



ISSUE
NINETY-NINE

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EASE OUR GUILT

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THE WORLD
IS ON FIRE

SPRING 2026

WORD ON THE STREET
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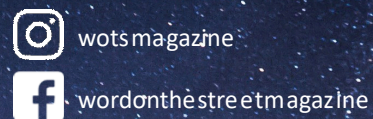
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WORD ON THE STREET Magazine

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?**

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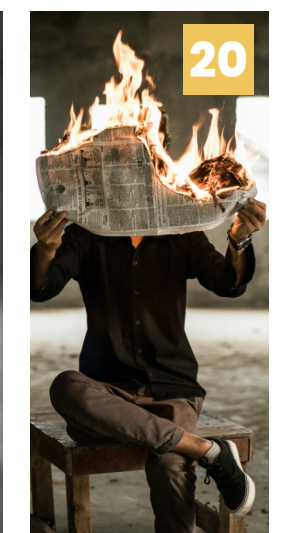
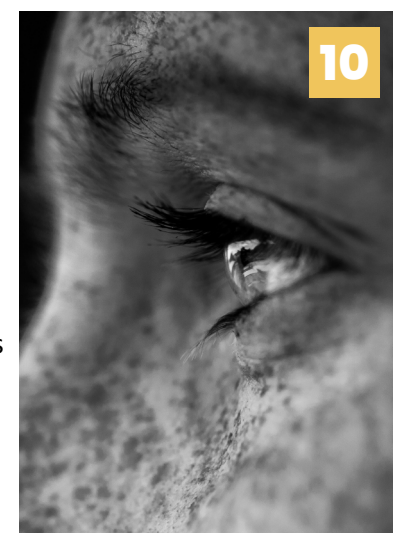


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Sticking around for the summer?



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WORD ON THE STREET

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Splitting IN TWO

CHOOSING BETWEEN GOD AND GOLD



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

What do you do when you start getting pulled in multiple directions in life? You choose a path. That's what happened to me when I was a sophomore at UW-Stout. I was a Hospitality Management major in my second year, and I thought I had it all figured out. I was following God, I had great friends, and I was vice president of one of the clubs for my major. Then I started to feel the pull in both directions. My major kept asking more from me: more site visits and after-class activities, more career fairs, more connections, more time. Simultaneously, God was standing there watching and waiting for me to give Him the time of day that He deserved. Following Jesus meant full involvement in Street Level and church. But I just kept pushing off the feeling of guilt that God didn't have my whole life. My thought process was that I could use my career for God, but I was going to do it my way.

I started splitting the difference, racing from hospitality events to church events one after another. I specifically remember literally running down the street in my heels after the Hospitality Mixer I had helped plan and run. By leaving the event early and arriving late to campus church, I was giving half of myself everywhere.

Then, a site visit came up in one of my classes. It was out of class hours and on a Monday, but I assumed I could make it work and still go to Street Level's Bible study that night because I always made it work. Then I found out that the site visit was going to be the exact same time. I emailed my professor asking if I could back out completely, or stay for the educational pieces and leave before dinner. That led to a series of emails back and forth as we tried to come up with some sort of plan. But the words that I can still see in my mind are: "You have to take a larger view on what this would demonstrate." This made me think long and hard. Who was I going to be for Christ? Was I going to conform to the expectations of a career, or was I going to follow God to the very end, no matter what other people thought of me?

In that moment, I probably made the wrong decision. I went to that site visit, and when I showed up late to the Street Level event, dressed in my business attire, out of breath, and having driven from a country club in the cities to be there, I was confronted with the reality that something had to change, and I wasn't going to like my options. When the next site visit rolled around, my professor announced that it would be on a Monday night again. I immediately emailed him to say I would not be attending and that I would complete any necessary makeup assignment. He agreed, and I started working on my book presentation, which was a bit of extra work I didn't have time for, but I knew it was worth it to be at Street Level.

I ran into my professor in the hallway the following day before class. He asked me, "How was the hospitality event on Monday night?" Apparently, there was another hospitality event on Monday night, and he had assumed I attended it, which was why I missed the site visit. Very awkwardly, I explained to him that I missed it for a Bible study. He looked at me for a solid 30

“I THOUGHT I COULD USE MY CAREER FOR GOD, BUT I WAS GOING TO DO IT MY WAY.”

seconds and said, "This has never happened before," and walked away into class. I followed behind him into the same class, and as I sat there listening to his lecture, I questioned everything.

It was only my second year in college, and I already didn't have time for God. Sure, I could miss out on extra class activities and pull back from extracurriculars for my major, but how long would that last? At that moment, I heard God clearly tell me I had to give it up. The career I had longed for and been told that I would become someone big in. The thing that I had a strong passion for, I was going to have to let go of it. But where would I go after? I had never not known what I was going to do with my life.

That's when I realized that God had been planning this change for me way before I had thought of it. Months earlier, my pastor's wife had randomly set me up with a marketing contract job with a co-worker of hers. I had zero experience, but she hired me, and I actually loved learning how to do marketing. After giving thanks to God for setting me up for the perfect transition, I scheduled a meeting with the Digital Marketing and Technologies advisor. I explained the situation to her and the professor I had been talking to because he happened to also be my hospitality advisor. That was a tough conversation, by the way.

But I did it. I switched to this major where I knew absolutely nothing except for the fact that God was going to give me the strength and comfort to get through it. Now that I am in my new major, I am absolutely loving being pushed outside my comfort zone and learning new things. I also just started pursuing a minor in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, so I can open my own marketing business, set my own hours, and be more flexible to do whatever God wants me to do. I won't make as much as I would've in the Hospitality industry, but I will be with God, and that is so worth it. Sometimes you have to give up your search for the gold to find the true treasure that is fully committing yourself to a life with God.

Alida



Help yourself! It's a common message we see and hear. Go to school and get the job that sets ME up for success. Take a day off for MY mental health. Get this great deal for ME. Stay with the people that make ME feel good. Wherever I go, I take care of myself and do what's best for ME. But what if that isn't *actually* for our best? Self-focus is everywhere and it takes shape in different ways all over the world. Many praise it and encourage it, but what if it's hurting us and others more than we realize?

Each of us is guilty of putting ourselves first and being selfish. We do this more often than we are willing to admit, or maybe we shamelessly flaunt it. When asked about our top priorities, a study found that our generation's priorities include (1) helping ourselves feel good and (2) freely expressing ourselves. When looking at our priorities we put self-care, self-love, self-expression, self-acceptance, and self-benefit first, even at the expense of others. *Seek first Your kingdom, and all You want will be Yours*—that's how we live. We really are selfish.

Our selfishness has become so normal that we're blind to it. We want to take care of ourselves and do what's best for us, "at whatever the cost." This is why we see more students at universities making up fake (or exaggerated) disabilities for personal benefit. Employees call in "sick" to work because they just don't want to go in. People don't show up to commitments because they'd rather prioritize their desires over the people that are counting on them. If we don't want to do it, we

won't. This is the result of self-promoting messages from social media, tv shows and movies we watch, examples from friends and family, teachings from culture, and the good feelings that self-focus momentarily brings us. "Do what is best for you" and "you're special." *Mmmm... That feels good.*

None of this should be a surprise, though. Sin first began with help-yourself, then it continued with save-yourself, and it was repeated over and over (and over). Sin is fueled by selfishness to do good *unto ourselves*. And it's not going to get any better in a world that doesn't want God. The Bible predicts that people will increasingly be lovers of self and pleasure (2 Tim 3:1-4). We'd rather save ourselves daily, instead of giving our lives up for the sake of anyone else.

