Welcoming but not Affirming: Getting to the Slippery Truth

As a survivor of the gay conversion movement, it feels amazing to know that our experiences are being heard nationally and that there is finally research that confirms the prevalence and damage of the gay conversion movement in Australia... The messaging of the movement that told me that I was “broken” has caused long-term damage to me” – Chris Csabs, survivor.

This article is written by Nathan Despott.

As a gay person raised in a Catholic home, but who spent his late teens and 20s in Melbourne’s evangelical community, the image of a large church with arms open to welcome LGBTIQA+ people is familiar but foreboding. Most of my experience in the ex-gay or “conversion” movement was through long-term involvement in loving and warm local Christian communities that, rather than condemn my sexuality, lovingly intimated that I was “broken”. My ten-year quest for healing was all-consuming and overwhelming.

Since leaving the movement in 2010, it has been morbidly fascinating to watch most formal ex-gay/ex-trans/conversion programs shut their doors, often replaced by celibacy movements and a new wave of churches that call themselves “welcoming but not affirming”.

“Welcoming”, a paradoxical halfway between “condemning” and “affirming”, is the point whereby a church shifts from viewing LGBTIQA+ people as utterly intolerable, instead viewing them as “broken” and in need of gracious support. LGBTIQA+ members often experience close fellowship here, but cannot usually hold positions of leadership or, in some cases, work with young people and children. Researcher Mark Jennings found that most of the Pentecostal/charismatic religious leaders he spoke to held a “welcoming” position.

The recent Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice report (Human Rights Law Centre/La Trobe University, Melbourne) indicates that “while the ‘welcoming but not affirming’ posture appears less hostile than overt opposition to LGBT rights, when its ‘not affirming’ aspects are withheld or disguised... it can be deeply harmful.”
“Welcoming” churches and the conversion movement share a view of sexual orientation and gender as being distinct from their expression (or “practice”). However, this distinction is relatively recent. It is certainly anachronistic to read scripture in this light. The word “homosexual” did not appear in bible translations until the mid-20th century. Modern “homosexuality” was demarcated by early psychoanalysts in late 19th century Europe, viewed as simultaneously intriguing and problematic for roughly a hundred years, then removed from the DSM in 1973.

The Preventing Harm report traces the development of the conversion movement and its ideology of “brokenness” from this point to the present day, where it has become virtually the mainstream lens through which evangelical communities – whether focused on orientation change or celibacy – engage LGBTIQA+ people.

The SOCE Survivor Statement, released by an Australian coalition of affirming organisations in September, outlined the core pseudo-scientific tenets of the ex-gay/ex-trans/conversion movement. While prime minister Scott Morrison responded by declaring that “conversion therapy is not an issue for me”, so central to the faith of a small number of “purity” groups (read: celibacy for queer people) was the “brokenness” ideology that they saw the Statement as an attack on their religious freedom.

Preventing Harm and the SOCE Survivor Statement present the conversion movement not merely as a type of therapy but as a broad movement that invests significant resources and energy in transmitting an ideology of “brokenness” through myriad channels and activities. Both reports recommend legislative interventions, tighter educational controls, regulatory measures for practice, improved media and broadcast standards, and support for survivors.

“Affirming” is distinct from welcoming. Responding to pastors who considered their churches to be “affirming” following a shift from condemnation to support, survivor support and advocacy group Brave Network Melbourne developed a model statement of affirmation. Could pastors and their leadership teams (and their online communications) readily state “We believe LGBTIQA+ people are a loved and essential part of God’s intended human diversity”? Many could not.

Do not misunderstand me. For some of these churches, their forward movement is honourable. Theologically and personally, their journey has been significant – particularly if their welcoming stance has led to rejection from conservative brethren. However, for LGBTIQA+ people of faith, the safety line lies between “welcoming” and “affirming”.

While welcoming churches may have opened their arms to LGBTIQA+ people or even actively shunned the conversion movement in favour of celibacy, only affirming churches have completely rejected the “brokenness” ideology and made the theological and pastoral shift to full equality – and therefore safety – for LGBTIQA+ people.

Cherished LGBTIQA+ allies such as leading evangelical ethicist Dr David Gushee, evangelical sociologist Dr Tony Campolo, mega-church leader Nicole Conner, and out-and-proud Christian pin-up Vicky Beeching have all paid a high price for their affirming stance.

