or use a cat emoji with suffixes as pronouns. Mandalorian star Gina Carano jokingly used boop/bop/beep as her pronouns on social media—and was swiftly canceled by Disney.

### NEW AND PREFERRED

These custom designations have become known as people's "preferred pronouns"—although if you use that phrase, you might well get corrected by someone telling



you to drop the “preferred” since they’re simply “your pronouns.”

Another related term is “neopronoun” (“new pronoun”) which Ezra Marcus at the New York Times describes as “a word created to serve as a pronoun without expressing gender” (e.g., ze/zir/zirs). Or, as Marcus explains, your neopronoun can bring in an already existing noun (a “noun-self pronoun”) that fits your sense of self. Some of the examples the Times gives include animals (e.g., bun/bunself, kitten/kittenself) as well as fantasy creatures (e.g., vamp/vampself, prin/cess/princeself). Are some people being more playful with their neopronouns than anything else? Possibly, the article answers—but hastens to add, “Many neopronoun users are dead serious.”

#### REFLECTING ON PREFERRED PRONOUNS AS A CHRISTIAN

As Christians, it’s good for us to reflect on how our faith teaches us to respond to cultural trends. When it comes to this trend—of people, regardless of their species or biological sex, picking a different pronoun that best matches their sense of self—how should Christians respond?

The big debate so far between Christians—at least between those Christians like myself who believe that our identity is rooted in our createdness, not in our subjective sense of self—has been whether or not we should use a person’s preferred pronouns.

- On one side, there are Christians who are very uncomfortable with going along with the idea that we give ourselves our own identities, and thus they won’t be using people’s preferred pronouns—even if they might suggest using creativity (e.g., not using pronouns at all when describing the person) in order not to unnecessarily offend.

- On the other side, there are Christians who are also uncomfortable with going along with it—but, out of a desire to build bridges, especially with non-Christians, they will go ahead and use a person’s chosen pronouns.

If you want to look at a clear-minded, kind-hearted Christian look at transgender issues in general, I highly recommend this article. As you’ll see, both authors have a friendly disagreement on this question of whether to use a person’s preferred pronouns, and you’ll see a helpful wrestling with the question from two Christian angles.

#### “AS CHRISTIANS, IT’S GOOD FOR US TO REFLECT ON HOW OUR FAITH TEACHES US TO RESPOND TO CULTURAL TRENDS.”

My goal in this article isn’t to enter that particular debate, as important as it is. My goal instead is to make a modest point about the power of preferred pronouns. I’m amazed at the remarkable power unleashed by whoever came up with the idea (here, it’s “whoever” not “whomever,” because “whoever” is acting as subject of a clause).

#### REMARKABLE POWER

In order to tell you what I’ve discovered about the power of preferred pronouns, I’ve got to tell you one more remarkable fact about myself: When I’m not wowing people with my knowledge of pronouns, I’ve got another backup subject of interest that makes me the life of parties, hypothetically, if I were to be invited to some. (I’m kidding.)

Here it is: I study philosophy. *Hold on to your hat, folks!*

Real quick, I’ve got to tell you about a school of philosophy. It’s called existentialism. What’s

“existentialism”? It’s the idea that my existence comes before my essence. What?? In other words, that I am (my existence) comes before what I am (my essence). Come again? Okay, here it is in plain English: If I’m an existentialist, I believe that I can create my own reality. I wasn’t born into a world in which truth was already set in stone and I have to live according to “the truth.” Rather, I get to create my own truth.

Are you ready for the remarkable power of preferred pronouns? Here it is: Preferred pronouns turn us all into existentialists.

I want you to notice something subtle but significant about preferred pronouns. If I use someone’s preferred pronouns, I don’t use them in conversation with the person. Sure, I might call someone a Mr. or a Ms. in conversation, but those are honorifics, not pronouns. The only personal pronoun I’ll direct to a particular person in conversation is “you.” However the person identifies, I will call the person “you” in conversation.

Using a person’s preferred pronouns means I’m using those pronouns in conversation with another person. Xe is on vacation this week. I’m about to have a conversation with dem. Isn’t this xyr’s birthday? Thus, using preferred pronouns isn’t nearly as much about showing a person a gesture of kindness. It’s way more about interacting with another person in a way that shows you’ve both philosophically accepted the other person’s subjective view of reality.

There are a thousand philosophies out there to choose from. Preferred pronouns have the potency to instantly convert millions—without them knowing—into a single philosophy: the school of existentialism. That’s power.



# DOES HAPPINESS COME IN A PILL?

## WHAT WE THINK WE KNOW ABOUT DEPRESSION “CURES”

1. [wondermind.com/article/what-depression-feels-like/](https://wondermind.com/article/what-depression-feels-like/)
2. [themighty.com/topic/depression/what-its-like-to-live-with-both-depression-and-anxiety/](https://themighty.com/topic/depression/what-its-like-to-live-with-both-depression-and-anxiety/)
3. [unselling-directory.org.uk/history.html](https://unselling-directory.org.uk/history.html)
4. A brief history of antidepressant drug development: from tricyclics to beyond ketamine, [bit.ly/45UYNjn](https://bit.ly/45UYNjn)

“Every day I was pissed I woke up. It felt like heaviness... I was on the verge of tears constantly.”<sup>1</sup>

“It’s no motivation to do anything, followed by the fear of failure because you aren’t doing anything. It’s both not caring at all and caring all too much. It’s a vicious cycle of hell.”<sup>2</sup>

**A**nxiety and depression. Mental health. You probably can’t get through a day without hearing about it... or living it. It’s all around us. And for many, much closer than we’d like. Counseling has been around as a form of treatment since Freud took the stage in the late 1800s.<sup>3</sup> But it wasn’t until the 1950s that the first antidepressant drug made its debut.<sup>4</sup> Since that time, the market has been flooded with pills and their promises for a healthier life. Almost anyone can show up at a doctor’s office, say they are feeling blue, and walk away with a prescription. And we really, *really* want to say that it’s working.