If you're a Christian, none of this should describe you. This is too common, however, among many people who call themselves Christians. *Go to church when it fits my schedule. Show up to get a message that makes me feel good. Sit by the same people, the ones I like best. Serve here and there, then use the remaining days and time for me. Read the Bible and pray when it's convenient, feels good, or benefits me.* But how many of us are *actually* sacrificial as Jesus was, giving up our time, calendars, resources, and desires for God and others ON AND OFF the clock? We follow a savior who lived in radical selflessness. If we were supposed to live a life of self-focus, then Jesus never would've died. Then, we never would've been saved. But Jesus *did* live a God-and-others-

focused life. So, we are supposed to imitate this as Christians, and God has given the Holy Spirit to help us do this. This is where we find true joy.

When we live a life of self-focus, we miss out on the life that God made us to live. We lose out on the community He's given us, because we are too busy with our own worries and cares, instead of loving others. But when we focus on reflecting God's love back to Him and to others, we find real joy and wholeness. We find freedom from a cycle of pressure to be perfect and trying to please ourselves. We find rest in Someone (not you) who is perfect, doesn't mess up, and has the answers we need. We find a renewed strength, and our faith returns to its rightful place—in Jesus, not ourselves. Because all that we are looking for within our imperfect selves, is actually whole in Jesus. We finally learn to seek first *His* kingdom, and not our own (Mt. 6:33).

Jesus didn't tell us to put God first, others second, and ourselves last to make life miserable. Following His way may seem counterintuitive, but it's the real deal. Anything else we try outside of Jesus will make us emptier. He created us and knows that we can't live a satisfying life when we live for ourselves. He is our antidote to the disease of selfishness, bringing true healing, hope, joy, and purpose beyond understanding. He helps us love others well and provides us the true love and joy that we seek if we are willing to live like Him—putting "me" last.

“IF WE WERE SUPPOSED TO LIVE A LIFE OF SELF-FOCUS, THEN JESUS NEVER WOULD'VE DIED.”



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Research from Harvard Recommends Surprising Health Hack: Go to Church

AN ARTICLE BY THE GOSPEL COALITION (WRITTEN BY REBECCA MCLAUGHLIN)

THIS REPRINT HAS BEEN CONDENSED FROM THE ORIGINAL VERSION

Imagine someone hands you a box of pills. You open it, and 52 neatly laid out tablets meet your eyes. If you're young and healthy, you might think, I don't need these. You either throw them out or stash them in a box somewhere for future use. If you're older or suffer from chronic physical or mental illness, you may be more intrigued. What if this is just the medication you're looking for?

You read the printed information in the pillbox and it claims this medication—if taken at least weekly—could elongate your life expectancy by seven years, significantly increase your chance of happiness, and substantially reduce the likelihood you'll suffer from depression.

Thinking this is too good to be true, you check the side effects. They're listed as a greater sense of meaning, greater likelihood of volunteering, and more generosity toward those in need. Once again, you're skeptical. This must be a scam. You turn to the back of the box to see where this information comes from. There you find this medication has been extensively tested by none other than the Harvard School of Public Health.

Would you take the pills?

WHY DOES IT WORK?

In a 2016 article for USA Today, Harvard School of Public Health professor and director of the human flourishing program at

Harvard, Tyler VanderWeele and journalist John Siniff posed this question:

If one could conceive of a single elixir to improve the physical and mental health of millions of Americans—at no personal cost—what value would our society place on it?

Going a step further, if research quite conclusively showed that when consumed just once a week, this concoction would reduce mortality by 20% to 30% over a 15-year period, how urgently would we want to make it publicly available?¹

We may think VanderWeele has conjured a health-enhancing drug. But VanderWeele goes on: "The good news is that this miracle drug—religion, and more specifically regular church attendance—is already in reach of most Americans. In fact, there's a good chance it's just a short drive away."¹

The prescription: "Church. Take once a week (or more) for best effects." Study after study has shown that people who attend religious services once a week or more are happier, healthier, and longer-lived than those who don't. If any other practice had the same effects, it would be widely advertised in public health campaigns.

Many today see church as outdated, unnecessary, or even harmful. The thinking is that less religion means less bigotry and more happy, psychologically healthy, socially responsible citizens. But the results of what has been called "the great dechurching" in America

have been measurably bad. Less churchgoing has led to lower mental health and happiness, more loneliness, more drug abuse, more alcoholism, less volunteering, less giving to those in need, reduced life expectancy, and more suicides. Even the most skeptical experts acknowledge that declining church attendance in the United States and (over a longer time period) across the West has had devastating side effects.

Maybe you feel less skeptical and more wistful when you hear talk of church. Perhaps you weren't raised in church, but you've seen how meaningful it is to other people, and you feel a little robbed. Perhaps you used to go to church, but circumstances of life took precedence. Whatever the scenario, there are many reasons why, in the first quarter of the 21st century, 40 million Americans (around 12 percent of the population) have stopped attending church.

The results of mental and physical health benefits of weekly church attendance can't be explained away simply by social contact. As VanderWeele explains, "Social support is critical, yet this accounts for only about a quarter of the effect." The religious element seems to be vital. Parents who join the same people each week to cheer for their kids' sports team won't see the same level of benefit. We humans seem to thrive when we worship together.

MORE THAN JUST A PERSONAL BENEFIT

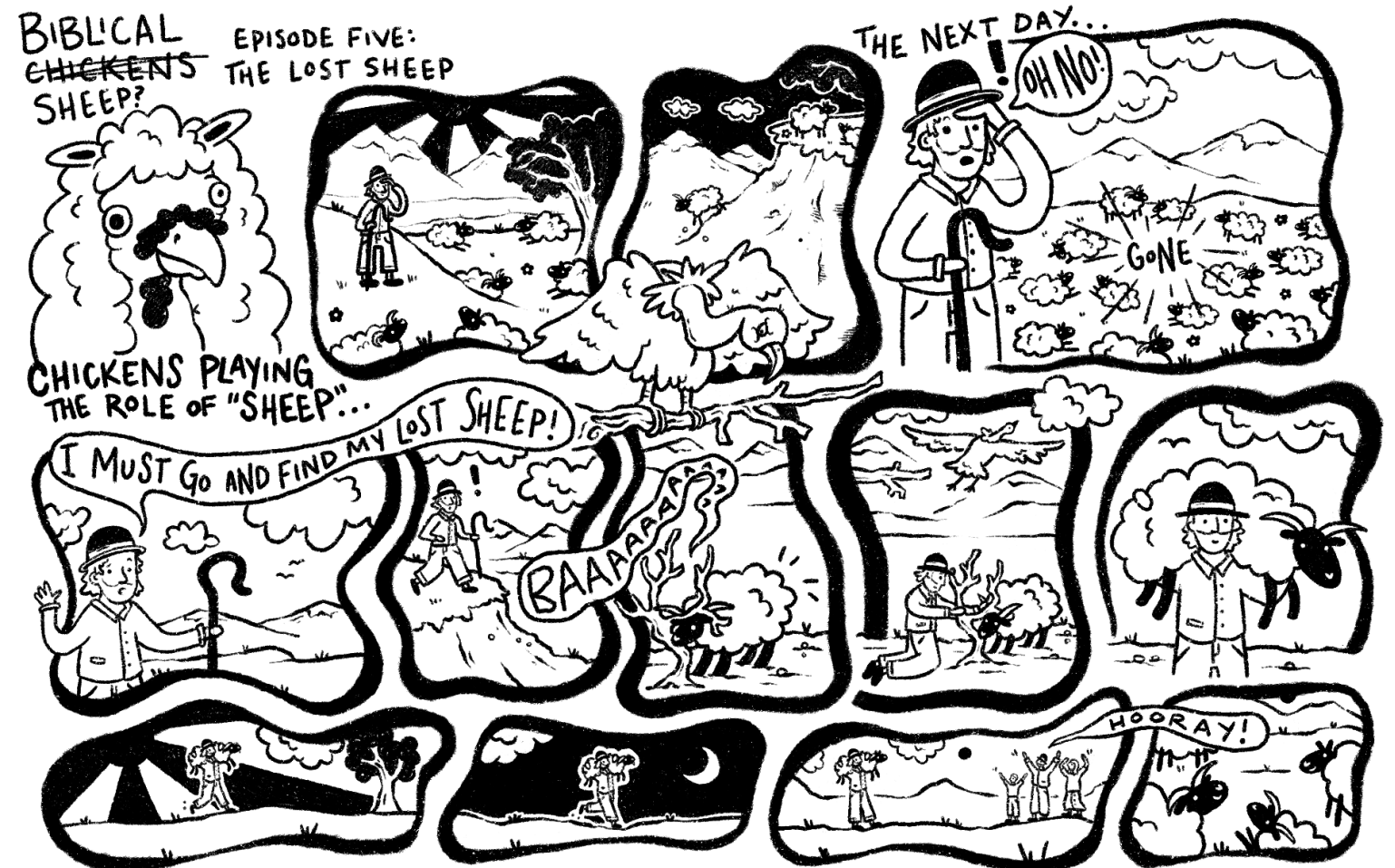
No matter your religious perspective, you likely view altruism, whether through donations or volunteering, as something that benefits society. But what is it that makes caring for the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable seem good to us?

