



ISSUE  
NINETY-FOUR

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THIS WAR AFFECTS  
US ALL

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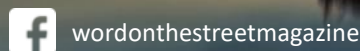
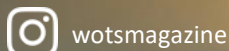
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Midwest. We also have contributing writers from the Philippines, Amsterdam, and parts of South Asia. Our desire is to write about topics focusing on God, life, and the ever-changing landscape of the world we live in.

Established in 1999, this magazine is rooted in the belief that Jesus is the center of everything and following Him will open your eyes to truth and the life you were made for.

We hope this magazine is helpful, challenging, and thought-provoking as it encourages you to engage your mind and engage your world as you pursue your walk with Christ. This life is too short to just go with the status quo. What are you waiting for?

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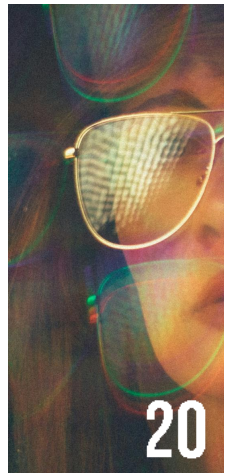
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# NO ONE READS THE BIBLE

## HOW BIBLICAL ILLITERACY IS TRENDING, EVEN AMONG CHRISTIANS



**B**ible literacy, or "basic knowledge of the people, stories, and themes that point to the coming of Christ to save the world," is at an all-time low.<sup>1</sup> Going to church doesn't even help the issue. According to Robert B. Sloan, President of Houston Christian University, "We get some interesting pop psychology and leadership exhortations, but it is fairly unusual to enter a Christian church and hear the minister take a piece of scripture, read it, explain it, teach it, and apply it."<sup>2</sup> If we make it to church, and many of us don't, we're not encouraged to open the Bible for ourselves. Pastors are content to provide and parishioners are content to consume the "inspirational high" without knowing the full context of what the Bible actually means.

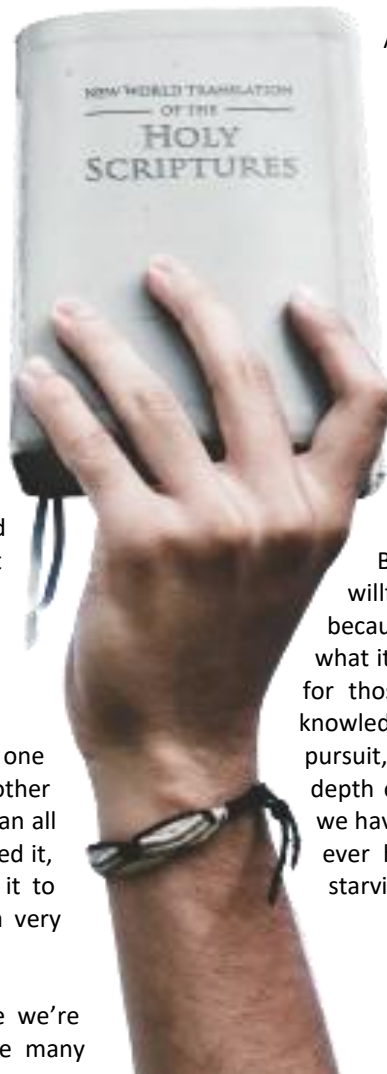
The statistics are staggering: "two-thirds of Americans identify themselves as Christians, yet only six percent of that group embrace the great majority of principles and commands from the Bible."<sup>3</sup> We believe there is something to be gained by adopting the title of Christian, yet we let ourselves off the hook when it comes to reading, understanding, and applying the Word. Professor and author Kenneth Birding says this discrepancy isn't benign like we might assume:

Christians used to be known as "people of one book." Sure, they read, studied and shared other books. But the book they cared about more than all others combined was the Bible. They memorized it, meditated on it, talked about it and taught it to others. We don't do that anymore, and in a very real sense, we're starving ourselves to death.<sup>4</sup>

Our perpetual starvation is made worse because we're numb to the fact that it's happening. There are many

**"TWO-THIRDS OF AMERICANS IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS CHRISTIANS, YET ONLY SIX PERCENT OF THAT GROUP EMBRACE THE GREAT MAJORITY OF PRINCIPLES AND COMMANDS FROM THE BIBLE."**

factors that keep us from actively pursuing God's Word like distractions (ahem, social media, anyone?), misaligned priorities, and being too busy.<sup>5</sup> All of these can be small, daily hindrances but they cumulate to a skeleton-like faith that's brittle and hollow.



Additionally, knowing the Bible even on a surface level has historically provided a general sense of right and wrong that has kept us safe and well-adjusted. Think: loving our neighbor and refusing to lie. Without that, we're getting our moral compass from somewhere else—namely, ourselves. We're apt to abide by our own truth sourced predominantly from emotions which fluctuate greatly. Our default setting is motivated by what's in our best interest, so no wonder there is such disunity when we all put the individual first.

If you're biblically illiterate, the question is: why? Some of us fall into the category of simple ignorance; we don't know how to dig into the Bible, but we'd like to. Others of us, though, willfully ignore the Bible and it's understanding because we know that we'd then be accountable to do what it says. We'd be without excuse. On the other hand, for those who do read the Bible regularly growing in knowledge and understanding will continue to be a lifelong pursuit, too. God is infinite so we'll never exhaust the depth of what it means to know Him. In our digital age, we have more resources and study tools than anyone has ever had, ever. How foolish of us to keep spiritually starving when abundance is at our fingertips.

<sup>1&3</sup> [denisonforum.org/biblical-living/bible-reading-unprecedented-low-america/](http://denisonforum.org/biblical-living/bible-reading-unprecedented-low-america/)  
<sup>2</sup> [robertsloan.com/2013/03/11/but-if-not-the-miracle-of-dunkirk/](http://robertsloan.com/2013/03/11/but-if-not-the-miracle-of-dunkirk/)  
<sup>4&5</sup> [biola.edu/blogs/biola-magazine/2014/the-crisis-of-biblical-illiteracy](http://biola.edu/blogs/biola-magazine/2014/the-crisis-of-biblical-illiteracy)

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future anymore. I was going to kill myself, but then an area of the fog cleared up. Something, no someone, quietly told me that it wouldn't end for me here. I began to cry. I chose life that day. Only now I've realized that it was God who pulled me away from the fire—ever so patiently pulling me back to Him.

After hospitalizing myself and going to a life-changing therapy program, I began to seek out and find the good things in life. It was trial and error, but this time the errors always led me into a better direction than before. Eventually, a year after my hospitalization, I realized that the path I had been on for so long wasn't the one I wanted to be on anymore, so I made the difficult decision to leave a three year relationship behind. It was probably one of the hardest things I've ever had to do.

Shortly after my breakup, I was on the phone with my sister and Jesus got brought up in our conversation. I told her that I was interested in learning about Him again. I had no clue about my interest in God until I said it out loud. I wanted to be shocked by my decision, but in my heart I was ready. God must've known I was ready and wanted me to know it for myself too.