But are we a society of people who have been greatly helped because of mind-altering medication? Are we seeing hopeful statistics, tear-jerking success stories of those who have had victory over depression and anxiety, and an overall culture of joy and happiness?

### WHAT WE (THINK) WE KNOW

Psychoactive medications are supposed to alleviate symptoms of mental dysfunction, such as hopelessness, anxiety, and fear. They’re designed to enter the brain tissue from the bloodstream and cause changes in mood, thoughts, emotions, and behavior. But what do we actually know about the cause of depression and anxiety?

For a long time, everyone thought Serotonin was the perpetrator. That’s a sneaky little chemical in your brain that would get out of whack and need to be regulated so those happy feelings could return. There’s only one problem with this theory: it’s wrong. A study was just released in July 2022 stating that chemical imbalances are not directly linked to depression at all.<sup>5</sup> Another study that dug into the long-term effects of antidepressants unearthed some surprising results: people who used antidepressants long-term did not have better physical or mental quality of life than those with depression who did not use medication to manage their symptoms.<sup>6</sup>

At this point, what’s wrong in the brain is only inferred rather than proved.<sup>7</sup> Despite decades of research, experts still can’t pinpoint the direct cause of depression or other psychiatric conditions. Just do a quick Google search and see for yourself. You’ll find a lot of theories:

5. *The serotonin theory of depression: a systematic umbrella review of the evidence*, doi.org/10.1038/s41380-022-01661-0
6. [neurosciencenews.com/antidepressants-life-quality-20451/](https://neurosciencenews.com/antidepressants-life-quality-20451/)
7. “Listening to Prozac... and to the Scriptures: A Primer on Psychoactive Medications.” by Michael R. Emler in *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*



# “BUT LET’S BE REAL: THESE MEDS AREN’T THE MAGICAL CURE WE WANT THEM TO BE.”

the pandemic, lack of exercise, social media... watching a sad movie. But they’re just that: theories.

Let us, as thinking individuals, fearlessly look at the facts: if scientists and researchers publicly acknowledge that they only have theories, and if recent studies are now proving some of those wrong, shouldn’t we stop and consider what may be going on before taking pills just “because the doctor said?”

## MEDICATION VS. COUNSELING

Meds aren’t the only treatment being used for mental illness. Often counseling is used with or instead of medication. So, are medications more effective than counseling?

It’s interesting that we even attempt to treat depression with counseling and not only medication. By using counseling as a treatment, we are acknowledging that depression is housed in the mind, while simultaneously saying that we, as the patient, have some power and control over our thoughts as well as the ability to change them. Counseling is based upon the idea that the individual can make decisions that affect thought and behavior change.

Studies have shown that counseling can be just as effective as medication in cases of mental problems.<sup>7</sup> There is also evidence that cognitive therapy is actually better than medication in preventing relapse in the long-run.<sup>7</sup> Often, a treatment program will use both medication and counseling together to work towards symptom improvement.

So, there’s reason to believe that both medication and counseling have been effective to some degree in reducing symptoms of people with depression. But symptoms, by definition, are only surface level manifestations of a deeper problem.

## CLEARING THE AIR

With inconclusive research and the foggy uncertainty surrounding this issue, we need to try and clear the air as Christians living in a world where mental struggles can be a daily reality. The Bible says that we are sinful, wicked people who act and are affected accordingly. Every single person already has a sick mind because of sin (Genesis 6:5, Ephesians 2:1-3, Colossians 1:21) and

there are mental problems that we all experience in some form throughout our lives. This is because God created us as both body and spirit creatures (Genesis 2:7) that always affect each other, for better or worse. If you get a good night’s sleep (body) you are more likely to not be a jerk the next day (spirit). But throw in a few sleepless nights and it won’t be long before you rip the head off the next person to ask you how you are this morning. The physical treatment of sleep can impact your spiritual fruit (kindness, joy) or lack thereof (head-ripping). So, physical remedies can affect our spiritual state, at least to some degree.

Of course medication has its place for treating illnesses, and it would be unwise to throw it out completely as an option for treatment under qualified direction and care, but remember this too: every single Christian will need to continually work through difficulty as part of this new life. When we put our faith in Jesus, God forgives us for all our sins, but He doesn’t take away every temptation and struggle immediately. He expects us to work through these, and even better, He gives us the ability to do that (Romans 8:12-13, 1 Corinthians 10:13). Do we follow a God who has given us power to overcome everything we come up against... except our mental problems?

## WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

Medication can give you a boost, that energy you need to get through a depressive period in your life. A relationship with Jesus Christ, however, will provide lasting freedom from sin, joy, and hope for eternity.

