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NINETY-SIX

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SPRING 2025

WORD ON THE STREET  
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LEVEL  
*Ministries*  
MAGAZINE





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# WORD<sup>ON THE</sup> STREET Magazine

UW-STOUT EDITION

## W WELCOME TO WOTS

In your hands you're holding a copy of *Word on the Street (WOTS) Magazine*. We exist as an outreach of Street Level Ministries, a college Christian ministry with groups in various cities. We're glad you're here.

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 meet every week to write and gather content as a group of young adults in cities around the

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.

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?**

## DISTRIBUTED AROUND THE GLOBE

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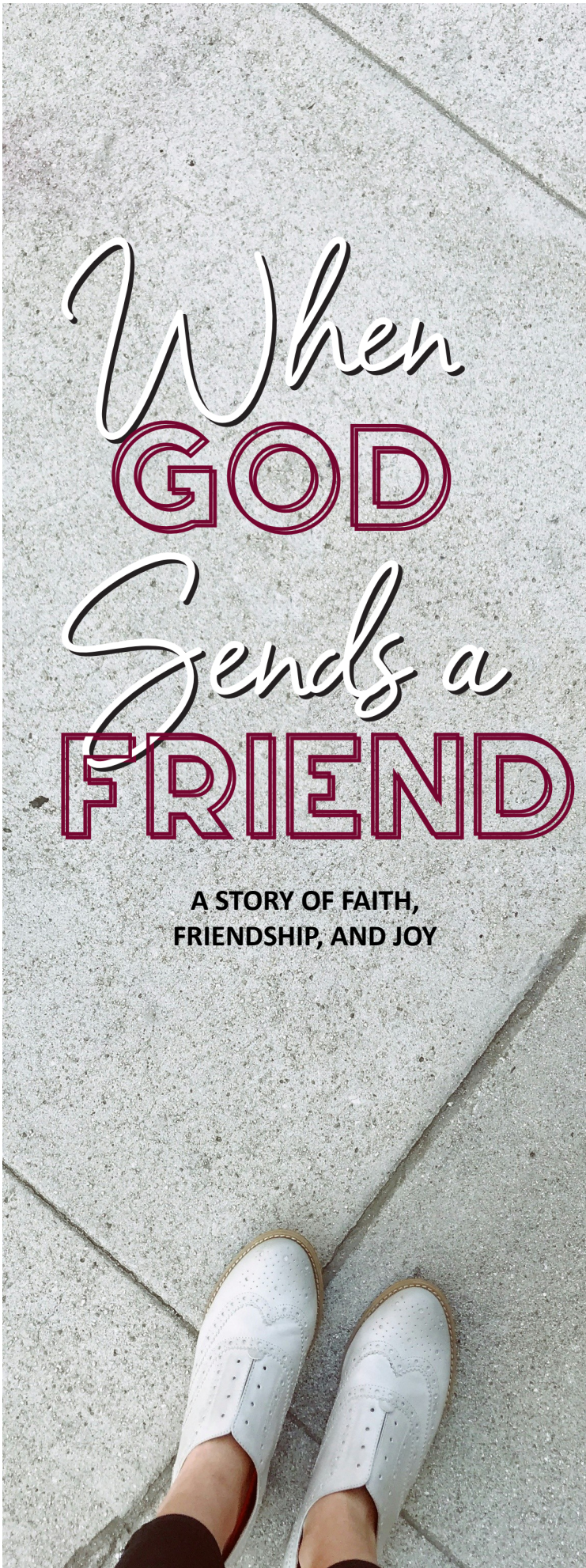
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There's an image I found on the internet that says, "The pain that you've been feeling cannot compare to the joy that's coming." It's based on the Bible verse Romans 8:18, and it is something I wish I could tell my younger self because it is so true.

Growing up, I was the girl who got picked on and made fun of because of her weight. Already in Pre-K, it seemed like there were always some kids who chose to pick on me. It was hard because year after year, I always hoped it would get better, that I would have more friends, and that I would be bullied less. However, year after year, it seemed like the opposite was happening. The few friends I did have started hanging out with a girl who had bullied me a lot, and suddenly, it felt like all my friends were gone. I had entered into what would be one of the darkest periods in my life. Quickly, I became the girl who sat alone on the playground and would come home to my parents crying. I was very depressed to the point that there were times when I felt like nobody would miss me if I would have disappeared. In my eyes, my life didn't matter.

But man, Jesus really wanted to show me how wrong I was. It was a few weeks before I was supposed to enter middle school when I met my best friend, Maia. We met at the fair while waiting in line to pick up some artwork. She was standing behind me, and I felt something (which I now know was God) telling me to turn around and compliment her art. We got talking and found out that we were both the same age and would be going to middle school together. Before we parted ways, she said she would see me at school, but I figured she would forget about me by the time classes started. However, on that first day, I heard someone calling out my name - there she was, smiling and waving at me; I felt like someone had finally seen me. Little did I know that she was going to be the person that would help pull me out of my depression. We quickly became close friends.

A few months after I met her, Maia started down a journey of physical health complications, which is the point where God started using her story to reach me. Maia had been a Christian since I met her, and at the time, I, too, claimed myself as a "Christian." I had grown up Catholic but only went to church once in a while, and while I did attend Wednesday night's CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) classes, I never really understood the importance of God or why He mattered. This stayed the same for the most part until high school when Maia's health complications continued to develop, and I saw her face her own dark



# “GOD STARTED USING HER STORY TO REACH ME.”

period. The more challenging times became, the more she relied on God and had faith in Him. That kind of faith made me start asking her and her mom questions about who God was and having conversations with them about the Bible.

In August 2021, Maia and her mom helped me pick out my first Bible, and while I claimed I was a Christian, I still wasn't - I was living a life full of sin and still hadn't fully committed myself to God. This way of living continued until the weekend of July 30, 2022. I had recently moved into my first apartment off campus, and Maia came up to see it. That Friday, my mom decided to take us to this cafe called The Blind Munchies where we met this guy named Ryan who invited us to church on Sunday. That Sunday, I remember being so nervous as I entered Believers City Church with Maia. I just had a feeling that something was going to change that day, and sure enough as soon as the worship began, I just began to sob. I felt this overwhelming joy consume me, and I just felt like I was home. I was holding onto Maia's hand, and we just looked at each other with tears in our eyes, and shortly after that, I closed my eyes and surrendered my life to God.

After that day, my life did change. Over the last three years, God really blessed me with so many things: a beautiful spiritual family through Believers City Church and Street Level Ministries, a mission trip He took me on, and growing me in so many ways. He's helped me overcome anxiety and just continues to remind me daily that He's got me and that He's never going to let me go. And it's not just these last three years that He's had my back; it's been my entire life. He was walking with me and helping me through those dark times without me realizing it. He sent me a best friend who helped show me what a loving God we have by being a loving, caring, and faith-filled woman herself.

Romans 8:18 is not just something that I can relate to, but something we all can. And right now, if you're somebody struggling through a dark time where you feel alone, please reach out to God because He loves you so much and will get you through these dark times. Truly, what you're facing right now will be nothing compared to the joy God is going to give you.

Always remember, God's got this.