This is when I began reading the Bible again. Soon after talking to my sister, I texted my dad asking him about which book of the Bible would be best to start in, but I made sure to clarify that I was "asking for a friend." He was not so easily tricked; he knew that the friend was me. With his suggestion, I started reading the gospel of John.

Reading through the book of John, I learned that God has so much love for us, but I had trouble wrapping my head around *why*. From previous friendships and relationships, I had become so used to conditional human love. A love where you give, then you—maybe—get some back. But, that love could end in an instant if you do something wrong.

I had the expectation that God must have the same conditional love, yet He came to earth as a human—who would experience the same pain and suffering as we do—all just so that He could love us, serve us, and sacrifice Himself for us so that we may be with Him forever. Talk about real love! I never experienced so much love from someone, and God's love was so overwhelming that I didn't know what to do with it all when it first started pouring in.

God's timing is so perfect, and He came into my life exactly when I needed Him. I started back in school after a year off with the heaviest course load I've done in my whole college experience, went through a breakup almost immediately at the start of the semester, became involved with an amazing church multiple times a week, moved into a new house, and on top of it all I worked every weeknight and often struggled

to get enough sleep—an experience where the weight of it all would've completely crushed the old me before I was saved by Jesus.

While I cannot say this semester was a cakewalk, God guided me through every single moment—the highs and the lows—and I can hardly express in words how grateful I am for the Lord and His guidance. I've learned that He never has and never will leave me, and He will give me peace and comfort in any moment of my life when I come to Him.

A verse that really stuck with me at the beginning of my relationship with Christ was Psalm 48:14, "For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end." It served as a helpful reminder that the Lord will always be my guide when I follow Him. No matter the situation, He is with me and showing me the way—His way.

**"I THOUGHT THAT THE PSYCHEDELICS I CONSUMED WOULD OPEN MY MIND AND SOLVE ALL MY PROBLEMS. THIS IS WHERE IT ALL WENT WRONG. TERRIBLY WRONG."**

Every day I learn something new about God and about who I am to Him, and it's been a beautiful journey of growth and reshaping myself to be more like Jesus Christ. I'm so thankful for everything the Lord has done, all to eventually lead me back to His eternal love and overwhelming grace. Even in the lowest lows of my life, He stood by me, patiently guiding me back home.

As I conclude, I am filled with such joy reflecting on all of the wonderful ways that the Lord has saved me. He is truly the path to life and love. Nothing in my life has brought me as much peace, joy, comfort, happiness, growth, and love as Jesus has brought me. As my parents would say... "Thumbs up for Jesus!"



SEE YOU NEXT YEAR!  
~DAPHNE

Daphne is a student from Street Level Ministries in Menomonie, WI



# CHRISTIANITY ISN'T SUPPOSED TO BE COMFORTABLE

WHAT I LEARNED FROM EXPERIENCING PERSECUTION

by Kelsey Kaleb | CONTRIBUTING WRITER FOR THE REBELUTION

**P**ersecution. It's a word that those of us in the Western world don't know a lot about. Maybe we've heard it, read about it in the Bible, or heard stories of Christians in other countries experiencing it. But most of us have never been through it. That was my story. I've heard testimonies of Christians in Asia and the Middle East getting beaten, arrested, or killed for their faith, but it always felt far away.

Until I moved to East Africa.

Earlier this year, I moved to East Africa, to a country God has put on my heart since I was eleven years old. I work with an international missions organization, and several people I live and work with, people who are very precious to me, have gone through persecution. Their stories of faith, passion for the Gospel, and forgiveness inspired and strengthened my faith. Little did I know that their stories would be what would help me through my own story and experience of persecution.

## MY STORY

I had been living in East Africa for a couple of months, and I was five weeks into a twelve week outreach we were doing in the southern part of the country. One of my teammates, a local church leader, and I went to visit a family who lived in the area one Sunday afternoon. While we were visiting and talking with them, we were able to share the Gospel with them, and they received it with so much joy. That day, both of the parents committed to following Jesus.

We went back to visit the family a few days later, to pray for and encourage them. We had been at their house for fifteen minutes, eating their cultural food and drinking coffee, when a young man barged into the

house. I remember him looking right at me, and he punched me on the side of the neck. He also hit the two people I was with, one in the arm, and the other on his head. The guy was taken outside, but he kept trying to fight and get back inside the house, where the three of us were. We had to hold the door closed because he kept throwing himself up against it, trying to get back in.

This happened a couple of times, and while this was happening, there was a crowd gathering outside, people who were with the man and also people who were mad at him. We were inside the house for about two hours. The leaders of the local church came, and they were able to get the crowd calmed down enough to get us out of the house and to walk us home. We found out later that the man who hit us and a couple of his friends found out that we were the ones who shared the Gospel, and they were not happy about it. So when they saw us come back to the family's house, they decided to do something about it.

## CHRISTIANITY ISN'T MEANT TO BE COMFORTABLE

So why am I sharing my story? It's not to make you feel guilty, nor am I trying to get your pity. It is because I want God to use my story to encourage people like you, and to strengthen people's faith, just like many people's stories of persecution encouraged me. I have friends who have been beaten, arrested, and who almost died because of the Gospel. They have stories of how God helped them forgive the people who beat them, how, through the Holy Spirit's power, were able to pray for mercy and blessing over the town they were persecuted in, and how God delivered and fought for them. It's stories like these that helped me through getting hit and the days and weeks following.



I also want to encourage and remind the Church of something that I also need to be reminded of: Following Jesus isn't about comfort. In fact, it is the complete opposite. In the Western world especially, I have noticed it is easy for us to make Christianity, even Jesus, about ourselves. We want our pastors to teach on the subjects we like and we get angry when they say something that offends or makes us uncomfortable. We want worship to be songs we like. We want Jesus to make our dreams and aspirations come true. We make Jesus about us, about what we want or don't want. When in reality, following Jesus is about Him. It's about living our lives completely surrendered to Him and living to make His name known. It's about loving and serving others. It's about sharing the best news in the whole world. And sometimes, we are going to have to suffer for it. Actually, both Jesus and Paul tell us to expect it. In the words of C.S. Lewis, "If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."

### JESUS IS WORTH IT

A few days after I got punched, my friend taught on 1 Peter 1 at church. I read through the first few verses and I remember very clearly how verses 6 and 7 caught my attention: "So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world." Whoa. Read that again. Peter is saying that the trials we go through—persecution included—will test and show that our faith is real, just as fire "tests and purifies gold." And you know what? Our faith is more precious and more valuable than gold. Which means going through trials and persecution is worth it because it makes our faith, the most valuable thing, stronger.

The days, and even weeks, after getting punched were not easy. I would wake up seeing the guy hitting me in the throat over and over again in my

mind, it took a while before I could go to other people's houses and I often felt safer going places at night. I have had to work through fear and triggers, and you know what? It was worth it. Jesus is worth it. Because there are now two people who are now following Jesus and who will get to be in heaven for eternity. It was worth getting punched because now, there is a young man who I, and my whole team, are praying for, that he would experience the love of Jesus himself. And it will be worth it if just one person is encouraged because of my story.