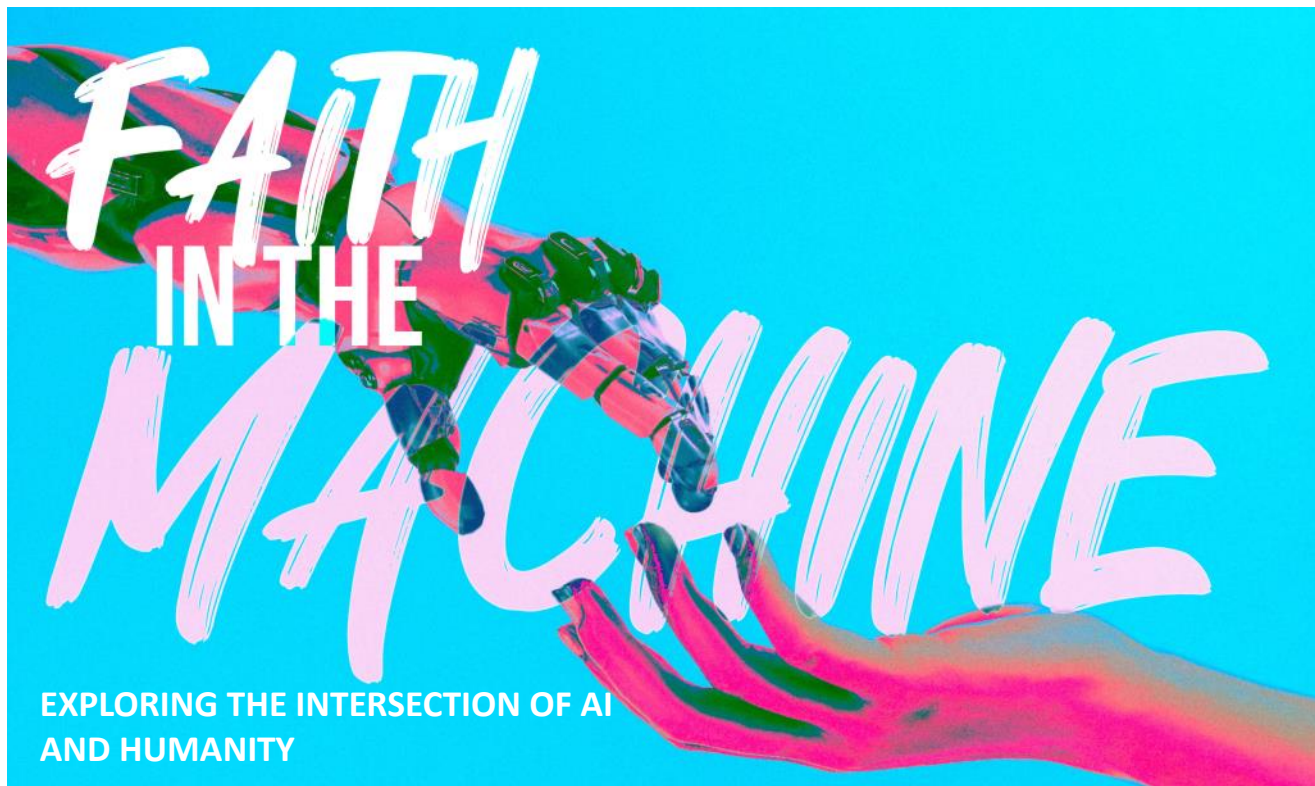
Before accepting that the answer for you comes in the form of a pill, look into why you are using or considering mind-altering medication. Ask some heart-searching questions, examine the research, and seek the counsel of those who know more than you, both medically and spiritually. Determine what is guiding your decision-making before grasping at the first promise of rapid relief.

Our fast-paced society claws after an insta-cure for every ailment. Slow down for a moment and...think. Maybe happiness doesn’t come in a pill.

## WE DON’T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS

HERE ARE A FEW SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

- 1 Little evidence that chemical imbalance causes depression, UCL scientists find, [bit.ly/3RrN8Ef](https://bit.ly/3RrN8Ef)
- 2 Depression: Antidepressants and the spiritual dimension, [bit.ly/45MVcDT](https://bit.ly/45MVcDT)
- 3 Antidepressants are not associated with improved quality of life in the long run, [bit.ly/4678cnE](https://bit.ly/4678cnE)
- 4 The evidence in favour of antidepressants is terribly flawed, [bit.ly/3LoCxGn](https://bit.ly/3LoCxGn)



## EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF AI AND HUMANITY

**T**im Burton's 1990 film *Edward Scissorhands* tells the story of an elderly inventor, who upon inspecting his elaborate cookie-making machines, steps away unsatisfied with his work. He picks up a heart-shaped cookie, holds it in front of his man-shaped machine, and offers a defeated sigh. He doesn't have a companion with a heart like his, so he sets out to create one.

Edward has a ghostly complexion, wild hair, and due to the premature death of his creator, a set of razor-sharp scissor blades in place of hands. After the inventor's death, he looked for companionship in a suburban community downhill from his cobweb-infested mansion. Despite his good manners, gentle spirit, and sense of humor, he was an outcast. Almost a human, but not quite.

Sounds like it could be a story from 2023, doesn't it? The past few years have shown an increase in loneliness, depression, anxiety, mental health disorders, and more. A glance at the news headlines reveals that humans are more connected yet more isolated than ever before. Since we can't find the human interactions that we crave, we try to find satisfaction in the machine. Instead of Edward, the name is ChatGPT.

Developed by the U.S. company OpenAI, ChatGPT is a form of artificial intelligence

(AI) that is trained to follow human prompts and provide detailed responses to queries.<sup>1</sup> It allows users to request information on specific topics and respond in a conversation-like format. ChatGPT was released to the public in 2022 and within the first five days, it is estimated that more than a million people accessed it. After two months, that number increased to 100 million monthly active users.

Similar to a human, ChatGPT can answer questions and carry on a conversation with whoever's on the other side of the screen. It has capacities for human-like expression, but to be effective, it needs to be trained and prompted by a human through a process known as Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF).<sup>2</sup> The machine may be able to change and adapt its algorithms to provide a different response, but it can't do it on its own. Neither could Edward.

At one point in the film, Edward was listening to the inventor read books on etiquette and poetry. By the end of the scene, he learned when it was proper to laugh, and cracked a forced, awkward-looking smile. He had to be taught by a human what was proper, funny, ethical, and what was not.