-Sierra

Sierra is a member of Street Level Ministries in Menomonie, WI



# RADICAL

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# ~~average~~ campus ministry



## Mondays

7pm - Gilbert Creek Room  
Merle Price Commons

BELIEVERS  
*Campus*  
CHURCH

## Wednesdays

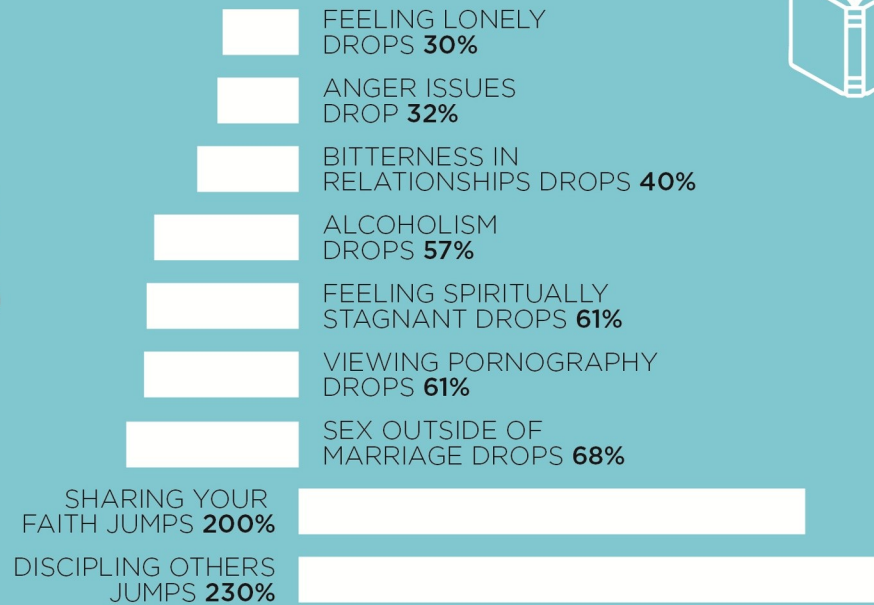
6pm - Free Dinner  
7pm - Church  
1009 6th St.E.





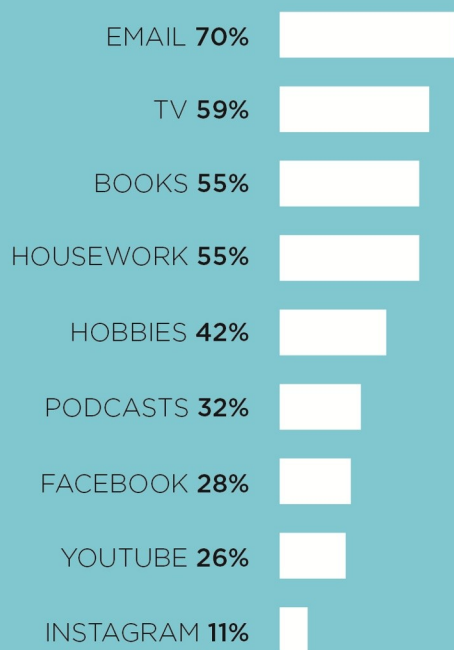


# WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WHO READ THE BIBLE 4 TIMES A WEEK?



## 30 MINUTES PER DAY

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE SPEND 30 MIN. OR MORE EACH DAY ENGAGING WITH THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES?



## IN LESS THAN 30 MIN, YOU COULD READ

RUTH 14m  
 SONG OF SOLOMON 17m  
 LAMENTATIONS 20m  
 JOEL 12m  
 AMOS 24m  
 OBADIAH 4m  
 JONAH 8m  
 MICAH 18m  
 NAHUM 7m  
 HABAKKUK 9m  
 ZEPHANIAH 10m  
 HAGGAI 6m  
 MALACHI 11m  
 GALATIANS 20m  
 EPHESIANS 19m  
 PHILIPPIANS 14m  
 COLOSSIANS 13m  
 1 THESSALONIANS 11m  
 2 THESSALONIANS 7m  
 TITUS 6m  
 PHILEMON 3m  
 JAMES 15m  
 1 PETER 15m  
 2 PETER 10m  
 1 JOHN 16m  
 2 JOHN 2m  
 3 JOHN 2m  
 JUDE 4m



## IN 12 MIN. PER DAY

YOU COULD READ THE WHOLE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

## IN 6 MIN. PER DAY

YOU COULD READ THE WHOLE NEW TESTAMENT IN 6 MONTHS

HEBREWS 4:12

**IN 7 DAYS, YOU COULD READ FROM THE BIBLE 7 TIMES**

ROMANS 10:17

Sources: denisonforum.org/biblical-living/bible-reading-unprecedented-low-america; crossway.org/articles/infographic-you-can-read-more-of-the-bible-than-you-think





# California IS BURNING

THE LA WILDFIRES LIT UP OUR TRUE NATURE

It's no news to anyone that Los Angeles was on fire this January. More than 12,300 homes and businesses burned to the ground, including two schools in the second largest school district in the country, and at least 27 deaths were reported. Our feeds were filled with everything from wide-eyed residents in disbelief that they were displaced into the shelter system, to chaotic reunions with pets their owners thought were dead. Despite the obvious devastation, the larger inferno that burned just as swiftly was the news cycle and social media meltdown that occurred simultaneously.

Immediately, conspiracy theories were spreading wildly, spewing disinformation on both sides that led to finger pointing and shouts of everything from "they deserved it" to "this was God's judgement." The fact that the water ran out of the fire hydrants is a sure sign that the California government is in on it! Oh, and what about the fact that State Farm pulled out of thousands of homeowner insurance policies mere months before the fires started? Something *must* be afoot.

While the exact cause of these fires is still unknown as of this writing, the conditions leading up to them

are well documented. California has a long history with wildfires, and over the last year, extreme drought conditions combined with those infamous Santa Ana winds, leading to a worst-case scenario of multiple out-of-control fires surrounding the second most populous city in the U.S.

The experts will probably discover that the cause of the fires was human in origin since 85% of all wildfires in America are caused by us according to the National Park Service. Perhaps some campers inadvertently let a campfire burn out of a control or someone stupidly flicked a still lit cigarette into the wrong brush pile. Maybe they will find out that it was more malicious in nature and some bad actor intentionally set them. There's also a chance it was natural in origin, since lightning is the second leading cause of all wildfires. Even spontaneous combustion can occur naturally if the conditions are right.

There is no doubt that the LA wildfires were terrible and caused far more damage than should have been possible. If there are things that can be done to reduce the degree of devastation fires can cause in the future, that would be amazing and should be pursued. But we're never going to be able to stop

# "WE'RE CONVERTING DISASTERS INTO CONDEMNATION AND PITTING HUMANS AGAINST HUMANS."

them permanently, or even be able to point a finger at any single causation explaining why they're happening at the rate or voracity that they are.

So, where is God in all this? In other words, "why does He let bad things like this happen?" You might also ask, "why do bad things happen to *good* people?" since people from every socioeconomic class, race, gender, religion, and ability were affected by these fires. No one was spared. The problem of these questions, however, is the viewpoint. The problem is, we're without God in this world because we choose evil, over and over again. We choose to try to be our own gods and mold everyone else into our own image, and that's always going to be doomed from the start.

The only One that can make anyone "good" is Jesus Christ who alone has the power to make us new creatures with new hearts that can truly love people and steward what we are given in this world. He alone is good, and without Him, well, you can see what happens when we're left to our own devices.