This may seem like a strange question. Whether we realize it or not, it turns out that the seemingly self-evident truth that all human life is equally valuable—regardless of a person's age, sex, nationality, income level, or abilities—came to us from Christianity. If Christianity isn't true, we aren't left with a better secular foundation for our core belief that all humans are equal. We're left with that ethical rug pulled out from underneath our feet.

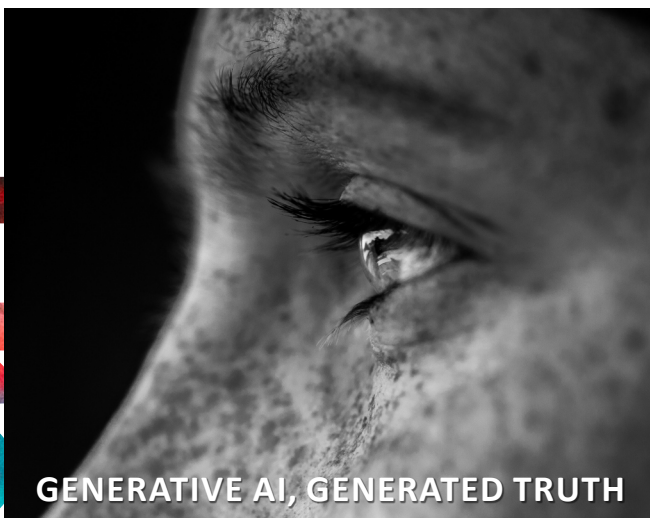
However healthy you and I may be by how much we work out, eat well, sleep, avoid smoking, get annual health checks, or even go to church—we'll all end up as corpses before long. Here is Christianity's claim: anyone who puts his or her trust in Jesus will be carried right through death to everlasting life with Him.

You may think this is simply not believable today. But VanderWeele is one of many world-class scholars who would challenge that assumption. Rather than dismissing Christianity, VanderWeele suggests that "any educated person should, at some point, have critically examined the claims for Christianity and should be able to explain why he or she does, or does not, believe them."

This isn't a command to believe anything. It's an invitation to consider whether a simple weekly practice might be more powerful than it seems. Look for a local church where you could find out more about who Jesus is and start attending regularly. If church is, as VanderWeele claims, something of a "miracle drug," why not start popping that pill now? It is worth a closer look.



I CAN'T BELIEVE MY EYES



GENERATIVE AI, GENERATED TRUTH

With how prevalent AI deepfakes have gotten in 2026, you'd be excused for wondering if anything you see in the mainstream media or on the internet is actually true. Back in 2022, thousands were fooled on Twitter (now known as X) when a French physicist and research director posted a picture of chorizo sausage claiming it was a high detail image of the star Proxima Centauri. A few days later, he admitted the post was a joke, but his point in his admission is clear. When we're expecting something specific, like new high detail pictures of a cosmic body from a newly launched space telescope, we should be aware of our cognitive biases.

The deeper meaning of the chorizo story, while itself not directly AI related, is poignant: our appetites are whetted for what we want to see. In this new world of AI image generation, we are now freer than ever to see only what we want to see. Even reputable mainstream media outlets, formerly bastions of trustworthy news, have used AI video generation shortly after the Maduro capture showing mass parades of Venezuelans celebrating his regime's collapse. It says a lot about the mainstream media's trustworthiness that they're being tricked into reporting on AI generated content as truth, or worse, that these same media companies have knowingly used AI generated content as propaganda to sway their consumers.

“WHEN YOU CAN NO LONGER BELIEVE YOUR EYES, EVERYTHING REQUIRES A MEASURE OF FAITH.”

It's time to address the elephant in the room: since no one is immune to propaganda, who or what are we supposed to trust anymore, and how are we supposed to see if something is actually true? Part of the answer comes from watching our biases. In fact, bias as a term has even been weaponized to mean something that's wrong with us. But we all have leanings, opinions, perspectives, and pattern recognition that simply allow us to survive. It's more when the patterns fit too well and align with our opinions and leanings too perfectly that we

should take care. As long as mainstream media continues to propagate AI generated content, we will continue to see takes specifically tailored to our cognitive biases more and more. The sooner we learn to put on our tinfoil hats and scrutinize everything we see, the better. Or is it?

On one hand, we now live in a media landscape where visual evidence no longer carries the authority it once did. AI can fabricate convincing images and videos that move faster than verification ever can. In moments of crisis, when reliable information is scarce, synthetic content fills the gap and is often relayed by institutions we once trusted to filter fact from fiction. If our eyes can be so easily deceived by a slice of sausage or an AI generated parade, where do we turn for objective truth? While the shifting sands of updates and deepfakes roil out of the internet and media, the Bible continues to be the solid ground of objective truth that it always has been.

It almost seems that God's purpose in all of this is for us to seek, ask, and question Him about the things we see in the world as they get more and more chaotic, rather than rely solely on our own understanding. When God prompts us in Isaiah 1:18, “Come let us reason together,” is it any wonder that He later bids us ask Him for wisdom if any should lack it in James 1:5? When the psalmist claims that the Word of God is a lamp to guide his feet, can the same truly be said about ChatGPT, BBC, CNN, YouTube, or X?

What's painfully clear in 2026 and beyond is that seeing is no longer believing. Sound and critical judgement is becoming more of a rarity as well as becoming more essential as a safeguard between what's reality and what's a convincing imitation. When you can no longer believe your eyes, suddenly it's clear that everything requires a measure of faith to believe – the core question is what takes less faith to believe? Faith is and has always been all we – all any of us – ever had. So, consider this when you don't know who or what to believe anymore: Jesus says in Revelation 3:20: “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.” In the age of the deepfake, the most “real” thing you can do is open that door. In a world where you can't trust your newsfeed, you can still trust the voice that has been calling out for millennia.