Similarly, AI may be able to reduce errors and make perfect analytical decisions based on data, but it can't determine what

is right, true, or ethical. It has a vast knowledge base, but it's limited to events that happened before September 2021.<sup>3</sup> If a user enters a prompt in the dialogue box and ChatGPT doesn't know the answer, it can't go away, research, problem solve, and come back with a creative solution. Nor can it respond with intuition or create something that hasn't already been created.

ChatGPT has capacities for human-like expression and may create a man-like machine, but it will never be able to create what truly makes a human, human: the heart and mind. It can offer a starting point for research, answer a question, set up an outline, and more, but it cannot "add context, detect nuance, display originality or flair, and produce content of a sophisticated nature" like a human.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of the film, Edward is cast out to live the remainder of his days as a recluse. Since the community couldn't fully understand him, they rejected him. So where does this leave us with AI? We have two choices: reject the beast out of willful ignorance, or embrace and seek to understand it. All the while, we must remember that it's a useful tool, but a terrible human. We cannot put our faith in the machine.

<sup>1</sup>forbes.com/advisor/in/business/software/what-is-chatgpt/

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>forbes.com/advisor/in/business/software/what-is-chatgpt/

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



# HUMAN VS AI

WOTS recently challenged some college students to a **strange duel**: write a haiku based on a random subject. We then tasked ChatGPT with the same prompt, and below are some of the more intriguing results.

## “ADULTING”—WINSTON

Age turns the pages by  
A childhood once, now forgone  
Now there’s nothing left

## “TEST ANXIETY”—CHASE

Tests are very wacky  
I dislike anxiety  
I will cry from them

## “FALL VIBES”—SAMANTHA

Crisp air blowing  
The pumpkins on the screen porch  
Leaves crunching around

## “PRIDE”—ELIZABETH

Pride is a prison  
Killer of relationships  
Destroyer of love

## “PULLING AN ALL NIGHTER”—REBECCA

The day never ends  
Staying up all night is fun  
Party all night long!

## “HOMESICKNESS”—NATHAN

Place of blood and bone  
Home of all I call my own  
Hold me there again

## “FIRST DAY OF CLASS”—KIRAN

Meeting new friends  
Finding our interests  
Proud being a back bencher

## “ADULTING”

Bills and deadlines loom  
Responsibilities blow  
Adulting’s harsh tune

## “TEST ANXIETY”

Paper stares, heart pounds  
Ink and fear, a daunting blend  
Test anxiety

## “FALL VIBES”

Crisp leaves in the breeze,  
Autumn’s colors paint the trees  
Fall vibes bring me ease

## “PRIDE”

Pride in who we are  
Colors shine with confidence  
Love’s flag, we raise high

## “PULLING AN ALL NIGHTER”

Clock’s relentless chime  
Night’s dark hours in my grasp  
Sleepless race with time

## “HOMESICKNESS”

Distance makes heartache  
Whispers of home’s warm embrace  
Long for that place

## “FIRST DAY OF CLASS”

New faces, bright halls  
First day’s nervous excitement  
Knowledge beckons us



# THE STENCH OF Self-Love

WHAT THE DEAD SEA AND US HAVE IN COMMON

In the Middle East, there are two bodies of water into which the Jordan River flows: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The former is a vibrant, life-giving ecosystem – birds flock to it, fish thrive in it, and plants grow in and near it. The latter is a place of death and decay where only microorganisms such as bacteria can grow. How can this be possible, when both bodies of water are fed from the same pure source?

It's a problem of output, not input. The waters in the Sea of Galilee do not terminate on themselves, but rather, they flow into another tributary. On the other hand, the waters in the Dead Sea have nowhere to go. The only way out is by evaporation – resulting in a huge concentration of salts and other rich mineral deposits. If you've ever seen a bucket of water that has been sitting for too long, you know what I mean. It's *nasty* business. So, what can we learn from these two bodies of water? I dare say, one of the most important lessons of our lives... a lesson about *love*.

In our world today, it seems like everyone is talking about “self-love,” or the “state of appreciation for oneself.”<sup>1</sup> According to Elizabeth Jarquin, Ph.D., “self-love teaches you the importance of putting yourself first.”<sup>2</sup> That can look different for each person, but generally, it is “prioritizing, trusting, being true to, and forgiving yourself when you aren't being true or nice to yourself.”<sup>3</sup>

Some people claim that Jesus Christ taught His followers to practice self-love. They interpret His words, “love your neighbor as yourself”<sup>4</sup> as “you must love yourself before you can love your neighbor.” If you compare this with His other teachings, you'll come to realize that He's *not* promoting self-love. He knows we don't need to be taught how to love ourselves, since we're already very good at it. Consider the following: Did you bathe, dress, and feed yourself today? Whose face do you look for first in a group photo? Who was the person you thought of most yesterday? It's obvious: self-love comes naturally to all of us.

Jesus' point is that we should take that massive love affair we have with ourselves and apply it to the people around us. Would the guy who said “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”<sup>5</sup> teach the opposite? Doubtful. Basically, He's saying you should be loving your neighbor as you *already* love yourself.

<sup>1</sup>[bbrfoundation.org/blog/self-love-and-what-it-means](http://bbrfoundation.org/blog/self-love-and-what-it-means)

<sup>2</sup>[forbes.com/health/mind/how-to-practice-self-love](http://forbes.com/health/mind/how-to-practice-self-love)

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>Mark 12:31

<sup>5</sup>Luke 9:23



## “HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THAT FOCUSING SO MUCH ON YOURSELF IS WHAT’S MAKING YOU MORE MISERABLE?”