As a human race, we're converting disasters into condemnation and pitting humans against humans. And yet, He's here, inexplicably, if we want Him.

## Jesus Criticized As Ableist For Healing Paralytic



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**JERUSALEM** — Jesus of Nazareth has come under fire once again, sparking accusations of ableism after miraculously helping a paralyzed man walk.

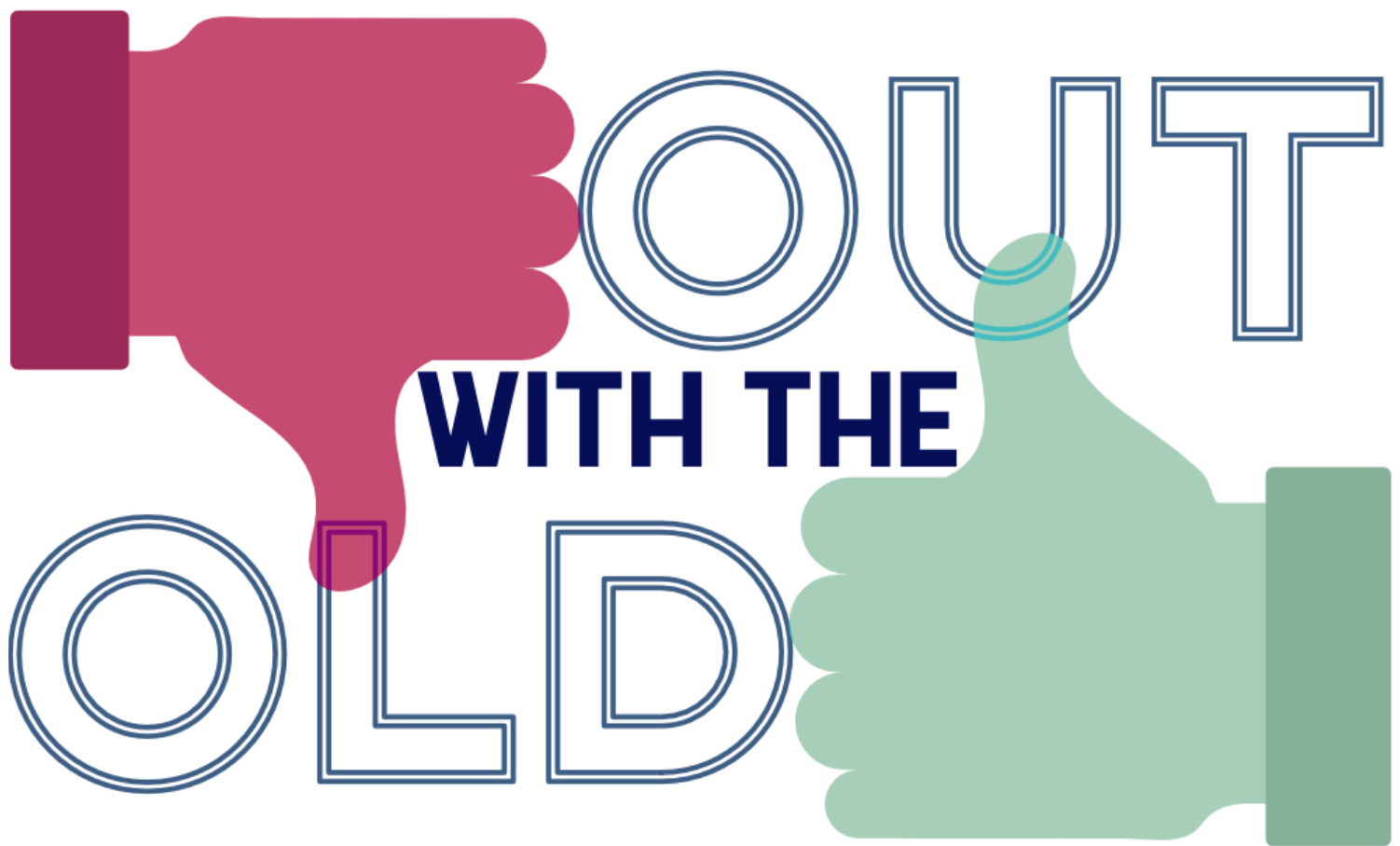
"Calling this a 'miraculous healing' only reinforces the idea that being paralyzed is somehow bad," said the local Pharisees, while the previously incapacitated man leapt for joy. "Hey carpenter – stop forcing your idea of normal on people, ok? That man was perfectly handi-capable."

Ableist thought leaders have called for Jesus to also stop healing the blind and mute. "Every day we have a dozen blind people come to Jesus begging for healing, when what they need is affirmation in being differently-abled," said local progressive Zerech Himoleth. "If Jesus really loved them, he would tell them how great it is to be blind and give them a high-five. Stick to making tables, Jesus!"

Additional concerns arose when Jesus restored the man's soul as well as his ability to walk, becoming dangerously non-affirming to the man's sinful heart. Despite pushback, Jesus has reportedly remained unfazed in His working to heal everything in a world deeply broken by sin.

At publishing time, Jesus had, through the excruciating destruction and glorious resurrection of His own physical body, continued offering grace and healing to any soul that will accept his Lordship.





## A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE GLOBAL SHIFT IN LEADERSHIP

**T**hese past couple of years, it seems like we have been getting more and more “elections of the century.” With each election, the divide appears to get a little wider, the candidates seem a little worse, and there is an overall increase in the palpable tension in the air. Gone are the days of choosing a candidate based on who seems more competent, more likable, or someone you’d want to share a drink with. Now, we hear phrases like “the lesser of two evils” or “anyone is better than X.” In the most recent wave of 2024 elections, a new overwhelming opinion has been noticed worldwide: “It can’t be any worse than it is now.”

This outcry has acted as a catalyst for a wave of surprising election results, leading to a decline in incumbent political positions worldwide. But should this really surprise us? According to a study by Pew Research, a startling 74% of people believe that elected officials do not care about

their opinions. Additionally, 42% indicated that no political party aligns with their views. This situation is distressing and, as a voter, quite confusing. It’s not difficult to understand why many would prefer to vote for something new.

Why do people feel this way? The past few years have been challenging for many. It seems that a new political scandal emerges and is quickly forgotten each day. Rapid inflation has driven up the costs of groceries, gas, and housing, forcing many people to tighten their budgets. This environment fosters distrust in leaders, as individuals notice that when they are held accountable, there are often few repercussions. As a result, many feel depressed and apathetic.