Brave Network and similar organisations have openly called on churches to explicitly declare their theological stance regarding LGBTIQA+ people rather than engaging in ambiguities such as “welcoming but not affirming”, which is widely seen as code for “you’re broken but we still love you”.

This would prevent people of faith spending years ensconced in communities that slowly erode their mental health. This is because, as LGBT Christian blogger Kevin Garcia states, “welcoming but not affirming is not welcoming at all”.

To learn more about LGBTIQA+ affirmation and the church, check out Walking the Bridgeless Canyon by celebrated ally Kathy Baldock, Changing Our Mind by Dr David Gushee, and Undivided by Vicky Beeching. If you are in need of safe affirming organisations, check out One Body One Faith, Affirm or Two:23 in the UK, Equal Voices or Brave Network in Australia, Q Christian Fellowship or the Reformation Project in the US.

There is a growing number of affirming churches – from progressive to evangelical and every denomination in between – across the world. LGBTIQA+ Christians visiting an “affirming” community for the first time can use a statement like the Brave Network statement of affirmation above as a litmus test.

(Nathan Despott is a co-leader of Brave Network Melbourne and works as a research and development manager in the intellectual disability sector in Australia. He thanks Australian LGBTIQA+ advocates and allies Chris Csabs, Nicole Conner and Michelle Eastwood for their contributions to this piece.)
A Dummies Guide to the Bible
1 THE BIBLE

Every writing which is written by The Spirit is profitable for teaching, for correction, for direction and for a course in righteousness 2 Timothy 3:16 Aramaic Bible in Plain English

Bible reading is at the heart of this Way of Life Community of Aidan and Hilda Way of Life

Traveller  I am drawn to this way of life but new to it. Why should it include daily Bible reading? I thought the Bible was an out-date book.

Guide  Because the Bible is a collection of writings which have passed the test of constant use, and which, although they lay bare the worst things human nature is capable of, they give glimpses of ways in which God speaks, inspires, challenges and unfolds divine purposes.

Traveller  Tell me about the Bible. What is it?

Guide  It is the most published book in the world and vast numbers of commentaries have been written about it. I am not an expert. There are experts in Hebrew and Greek (the original languages of the Bible), the cultures of Bible lands, brilliant theologians and profound mystics who can help us.

Traveller  OK, but please will you give me a Dummies Guide to start me off.

Guide  All branches of the Christian Church agree that at least sixty-six ‘books’ comprise ‘the canon’ (agreed list) of Scripture. These sacred writings written over two millennia gradually gained recognition as having innate authority. In 367 Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, stated that the list of 27 books that we call the New Testament was ‘canonised’, that is, that a ruling had been given by senior church leaders as to their inspired authority.

Traveller  What’s the difference between the New Testament and the other books?

Guide  The others are about The Old Covenant (or Testament) God made with one people. The last twenty-seven are about the New Covenant (or Testament) God made through Jesus Christ with all people.

Traveller  So Timothy, in today’s Scripture verse, meant that these writings before the New Testament were inspired?

Guide  Yes, but we believe that the same applies to the New Testament.

Reflection

The Divine Scripture is a sea, containing in it deep meanings, and an abyss of prophetic mysteries; and into this sea enter many rivers. There are Sweet and transparent streams, cool fountains too there are, springing up into life eternal… Various then are the streams of the sacred Scriptures. There is in them a first draught for you, a second, and a last. Bishop Ambrose in a letter to Constantius 379.
We are Not Called to Follow an Organisation but a Way of Life.

I am the way, the truth and the life’ Jesus did not call people to join an organisation, but to follow a way of life. Ray Simpson

In the last few years I have had a lot of people asking me about community, church, gathering, attendance etc... In the last decade our understanding of what it is to be a Christian or what it is to attend church has become very entrenched with the institutional model of attending church weekly on a Sunday. Singing three fast songs, two slow songs, having announcements, offering and a message.

I challenge you to show me where this model is reflected in the bible.

I constantly hear sentences like: Where do you fellowship? Where do you find like minded people? Where do you attend?

Jesus us told us to go OUT into all the world. His own life models being present in community, in every day life.

I have been challenged of recent years to be more present in my community. To BE the presence of God IN my community. To be available and to be salt and light. That means being accessible and involved in the life of the community around me.

Not living in fear. Not living in judgement and condemnation. Just being who God created me to be and loving those around me.