SATIRE



Gluten-Free Alternatives for a Bread-Free Lifestyle

SUBSTITUTING SALVATION WITH A SANDWICH

Are you looking for a way to leave your church but can't come up with a good excuse? Complain about the gluten. For years, many of us have tried to “toughen up” and choke down the Body of Christ like it's a spiritual obligation. So, here are nine gluten-free alternatives to the Bread of Life that will leave you physically healthy, emotionally fulfilled, and eternally condemned to Hell.

1. INDULGE IN A BIG CRYSTAL

If bread can't center you, maybe a fist-sized chunk of quartz can. Wear it around your neck like an Olympic champion. Hold it during the day. Whisper your anxieties into it. And remember: if something in your life is going wrong, it's not your fault; it's negative energy. Let the crystal absorb it.

2. GIVE YOURSELF A CRY BREAK

Schedule a daily cry in your car or shower and call it self-care. It releases tension, clears your sinuses, and conveniently distracts you from dealing with anything meaningful.

3. MANIFEST YOUR FULFILLMENT

Instead of receiving Jesus, close your eyes and manifest spiritual nourishment. Picture a loaf made entirely of light, air, and your own self-confidence. Consume it with your mind. You aren't getting what you want? Just think about it more.

4. KEEP TRACK OF THE STARS

Look up to the heavens, (not the one with the pearly gates), but the one with the constellations that definitely know more about your life than your Creator does. Let the stars decide your personality, your decisions, and your excuses. Mercury is always in retrograde when you need it to be.

5. BEGIN FEELING “SPIRITUAL”

Light a candle. Burn some sage. Say the word “energy” in a sentence where it doesn't belong. Feel the holiness of being undefined. Mix a little self-help, a little nature worship, and a little “I'm spiritual but not religious,” then pretend it leads to eternal life.

6. AFFIRM YOURSELF

You don't need God or gluten. Repeat affirmations like: “I am enough.” “My gut is fearfully and wonderfully made.” “I can do all things without crust.”

7. INDULGE IN A SWEET TREAT

If you can't take communion, take a cupcake. Preferably one made of almond flour, coconut sugar, and acts as if it tastes like the real thing. When life feels empty, simply eat something covered in sugar and pretend the rush is emotional healing. Nothing says “I'm fine” like replacing spiritual hunger with a cookie.

8. DOWNLOAD AN APP

Why rely on a plan laid out for you by your creator when you can rely on a subscription service to generate one?

9. PRACTICE SOME YOGA

When all else fails, lie on the floor with your legs up the wall. Sit very still, breathe very slowly, and pretend that inner peace is the same thing as actual transformation.

We Don't Want to Hear It

SILENCING JESUS WON'T
EASE OUR GUILT

Some people are surprised when we say our magazines get thrown in the trash by people who don't like what we write. If you're reading this, hey - thanks for not throwing this in the garbage! We aren't surprised when we see it anymore. We can look throughout history and see that since the time Jesus was here on earth, His message was not well-received, so we don't take it personally. Locally, nationally, and across the ocean, the world is telling Christians to shut up.

OUT WITH THE TRASH

College students at our local university tell Christians to shut up nearly every day. If we (writers for a college Christian magazine) want our publication to stay on the racks on our campus, we make rounds almost daily. Checking the trash bins around our magazine racks feels like winning the lottery (they could at least recycle them, jeeze...). We've sure learned our printer inside and out, but we'll keep them coming.

We're not the only Christian group this happens to. Colleges are notorious places for Christians to encounter free speech issues. In February 2026, Atlantic Cape Community College in New Jersey U.S.A. was found guilty of withholding funding from a Christian club while providing funding to the campus' Pride Club. When called out for it, the school officials told the Christian club it could not receive funding because it is Christian. Thankfully they revised their policy after they were called out by Alliance Defending Freedom, a nonprofit legal organization, but it never should have had to go that far.¹ Back in 1995, the U.S. Supreme Court found the University of Virginia guilty of refusing student activity funds to be used to print their Christian student magazine.² Ouch.

Not much has changed in the legal system in the last 30 years. U.S. courts tell Christians to shut up by hindering children from worshipping God even when they want to. In December 2024 after attending a church for three years, 12-year-old Ava decided she wanted to be baptized. Too bad her dad doesn't like Christianity. He claimed her church was "psychologically detrimental," and a U.S. district court sided with him. For over a year Ava's mom was banned from reading the Bible to her daughter or taking her to church despite Ava's wishes. The case was elevated to the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, where it stands currently.

Some people try to silence Christians altogether. Last August, students Fletcher Merkel (8) and Harper Moyski (10) were shot and killed during a church service to celebrate the new school year at Annunciation Catholic School in Minnesota, United States. Church shootings have happened at Richmond Road Baptist Church and CrossPointe Community Church... The list could go on, and these are in the last year in the United States alone. Physical violence against Christians only amplifies when you cross the border.

"NOBODY ELSE IN HISTORY IS AS CONTROVERSIAL OR CULTURALLY IMPACTFUL AS JESUS."

TAKE THEM DOWN

The world tells Christians to shut up by brutalizing and murdering them. The violent persecution of believers around the world is a heinous attempt to silence Jesus' message. Roughly 3,490 Christians were killed in Nigeria and across Africa in 2025 alone. Earlier this year, over 160 Christians were abducted by armed men in at least two Nigerian churches. The lack of news coverage on these cases until recently is startling. Just last month, March 2026, 12 were killed and several others were injured on Palm Sunday when gunmen attacked a neighborhood in north-central Nigeria, a largely Christian city.

In China, churches must be registered by government agencies, which recognize only state-sanctioned Protestantism or Catholicism. Any house or underground churches are often susceptible to raids or arrest. In India, local monitoring groups reported close to 900 cases of physical assaults, threats against worshippers, and disruptions to church services in 2025.³ Islamic groups have a long history of targeting Christians in Mindanao, Philippines.

Those who believe in Jesus are a reflection of Him to the world. Our lives show the world who He is, what He did, and what He's like. We believe the truth that we are sinful and without Him, we're totally lost. Only through Him can we be saved. Not everyone wants to hear that. Most people want to be told they're a good person and be recognized for their great work, effort, and accomplishments. When Christians threaten that comfort with the message that something is wrong, they attack us, often vehemently. After all, if they can't get to Jesus, all they can do is come after us.

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THIS WAY

Dragging Christ's name through the mud is nothing new. The Alexamenos Graffito in 200AD is said to be one of the first times Jesus' image was mocked. Long before then, Jesus' disciples discovered the cost of following Him. Nearly all of them died martyrs' deaths, except for John who just wouldn't die when they threw him into a basin of boiling oil.

It was no surprise to Paul and the apostles that the world didn't want to hear what they had to say. Jesus gave them fair warning the world would hate them. After all, it hated Him first. Ironically, the people who were the most religious in Jesus' day were the biggest offenders – They ridiculed Him, hated the miracles He performed, and despised when He healed and changed lives in radical ways. It was these offended ones that pushed for His trial, mocked Him the loudest, and celebrated His gruesome death. They tried, in the most horrifying way imaginable, to silence Him once and for all.

Something about the Christian message doesn't allow people to stay neutral. They crucified Christ and mocked His images in the

early centuries. Christian persecution continues around the world today, and even in small ways His followers are attempted to be silenced. Who is this Jesus that offends us so?

WHO IS THIS JESUS?

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6). The Bible calls Him the "rock of offense" (Isaiah 8:14, 1 Peter 2:7-8). When you actually believe this and say it out loud, people will get upset. Jesus offends because He claimed to be and is the Son of the One True God. Nobody else in history is as controversial or culturally impactful as Jesus. His claims demand an answer from all people of all time. Jesus is offensive because He challenges human pride (Matthew 23:12), demands complete self-denial (Matthew 16:24) and says apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:15). You should be offended... He says you're wicked to the core (Mark 7:20-23)!