Even in the midst of having to work through anxiety, I have seen God move and work in my life in ways I never have before. He gave me the grace and the ability to forgive the guy who punched me, I am even able to pray for his salvation. He has worked through and in local and church leaders, and they apologized for the way we were treated. Getting to see God move the way He has, has also made it worth it. Just a few minutes after the guy hit us, the father of the

family, who had just become a Christian the week before, high-fived my teammate and I and said, "My house is getting destroyed because I am now a follower of Jesus. It is an honor that this is happening." I could not put it better myself.

### CONCLUSION

I want to make one thing clear: I am not sharing my story to bring attention or praise to myself, or to make me look like a hero.

There have been times where I have let fear win, or times that I have been mad at God because He didn't stop it from happening. There are also so many people who have suffered way more than I did. But I am learning that there is so much grace, and that my story isn't about me in the first place. I'm just a broken vessel that God wants to use, and so it is my job to let Him...

*Continue reading Kelsey's concluding thoughts at The Rebellion, a group of young Christians rebelling against low expectations.*  
[therebolution.com](http://therebolution.com)



## I HAVE HAD TO WORK THROUGH FEAR AND TRIGGERS, AND YOU KNOW WHAT? IT WAS WORTH IT. JESUS IS WORTH IT.

# THIS WAR AFFECTS US ALL



**W**hen news of the Hamas attack on Israel went out on October 7, 2023, shockwaves were felt around the world. So many people all at once were faced with dizzying degrees of reaction, ranging from a simple shrug of the shoulders, to more cynical, and even violent.

It's true there are no easy or pleasant answers. Hamas militants attacked Israel and brutally killed 1,200 innocent civilians and captured hundreds of hostages, including old women and young children. Israel responded by targeting Hamas operations embedded deep in Gaza City, and the ensuing war has already been too long and too bloody. As of this writing, over 21,000 Palestinians civilians have been killed in the crossfire.<sup>1</sup> Whole neighborhoods have been leveled. Countless lives have been altered forever.

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is ancient. God declared way back in chapter 17 of Genesis that He would give to Abraham and his offspring, "The land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession."<sup>2</sup> Canaan was in what today encompasses modern day Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. Because of the conflict between Abraham's future offspring, this land has been in dispute ever since.

WHAT YOUR REACTION  
TO THE ISRAEL-HAMAS  
WAR REVEALS

When the international community moved to establish a "national home" for Jewish people in the area, tensions inevitably arose. As Jews flocked to Israel during the 1920's to 1940's, many fleeing persecutions arising in Europe from the Nazi Holocaust and World War II, resident Palestinian Arabs saw them as an occupying force because they viewed the land as their ancestral home too.<sup>3</sup> When conflict over this region boiled over once again in 2023, seeing its shocking headlines was wearying to not only civilians, but it also severely tested the attention span of world leaders already struggling to keep up with the demands of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War.

It is natural to experience fatigue from watching world events, and along with it its punk little sister: worry. *What if this is just how the world is now?* There is so much bad news out there, after all, that turning a blind eye to it seems reasonable. For those living outside of the warzone, it's easy to have a false sense of security though, which leads us to think that we have the luxury to not care. Succumbing to apathy looks like taking everything you have not only for granted but also believing that what you have is a human right and what you don't have is a violation of that.

Or we're becoming enraged. In London this past fall, 300,000 people marched on Armistice Day calling for a cease-fire in Gaza. The chant, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," was





heard, which means a call for the destruction of Israel.<sup>4</sup> Across college campuses, the mood is tense among students linked to the war who are enduring rising antisemitism and threats if they are from the region or of Jewish heritage. A report revealed that they are struggling with sadness, fear, and anger.<sup>5</sup>

**“FOR THOSE LIVING OUTSIDE OF THE WARZONE, IT’S EASY TO HAVE A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY, WHICH LEADS US TO THINK THAT WE HAVE THE LUXURY TO NOT CARE.”**

In today’s digital landscape, hate is now viral. According to Mark Penn, CEO of Stagwell and chairman of The Harris Poll, “The Israel-Hamas war is not an issue split by party, but by age and media consumption.” *A New York Times*/Siena College poll has found that 43% of TikTok users get all their news from that social media platform. If the only news input you’re getting is from TikTok, you will inevitably fall victim to the influence of viral reels that fail to give the full picture, and worse, promote hate-filled perspectives on an evolving, multi-faceted situation in the Middle East.

But let’s not be like so much of the world. Instead of leaning into the emotive news hits generated on social media or piecemealed through conversations with family members and friends, figure out the real news. There’s no such thing as a completely neutral news source, but you can reside above the fray by learning the facts and not going solely by what someone else convinced you to believe.

While staying informed about the world may seem like a burden, the alternative is worse. We’re living in really trying times, but as Christians we’re called to stand out, and that starts with not hiding under a rock, and not going with whatever seems right. We’re called to use our brains and take a stand for what is right. So, when it comes to this latest war, what can you do about it? Obviously, you can’t affect anything directly, but you can be a truth-seeker. You can pray. You can be wise when you enter conversations with others.

Our motivation simply cannot stem from how the world is doing, and no, it’s not going very well. Our motivation must come from outside this world. God is not surprised by any of this, so let’s not be surprised. Let’s be informed about the world while we work to make a difference in the capacity He is calling you to. It’s quite peaceful there.

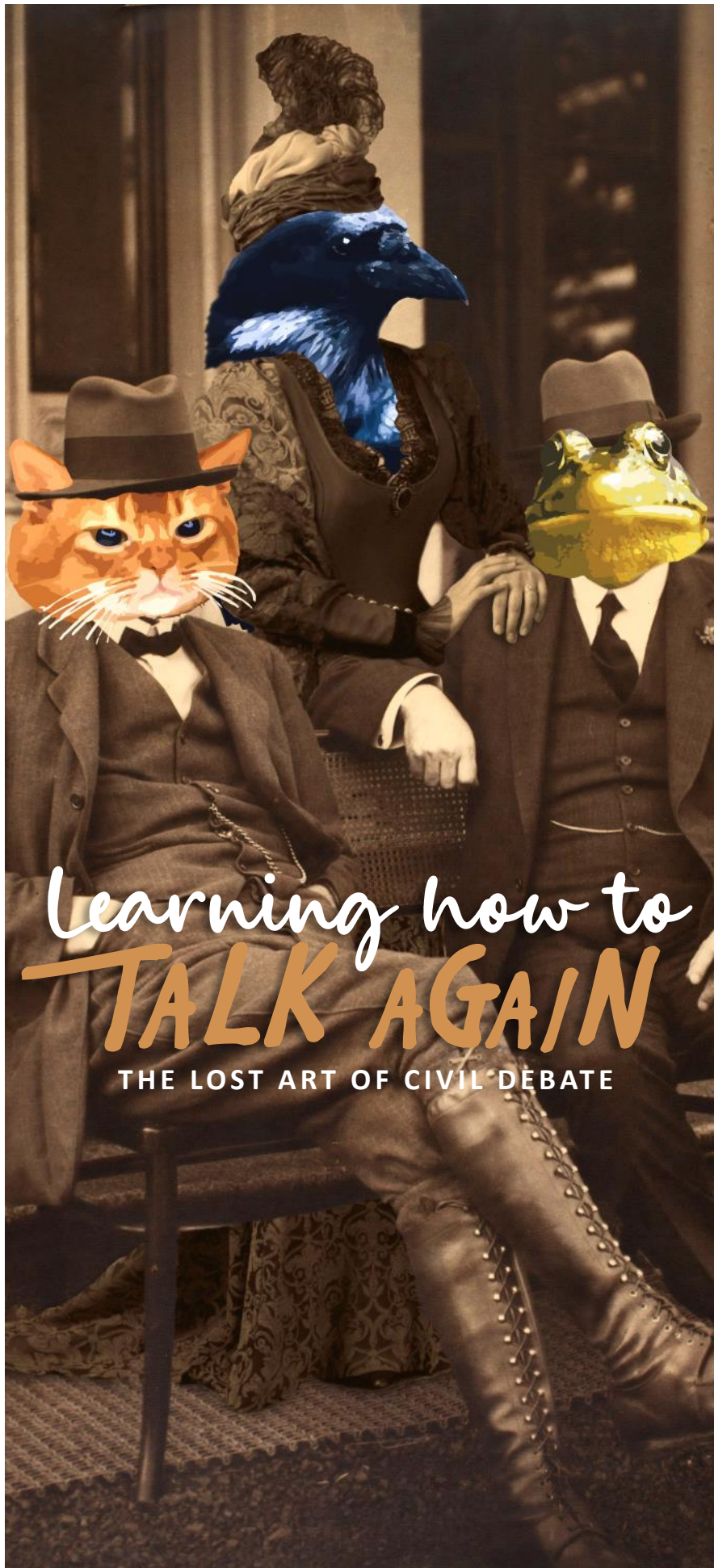
1 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67039975>