In this time of tumult, how do we, as Christians, respond? First, we need to recognize one undeniable fact: we serve God and owe loyalty to Him first and foremost. Yet, we must also respect

“...A NEW OVERWHELMING  
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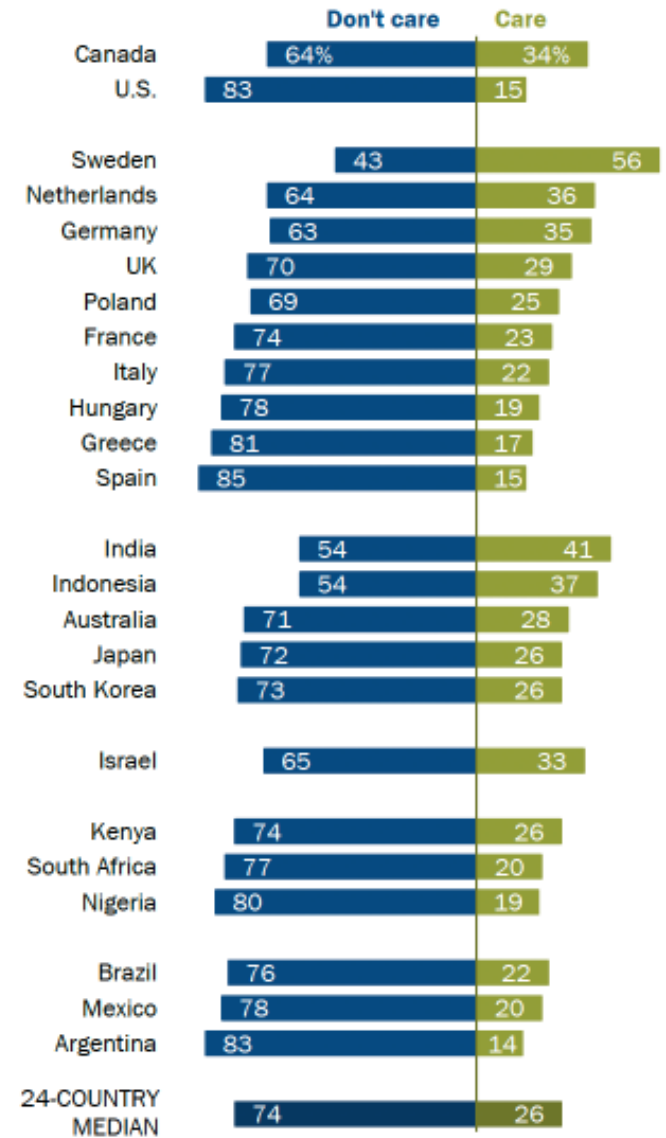
those who are put into power by God. “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s,” words spoken by Jesus to direct us to obey our leaders. However, our leaders won’t be perfect; we accept that they, like us, are sinful by nature. There will not be any party or person that perfectly represents everything, good or bad. We need to understand this. We are not saved by the political party we follow or the candidate we vote for.

So why should we vote? As Christians, if we believe that whatever happens is part of God’s plan and that we often have to choose between flawed options, why engage in the voting process? It’s easy to separate our lives into the secular and the spiritual, treating each domain as mutually exclusive. We might view voting as a purely secular activity and become frustrated when politics dominate our lives. Nevertheless, the Bible calls us to follow laws, pay taxes, and respect authority. We need to merge these concepts: exercising our civic duty demonstrates our respect for authority and allows us to express our Christian perspectives to others.

Ultimately, after the election is over, we may find ourselves grappling with emotions that range from disappointment to frustration regarding the outcome. It’s not uncommon for us to disagree with our new leader’s policies and procedures, especially if those decisions directly contradict our deeply held beliefs or values. Conversely, after the election concludes, many of us may instead experience a wave of excitement and optimism about the future. It’s natural to feel happy when the results align with our hopes and values, especially if the newly elected leader’s vision resonates with our own beliefs. However, even in times of joy, it’s essential that we remember that our primary commitment extends beyond the political landscape. In such times, it’s vital to take a step back and reflect on our position as citizens. While we may live in this nation and participate in its democratic processes, our citizenship here is ultimately secondary; our primary goal needs to be following God and being a citizen in heaven.

**Most do not believe elected officials care what people like them think**

*% who say elected officials care/don't care what people like them think*



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.  
Source: Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey. Q40.  
“Representative Democracy Remains a Popular Ideal, But People Around the World Are Critical of How It’s Working”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/02/28/representative-democracy-remains-a-popular-ideal-but-people-around-the-world-are-critical-of-how-its-working/>



# YOU ARE **NOT** YOUR TRAUMA

## THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE ON PAST HURTS

**I**t was a Saturday. I decided to clean the gas stove in the kitchen, where dozens had made their meals before me over the years. The baking soda and vinegar concoction I made to cut the grease oozed brown from my fingers to my elbows. And then the phone rang.

“Dad is receiving CPR. You need to get here now.”

I grabbed a roll of paper towels, suds dropping to the floor. My dad had collapsed while biking, training for one of his races. He was an hour and a half away. I didn’t make it far before my mom called and uttered the words I’d been dreading: “Honey, I need you to pull over.” He was 56 years old.

Grief is a funny thing. It hits you when you least expect it, like when you’re eating a blue cheese salad or pulling on a pair of wool socks. Death is traumatic whether you’ve been anticipating it for years or whether it comes as quick as a phone call. But this article isn’t about death. It’s about trauma, in all its terrible forms.

Have you ever felt like horrible things always happen to you, things out of your control? Like the odds were stacked against you? Ever wanted more sympathy from the people around you, held grudges, or blamed others? If so, welcome to humanity, where we’re all tempted to adopt a victim mentality.

# “TRAUMATIC EVENTS IN OUR LIVES CERTAINLY SHAPE US, BUT THEY DO NOT DEFINE WHO WE ARE.”



The months that followed my dad’s death are a blur. Some days were unbearable. I kept going to church, but I had more questions than my faith could give me answers to. In a twisted way, my situation made me feel special. Finally, I wasn’t like everyone else. I had a story to share and, man, did it feel good to tell it. I relished the pity of strangers, friends, and classmates. I had been through so much and it felt good for people to know it.

Our tendency toward a victim mentality stems from a dependence on others for validation. We want people to feel bad for us (or at least notice us). While we all need people around us who care, the victim mentality brings it to a new level. Those under its grip display a nasty little thing smart people call moral elitism, a defense mechanism in the midst of deeply painful emotions. The victim denies their own aggressiveness and projects it on others. Everyone around them is the threat, and the victim is of no fault and morally superior. And it’s become generally acceptable behavior. Take all the villain backstories movies, for example. The villain’s evil actions are seen with more understanding when their former traumas are brought to light.

It’s been proven that those with a high tendency to see themselves as a victim are less willing to forgive others, show more desire for revenge than simple avoidance, and are statistically more likely to behave in a revengeful way.<sup>1</sup> For some, their trauma is who they are, and they won’t hear from anyone that isn’t true.

Let’s be clear that there’s a difference between being a victim of something tragic and adopting a victim mentality. The Bible gives examples of God condemning people who have oppressed innocent victims (Zechariah 7:9-10), not to mention Jesus’ own suffering despite having never sinned. If anyone has license to a victim mentality, it’s Him.

In the months that followed, lunches after church taught me everyone had a story to

tell. I ate soup with those who had lost babies, gotten divorced, and been abandoned by parents. I sipped coffee with those who had illnesses, cancer, and no family to call. Trauma wasn’t just my story anymore; it had touched us all. They reminded me of God’s presence when I did not feel Him and of His goodness when I couldn’t believe it. They didn’t fight for whose story was worse. They comforted me like God had comforted them (2 Corinthians 1: 3-5). It was God, time, and these people that healed me. They were all victims of evil in the world and they still found joy and purpose in God. There was no time to mope. There was work to be done. And while I still miss my dad greatly, I wholeheartedly agree.