This is not the message of our world in 2026. The world says humans are basically good, we can do anything we put our hearts toward, and we should get rid of anyone in our lives that tells us we can't or shouldn't. But all our pride, self-indulgence, and independence from Jesus isn't making our world (or our lives) better or happier. It's rotting it from the inside out.

At one point, all of us were against Him. We were all offended by Him. Follow Jesus? No, thank you. But everything changes when you realize all the ways you offend God. When you start to see your sin (your selfishness, your pride, all the ways you judge others, or the white lies you tell to save your own reputation...), you start to think about God. You wonder if He's real and if He sees you as guilty, and He does. By default, we're all against God. He is perfect and can't be near all our imperfection, but this is exactly why Jesus came to die and be resurrected.

When we admit our fault before Him and accept what Jesus did, the path to knowing God personally breaks wide open. Because Jesus took care of our offense before God, we can be close to Him. You start to understand how much God loves you, and how much He loved you even before you acknowledged Him (Romans 5:8). God starts revealing Himself to you in ways you can't describe. Christians see God working personally—supernaturally—in their lives, and we want other people to experience it, to experience Him.

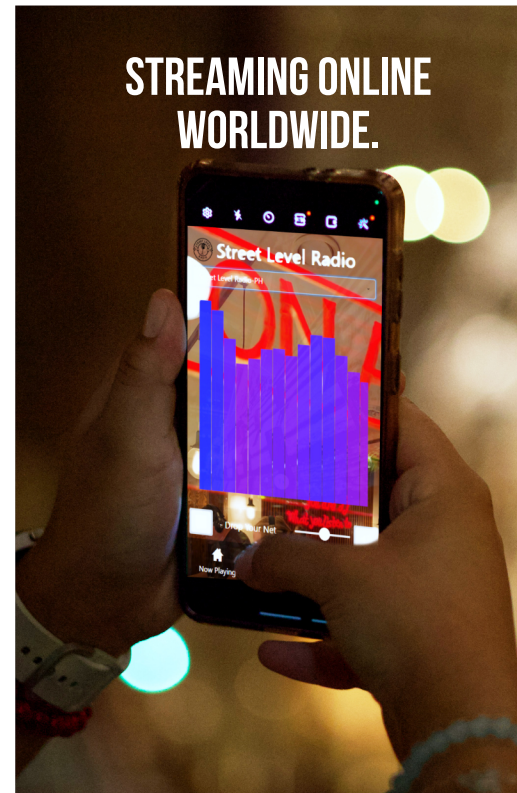
So, we're not going to shut up, even as the world gets louder. We're going to hang up posters. We're going to write because we believe that someone else out there wants to know Him too. We write because we want people to think about Jesus is an entirely new way – in a real way, which means in a controversial way, because there's no neutral ground when it comes to Him.



YOU ARE WHAT YOU LISTEN TO

A STREET LEVEL RADIO REVIEW

Whether we realize it or not, what we let into our ears has a way of shaping our hearts. Music and media don't just fill the silence between classes or during late-night drives, they reinforce our beliefs and subtly forge how we see the world. Street Level Radio (SLR) cuts through the noise with music that actually stands out, biblical teaching that doesn't put you to sleep, and news that highlights perspectives you may not hear elsewhere. Going strong for more than two decades, "you are what you listen to" isn't just its slogan. It's a warning and an invitation. SLR broadcasts from the Blind Munchies Coffeehouse in Menomonie, Wisconsin, and you can tune in locally at 101.7 FM or stream it worldwide at streetlevelradio.com.



THE MUSIC

When it comes to music, Street Level Radio breaks the mold by not shying away from different genres. With most stations, you might tune in and get a specific genre like Pop or Rock, but with SLR, the music is distinctly Christian across a broad range of genres, including Rap, Post-Bossa Nova, Garage, Punk, and Indie. They even play secular music. That's their key: that the music slaps. The curators and DJs spend a lot of time making sure the music is the kind that you'd want to hear when you tune in. They understand that holiness doesn't have to sound like elevator music.



“YOU ARE WHAT YOU LISTEN TO’ ISN’T JUST A SLOGAN. IT’S A WARNING AND AN INVITATION.”

THE TEACHING

As a Christian radio station, it'd be remiss if it lacked biblical teaching. You are what you listen to, right? The station features teaching from local pastors alongside clips from recent sermons and well-known voices. The teachings aren't just feel-good sound bites; they're asking if you're comfortable; they're asking if you're awake. It's the kind of content that catches your attention mid-study because it stands apart from overly sweet Christian stations that tend to wrap the Good News in bubble wrap.

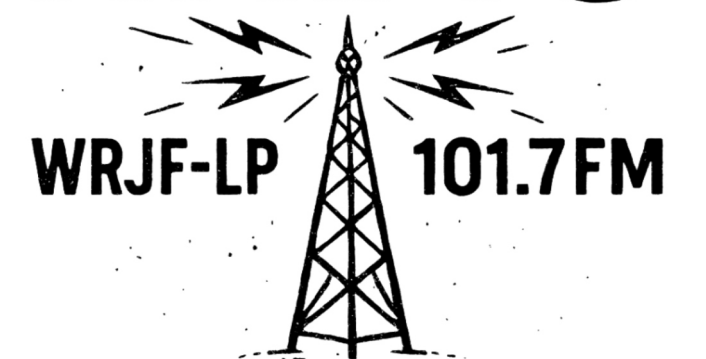
FAITHFULLY RELEVANT NEWS

SLR also approaches the news differently. They look for topics that a lot of media ignores. By sharing news from a Christian lens, the goal is that instead of just hearing yet another tough bit of news, we get connected to the bigger picture. God is working through these events; SLR just shines a light on them. The goal is not to just inform the listener, but to get them thinking more critically about the world in which we live.

IT'S MORE THAN MUSIC

Good music is undeniably at the core of SLR. But when you're listening, it eventually hits you: this thing is bigger than music, bigger than radio. It's not here to help you zone out, it's here to sharpen you. The next time you're half-awake and caffeinated, cramming for exams and questioning your life decisions, you should tune in to tune out the noise. (You should definitely also tune in when life is not so stressful.) There are a lot of stations out there if you just want to listen mindlessly. Street Level Radio wants you to engage and listen like it matters. They said it best in one of their former slogans: "It's More Than Music." And if it's true that you really are what you listen to, then SLR might just be the last station you'll ever need.

STREET LEVEL RADIO



MENOMONIE, WI
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GOOD music · GOOD teaching · GOOD news

Bible Receives Modern Update
With 'Morally Gray Edition'

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION · BabylonBee.com

CLEVELAND, OH — The Bible finally received a much-needed modern update called the Morally Gray Edition, which removes all outdated black-and-white morality that was found in prior editions.

The problem of Bibles being stuck in the past is itself now a thing of the past, as Pilgrim Press, a publishing arm for the progressive United Church of Christ, unveiled a new Bible translation that has been updated with modern cultural norms and morality in mind. Progressive and non-traditional theologians came together to make up the new Morally Gray Edition, which removes all the outdated absolute moral standards that conflict with today's society.

"Modern people don't have time to worry about whether or not God is happy with their lifestyle choices," said Pastor Karen Pressley. "They need a Bible that is suited for them, where morality is colored in beautiful shades of rolling and unfolding, radiant and ambiguous, gray. A morality rainbow, if you will."