2 Genesis 17:8

3 [bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44124396](https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44124396)

4 [timesofisrael.com/many-thousands-march-against-israel-in-london-on-armistice-day-demand-gaza-ceasefire/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/many-thousands-march-against-israel-in-london-on-armistice-day-demand-gaza-ceasefire/)

5 [christianitytoday.com/news/2023/november/israel-hamas-antisemitism-college-campus-ministry.html](https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2023/november/israel-hamas-antisemitism-college-campus-ministry.html)



# Learning how to **TALK AGAIN**

THE LOST ART OF CIVIL DEBATE

**N**o one seems to understand what an actual debate is anymore and it's because they've become rare to see. Though before defining what a debate is, let's talk about what it's not. A debate is not dropping a comment on a post that triggers an entire sect of the internet, nor is it a one-sided yelling match like the ones you see at protests. A debate is not being the loudest person in the room, nor is it insults voiced through a mic at an interview. That is the kind of communication that we see more often than an actual constructive conversation on a topic with opposing views.

The underlying common factor in the scenarios listed is a lack of dignity, along with an overdose of pride. Nowadays, people want to be heard, yet no one wants to listen. This gets no one anywhere, and only further separates an already divided nation. We've talked about what a debate is not, now let's talk about what it is, starting with its key ingredient: dignity.

## **REPRESENTING MORE THAN OURSELVES**

Dignity is, "the state or quality of being worthy of honor or respect" according to Oxford Languages. As Christians, we are taught to, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."<sup>1</sup> We are supposed to speak with graceful intentionality, keeping in mind how we are not only representing ourselves, but Christ.

When having a rather triggering conversation with someone, especially if they are not of the same faith, we have to bear this in mind so we don't let our tongues get us into unnecessary trouble. Proverbs wisely explains why: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."<sup>2</sup> Stirring up anger is not productive towards anything. Instead, it stops our ability to build relationships with those we are called to love. This is real tolerance. That is, being



able to tolerate difficult conversations or experiences with others long enough to cultivate a meaningful relationship despite differences.

On the more practical side, avoiding challenging conversation limits people's ability to understand if they are wrong about something, or gain further insight into why they may be right. Or, it could prevent people from discovering a different solution altogether! Gathering all sides to a story, no matter how much patience it takes, does more than just help each person feel heard. It allows truth and context to be further uncovered by nabbing pieces of it through all the different perspectives that are presented.

### THE COST OF NONSENSE OFFENSE

A few years back, a professor at the University of Illinois gave an exam in his Civil Procedures II course.<sup>3</sup> On the exam, he wrote a question that had two redacted (meaning not spelled out) racial slurs from a

hypothetical court case. The entire question was posed in a way to show what an actual case could look like. However, despite the care taken to ensure the students knew the question was strictly for educational purposes, a student was offended and got the professor barred from campus, where he could no longer attend university events or even speak to his former colleagues and students.

The result of this verdict does not just fall on the student, but also on a justice system too afraid to cause a stir. It is extreme cases like this that prove how important it is to learn how to tolerate mature topics that could be offensive. How far does censorship have to go to avoid offending anyone? How many students lost out on the opportunity to learn from a professor who knows what happens in an actual courtroom? The moral of the story is that the inability to read the room and keep one's head about oneself could cost others essential education and even their livelihood.

### LEARNING TO TALK AGAIN

The key to having constructive, educational conversations is to start with a heart of humility. Asking yourself, "What can I learn from this person?" is a great start. Going further into that as Christians, remember that we are to, "put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth."<sup>4</sup> We must speak with grace to show the love we are called to give and to better represent Jesus.

Another tip is to be patient and allow people to share their side of the story, their entire story, and not interrupt. This goes along with being a good listener. Paying attention to what the person is saying is where personal learning and growth happen. Consider this when listening, does the information give you a firmer stance on the hill you've prepared to die on, or does it actually prompt you to step off of it?

Learning how to cultivate challenging conversations in everyday life is critical for individual, societal, and spiritual development. It may be uncomfortable at the moment, but the more dignity is implemented into these conversations, the more real tolerance can be applied so honest love can be shared. You can practice this at work, school, church, etc. because tough conversations don't have to cause a scene. They can instead be taken as opportunities to maintain manners, learn about a new perspective, and extend empathy towards a person you do not agree with.