John, who was one of Jesus’ closest friends, wrote “God is love.”<sup>6</sup> If that’s true, then to understand love, we must first understand God. A big task, right? Well, it’s not that complicated. To know who God is, we just need to get to know Jesus. He said, “If you had known me, you had known the father.”<sup>7</sup>

Look at Jesus’ life in the Bible (go ahead, I *dare* you). Did He ever prioritize Himself? Nope. Trust Himself? Nah. Forgive Himself? No. Put Himself first? I can’t think of a single time! His ultimate act of love was displayed when He sacrificed Himself to forgive the people that brutally murdered Him. Boy, am I glad Jesus didn’t prioritize loving Himself that day! God’s love flowed through Jesus like the Jordan River flows through the Sea of Galilee. That love was vibrant, active, and life-giving. Ultimately, Jesus’ life and death caused and still causes humanity to flourish.

Have you considered that focusing so much on yourself is what’s making you more miserable? Studies have shown that too much focus on oneself is associated with anxiety and depression.<sup>8</sup> Imagine if you made a huge mistake in a group project and caused everyone to get a lesser grade. If you focus your attention on what you did wrong and how the group perceives you, you will most likely get trapped in a cycle of self-doubt, regret, and hopelessness. This could lead to depression about your own character and anxiety about future group projects.

Researchers have also found a cyclical link between material consumption and loneliness: “When we purchase material possessions (even in the name of self-love), we surprisingly feel lonely, so we try and soothe ourselves through buying more, but this only makes us feel worse.”<sup>9</sup> Apparently, “self-love” isn’t working too well.

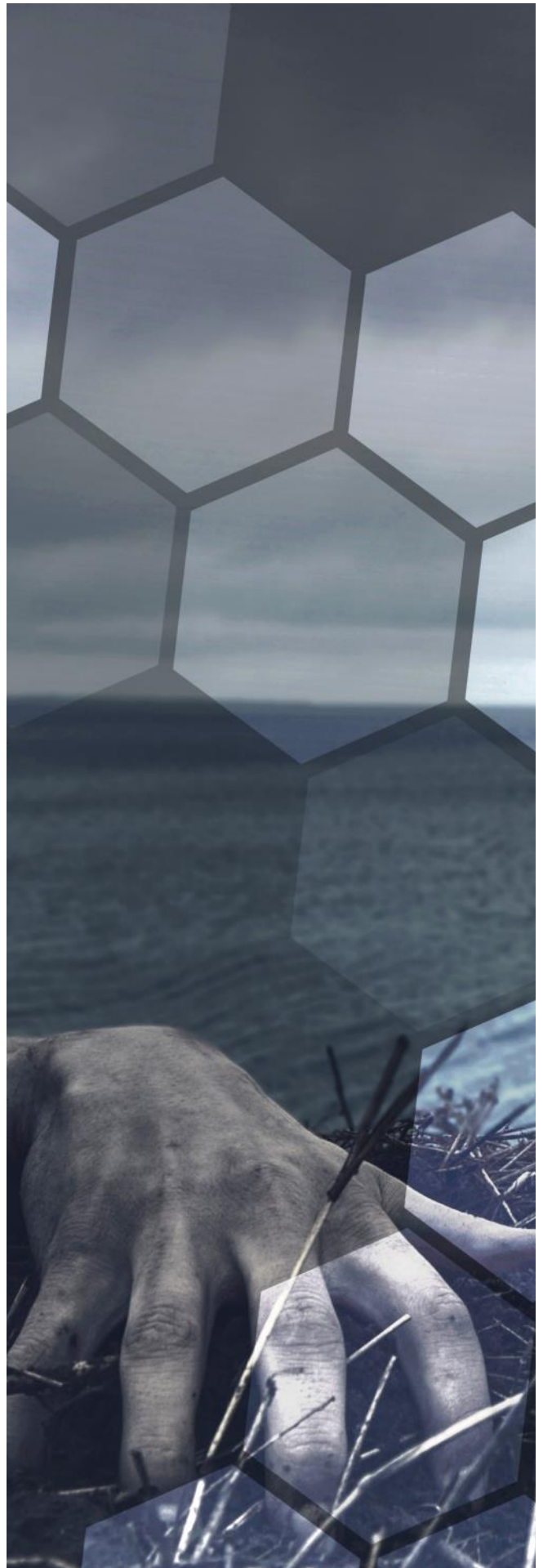
Instead of being like the Dead Sea, we were meant to be like the Sea of Galilee. True love is meant to flow out of us and produce life, instead of terminate on us. Imagine what the world would be like if we started thinking and living this way! If we were better at loving each other, then we wouldn’t need to focus on loving ourselves so much.