"The Bible is really a choose-your-own-adventure book now, which is much better than God telling you what path is good and what path is bad, you know?"

When asked for their reason for the new Morally Gray Edition of the Bible, the theologians behind the project said that traditional Bibles were from a time when society didn't even know that men could get pregnant or that women could be pastors.

"We just know so much more about humans now, and how the humans that came before us were totally stupid compared to us moderns."

All the judgmental language about God's wrath and absolute moral laws regarding homosexuality, abortion, and the distinctions between men and women have now been removed, making a much smaller book. Instead, you'll open up the Morally Gray Edition and find lots of QR codes that point you to YouTube videos from progressive pastors telling you that everything is OK.

At publishing time, Pilgrim Press had announced the need for an even more modern revised version of the Morally Gray Edition, which will be further updated to remove all the outdated morality of the previous translation team.



EXPLORE WISCONSIN MAKE NEW FRIENDS PRACTICE ENGLISH

IN ASSOCIATION WITH STREET LEVEL MINISTRIES
AN OFFICIAL UW-STOUT STUDENT ORG

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What we
need now is
a **REAL** king!

BELIEVERS *City* CHURCH

Biblical - Missional - Radical
Menomonee WI

Wait, How Do I Make Friends?

FIVE STEPS TO SURVIVE
SOCIAL INTERACTION

So, you just went to an event and didn't have anyone to talk with? Everyone hates that feeling. A little social awkwardness doesn't make you a weirdo. You naturally long for human interaction but just aren't quite sure how to get yourself out there. You aren't alone. It's common nowadays for people to pay therapists to listen to them and spend time with them, which used to just naturally come from having good friends. But many of those people are just like you—wanting friends but not knowing how to get there. Here's your simple guide on how to be less lonely:

STEP 1: Walk up to someone. Yep, you have to go where the people are (aka not standing awkwardly in the corner looking at the weather app). It'll take some bravery, but skip this step, and you're waiting for other people to come to you, which may only happen if you show up new to a church for the first time. Make a move! Try going to school clubs or local Bible study groups. These have enough people for meaningful connections without being overwhelming. (P.S. Making the first move is a great way to make yourself more approachable and puts others at ease, too.)

STEP 2: Introduce yourself. "Hi, my name is Alan." But what do you say after that? Low-hanging fruit includes: your major, your hometown, the classes you're taking this semester, etc. Finding common interests can propel simple small talk into deeper conversations.

STEP 3: Ask them questions. Don't just answer the questions they ask you. Conversations go two ways, y'all! But be warned: asking questions implies you're actually interested in getting to know them too. Be careful not to make this feel like an interrogation. Be flowy, show emotion, and build off their responses to show genuine interest!

STEP 4: Do things together. Emphasize quality time. (Bonus points if you prioritize free time with them outside of regularly scheduled programming, like class or Bible study.) Also, remember to spend lots of time with your new friends. Not only is quality time important, but also the frequency of spending time is too. The more often you hang out with people, the more you get to know and appreciate them on a deeper level.

STEP 5: Stick with each other through hardships. Proverbs 17:17 states: "A friend loves at all times, but a brother is born for a time of adversity." Some of your best memories can be made when going through difficulties with new friends. Something about sharing struggles and laughing off tough times with people will grow you so much closer. We must remember too, friendship requires risk and sacrifice. With this risk can come hurt as well. There will be hard and tough lessons. But sometimes these tough lessons will bring amazing changes and help you grow.

Loneliness is a real thing, but you shouldn't just bask in these feelings and not do anything about them. God calls for His followers to be in unity with each other, as Ecclesiastes 4:12 mentions. "A threefold cord is not easily broken." The church is a place of true community, and you're welcome to be a part of it. Don't just be "around." Get involved. Learn about the people next to you and let them know you. Get the most out of your attendance times. Let down those walls and don't be afraid of a little awkwardness. You must be a friend to have friends. So don't be afraid to make that first approach and find your inner extrovert.

The False Hope of “REBRAND YOURSELF!” Identity Shifts

AN ORIGINAL ARTICLE BY THE GOSPEL COALITION
(WRITTEN BY BRETT MCCrackEN)



A growing subgenre of YouTube influencers and videos promises quick, easy hacks for reinventing yourself and becoming a “new you.” Here are some examples:

- Identity Shifting: Your New Way to Reinvent Yourself (in 3–6 months)
- How to Become UNRECOGNIZABLE In 90 Days: Rebrand Your Identity, Build Micro Habits & Glow Up Fast

Hundreds of videos like these share the same characteristics. They’re from attractive life coaches or wellness gurus touting step-by-step methods for identity reinvention (e.g., “seven simple steps to rebrand your life” or “five steps to make your identity shift”). The central concept in each is that behavior follows from identity. When your mindset shifts—when you start to visualize yourself differently—your actions and habits naturally align with that new identity. As one guru states in her video, “Someone who identifies as an athlete doesn’t have to force themselves to exercise; it’s just part of who they are.”

No wonder these videos have a huge viewership. The method sounds like magic.

IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE INTERNET AGE

In many ways, these videos are just the latest expressions of the New Thought philosophies that have been around since the 19th century (helpfully unpacked by Melissa Dougherty in her new book, *Happy Lies*). They’re downstream from Norman Vincent Peale’s *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret*, various “name it and claim it” prosperity gospel heresies, and other expressions of the “think your desired reality into being” philosophy.

But the identity-shift method has gained traction in recent years because of how the concept of identity has been reshaped by the internet. And because Christians are very much shaped by these

digital dynamics too, we can be just as tempted toward the identity-shifting mindset. Consider these two ways our understanding of “self” has changed.

1. FAST, FLUID, FRAGMENTED SELVES

In the internet age, we receive the world in hyperspeed, disconnected fragments of ephemera, quickly forgotten, hardly registered. Memes come and go in a week. Fashion is fast and disposable. Synthesis, stability, and continuity are anathema. Fluidity and disruption are the governing laws.

Naturally, we’ve started to fit identity formation into this grid. You can reinvent yourself as often as you change your profile pic. What you were yesterday matters little; the internet is about the now. Every day online is a new pseudoevent, a new trending topic, a new spectacle. If it’s not new, it’s rarely noticed. We think our identities can, and must, play by these rules.

2. PERFORMATIVE, BRANDED SELVES

Another change in the internet age is how central performance has become, as well as the rising importance of “good branding” in an increasingly competitive (and visual) attention economy. Social media has made every individual an actor with an audience.

Meanwhile, the democratized nature of social media makes fame feel within reach. “Influencers” have shown that with a good enough aesthetic and savvy marketing, anyone can become famous.

EXTERNAL REALITY DOES SHAPE YOUR IDENTITY. THAT’S A GOOD THING.

Christians are not immune to the performative pressures of identity in the digital age. We should know we are not our own (1 Cor. 6:19) and that God determines our identity and destiny more than we do. We should have a robust theology of suffering that enables us to see God’s kindness in limitations. Still, many of us

“WHO WE ARE IS NEVER WHOLLY WITHIN OUR GRASP TO DETERMINE FOR OURSELVES. EVERY PERSON’S IDENTITY IS INESCAPABLY FORMED BY HIS OR HER CONNECTIONS TO OTHERS.”

fall prey to the attractive self-help messages that reality is bendable to your will and that you can manifest your dreams.

In one video, influencer Jillz Guerin argues that your identity (which she tellingly defines as your “self concept”) shapes your reality. “You will never go farther than the limits of the person you see yourself as,” she argues. But what about limits that are outside your own thoughts? Reality is far bigger and more imposing than simply the ideas, preferences, and dreams in our brains.