If you don’t have a relationship with God, it’s understandable that your trauma might define you. No bigger thing in your life has changed you as much as whatever you went through. But if you know God, you know peace despite your circumstances (Isaiah 26:3, John 14:27, John 16:31-33, Philippians 4:6-7, Romans 5:1, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 2:14-16). It might take time to heal, but you’re not dominated by sorrows or owned by anything but Him. It won’t be easy to let the past hurts go (and we can expect more to come), but in time you’ll trust that God has a plan for your life, and you’ll want to figure out what it is.

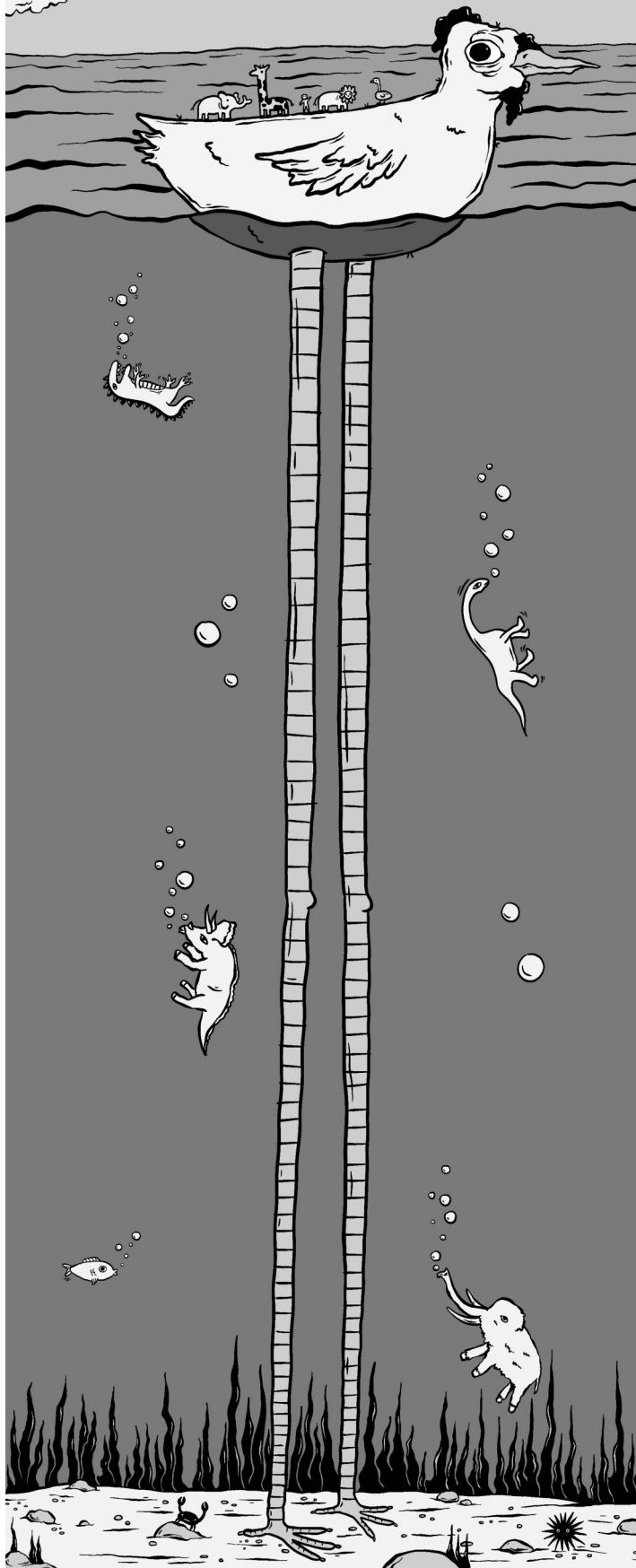
Traumatic events in our lives certainly shape us, but they do not define who we are. Christians should give themselves no license to a victim mentality. God doesn’t want us to stay miserable and angry, and we can’t expect Him to do all the work. Healing is a choice. We need to step toward Him and participate. We have to want to get better.

If we are the people He’s going to use to show the world what He is really like, we should be motivated to let Him heal us. Just like we can choose to heal, we can choose to embrace the life God created us for, but it will require us to get up and move.

<sup>1</sup>[scientificamerican.com/article/unraveling-the-mindset-of-victimhood/](http://scientificamerican.com/article/unraveling-the-mindset-of-victimhood/)



No... Noah's Ark was not just a really big chicken with long legs...



## A HISTORIC SHIFT Gen Z men now outnumber Gen Z women at church

According to a recent poll done by the Survey Center on American Life, more young men are showing up at church than their female peers. This trend is a sharp reversal of the status quo because up until now, women have led the way in church attendance.

“For the first time in modern American history, young men are now more religious than their female peers. They attend services more often and are more likely to identify as religious,” reported Ruth Graham of *The New York Times*. So why are Gen Z men bucking the trend?

The reasons behind this pattern shift are thought to be two-fold. First, young women are making a bigger exodus from churches. Of those checking the box for “religiously unaffiliated,” the poll discovered that there is over twice the gap between Gen Z and Baby Boomer women, than among men in those same categories. So even though more men are deciding to stay, women leaving the church is still a large factor in understanding this emerging trend. In better news, Gen Z is overall

more religiously affiliated than the generation before them – Millennials. Axios reports that Millennials are the most nonreligious of any generation on earth today.

Understanding what is driving this trend in Gen Z is important because its ramifications are far-reaching. If the gap between genders in religious preferences is widening, there must be a common factor. It also is important for Christians to understand why this is happening so we can more accurately understand the hurdles in sharing the gospel with this crucial generation.

Young men and women are on increasingly different paths in more areas than just religion. According to the Denison Forum, Gen Z women are:

- *More educated than Gen Z men*
- *Earn a higher income in prominent cities like New York and Washington*
- *Less likely to say they want to become parents, by a margin of 12 percentage points*
- *More likely to report feeling like they are treated unequally in most churches*

That final point is especially important in putting a finger on what's going on. The Denison Forum offered this explanation:

“Many Gen Z women came of age during the #MeToo movement—and its religiously based cousin #ChurchToo. As such, some of their most formative years were spent hearing about the abuse and scandals perpetrated against women, far too often by leaders in the church. It is understandable that many would find it difficult to separate that kind of abuse from the faith of the abusers, even if drawing such a correlation overlooks the basic realities of who Jesus is and what the gospel is truly about.”

Even though Gen Z men also grew up hearing the same things, their experiences of those events were not the same. Derek Rishmawy, who leads a ministry at the University of California, Irvine, offers a possible explanation. He said that Christianity is, “One institution that isn't initially and formally skeptical of (men) as a class.” He commented further, saying, “We're telling them, ‘you are meant to live a meaningful life,’” which is especially impactful in a world that sends mixed signals, including automatically lumping all men together in one demonized group.

It's no wonder that many young men are finding the clear message of Jesus Christ attractive in a world that is

increasingly hostile. At church, you can find community, friendship, and purpose, which is a rare commodity these days. However, that is true for all people, including their female peers, and we as Christians have a dire responsibility to make that clear to Gen Z and beyond.

#### **HOW TO REACH GEN Z**

A big hurdle in reaching Gen Z men and women is their agreement on the issue of mental health. Forty-six percent of them named mental health as the biggest problem for not only themselves, but their communities, too. Additionally, the issue of addiction was a large contender at 31 percent.