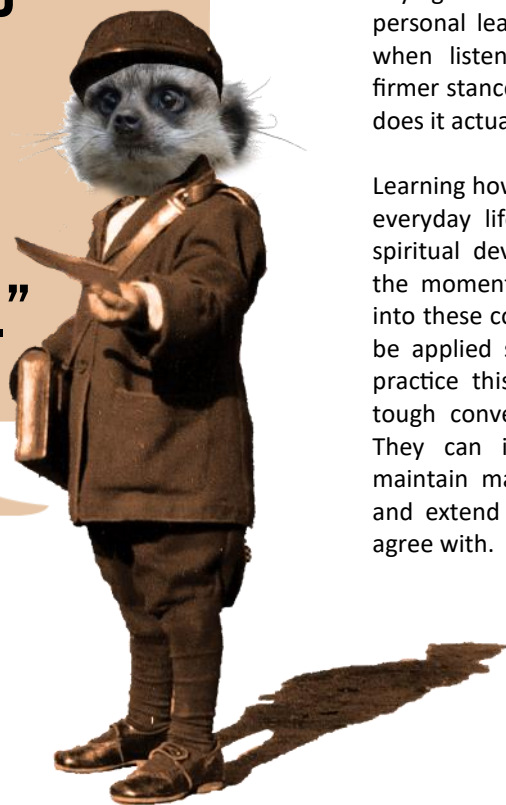
<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:29

<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 15:1

<sup>3</sup> [thefire.org/news/lawsuit-professor-suspended-redacted-slurs-law-school-exam-sues-university-illinois-chicago](http://thefire.org/news/lawsuit-professor-suspended-redacted-slurs-law-school-exam-sues-university-illinois-chicago)

<sup>4</sup> Colossians 3:8

**“STIRRING UP ANGER IS NOT PRODUCTIVE TOWARDS ANYTHING. INSTEAD, IT STOPS OUR ABILITY TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE WE ARE CALLED TO LOVE.”**



# GROW UP!

## Therapy Culture Has Undermined Our Maturity

By David Brooks

The following are some excerpts from an article by the *New York Times* Opinion Columnist, David Brooks. The full article, called, “Hey, America, Grow Up! Therapy Culture Has Undermined Our Maturity,” was originally published last August for the *New York Times*. We hope you’ll see the world with a bit more clarity after reading through this – it’s eye-opening to read something that describes what you’ve been experiencing but probably haven’t been able to call out as the culprit.

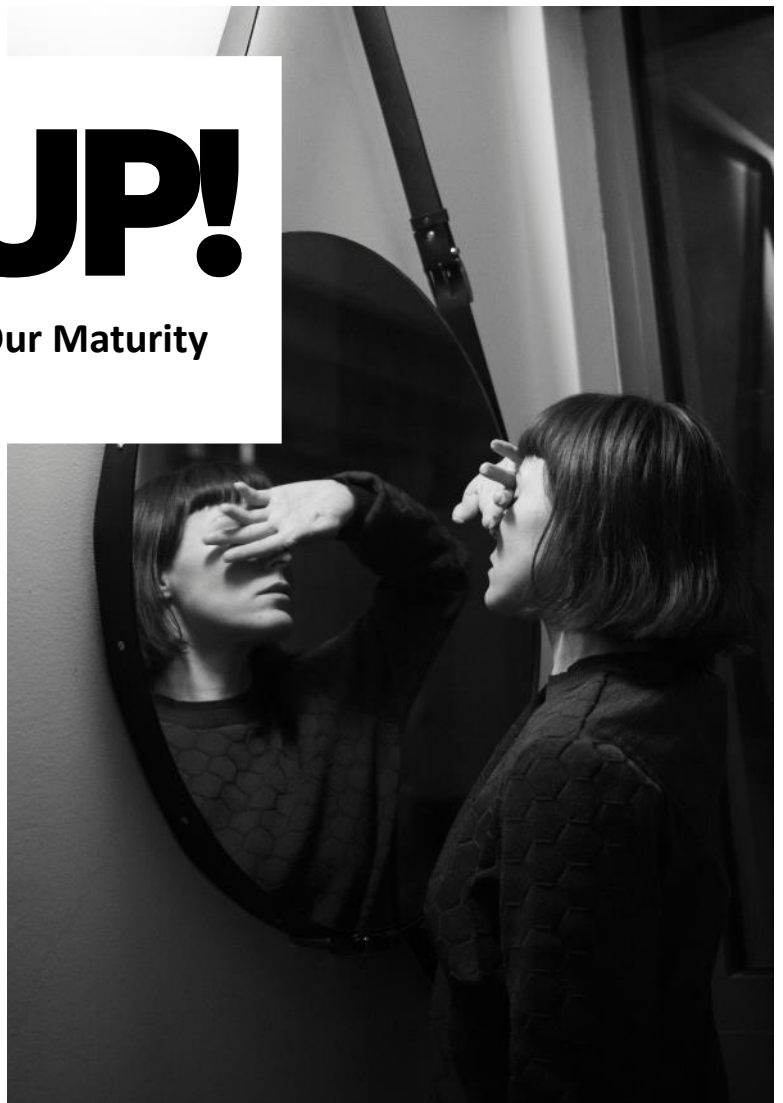
*If I were asked to trace the decline of the American psyche, I suppose I would go to a set of cultural changes that started directly after World War II and built over the next few decades, when writers as diverse as Philip Rieff, Christopher Lasch and Tom Wolfe noticed the emergence of what came to be known as the therapeutic culture.*

*In earlier cultural epochs, many people derived their self-worth from their relationship with God, or from their ability to be a winner in the commercial marketplace. But in a therapeutic culture people’s sense of self-worth depends on their subjective feelings about themselves. Do I feel good about myself? Do I like me?*

*From the start, many writers noticed that this ethos often turned people into fragile narcissists. It cut them off from moral traditions and the normal sources of meaning and identity. It pushed them in on themselves, made them self-absorbed, craving public affirmation so they could feel good about themselves. As Lasch wrote in his 1979 book, “The Culture of Narcissism,” such people are plagued by an insecurity that can be “overcome only by seeing his ‘grandiose self’ reflected in the attentions of others.”*

*Lasch continued: “Plagued by anxiety, depression, vague discontents, a sense of inner emptiness, the ‘psychological man’ of the 20th century seeks neither individual self-aggrandizement nor spiritual transcendence but peace of mind, under conditions that increasingly militate against it.”*

*Fast forward a few decades, and the sense of lostness and insecurity, which Lasch and many others had seen in nascent form, had transmogrified into a roaring epidemic of psychic*



*pain. By, say, 2010, it began to be clear that we were in the middle of a mental health crisis, with rising depression and suicide rates, an epidemic of hopelessness and despair among the young. Social media became a place where people went begging for attention, validation and affirmation — even if they often found rejection instead.*

...

*Apparently, every national phenomenon has to turn into a culture war, and that’s what happened to the psychological crisis. In one camp, there were the coddlers. These were the people who squarely faced how much abuse, mistreatment and pain there was in society. They sought to alter behavior and reform institutions so that no one would feel emotionally unsafe.*

*The problem is, the coddling approach turned out to be counterproductive. It was based on a series of false ideas that ended up hurting the people it was trying to help.*

*Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt described the first bad idea in “The Coddling of the American Mind.” It was the notion that “what doesn’t kill you makes you weaker,” inducing people to look at the*



wounds in their past and feel debilitated, not stronger.

The second false idea was, "I am a thing to whom things happen." The traumatized person is cast as a passive victim unable to control his own life. He is defined by suffering and lack of agency.

The third bad idea is, "If I keep you safe, you will be strong." But overprotective parenting and overprotective school administration don't produce more resilient children; they produce less resilient ones.

...

The instability of the self has created an immature public culture — impulsive, dramatic, erratic and cruel. In institution after institution, from churches to schools to nonprofits, the least mature voices dominate and hurl accusations, while the most mature lie low, trying to get through the day.

The people with these loudest voices often operate in that histrionic manner that suggests they are trying to work out personal wounds through political expression. People on all sides genuinely come to believe they are powerless, unwilling to assume any responsibility for their plight — another classic symptom of immaturity.