Consider our physical bodies. We can’t control whether we have a male or female body, or how tall or short we are. So if we’re a man who wants to “rebrand” as a female, or a short person who wants to “reinvent” himself as a tall guy, is it possible to just think of ourselves as the physically altered person, to make it happen?

The body God gives comes with limitations (much to the chagrin of contemporary gender ideologues). As I’ve argued before, transgenderism’s rise in plausibility is directly related to the internet’s normalization of disembodied, avatar identity. Online, I can be a “self” unconstrained by pesky things like bodies and physical places. So we start to believe that the virtual “self” is more real than the actual, embodied self.

Yet reality is bigger than your brain. Identity isn’t just something you manifest in a vacuum, subject to your whims and wishes. Your identity is made, over time, in a web of circumstances and nouns (people, places, things) mostly out of your control—largely given, not chosen.

This is good news. The (partial) uncontrollability of my identity—like the broader uncontrollability of the world—is a profound grace.

FORMED BY OTHERS

A common theme in today’s “identity shift” videos—and self-help, therapy culture more broadly—is that you should only surround yourself with people who affirm your desired identity and avoid people who get in the way of it. Yet who we are is never wholly within our grasp to determine for ourselves. Every person’s identity is inescapably formed by his or her connections to others. We’re more textured and interesting people because of the family and faith tradition we’re born into, the institutions we’ve developed within, our cultural and geographical place in the world, our socioeconomic status, the hardships we’ve faced, the commitments we’ve made. I’m so thankful my parents, my spouse, my church family, and so many others help me understand who I am—and who I should become.

We should rejoice that identity isn’t something we conjure up in isolation. And when other people in our lives push back or challenge our choices or self-conceptions, we shouldn’t immediately see this as “toxic,” draining, or an excuse to cut them off. Sometimes it’s precisely these pushback moments that God can use to shape us most profoundly.

Amid the crushing expectations of performative identity and attention-grabbing expressive individualism, it’s a huge burden lifted to embrace communal wisdom and influence over our identity. In a church community, this is especially powerful. God brings us together in the church not to just affirm each other as we are and as we choose to be but rather to spur one another toward becoming more and more like Jesus.

KERNEL OF TRUTH BUT BETTER HOPE

There are kernels of truth in some of these “rebrand yourself” videos. The idea that change happens from the inside out isn’t far from Christian conceptions of sanctification—it starts with the Holy Spirit inside us, giving us a new-creation identity that catalyzes new-creation behavior. When Kim Foster says in one video, “If you want to change the fruit that the tree produces, you have to address the root,” it sounds almost like something a Christian preacher might say.

But there’s a crucial difference. In secular self-help theories like this, you have to do the work to “address the root.” You have to work hard to shift your mindset. It’s on you. But in Christianity, Jesus addresses the root. He transforms us. Our new identity is received, not achieved. We still have to embrace that new identity and pursue actions that flow from and align with that identity (not unlike how some of these “seven-step” programs suggest), but we aren’t the originators of the identity. God is.

In the same way that the body God gives is a gift we don’t create but accept, the identity God gives—through the gospel—is one we only have to accept.

What a relief! What a better hope.



The World is on Fire

FIGHTING BACK AGAINST THE RISING TREND OF NEGATIVE NEWS AND VIEWS

War. Crime. Scandal. Corruption. These aren't just the occasional interruption in our news cycle; they are the news cycle. A college student can wake up, check their phone, and within thirty seconds be hit with a school shooting update, a celebrity meltdown, a political scandal, and a new true-crime documentary about someone's worst nightmare. We scroll for entertainment and instead get tragedy. Yet strangely, we keep coming back. We're drawn to the negativity; comforted by stories that confirm our pessimism or make our own lives feel less chaotic by comparison.

This trending desire has consequences. Studies show that since 2000, negative headlines have increased by more than 300%, while headlines expressing anger and fear have doubled.¹ Editors know pessimism sells, so the cycle persists: the more negativity we click on, the more we get. And it's working: in 2025, only 59% of Americans believed their lives would be better in five years, the lowest since Gallup began asking nearly 20 years ago.² The Americans aren't even the most pessimistic; a survey conducted by Trellis found that most European countries held an even gloomier outlook on their lives.³

This negativity surrounding us makes it easy to absorb this gloom. When it seems like reality itself is working against us, it's easy to assume that discouragement is the correct response. But we aren't called to fall into the current of the world. We must question our instinct to see our own life through the world's lens of pessimism. The gap between what we expect from life and what God actually promises can pull us toward despair, but it doesn't have to. Christians can acknowledge hardship without letting it dictate our hope.

Scripture calls us to adopt this perspective. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus urges us not to be consumed by worry. We are limited; we cannot carry the burden of the world's chaos. God doesn't ask us to panic. He asks us to trust. And more than that, He calls us to stand out. While the world spirals into pessimism, Christians are meant to be marked by steadiness, clarity, and hope, not to get sucked into the whirlpool.

This world is not our permanent home. It's fallen, and pretending otherwise only deepens our disappointment. Yet that doesn't give us an excuse to be swallowed by despair. Our responsibility is twofold: to stay aware of what's happening and to refuse to let negativity define us. We can stay informed without being overwhelmed, be realistic without losing hope, and stay engaged without sinking into gloom.

Jesus doesn't tell us to avoid the darkness. He tells us to be the light within it (Matthew 5:14-16). That means resisting the pull toward outrage culture, refusing to let fear-based media shape our identity, and choosing to speak with hope when everyone else is speaking with despair. It means being the person who doesn't share the scandalous headline, who doesn't revel in the latest tragedy, who doesn't let cynicism become a personality.

In a culture addicted to bad news, Christian maturity will stand out. By refusing to let fear dictate our tone or harden our hope, the world's negativity will lose a little of its flame.



Until Jesus Called My Name

A JOURNEY FROM A SLUM TO DISCIPLINING HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS

I was born into a Hindu family and grew up worshiping idols. My childhood was marked by poverty and pain. When I was in the 6th standard, my father passed away, leaving my mother alone to raise five children. She worked tirelessly as a helper to feed us, but life was full of hardship. I longed for a father's love but found none, and gradually my heart became empty.

As a young boy, I tried to find purpose by serving idols at the temple every Tuesday. I believed that by doing so, the gods would bless me. But when I failed in the 8th standard despite my devotion, I was shattered. I thought, "If God is real, why does He not help me?" I felt completely abandoned. In despair, I even thought of ending my life, but fear stopped me. That day, I made a firm decision that there was no God.

Days turned into months. I grew up without any aim or direction. I stopped studying and began spending time with bad company, stealing, and abusing. My mother tried to correct me, but I rejected every good thing she said. Deep inside, I was broken, hopeless, and angry at life.

How I Met Jesus: When I was living without purpose, my brother invited me to join a Gospel Center he had joined a couple of months ago. I went reluctantly, just to please him. There I met a teacher who welcomed me with kindness. On the first day, he taught me a few English words, encouraged me, and gave me samosa and jalebi. His care touched me, and for those simple snacks, I kept coming regularly!

As I continued attending the Gospel Center, my teacher—who was also a friend of my elder brother—began teaching me a one-to-one Bible study. The topic was Matthew 7:7: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

My teacher told me, "Jesus is the Lord, and when you sincerely ask in His name for what you truly need, He will answer your prayers." I replied with tears, "My father passed away when I was very young. I have suffered along with my family. We live in a one-room house in the slum—five siblings and my mother. We struggle even for food. God never gives me anything. I don't think there is any God." Gently, my teacher said, "Just pray for what you actually need—in Jesus' name." So I decided to pray for two things:

1. That I pass 8th grade, because I had already failed twice and this was my last chance before the school expelled me.
2. That I learn to play the guitar.