“Considering that the church represents a source of mental health problems for a relatively large portion of Gen Z women, it makes sense that they might be more hesitant to attend and more willing to look outside of the Christian faith for answers,” wrote Ryan Denison of the Denison Forum. “While God's truth does not change with our experiences, our experiences often provide the lens through which we understand the Lord. As a result, one of the best ways we can reach out to young people regardless of gender is to make our communities of faith a place where they can feel welcome and safe.”

This certainly doesn't mean bending content and practices to accommodate all desires. Let it not be so. If churches were to tailor their services and outreach to fit the ever-changing whims of what the world wanted, the gospel would be sadly diluted. Ironically, however, “authenticity” is one of the most important values that Gen Z is after. What better vessel than the gospel to sound out the truth in a real, lived-out way? Gen Z is searching for people and organizations that actually live out what they say they believe. All this to say, however, that how we reach out to Gen Z is vital. You can't just plonk down a hymnal on a pew anymore and expect they will come.

While He walked this earth, Jesus' followers were a diverse, unexpected bunch. He talked to women and lifted them up into vital ministry work in a time that only saw women as second-class citizens. He saw people with disabilities and didn't just walk by. He healed them. He asked to come into the houses of men the world had already decided were lost causes. He looked at each person as a person, not as a stereotype.

Despite whatever trend is happening, all people need Jesus. We are to represent Jesus on this earth as His ambassadors. Will you?





# WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU MAKES YOU WEAKER?

## A NOTE ON "THE CODDLING OF THE AMERICAN MIND"

**"H**elp me find my trigger." Yep, a student actually asked a faculty member this on a college campus in America. Instead of realizing that it is in fact a *good* thing to not be triggered (meaning, you will not potentially be traumatized by what is about to be shared), this student was seeking help to identify a topic they should be sensitive toward. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's go back to 2015.

That was the year a cover story for *The Atlantic* titled "The Coddling of the American Mind," gained national attention. It was written by a constitutional lawyer and a social psychologist at New York University who study American culture wars. The authors, Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt address a concern that more and more college students across the U.S. are demanding they be protected from ideas and words they don't like. Lukianoff and Haidt were fueled by the mental health crisis among Gen Z and the dramatic rise in anxiety, depression, and suicide rates in 2012 that no one could quite explain. They share how this trend of coddling is disastrous for both education and mental health:

"Something strange is happening at America's colleges and universities. A movement is arising to scrub campuses clean of words, ideas, and subjects that might cause discomfort or give offense. Last December, Jeannie Suk wrote in an online article for *The New Yorker* about law students asking her fellow professors at Harvard not to teach rape law—or, in one case, even use the word violate (as in 'that violates the law') lest it cause students distress. In February, Laura Kipnis, a professor at Northwestern University, wrote an essay in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* describing a new campus politics of sexual paranoia—and was then subjected to a long investigation after students

who were offended by the article and by a tweet she'd sent filed Title IX complaints against her" write Lukianoff and Haidt.

The article is littered with other situations where offended students win the battle and well-meaning educators are charged for teaching what they likely have taught for years. Ten years since the article's publication, the topic has only become more applicable. Lukianoff and Haidt go on:

"The current movement is largely about emotional well-being... It presumes an extraordinary fragility of the collegiate psyche, and therefore elevates the goal of protecting students from psychological harm. The ultimate aim, it seems, is to turn campuses into "safe spaces" where young adults are shielded from words and ideas that make some uncomfortable. And more than the last, this movement seeks to punish anyone who interferes with that aim, even accidentally. You might call this impulse vindictive protectiveness. It is creating a culture in which everyone must think twice before speaking up, lest they face charges of insensitivity, aggression, or worse."

"There's a saying common in education circles: Don't teach students what to think; teach them how to think. The idea goes back at least as far as Socrates. Today, what we call the Socratic method is a way of teaching that fosters critical thinking, in part by encouraging students to question their own unexamined beliefs, as well as the received wisdom of those around them. Such questioning sometimes leads to discomfort, and even to anger, on the way to understanding. But vindictive protectiveness teaches students to think in a very different way. It prepares them poorly for professional life, which often demands intellectual engagement with

# “ARE WE ATROPHYING? DO WE RECOGNIZE THAT A LITTLE BIT OF RUB IS WHAT’S NEEDED TO GET STRONGER?”

people and ideas one might find uncongenial or wrong. The harm may be more immediate, too. A campus culture devoted to policing speech and punishing speakers is likely to engender patterns of thought that are surprisingly similar to those long identified by cognitive behavioral therapists as causes of depression and anxiety. The new protectiveness may be teaching students to think pathologically.”

To illustrate this point, Lukianoff and Haidt point out that it is a misguided practice, according to the most basic tenets of psychology, to attempt to help people with anxiety disorders by telling them to avoid the things they find fearful. Even cognitive behavioral therapy, a widely accepted practice in both inpatient and outpatient therapy, teaches critical thinking skills, which require one to ground their belief in evidence rather than emotion. Lukianoff and Haidt site two definitions for the term “emotional reasoning” and evidence that higher education in America has embraced it:

“[David D. Burns, author of *Feeling Good*] defines emotional reasoning as assuming ‘that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: I feel it, therefore it must be true.’ Leahy, Holland, and McGinn [authors of *Treatment Plans and Interventions for Depression and Anxiety Disorders*] define it as letting ‘your feelings guide your interpretation of reality.’ But, of course, subjective feelings are not always trustworthy guides; unrestrained, they can cause people to lash out at others who have done nothing wrong. Therapy often involves talking yourself down from the idea that each of your emotional responses represents something true or important... Emotional reasoning dominates many campus debates and discussions. A claim that someone’s words are ‘offensive’ is not just an expression of one’s own subjective feeling of offendedness. It is, rather, a public charge that the speaker has done something objectively

wrong. It is a demand that the speaker apologize or be punished by some authority for committing an offense.”

What does all this mean? The authors are saying that to let your emotions rule what you will or will not listen to is only a detriment to yourself and your development, and universities are not serving students well by allowing the hypersensitivity. In a world where trigger warnings are commonplace, students are not being prepared to handle difficult ideas and situations (which life will no doubt throw at them!).

In their book that followed the article, Lukianoff and Haidt share three Great Untruths they believe are behind free-speech controversies at American universities. We won’t spoil them all, but Great Truth #1 pleads us to consider the idea of antifragility. They describe how humans don’t just have the ability to simply endure stress, but actually grow and thrive as a result of it. Just like we need gravity and exercise to keep our muscles from atrophying, if we are not exposed to difficult circumstances (and instead are protected from any possibility of encountering them), it is likely we will have difficulty navigating them when they come. Lukianoff and Haidt write the solution to it all rather simply: “Rather than trying to protect students from words and ideas that they will inevitably encounter, colleges should do all they can to equip students to thrive in a world full of words and ideas that they cannot control.”

It begs the question for us all: Are we atrophying? Do we recognize that a little bit of rub is what’s needed to get stronger? And are universities in America still the “marketplace of ideas” they claim they want to be in their freedom of expression and academic freedom policies? The answer lies in students’ willingness to hear and consider the opinions of those they do not agree with.