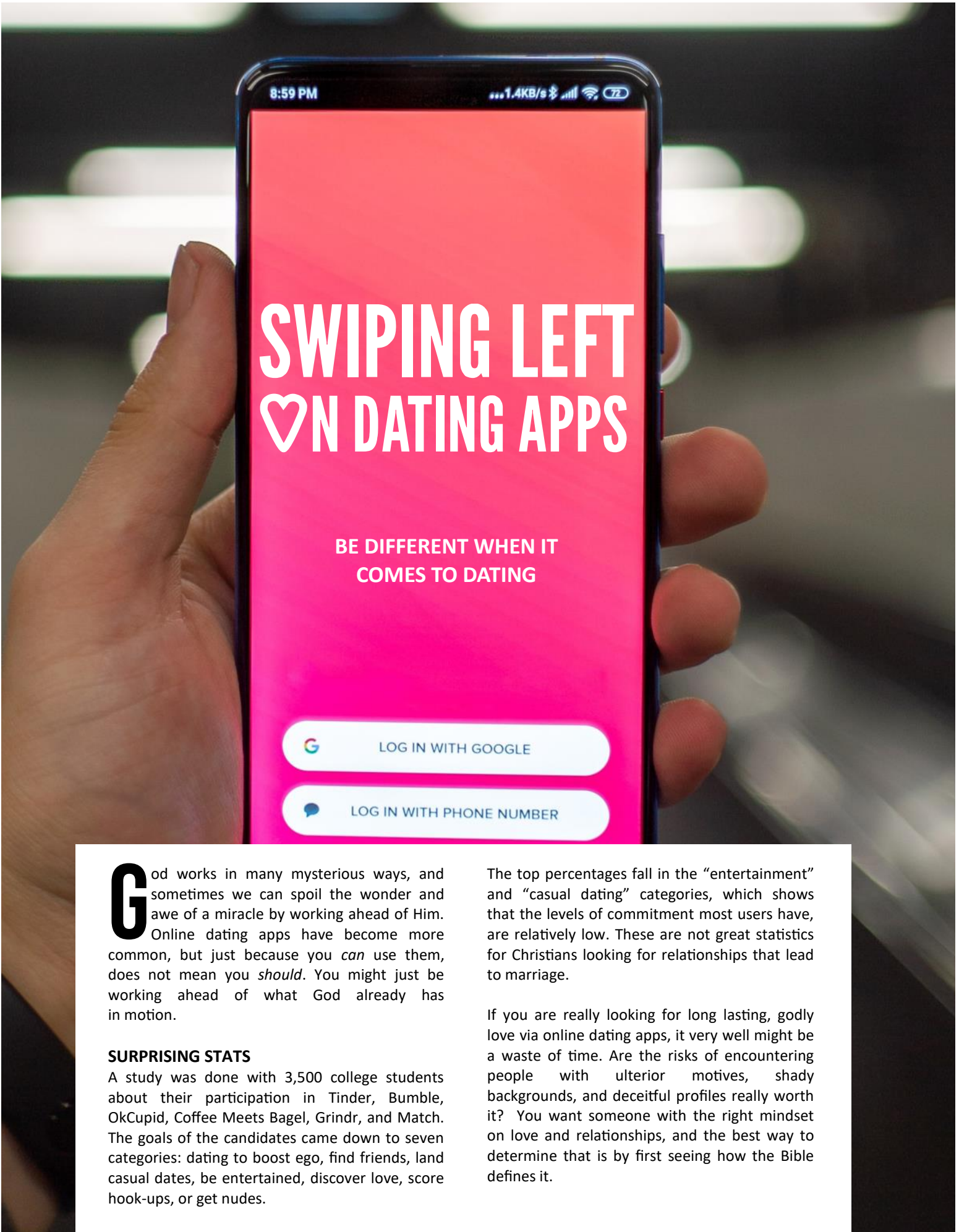
<sup>6</sup>1 John 4:16

<sup>7</sup>John 14:7

<sup>8</sup>[rl.umsl.edu/urs/39/#:~:text=Researchers%20have%20linked%20self%20focus,mental%20illness%20in%20the%20country.](http://rl.umsl.edu/urs/39/#:~:text=Researchers%20have%20linked%20self%20focus,mental%20illness%20in%20the%20country.)

<sup>9</sup>[time.com/6271915/self-love-loneliness/](http://time.com/6271915/self-love-loneliness/)





**G**od works in many mysterious ways, and sometimes we can spoil the wonder and awe of a miracle by working ahead of Him. Online dating apps have become more common, but just because you *can* use them, does not mean you *should*. You might just be working ahead of what God already has in motion.

#### **SURPRISING STATS**

A study was done with 3,500 college students about their participation in Tinder, Bumble, OkCupid, Coffee Meets Bagel, Grindr, and Match. The goals of the candidates came down to seven categories: dating to boost ego, find friends, land casual dates, be entertained, discover love, score hook-ups, or get nudes.

The top percentages fall in the “entertainment” and “casual dating” categories, which shows that the levels of commitment most users have, are relatively low. These are not great statistics for Christians looking for relationships that lead to marriage.

If you are really looking for long lasting, godly love via online dating apps, it very well might be a waste of time. Are the risks of encountering people with ulterior motives, shady backgrounds, and deceitful profiles really worth it? You want someone with the right mindset on love and relationships, and the best way to determine that is by first seeing how the Bible defines it.



# THE GOAL OF ONLINE DATING ACCORDING TO ABODO\*

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR AS A CHRISTIAN

The Bible defines love as this “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”<sup>2</sup> In contrast, society tends to chalk love up to fickle feelings and romanticized sexual tensions. The question to ask then is, can you find these characteristics of love described in 1 Corinthians via the web? Simply put, no. Actions must be seen in person.