I am moving further and further away from the ‘us and them' mentality and closer to just 'us'. In doing so I have met and am doing life
with some of the most amazing humans on the planet. There is no longer ‘us and them’. There is just us and that is enough for me. In fact I have had more God encounters in the last 4 years than in the previous 30.

For God so loved the world that He gave his only son Jesus.

I am sorry Christians but God does not love you more than anyone else. God IS LOVE. **HE LOVES** – everyone. He loves the whole world and everything in it.

When we love, we make an environment where the spirit of God can dwell because that is who he is. People are drawn to love, they crave it and need it. Love is the greatest power in the universe. “For the greatest of these is LOVE”.

Dear friends, let us continuously love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born from God and knows God.

I no longer drive each week to a location to meet with other ‘Christians’.

I no longer spend all my time and energy ‘doing’ church I am the church. I no longer worry about inviting people TO church. I invite people to church every time I have a conversation with them and every-time I demonstrate the love and acceptance of Christ toward them.

This post from Rev Ray Simpson from the Way Marks of Life initiative explains it very well and it is different for all of us. As long as we are following Christ and not the institution.

**Way Marks Of Life**

COMMUNITY IS NOT READY-MADE

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel... and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confidant in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear. Philippians 1:12, 14.

There is no ready-made Community on anyone's doorstep. Unity with other members is rooted in the knowledge that we all follow the community's Way of Life and that this reflects our deepest calling. Introduction to the Way of Life

**Traveller**  I want a community that is there for me every day where I live.

**Guide**  I encourage you to ask yourself this question: Which do you love most – God or your idea of a community?

**Traveller** Why can't I have both?

**Guide**  God comes first. God may give you what you long for but it will be on his terms, not yours.

**Traveller**  What do you mean?

**Guide**  The first issue to sort out is this: Is God calling you to live this Way of Life? If you commit to this, you will be led wherever God wishes to lead you. God may ask you to open your heart to local people and share in an existing group, or to draw new friends to meet together. God may, however, lead you to a different focus.

**Traveller**  Can you give an example?

**Guide**  The apostle Paul was asked to travel on missionary journeys. Then he was put under house arrest. He carried those he had met in his heart. He wrote letters to them and prayed for them but he had no ready-made community on his doorstep. This dispersed
community of Aidan and Hilda may be like that.

**Traveller** In what ways?

**Guide** Some keep in touch through area groups, and occasional community events, others keep in touch with like-minded members through Skype, Facebook, email and other social media. All use the daily prayer diary. But there is something deeper that binds us together. When we truly ‘come home’ we are known as we are known.

**Reflection**

What is your deepest calling?


I am the way, the truth and the life’ Jesus did not call people to join an organisation, but to follow a way of life.

Under the guidance of Ray Simpson, renowned for his expertise in Celtic spirituality, this daily prayer book is structured according to the way of life adopted by the Community of Aidan and Hilda. Along with a short Bible reading and reflection, each day includes a step to enable readers to move away from what is destructive towards what is life-giving. There is also a unique spiritual breathing exercise following the rhythm with which our bodies breather, allowing us to pray with our very core, wherever we are.

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**6 Warning Signs Your Church Culture Is Toxic**

By Carey Nieuwhof | Reposted from Carey Nieuwhof /Blog

Every church has a culture. But how do you know if your church culture is toxic?

More importantly, how would you know whether you’re creating a toxic church culture as a leader?

I’ve interacted with many church leaders (and readers of this blog) and the sad reality is that there is no shortage of toxic church culture stories and experiences.

But it doesn't have to be that way. And it certainly isn't always that way.
Leaders are the architects of culture.

You create a culture whether you intend to or not.

Part of shaping a healthy culture is being aware of the signs of toxic culture and the signs of health. I blogged about the early warning signs that a person may be toxic here. But organizations have different signs than individuals do.

So how do you know if your church culture is toxic? Believe it or not, the Bible gives incredible practical advice. The longer I lead, the more I use Galatians 5:16-23 as a health check for me personally and for anything I lead. It describes what's healthy and what's not, for me as a leader and for the church.

Below, I outline 6 warning signs that are practical applications of that text.

1. The Politicians Win

One sure sign of a toxic culture is that you have to play politics to get anything done.

You know things have gotten political in your church when:

Decisions rarely get made the way they're supposed to be made.

Most decisions happen outside of meetings or any agreed-upon process.

You can't get a yes without offering something in return.