“The Coddling of the American Mind” was originally published as an article in the Atlantic in 2015 by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt. When the topic gained America’s attention, the authors published a book with the same title in 2018. In 2024, Korchula Productions made “The Coddling of the American Mind” documentary that follows the stories of five university students whose experience of college wasn’t quite what they’d hoped. The film explores similar themes to the original article and addresses the same question: Why are Gen Zer’s so anxious and depressed? The students share their lived experiences of how hypersensitivity and their campus’ protection from difficult concepts contributed to their emotional fragility, and how they decided to start thinking for themselves. The film can be streamed on Amazon, Apple TV, Google Play, and Substack.



# BELIEVERS COMMUNITY NEWS



## Persecution Report Hostility to Christians grows in India, Africa, and Beyond

As India engaged in a six-week national election last year and targeted persecution was increasing, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended that the U.S. State Department add India to its list of worst violators of religious freedom. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was re-elected, but he and his Hindu-nationalist party continue to persecute Muslims and other non-Hindu faiths, including Christians.

The commission's report pointed to violent clashes in India's northeastern Manipur state, where over 500 churches and two synagogues have been destroyed. Additionally, accusations of India's involvement in assassination attempts on foreign soil have surfaced.

“Essentially what India is saying is, if you're not a Hindu, you're really not an Indian citizen,” Commissioner David Curry told WORLD News. “And they are doing any number of things which are making it difficult for people to practice their faith.”

The report also calls for other countries, including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Nigeria, and Vietnam, to be designated as countries of particular concern, with specific emphasis on Nigeria's poor religious freedom conditions and Azerbaijan's targeting of ethnic Armenians. Based on these findings, the commission is urging stronger actions and sanctions against these violators to uphold international religious freedom standards.

They are not the only group documenting these rising trends. According to the latest edition of the Global Persecution Index (GPI), released in January 2025, India, the African Sahel, and Nicaragua—a predominantly Catholic and Protestant nation in Latin America—are among the latest hot spots for Christian persecution worldwide.

The GPI report was compiled by the nonprofit International Christian Concern, which is based in Washington, D.C. It states that 300 million Christians worldwide currently face persecution for their faith from governments, terrorist groups, and society. It also points to rising Hindu nationalism in India where politicians are stripping religious minorities of rights by instituting anti-conversion laws, promoting the country as a Hindu state, and promoting legislation to limit religious expression. These shifts have emboldened radicalized mobs to attack both Christians and Muslims.

In Africa, Islamic terrorist groups have increased violent attacks and killings targeting Christians across the continent. The threat is especially bad throughout the Sahel region that lies between the Muslim-majority north and the Christian-majority south. Extremist groups like Boko Haram have attacked Christians throughout northern Nigeria, southeast Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. In Mali, terrorist groups ramped up operations after UN peacekeepers began withdrawing in 2023.

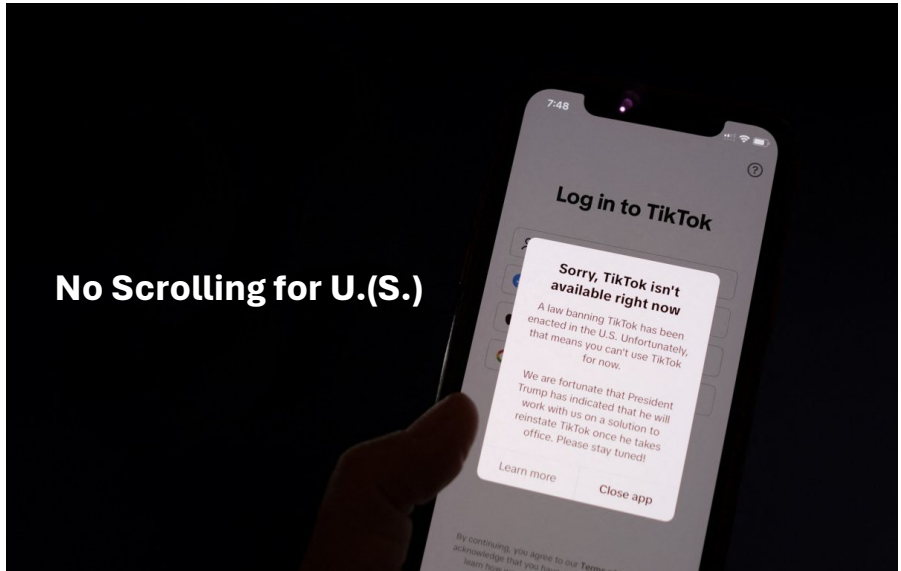


Last January in Nigeria, thousands of Christians participated in a peaceful march for change after deadly attacks over the Christmas season killed more than 200 people. Commissioner Eric Ueland has criticized the State Department for failing to recognize Nigeria as one of the worst religious freedom violators for the past three years. He acknowledged that American authorities have recognized the role of non-state actors like the Boko Haram terror group.

“However that designation does not account for the imprisonments and mob violence, for alleged blasphemy, the mass killings, including killings of many Christians in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, and the consistent failure of the Nigerian government to prevent or punish widespread violence impacting religious freedom in Nigeria,” Ueland said.

In Nicaragua, Christian freedom has deteriorated dramatically under an increasingly hostile government. President Daniel Ortega’s administration has arrested numerous Roman Catholic priests on inflated charges, and in August the Nicaraguan Ministry of the Interior canceled the legal status of more than 1,500 churches and nonprofits, including Catholic, evangelical, and Pentecostal groups. Nicaraguan officials also revoked tax exemptions from churches, requiring them to pay income taxes on congregants’ tithes and offerings. The human rights group Colectivo Nicaragua Nunca Más says more than 200 religious individuals have been exiled in recent years.

While persecution is rising in various places, the ICC report emphasized that the gospel is still spreading. Iran hosts one of the fastest-growing Christian populations in the world, and churches in Indonesia are growing despite heightened restrictions there.



## No Scrolling for U.(S.)

TikTok, the wildly popular video-sharing app owned by the China-based company ByteDance, is under increasing pressure to avoid a ban in the United States. The app has long faced scrutiny over concerns about its potential access to American users' data and its connection to China, raising national security fears.

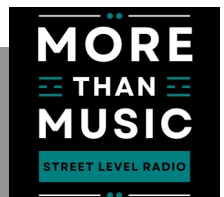
In a decisive move, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a law mandating ByteDance to sell its U.S. operations or face a complete ban. Despite a flurry of last-minute offers—including a \$20 billion bid from Shark Tank’s Kevin O’Leary and a proposed merger with Perplexity AI—ByteDance rejected the deals, leaving millions of TikTok users temporarily locked out.

The situation took a turn on January 19, when President-elect Trump, after receiving assurances from TikTok’s CEO, announced an executive order delaying the ban. The order grants TikTok 75 more days to negotiate a potential deal, preventing an abrupt shutdown of the app that is used by millions of Americans daily.

The order gives Trump’s administration time to work out a solution that addresses national security concerns while ensuring that the app’s millions of users are not left in the dark. For now, TikTok is back online, as it made its way back into app stores mid-February. There is still no further update as both the app and U.S. regulators work toward finding a resolution.

<https://thepourover.org/muscle-memory/>

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# WHERE'S MY MIND?