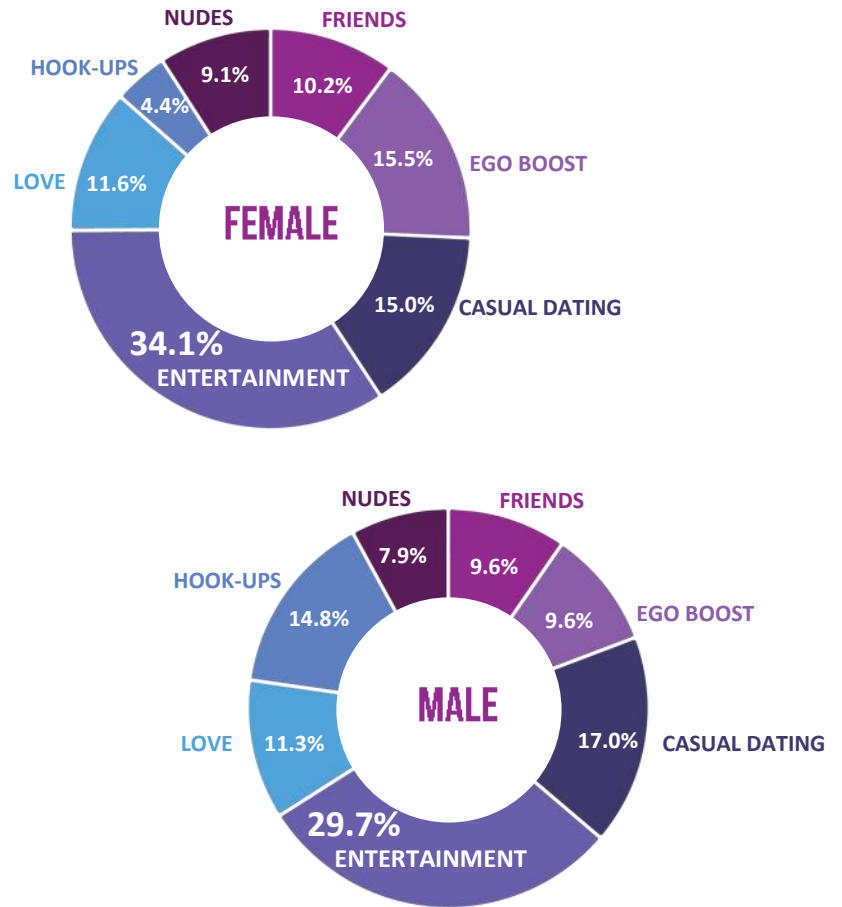
Obviously, in-person dates can be set up, but knowing how a person lives on the day-to-day is different than, say, a scheduled dinner. You should find out more about a person than just how they eat a steak or score at mini golf. For example, you should see how they respond when you are having a bad day, or even a bad week. Do they carry your burdens with you by intentionally helping as a teammate does? You should see how they humble themselves in a disagreement. Do they have enough humility to admit when they are wrong? Or even if they are not in the wrong, are they still willing to put differences aside for the sake of the relationship?

You should take note of their tone with you. Do they speak kindly to you, always being mindful of how their message may come across? Take note of how they respect physical boundaries. Do they choose to honor your mind and heart first before even considering anything physical? Considerations like these take time, and more so with a screen in between.

Lastly, it is worth noting the numerous factors that are out of our control when it comes to godly relationships. After all, you cannot force a genuine romantic connection. There is a reason the saying, “match-made in heaven” exists. Relationships take a good degree of faith and surrender.

## SURRENDERING THE SPECIFICS

The most important thing to keep in mind when pursuing a relationship is God’s decision on the matter. You can be assured that God will be working in the very thing He designed: marriage. God actually cares about your love life, so He has already worked out the specifics. So, pray about your desire for a relationship and trust that God will answer your prayer in the way He deems best. The next step would be to get (or stay) involved in a local church to serve with other Christ followers.



\*Data from an ABODO survey of 3,500 college students who use dating apps

That automatically sets you up for better when you are doing life alongside people who are on the same track spiritually, mentally, and even moralally. Besides, no matter if God has marriage planned for you or not, being planted in a church puts you in the best position to follow what God desires for you in all areas of your life.

## REFLECTION

It can be tempting to rush or fight for control in an area of life that is constantly brought up in our culture: from movies, to friend groups, at school, with family, etc. However, as a Christian you are called to surrender what you want for what God wants. Ask yourself before you participate in online dating: Are you acting out of fear or impatience? Is your main focus on loving God and others first? Are you in the position God wants you in the most, that being a local church community? Are you trying to force your own will? Or are you trusting that whatever story He writes is the one that is best for you?

<sup>1</sup><https://www.rentable.co/blog/swipe-right-love/>

<sup>2</sup>1 Corinthians 13:4-7

# BELIEVERS COMMUNITY NEWS



## Animal advocacy group rewrites Bible aided by Artificial Intelligence



**A**n animal advocacy group has used ChatGPT to modify the book of Genesis to make it "vegan friendly." This vegan twist version of the Bible refers to animals as "beings" and proposes the use of plants for clothing instead of animal skins.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) claim they want to appeal to the younger generation with a "cruelty-free story of creation."

"The Bible has long been used to justify all forms of oppression," PETA President, Ingrid Newkirk, stated. "So, we used ChatGPT to make it clear that a loving God would never endorse exploitation of or cruelty to animals."

In PETA's version of the book of Genesis, Abraham befriends a gentle

**"SO, WE USED CHATGPT TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT A LOVING GOD WOULD NEVER ENDORSE EXPLOITATION OF OR CRUELTY TO ANIMALS."**

lamb to demonstrate his respect for God's creation, instead of sacrificing a ram to show his faith.

Another example of a change can be found in chapter 21, which explains the conception of Isaac, and how they added a dog named Herbie to the family.

PETA's version of the story reads, "As they walked with Herbie, Sarah and Abraham thought of the importance of adopting dogs from shelters and rescue

organizations rather than purchasing them from breeders. They spoke of how buying a dog or cat from a breeder or a pet shop contributes to the companion animal overpopulation crisis, as countless dogs and cats in shelters await loving homes while breeders continue to produce more puppies and kittens for profit."

PETA's vegan Bible sparked controversy among Christians who criticized the revised version on social media. Some users called for the organization to be sued, while others described them as "blasphemous fools" as God's word warns against such actions as adding to and re-writing Scripture.

<https://premierchristian.news/us/news/article/animal-advocacy-group-rewrites-bible-aided-by-chatgpt-to-make-it-vegan-friendly>

# Persecution in Uganda

## Woman Converts to Christianity



**A** Muslim man upset with his wife's conversion to Christianity in western Uganda denied her food and left her in a national park to be eaten by wild animals.

Muhando, 27, said her husband beat her and kept her from food for a week after learning that she had put her faith in Christ. She had kept her faith hidden from her husband, Bwambale, and other relatives after accepting Jesus in 2021.