The core problem here goes back to the therapeutic ethos itself — the way it cuts people off from the larger sources of a moral order; the way it charges people to create yourself by yourself, out of yourself; the way it refuses to recognize the reality that we see ourselves as others see us.

...

If we're going to build a culture in which it is easier to be mature, we're going to have to throw off some of the tenets of the therapeutic culture. Maturity, now as ever, is understanding that you're not the center of the universe. The world isn't a giant story about me.

In a nontherapeutic ethos, people don't build secure identities on their own. They weave their stable selves out of their

## **"MATURITY, NOW AS EVER, IS UNDERSTANDING THAT YOU'RE NOT THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE. THE WORLD ISN'T A GIANT STORY ABOUT ME."**

commitments to and attachments with others. Their identities are forged as they fulfill their responsibilities as friends, family members, employees, neighbors and citizens. The process is social and other-absorbed; not therapeutic.

Maturity in this alternative ethos is achieved by getting out of your own selfish point of view and developing the ability to absorb, understand and inhabit the views of others.

Mature people are calm amid the storm because their perception lets them see the present challenges from a long-term vantage. They know that feeling crappy about yourself sometimes is a normal part of life. They are considerate to and gracious toward others because they can see situations from multiple perspectives. They can withstand the setbacks because they have pointed their life toward some concrete moral goal.

...

The best life is a series of daring explorations launched from a secure base. The therapeutic culture undermined that inner security for several generations of Americans. Maybe we can try to build a culture around the ideal of maturity, and its quiet strength.



Original art by Daphne

# Beyond the Shire:

## A Hobbit's Timeless Lessons for Gen Z

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* is a timeless classic that has captivated the hearts and minds of readers for generations. It is a tale of an unassuming hero, Bilbo Baggins, embarking on a grand adventure to restore the Misty Mountains and previous homestead to a clan of dwarves led by the company of Thorin Oakenshield. It resonates with the essence of courage, curiosity, and character development. You could even say it parallels Gen Z, a generation coming of age in a world marked by rapid technological advances and unprecedented social changes.

While these digital natives might tell you they fear missing out, are anxious, and are indecisive (this isn't an exhaustive list by any means), there is more to them than they or the culture perceives them to be. Bilbo finds himself breaking out of his stereotype through an unlikely invitation from a wizard offering dramatic adventure, odd because hobbits are known for their fondness for the comforts of

home, suspicion of outsiders, and anything that disturbs the peace.

### AN ADVENTUROUS SPIRIT

Bilbo's initial response to such adventure is a definitive no to the wizard's request. "I'm sorry Gandalf... you've got the wrong hobbit." Like his unexpected journey, Gen Z also yearns for experiences beyond the ordinary. The generation can be perceived as apologetic, compliant, or even lazy, yet they have an underlying desire for unique and unconventional adventures. Bilbo's encounter with mythical creatures mirrors Gen Z's pursuit of diverse experiences to challenge the status quo and seek fulfillment outside the norm.

Society often labels Gen Z as needing constant guidance. Their quest for adventure showcases a spirit of independence and a willingness to explore the unknown.

Gen Z seeks authenticity in

their experiences in a world saturated with information, drawing inspiration from influencers and evaluating a myriad of options before settling. Like Bilbo, lost in his comforts and concerns of home, doilies, and his mother's dishes, he forsakes the curiosities and adventure of his youth, initially giving into the culture's definition of a hobbit and his own. There's more to Gen Z than stereotypes may suggest. They're carving their own path in a very uncertain world, juggling their desire to seek adventure wherever they can with their need for stability by saving for a rainy day.

### LOST ALONG THE WAY

Even after careful thought, Bilbo finds himself rushing to the dwarven company, seeking adventure. Barely into the journey, however, Bilbo



### STUDENT POLL





shouts, "STOP! We have to turn around. I forgot my handkerchief." Gandalf reminds him that he must manage without his pocket handkerchief and many other things. A moment where Bilbo was told no, even in our culture, has become more of a foreign concept than a reality. It's something this generation is having a more challenging time facing: being told something hard out of love for something greater than having one's favorite handkerchief.

Even while pursuing these new ventures, Bilbo faces dilemmas on his journey, reflecting on doing what is right and what is easy. Not long after, Bilbo finds himself missing the comforts of home, resolves that he doesn't belong, and heads back home. After nearly falling from the ledge of a cliff, Thorin uses the moment to state, "He's been lost ever since he left home." He saw through the hobbit's desire for the comfort and safety within the Shire.

### AN UNEXPECTED PARTY

Remember that cliff from earlier? Bilbo needed the help of his companions to pull him up from disaster. He had to rely on the company he kept, who differed from him, to reach their goal.

Gen Z, too, believes in forging connections across cultures, backgrounds, and identities, much like the



fellowship that formed around Bilbo. It might seem honorable to be a truly independent individual who has seemingly got it all together, but more gets accomplished when done with others.

### RIDDLES IN THE DARK

The journey required adaptability and resourcefulness, traits shared by Gen Z in the face of a rapidly changing landscape. Bilbo relied on his wits amidst the heat of situations, one of which was while trying to save stolen ponies from giant mountain trolls. Gen Z leverages technology and resources to solve problems by emphasizing quality over the experience, taking a sensible approach, evaluating options meticulously, and making informed decisions. Driven by a sense of pragmatism and security, Gen Z exhibits conservative spending habits, seeks stable employment, and makes wise investments, which echo Bilbo's cautious approach to his adventures, ensuring a balanced and secure journey through uncharted territories.

Bilbo showed more signs of ingenuity when he was lost in the troll's secret cave because he had to navigate on his own. He stumbled upon Gollum, an inhabitant deep within. This strange cave dweller presented a challenge of solving riddles to gain assistance for a way out or risk being eaten.



Sidebar: See if you can solve this riddle Gollum gave:

*What has roots as nobody sees,  
Is taller than trees,  
Up, up it goes,  
And yet never grows?*

The story of this unlikely hero and Gen Z's may seem worlds apart from us, but the parallel journey reveals a shared spirit of adventure, resilience, and the desire to make a mark on the world. Whether you're embarking on a quest for treasure or fighting for a more just society, remember that, like Bilbo, your journey is uniquely yours. It can be full of unexpected twists and turns. None of this happens overnight. Sometimes, it takes encouragement from a wise old wizard to move forward. Gandalf understood there was more to Bilbo than Bilbo himself.

He may have lost his neighbors' respect but he gained so much more: transforming from a timid homebody, living quietly in his hobbit hole in the Shire, to a hero at the center of a dangerous adventure. It took action to leave the comfort of his home in the first place, breaking out of what's culturally expected, to experience going beyond the ordinary into the unknown. What about you?

*[By the way, the answer to the riddle is: a mountain.]*

<<< WOTS polled students on the UW-River Falls and UW-Stout campuses to learn their perception of their generation. The more frequent the word choice, the larger it appears. UWRF students identified most strongly with FOMO and UW-Stout students reached for a tie between mental health awareness and a short attention span. I'm sorry, what were you saying?