From that day, my teacher and I prayed together every day. He didn't just pray—he also spent his days and nights teaching me English and other subjects along with my regular Bible study. He even arranged another teacher to teach me the guitar. To my surprise, I began to do well in my studies, and my guitar skills improved. After two long years, I finally passed 8th grade and began playing guitar. When I saw these results and the change in my life, I broke down in tears. I realized that Jesus had heard my prayers. I repented for all my sins—my stealing, abusing, immoral life, and not believing in Jesus—and asked Jesus to forgive me. I prayed, "Lord Jesus, please accept me as Your son and take care of

¹bigthink.com/the-present/negative-media-headlines-skyrocketed/
²apnews.com/article/poll-gallup-optimism-future-republicans-democrats-4dc287cddbbaefb077895746613fea4e4
³trellis.net/article/mapping-global-optimism-pessimism-2026/

“DEEP INSIDE, I WAS BROKEN, HOPELESS, AND ANGRY AT LIFE.”

me.” I accepted Him as my one and only God and Savior. I believed that Jesus died on the cross for my sins because He loves me. And from that moment, there has been no turning back.

After accepting Jesus, my life began to change completely. I continued to study the Bible and went to the Gospel Center every day. I spent most of my time there—studying, eating, sleeping, attending morning prayers, and then going home only to get ready for school. God helped me grow both in faith and in my studies. By God’s grace, I passed my 12th grade with a good percentage and was admitted to the University of Delhi—a dream for many students in India. During my bachelor’s degree, I served full-time as a leader in my Gospel Center. I swept the floors, cleaned the halls, taught the Bible, helped others to study, taught the guitar, and led praise and worship. God used me in every area of ministry and shaped my heart as His servant. After completing my bachelor’s degree, I started a new Gospel Center. Later, He blessed me with a wonderful job at the Embassy. Through this, God provided stable work and a good salary so that I could take care of my family and also sustain the Gospel Center financially. I have seen that when we trust and obey, God makes the impossible possible. Today, I serve at a Gospel Center, where around 100 students gather regularly. I deliver Sunday messages, teach music, guide students in their academics, and lead group Bible studies. The same God who rescued me from darkness is now using me to bring His light to others. Not only this, after receiving a stable job, I have now moved out of the slum and am living a dignified life. My prayer is that God may use my life for His glory.

I believe music is a powerful tool to draw youth closer to Christ, so I want to use my gifts to strengthen our ministry in praise and worship. I also believe that education removes poverty and restores dignity. My vision is to educate and disciple young people across India so they may know Jesus personally and become leaders for His Kingdom.

I pray to see a generation transformed by His Word—disciples who become lights in their families and communities. Through these Gospel Centers, I believe many more “Rahuls” will find purpose, forgiveness, and new life in Jesus.

-Rahul

BELIEVERS COMMUNITY NEWS



US colleges see spike in students with disabilities, including elite schools

The number of college students reporting disabilities rose more than 50% over the last decade across a wide swath of schools, including at some of the most selective universities in the United States, according to a *New York Times* analysis of government data.

While some colleges and students have embraced the trend, saying it shows schools are opening their doors to students who might previously have been shut out, it has raised worries that some could be gaming the system.

Among the top 100 schools that saw the biggest increases in students with disabilities are several in the group known as “Ivy Plus,” some of the most difficult schools in the nation for a student to get into, including Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

What is causing the increase is not entirely clear, but experts named a number of factors, including a rise in ADHD and autism diagnosis as well as an uptick in diagnoses of severe anxiety, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Students and their families are also getting better at understanding the law and pursuing accommodations, many starting when students are in grade school. Additionally, stigma around mental illness, which might have discouraged a student in the past from registering a disability, has fallen.

The rising numbers have concerned some. Graham Hillard, who had written on the issue for the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal, a conservative policy group, said the current “incentive structure” to secure accommodations has led to more diagnosis. “Is this fair?” he said. “Obviously not. But it will presumably sort itself out when kids who’ve never worked under a deadline or concentrated in a busy room attempt to join or stay in the workforce.”

Cole Cochrane, a Harvard University junior, said he wouldn’t be surprised if the intense pressure on campus meant some people look to help themselves by seeking accommodations. If there is anyone gaming the system, “it’s a product of stress and desperation,” he said.

But adding more restrictions on accommodations could hurt people who really need them, he said. A possible alternative: “Realize it’s okay to have less than a 4.0 at one of the world’s top universities.”

theistar.com.my/lifestyle/living/2026/03/17/us-colleges-see-spike-in-students-with-disabilities-including-elite-schools



CURATED NEWS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES



Indian Court Rules Christians Can Hold Home Prayer Meetings

A pastor in a remote village in India’s largest state of Uttar Pradesh remembers the Sunday in March 2023 when persecution became real to him. He was leading a group of 13 people in worship as they sat cross-legged on a mat covering the cement floor in his home. In time with the music, he shook a tambourine while parishioners clapped loudly.

Suddenly, about 20 men dressed in saffron entered the small room shouting, “Jai Shree Ram! (Hail the Lord Ram).” They dragged the pastor by his collar out the door as they beat him. Police quietly waited outside as the mob chased out the worshipers. Soon after, authorities booked the pastor under Uttar Pradesh’s anticonversion law, claiming he was forcibly converting Hindus.

After nearly three years and multiple court hearings, he secured bail under stringent conditions. Charges against him are still pending, even as a Christian relief organization aids him in his legal battle. He is currently stuck in a limbo, neither cleared of the case nor convicted of any wrongdoing. Since he is on bail and charges against him are still being heard, he is cautious about divulging specific information.

Until that fateful morning, violence seemed distant to a pastor in a remote village in India. “I never imagined they would find us,” he said. “We were just worshiping quietly in a remote village in our own home.”

Last month, the Allahabad high court, which has jurisdiction over Uttar Pradesh, ruled in a separate case that prayer meetings held on private property do not require any prior permission. The ruling has encouraged the pastor as well as other Christians arrested for house church gatherings. The high court invoked Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, affirming that freedom of religion is a fundamental right and religious prayer meetings within one’s own private premises are not unlawful.

This is such a significant ruling because the number of violent incidents against Christians in Uttar Pradesh has ranged from 100 to 300 in the past five years, according to the United Christian Forum. Since 2014,

[Christianitytoday.com/2026/03/india-christian-anticonversion-prayer-meeting-courts/](https://christianitytoday.com/2026/03/india-christian-anticonversion-prayer-meeting-courts/)

Uttar Pradesh has recorded a total of 1,317 incidents, much higher than any other state in India.

“I see Christians celebrating the high court verdict, but the elephant in the room is unconstitutional anti-conversion laws,” said a Christian lawyer who practices in the Allahabad high court. The National Council of Churches filed a petition alleging that anti-conversion laws violated Christians’ fundamental rights. Called the “Freedom of Religion Act” in most states, the anti-conversion laws criminalize any form of religious conversion away from Hinduism.

These laws mandate that individuals who want to change their faith must submit a preconversion declaration to local authorities 60 days prior. Police then have to look into the reason and circumstances leading up to the conversion. Post conversion, the individuals must submit a secondary declaration to formalize their new faith with the state authorities.

The pastor in this story remains anonymous so that he won’t face more repercussions. He is currently out on bail facing charges under Uttar Pradesh’s anti-conversion laws.



*an iced latte w/
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