You have to continually lobby to be heard.

If you're always jockeying, lobbying and courting favour to get the right decision made, it's a sign your organization is unhealthy.

In the local church, having to play politics to win is a sure sign there's sin.

When you do what you say you're going to do the way you said you're going to do it, you bring health to an organization.

2. What Gets Said Publicly Is Different From What Happened Privately
Another sign things are becoming toxic is when what gets said publicly is different than what happened privately.

When there's spin on every issue and nothing can be said publicly without 'agreeing' on what gets said first, things are bad.

For sure, there are times where a situation is delicate and you will want to ‘agree’ on what gets said publicly to honour everyone involved, but in too many organizations few things that get done privately can be announced the same way publicly.

And to be sure...when you're crafting any kind of a public statement, you want to pay attention to the words you use and perhaps even find agreement on them.

But the end product should never be the opposite or even different than what actually happened

I have good fortune of being part of several healthy organizations. I love it when people pull me aside and ask (in hushed tones), “So what's the real story?” and I get to tell them “Actually, that is the real story.”

Living in that kind of culture really helps you sleep at night too.

3. You Deal With Conflict By Talking About People, Not To People

The golden rule of conflict is this: talk to the person you have an issue with, not about them.

In too many churches and organizations, the opposite is true.

People talk about people rather than to them.

The church should be the BEST organization in the world in dealing with conflict. Often, we can be the worst.

The next time you want to talk about someone (i.e. gossip), talk to them instead. If you can't or won't, there's something wrong. Pay attention to that.

Want to know what's wrong most of the time? You're gossiping. That's what's wrong.

Trying to resolve conflict by gossiping about the person you're angry with is like trying to extinguish a fire with jet fuel. It only inflames things.

Sure, occasionally you need advice from a friend about how to approach a situation. When I'm in that situation, I try to assume the person we're talking about will hear everything I say. Even if they don't, the fact that they could speaks volumes.

Do I always get it right? No, but it's a great integrity check, and I try to live by it.

If you want more, I outline 7 steps for dealing with conflict in a healthy way in this post.

4. Church Fights Are Normal

Conflict is normal. Church fights shouldn't be.

Yet so many congregations are in perpetual fighting mode. One day it's the music. The next it's the carpet. The next it's some staff member everyone ganged up on.

Failure to get point #3 right above is the way churches come to see fights as normal.

Another reason churches fight regularly is because personal preferences have trumped organizational mission.

Essentially, members decide that what they want is more important than what others want or the church needs to make progress.

When that happens, it essentially pits one selfish person or group against others.
And when that happens, everything dissolves.

If your church is in conflict there should zero mystery as to why it isn't growing.

5. There’s An Entrenched ‘Us’ And ‘Them’ Mentality

The church should always be a ‘we,’ not an ‘us’ and ‘them.’

Fundamentally, being a Christian causes us to die to ourselves and rise to something bigger than ourselves.

Some Christians forget that.

Whether the ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality exists between factions in your church or between your church and the community, it’s always fatal to health and growth.

The job of a leader is to raise vision high enough and urgently enough for all of us to become bigger than any of us.

United, the church will always accomplish more than we will divided.

6. No One Takes Responsibility

So who’s going to fix your church?

No one.

Someone.

Anybody but me.

As long as things are someone else's fault, things will never get better.

A final sign your church is toxic is that no one takes responsibility. Instead, people just blame everyone else.

You can blame the culture, the pastor, the leader or anybody, but until you take responsibility, things will never get better.

Blame is the opposite of responsibility. Leaders who stop the blame cycle and take responsibility have the potential to usher in real change.

But, you say..."I'm not responsible for all of it." True.

But you're likely responsible for some of it. Own what you can. Own all you can.

If no one else does, still take responsibility.

You'll get healthier. And if they don't, you'll leave and will eventually join a healthier church.

Health attracts health.
One of the most important questions facing our time in history is this, “If right-wing conservative Evangelical Christianity had its way, what would the world look like?”

Despite how various Evangelicals might respond to this question, perhaps the best vantage point for an accurate discernment of the answer is to observe pivotal moments in history where conservative Evangelicals (as a whole) have actually won their desires. For nothing reveals the true content of one’s aspirations like the results they bring when successful.