**"WHETHER YOU'RE EMBARKING ON A QUEST FOR TREASURE OR FIGHTING FOR A MORE JUST SOCIETY, REMEMBER THAT, LIKE BILBO, YOUR JOURNEY IS UNIQUELY YOURS. IT CAN BE FULL OF UNEXPECTED TWISTS AND TURNS."**



# BELIEVERS COMMUNITY NEWS



## 57 PRO-PALESTINE PROTESTERS ARRESTED AT UMASS AMHERST

**F**ifty-seven pro-Palestinian protestors at the University of Massachusetts Amherst were arrested by campus police for trespassing during a sit-in protest at the Whitmore Administration Building. During the protests, students demanded Chancellor Javier Reyes condemn the Israel Defense Forces' attacks on Gaza and cut the university's ties with defense contractor Raytheon Technology.

Hundreds of students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst were heard chanting "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" during the protest. These same students occupied the university's admin building long after it closed for the evening, leading to 57 arrests for trespassing.

The chant: "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," is a common call-to-arms for pro-Palestinian activists, particularly among

student activists on college campuses. It calls for the establishment of a State of Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, erasing the State of Israel and its people. It is also a rallying cry for terrorist groups and their sympathizers, from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) to Hamas, which called for Israel's destruction in its original governing charter in 1988.

Students rallied in front of the student union at 2 pm before marching to the Whitmore building to meet with administrators to present their demands. They remained inside the building after hours, despite "multiple verbal warnings" that the building was closing at 6 pm, the university said in a statement. UMass Police arrested 56 students and one university employee.

<https://notthebee.com/article/57-pro-palestine-protesters-were-arrested-at-umass-amherst-last-night-after-they-occupied-the-admin-building>



## RECOGNIZING FAKE NEWS NOW A REQUIRED SUBJECT IN CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS

**P**ushing back against the surge of misinformation online, California will now require all K-12 students to learn media literacy skills—such as recognizing fake news and thinking critically about what they encounter on the internet.

In October 2024, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 873, which requires the state to add media literacy to curriculum frameworks for English, language arts, science, math, history, and social studies, rolling out gradually beginning next year. Instead of a stand-alone class, the topic will be woven into existing classes and lessons throughout the school year.

"I've seen the impact that misinformation has had in the real world—how it affects the way people vote, whether they accept the outcomes of elections, try to overthrow

our democracy," said the bill's sponsor, Assembly Member Marc Berman, a Democrat from Menlo Park. "This is about making sure our young people have the skills they need to navigate this landscape."

The new law comes amid rising public distrust in the media, especially among young people. A 2022 Pew Research Center survey found that adults under age 30 are nearly as likely to believe information on social media as they are from national news outlets. Overall, only 7% of adults have "a great deal" of trust in the media, according to a Gallup poll conducted last year.

Media literacy can help change that, advocates believe, by teaching students how to recognize reliable news sources and the crucial role that media plays in a democracy.

<https://www.pleasantonweekly.com/news/2023/11/19/recognizing-fake-news-now-a-required-subject-in-california-schools>



## ‘GO BACK TO CHURCH’ AS LONELINESS NOW A MAJOR U.S. HEALTH THREAT

**T**he U.S. Surgeon General says loneliness is now a public health threat so severe that it’s on par with smoking and obesity. For far too many Americans, loneliness can become a painful secret, U.S. Surgeon General Murthy, said, revealing that he experienced this firsthand.

“This is an issue so many people struggle with in the shadows because they feel ashamed,” he told ABC News.

Last summer, Dr. Murthy released a new Surgeon General Advisory calling attention to the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection in our country. He said loneliness increases the risk of physical ailments like heart disease, dementia, and stroke plus mental ones, including depression, anxiety, and suicide. He adds the possibility of premature death due to loneliness could equal that of smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and can pose a greater health risk than living with obesity.

Murthy said about half of adults are struggling with loneliness and even greater numbers of children are. That can be surprising given the fact that many young people are frequently connecting with their peers online. However, Murthy said technology serves as a poor substitute for in-person connection. Mental health experts, like psychiatrist Daniel

Amen, believe social media can prove to be addicting, and therefore predict the problem will only get worse.

“I actually believe we’re on the beginning of a tidal wave of brain and mental health problems in young people, and it’s because we’re more disconnected than ever before, disconnected from our own families because when people are together their faces are buried in their gadgets,” Dr. Amen told CBN News.

Dr. Amen said loneliness was a serious problem in America before the pandemic, but the COVID-19-related shut-downs made loneliness “exponentially worse.” He points out that while the pandemic is over, many people continue to remain isolated from those with whom they interacted before the pandemic. Therefore, he recommends minimizing screen time while maximizing in-person interactions.

He stated, “So it’s back to church,” he said. “Go back to church. Get involved. Get involved with groups. We have to go back. And really, no better place to solve it than the church.”

<https://www.faithwire.com/2023/09/01/top-psychiatrist-says-go-back-to-church-as-loneliness-now-a-major-us-health-threat/>



**“ THIS IS AN ISSUE SO MANY PEOPLE STRUGGLE WITH IN THE SHADOWS BECAUSE THEY FEEL ASHAMED.”**

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# THE DANGERS OF AMERICA'S APPROACH TO GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE

## A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE STATE OF CHILDHOOD GENDER DYSPHORIA

**W**e've all gone through puberty. It's a weird, confusing time for everyone. Your body starts changing, and you start noticing other humans in a way you didn't before. You also start to see yourself differently, and at times, you're not really sure who you are anymore. In light of such, gender dysphoria isn't that surprising. Simply put, gender dysphoria is a feeling of distress when a person doesn't identify with the gender that's on their birth certificate. It starts during childhood for most, although some don't experience it until puberty or adulthood.<sup>1</sup>

Children, whose minds and bodies are still developing, can be easily influenced into thinking the only way out of their discomfort is by changing genders completely through gender-affirming care. Treatments vary but commonly include hormone therapy, surgeries, mental health counseling, voice training, and social transitioning support. Additionally, kids have easy access to media that can plant doubts in their minds and show them how easy and satisfying it is to transition. Influencers display a picturesque life online, easily able to hide any pain, doubts, or fears they experience along the way.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, a lot of underlying conditions are ignored throughout the process of transitioning genders. Most of the time, therapists and gender-affirming clinics don't ask the important questions that may reveal issues of anxiety, depression, eating disorders, neglect, abuse, and more. So instead of treating the problem, physicians end up treating only the symptoms of something much larger. It's like putting duct tape on a rusty pipe. It may temporarily fix the leak, but eventually, the pipe is going to burst. In Camille Kiefel's case, a 32-year-old detransitioner, she said, "When I transitioned, my suicidal ideation did not go away."

# “WHEN I TRANSITIONED, MY SUICIDAL IDEATION DID NOT GO AWAY.”

## THE FAST TRACK TO TRANSITIONING

According to Do No Harm, a medical and political advocacy group of medical professionals, “The United States is the most permissive country when it comes to the legal and medical gender transition of children.” France comes in at a close second, but still urges “great caution.”<sup>3</sup> Even though most European countries share the United States’ broad support of transgenderism, many of them reject the gender-affirming care model for children. In 2022, the UK’s only national gender clinic for children was shut down by court order. In the Netherlands, the government requires a statement from a doctor, psychologist, or psychotherapist that affirms that one has the “permanent conviction” of belonging to another gender other than the one stated on their birth certificate.<sup>4</sup> It begs the question: what do their doctors know that American doctors don’t?