## FINDING REST AND FULFILLMENT IN JESUS, NOT DRUGS

If you had to picture yourself on an average day, what does it look like? Perhaps, you have found the pleasures of a midnight toke, a few drinks out on the town, or maybe you've decided to take a few hits, tabs, points, or another means to consume an "eye-opening" substance. There's plenty of reasons for using drugs (drugs being anything including getting drunk that you take or use to alter your mind), so if this sounds like you—whether you're running to or from something—I invite you to ask yourself why you are using these drugs.

To clarify, substances were once my main go-to activity and I, too, eventually had to really ask myself the "why" of my drug use. Whether drinking, smoking, snorting, or eating—if it was offered, I probably did it, often in hopes of finding something more. Nothing I ever used, however, provided a lasting fulfillment no matter how many times I'd try. Only recently have I found that fulfillment. Once I found sobriety, I discovered that the areas I had once tried to fill with drugs were being filled with something so much better.

So, is the joy and excitement you find in drugs providing you something that lasts; or, like dew that soon disappears, does it fade away as the sun rises once again? Simply speaking, no matter how much you consume, the effects are only temporary. Once you finally come down it's going to take more to get back up there, but what if I told you that Jesus can take you somewhere so much better? Let me explain.

“ WE ALWAYS FALL SHORT AND FADE AWAY BECAUSE WE SEEK THESE THINGS OUT BY A PHYSICAL MEANS WHEN THE REAL SOLUTION IS SPIRITUAL ”

Think for a moment of the best experience you ever had while on any type of drug. When you take out the visual effects or discombobulated movements from this experience, what we have left is the euphoric feelings of that high. Our spirits long for these moments of joy and euphoria, but in hopes to seek out the goodness of God (whether you recognize it or not) not some counterfeit goodness that the drugs provide. Ultimately, we always fall short and fade away because we seek these things out by a physical means when the real solution is spiritual. We have a spiritual need that cannot be fulfilled physically through drugs, but only through a relationship with who we were made in the image of, which is God Himself. Jesus made it possible for us to be in relationship with and spiritually filled with God's presence, which is far more spiritually fulfilling than any drug that you can consume—to this, I can attest.

When we get closer to God, we can find Him entering our lives more deeply—changing our lives in ways we could never imagine—but this can only happen when we begin to rely on Him rather than the drugs we've been using.

God calls us to be sober-minded, not to limit us but rather so that we may flourish to our fullest potential as a part of His beautiful creation.

Experiencing life with a sober mind is truly the way that God intended it to be. We cannot go about our relationship with God under the influence of drugs and expect to get everything God has to offer us when we cannot give our full self to Him. James 4:8 says, “Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.” Is your loyalty divided between God and drugs? If it is, now is the time to make a change.

When I initially began following God, I wasn't completely sober, but was almost there. There were still some pieces that were holding me back from fully following God, and I'm not just talking about puzzle pieces. Within my heart, I felt a conviction that told me that I couldn't continue using, to not even keeping my drugs as a “back-up”, and I had to make the decision of where my loyalty would fall—God or the drugs. Had I allowed myself to continue living in a space of being lukewarm between God and drugs, there was the risk of my heart becoming too calloused from enough times of saying “not yet” and end up becoming numb to what God was saying to me.

By getting rid of what is holding us back from God, we create space in our lives to grow closer to Him in unimaginable ways. You can then experience life in the way that humans were meant to live, which is with God. Jesus showed us how to do this as He, too, was fully human, just like we are. He showed us how to endure all circumstances—not by going to drugs or any other easy substitute, but to God. Fully surrendering your feelings to Him and acknowledging that He is there with you to love and help you, something that the drugs could never do.

I invite you to reflect and ask yourself whether the things you are seeking out in this life are really fulfilling you. If you're willing to lay them down to find fulfillment that lasts an eternity and not just a lifetime, you'll find true rest and fulfillment.





# THE END OF RACE POLITICS:

## Arguments for a Colorblind America

A BOOK REVIEW OF A DIVISIVE NEW NOVEL EXAMINING THE STATUS QUO OF RACE IN AMERICA

Defining terms and their real history are the heartbeat of Coleman Hughes' 2024 debut novel, "The End of Race Politics: Arguments for a Colorblind America." As a black man and recent graduate of Columbia University, his insight into the status of race politics in America is atypical of the narrative we're used to hearing. He wrote it as a conclusion to his search for why, as one of the few black students in his philosophy program at the university, his peers seemed more radical about race relations than his own grandparents who endured segregation.

Hughes argues that today's version of antiracism—or neoracism as he labels it—is actually just repackaged racism in disguise. "Neoracism insists that sharp racial classifications are a necessary part of a just society." Colorblindness on the other hand, a term that is considered old-fashioned and even dangerous rhetoric by many, is the way forward according to Hughes, and, he argues, was the original intent of the Civil Rights Movement, including Dr. King himself. Elevating one race over another perpetuates a vicious cycle, but "treating people without regard to race, both in our public policy and in our private lives" would actually make the equality we say we're seeking as a society.

As you read his book, Hughes' voice is calm but relentless in driving home that race shouldn't be as big of a deal as it is. "I think race is irrelevant to the things we care most about in life, and dividing people by race is an obstacle to realizing

this dream. In my ideal future, the people of this country would be so busy pursuing the things that really matter that we might go weeks or months at a time without ever thinking about the concept of race." It's an idea that might make you squirm and want to label as racist itself, but that's his whole point:

"Whether we are talking about current disadvantages (what is sometimes called 'privilege') or historical disadvantages, racial identity is a bad proxy. If all whites were advantaged, it would make sense for practical purposes to equate whiteness with advantage. If all blacks were impoverished, then it would make sense for practical purposes to equate blackness with poverty. But racialized generalizations like these don't work. There's no version of 'white people are X' or 'black people are Y' that provides an accurate rule of thumb for addressing issues like poverty or historical injustice."

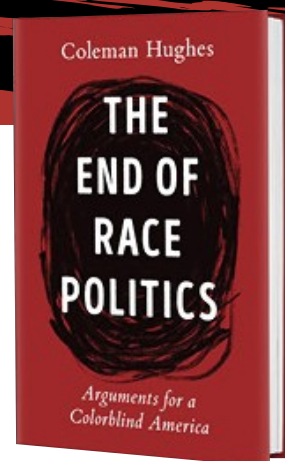
Hughes brings his own story, and that of his ancestry (American slavery), into the book often to corroborate what he's saying. He grew up not affected by his status as a "half-black, half-Hispanic" boy until he encountered ideas about race at a People of Color Conference in his youth and later on at Columbia University. These experiences "pave(d) the way toward a social and political hellscape where skin color—a meaningless trait—is

given supreme importance." He also makes a compelling case that America's own history points to more victory and progress on this issue than today's neoracists care to admit. He uses statistics and facts to outline that blacks have more political and cultural power in America than whites nowadays, but conceding this point would be a blow to the ideology of neoracism that approves "discrimination in favor of non-whites" as "justified on account of the hardships they endure—and hardships their ancestors endured—at the hands of whites."

It's at times an uncomfortable read, but if you enter in with an open mind, perhaps you'll come away from it with a renewed understanding of what's at stake: you, *us*. Hughes is ultimately arguing that it's the person that matters, not their skin color. How did we stray so far away from that simple concept?



*Coleman Hughes is a writer, podcaster, and opinion columnist who specializes in issues pertaining to race, public policy, and applied ethics. His writing has been published in numerous publications including the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. In 2021, he appeared on Forbes' 30 Under 30 list.*



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