This past May, Muhando prayed in her room, read from her Bible and fell asleep, she says. "Unfortunately I left the door open," Muhando told *Morning Star News* from her hospital bed. "My husband came back from his place of work and called me, and I didn't respond because I was deep in sleep. He opened the door and found me with my Bible and a notebook on my chest. He shouted, 'Allah Akbar (God is greater)!' The shouting of the jihadist slogan woke her.

"I was terrified after seeing him; he asked me what the matter was," she said. "I answered him that this is a holy book. He got annoyed and beat me that night and told me that he was punishing me for

**"I ANSWERED HIM THAT THIS IS A HOLY BOOK. HE GOT ANNOYED AND BEAT ME THAT NIGHT AND TOLD ME THAT HE WAS PUNISHING ME FOR LEAVING ISLAM, AND THAT HE WILL AUTOMATICALLY BE REWARDED IN [PARADISE] BY ALLAH."**

leaving Islam, and that he will automatically be rewarded in (paradise) by Allah."

After that night he kept her from eating, she said, adding that after two days he threatened to kill her if she told anyone. On May 17, Bwambale took her to nearby Queen Elizabeth National Park.

"My husband said he had received a dream from Allah of taking me somewhere," Muhando told *Morning Star News*. "He took me in his vehicle and dumped me inside Queen Elizabeth National Park to be eaten by wild animals."

The pastor of the church she had been secretly attending happened to drive by

on the main road bordering the park, which is not fenced, and spotted her, she said. He called others to help him, and they took her to a medical clinic.

"Sharifa's health was in a bad state," said the pastor, whose name is withheld for security reasons, "and she has been undergoing treatment while suffering from injuries. The doctors are treating her for starvation and trauma-related symptoms."

While preparing to report the case to police, he learned that Bwambale had died in a traffic accident, the pastor said.

The attack was the latest of many instances of persecution of Christians in Uganda that *Morning Star News* has documented.

Uganda's constitution and other laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to propagate one's faith and convert from one faith to another. Muslims make up no more than 12 percent of Uganda's population, with high concentrations in eastern areas of the country.

[assistnews.net/?p=35407](https://assistnews.net/?p=35407)

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# HOW THE JESUS REVOLUTION FILM CAUGHT HOLLYWOOD OFF GUARD

## THE STORY OF A HIPPIE-LED REVIVAL

*This article was originally published by Christian Headlines in May 2023.*



The box office hit *Jesus Revolution* is now a home video hit, too. *Jesus Revolution* climbed to number one in the United States in DVD/Blu-ray sales and a separate Blu-ray-only chart according to data released during the first week this month, topping such titles as *Cocaine Bear*, *Magic Mike's Last Dance*, *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* and *Top Gun: Maverick*. In its second week of release, *Jesus Revolution* dropped only to No. 2 on both charts. Media Play News first reported the data.

The movie tells the story of a hippie-led revival in the 1960s and 70s that launched in California before spreading nationwide. It spawned the ministries of Chuck Smith, Greg Laurie and Lonnie Frisbee, among others.

*Jesus Revolution* grossed more than \$50 million at the box office and stayed in the Top 10 for five weeks. It was made by the same company that produced *I Can Only Imagine* and *American Underdog*.

"I think it caught Hollywood off guard that a drama, a little faith-based drama, did this," Brent McCorkle, who co-directed *Jesus Revolution* and composed the music, told Christian Headlines this week. "I think it's great for cinema, I think it's great for the faith market."

The movie earned an A+ rating at CinemaScore, which polls moviegoers after they've watched a film. It also received an audience score of 99 (out of 100) from verified moviegoers at Rotten Tomatoes. The film has a message that society needs to hear, McCorkle said.

"I think this is a movie that tries to include and tell everybody that they're loved and that they're made in the image of God, and that their life has value," he told Christian Headlines.

"If we come together and try to love each other, a lot of this stuff's gonna get sorted out," he said, referencing societal divisions. The film "just kind of doubles down on what I think are the things that we should be focusing on as a culture and also as people of faith." Those things, he said, are kindness, compassion, empathy and belonging. It stars Jonathan Roumie (*The Chosen*) as Lonnie Frisbee, Kelsey Grammer (*Cheers*, *Frasier*) as Chuck Smith, Joel Courtney as Greg Laurie, Kimberly Williams-Paisley (*Father of the Bride*) as Laurie's mother and Anna Grace Barlow as Laurie's girlfriend and future wife Cathe.

*On a snowy February evening, the writers of WOTS magazine, along with our church family, piled into our small-ish town theater to see this story unfold on the big screen. We weren't interested in just another Christian flick. We went to see a piece of our history. Our church was born from the hippy movement depicted in the film when one pastor from California made his way to western Wisconsin. When he crossed paths with a coffeehouse owner in Menomonie, the rest was history and Believers City Church was born. To this day, we hold to our roots: a rag-tag group of Jesus-loving people who want to change the world.*

[christianheadlines.com/contributors/michael-foust/jesus-revolution-climbs-to-no-1-in-america-in-dvd-sales-it-caught-hollywood-off-guard.html](https://christianheadlines.com/contributors/michael-foust/jesus-revolution-climbs-to-no-1-in-america-in-dvd-sales-it-caught-hollywood-off-guard.html)

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*Campus*  
**CHURCH**

## STREET LEVEL MINISTRIES

A community of young people following Jesus at UW-Stout.

[streetlevelministries.com](http://streetlevelministries.com)

Street Level Ministries is an official UW-Stout student organization



## MONDAYS

6pm Dinner  
& Spiritual Discussion

@ *The Blind Munchies*  
*Coffeehouse*

621 Wilson Ave, Menomonie, WI