From hormone treatments to life-altering surgeries, transgender individuals become lifelong medical patients. Chloe Cole began transitioning at age 12 when she was influenced by doctors into genital mutilation, including a double mastectomy. At one point, her gender specialist asked her parents, “Would you rather have a dead daughter or a trans son?”<sup>5</sup> The drugs she consumed made permanent changes to her body and now, as a 19-year-old, she is both physically and emotionally changed for life.

Don’t you think that when dealing with something so sensitive, personal, and life-altering, the U.S. would put forth more care and effort than their current piecemeal approach? Scientists “still don’t know exactly what causes gender dysphoria, although some experts believe that hormonal influences in the womb may be involved.”<sup>6</sup> If the people we look to for answers don’t even know the cause, perhaps we should slow down before offering irreversible, life-changing medical treatments to kids.

Furthermore, studies show that only 12% to 27% of cases of childhood gender dysphoria persist into adulthood.<sup>7</sup> Age restrictions are put in place for

other things, so why can’t the same be considered for transitioning genders? We don’t let kids drive, drink alcohol, gamble, get married, consume tobacco, or enlist in the army. These restrictions are both for their safety and for society’s well-being as a whole.

## CAN KIDS BE PROTECTED?

Children can’t be trusted to know what’s best for them. That’s why they’re called *children*. They need guidance, especially from their parents or guardians. Abel Garcia, another detransitioner, thought he knew what he was getting into, but “Woke up one day, looked at myself in the mirror, and asked myself, ‘what the heck am I doing?’ I realized I would have never been a woman. At best, I would have been a caricature of what I believed a woman was.”

There are so many voices trying to speak into kids’ lives, so it’s no wonder they’re unable to truly identify who they are. They need someone to speak the truth to them about their identity. Like an artist paints a masterpiece, or an architect designs a building for a certain use, there is a Master Designer behind each person’s life.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear: God created human beings in His image. That inherently gives each of us an identity, and God wants us to know it. He isn’t the author of confusion. He’s not hiding His will or intentions for people behind His back, as if we have to guess if the correct choice is in the left hand or the right. If gender is a confusing thing, we can be honest with Him, and He’ll be honest with us about who we really are.

We may live in the “age of sensation,” but just because we think or feel something, it doesn’t mean we’re right about it. Feelings are a great gauge, but a terrible guide. God’s wisdom is that we can act ourselves into a new way of feeling much quicker than we can feel ourselves into a new way of acting.

<sup>1</sup>psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria

<sup>2</sup>prageru.com/video/detrans

<sup>3</sup>donoharmmedicine.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Do-No-Harm-Reassigned-Report.pdf

<sup>4</sup>ibid.

<sup>5</sup>prageru.com/video/detrans

<sup>6</sup>ibid.

<sup>7</sup>ibid.

<sup>8</sup>ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Genesis 1:27

<sup>10</sup>1 Corinthians 14:33

<sup>11</sup>Herbert Hendin, “The Age of Sensation”

**F**ailure is not fun, but contrary to popular belief—it IS an option. Since it is, why not learn from them? Let me tell you a story.

### FAILED PLANS

I was 21-years-old and thought I had everything figured out. My dad had another drinking spell where he was refusing to go to treatment. By that time, I lost count of how many times he had relapsed. I planned to drive four and a half hours home from Menomonie and then transport him three hours to the Veterans Affairs (VA) medical center in St. Cloud, Minnesota. That way he could get the help he needed. This wasn't the first time making the trip to the VA. I executed the plan on a beautiful April day. However, my dad ended up passing away during the trip to St. Cloud. My plan failed in a big way, more than I could have imagined.

Let's look at another example of failure but this time from the Bible. Saul, a religious leader, was on a mission to Damascus from Jerusalem. He planned to take Christ's followers as prisoners back to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2). However, Jesus literally stepped in the way on the road to the city of Damascus and prevented him from fulfilling the plan. Read more about it in Acts chapter nine. Saul's plan failed.

### THE OUTCOME OF SELF-TRUST

The failure of my plan showed that I wasn't in control. It made me re-evaluate what I was doing in life. It spurred me on to a search ultimately ending in salvation in Jesus. Without the failure, I would never have considered anything wrong with how I was living. God opened my eyes to how I didn't include Him in the plan. That was before I knew "God's thoughts are nothing like mine, and His ways are far beyond anything I could imagine."<sup>1</sup> Can you think back on past failures where something didn't go the way you planned? Did anything good come from it? Not to say that every failure guarantees good things, but God really does have a plan for everything.<sup>2</sup>

Saul's failure also showed him that he wasn't in control. Jesus opened Saul's eyes that day to the flaws of his plan. Saul thought he was doing God's will by persecuting the Christians; however, he wasn't. If he was, Jesus would not



have said, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?"<sup>3</sup> So instead of persecuting Christians, he became one. Saul became Paul the Apostle.

### WHOM SHOULD WE TRUST?

I have heard it said before that no one hurts us more than we hurt ourselves. Now considering the phrase, wouldn't it be logical to not trust in ourselves? However, the reality is that most of us do. This leaves God out of the equation, resulting in things not adding up. Where should we place our trust? The answer is God. For He is the only One whose, "Works are perfect, and all His ways are just."<sup>4</sup> He is the only one we can fully trust, "For no word from God will ever fail."<sup>5</sup> I came to salvation in Christ because of the chain reaction set forth by my failed plan. Looking back, I can see how God was working in all of it. Paul could also relate since Jesus interrupted his plans, and it led him to become a believer. The encounter left him blinded and helpless, needing to be led by hand to Damascus. He remained blind there for three days before a believer named Ananias, at God's command, came and laid hands on him. Afterward, Paul received his sight and the Holy Spirit.

### WORKING THROUGH FAILURES

We will fail again, but with God, there is hope and victory because of Jesus. It doesn't mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, hungry, destitute, in danger, or threatened with death. In failure we tend to run from God, but He wants us to run towards Him. He isn't surprised by our failures because He is all-knowing. That is why God sent His son Jesus to die in our place, for our sins, so we can have a relationship with Him. When we fail, we can go to Him, ask for forgiveness, and move on knowing we are covered by the blood of His Son, Jesus. Hang onto passages like, "God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them."<sup>6</sup>

See, failure is an option. It just isn't the preferred one. God will teach you about yourself and Him if you allow Him to. Let the Lord use your failures to shape you to be more like Him. "Come close to God, and God will come close to you,"<sup>6</sup> and through that, you learn how to be more like Him.

1. Isaiah 55:8 NLT 2. Romans 8:28 NLT 3. Acts 9:4 NLT 4. Deuteronomy 32:4 NLT 5. Luke 1:37 NLT 6. James 4:8 NLT





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