Or perhaps, we could examine their commonly held beliefs and the future those beliefs envision. For in the end, the true sum of one’s faith can be found most clearly within the true impact their faith desires, regardless of what they may or may not claim to confess. We are responsible both for what we believe and the future those beliefs ultimately bring forth. Are we not?

Most recently, one of the prized accomplishments of conservative Evangelicalism is the election and continued support of Donald Trump as President. Say what you will about the politics involved, the bottom line is this—his character, priorities, and leadership are clearly creating a world where the wealthy become richer, the poor become more vulnerable, greed is expanded, bullying is desensitized, corruption is protected, white privilege flourishes, elitism is unleashed, minorities are further marginalized, racism is energized, sexism is normalized, the LGTBQ community is increasingly demonized, and right-wing Christian conservatism is prioritized.

Yet sadly, this is not by chance.

In fact, among many conservative Evangelicals, these are tacitly received as nothing less than welcomed results. For if this presidency was the first occasion in which conservative Evangelicalism has had influential success towards the fruition of these same kind of deplorable realities, then this moment in history would be less profound. However, from the slavery and lynching of black people to the belittlement and abuse of women, conservative Evangelicalism has long resulted in the increased spiritual justification of some of the most evil atrocities ever committed on planet earth.

In fact, now we have an administration, like never before, that increasingly creates economic systems that blatantly benefit the wealthy and exploit the vulnerable, brutally splits families with children apart who are seeking asylum in our country, aggressively sides with Israel in order to further the fulfillment of “biblical” prophecy, threatens to pull news press credentials over “negative” coverage, belittles and thwarts people with disabilities, and has dismantled highly important LGBT-protecting policies, all in the name of undoing the leadership and legacy of our first black President.

Yet sadly, once again, this is not by chance.
Conservative Evangelicalism teaches its followers that faithfulness to God leads to financial prosperity and wealth. Having pastors with six figure salaries, churches with multi-million dollar facilities, and followers with luxurious lifestyles are seen as a reward from God not a departure from the ways of Jesus. In the mind of conservative Evangelicalism, if you are struggling financially or devoid of financial abundance, it is likely that some aspect of your faith life is askew. Ministry and Christian “success” is largely defined by the increase and accumulation of “more”—more money, more power, more influence, more campuses, more staff, more baptisms, more attenders, more speaking engagements, more followers on Twitter. In the world of conservative Evangelicalism, more is never less, more is always more—even at the expense of others.

Conservative Evangelicalism sees people primarily as spiritual projects for the ultimate goal of conversion into their faith system. Even helping the poor and hurting is largely seen as a means to a faith-serving end that builds their kingdom with more converts and satisfies their obligations of obedience to their faith. Poor hurting people are ultimately helped only to the extent in which it somehow serves their faith system. In fact, within conservative Evangelicalism, poverty (and even hardship) is often deemed as a result of unfaithfulness and wrong belief.

Conservative Evangelicalism manifests a territorial greed that desires to conquer people, groups, communities, perceived enemies, and the planet at large, not for the purpose of serving humanity selflessly, but rather garnering its submission to their faith system. Conservative Evangelicalism largely portrays Jesus as a white man. Not just a white man, but a white man who is a Republican, gun-owning, racist homophobic nationalist who is wrapped in the American flag.

Conservative Evangelicalism manifests a good-old-boy-club mentality for white male heterosexuals that gives them a hypocritical privilege, license, and authority over women, often leading to their sexualization, discrimination, control, and abuse. In fact, the only sins that truly matter in conservative Evangelicalism are the ones that are different from theirs and enable them to condemn those who would threaten their white male heterosexual Christian privilege and power.

Conservative Evangelicalism declares the Bible as being the infallible word of God and their interpretations exclusively faithful and accurate to the discerning of its meaning and truth.

Conservative Evangelicalism interprets the Scriptures as condemning the LGBTQ community, labeling them as “abominations,” cancers to our society, enemies of procreation, and deviants destined for hell.

Conservative Evangelicalism once asserted a biblical justification for black slavery and murder, and the demonization of interracial marriage. Conservative Evangelicalism portrays a god who is justified in killing his enemies, destroying entire groups of people, and sentencing disobedient non-believers to a hell of eternal torment.

Make no mistake, what we see unfolding before our eyes is nothing less than the manifestation of the dystopian dreams of much of conservative Evangelicalism. No matter how much they might sprinkle it with spiritual glitter and dress it up with stage lighting and smoke machines, the finish line of their faith understanding is a violent Armageddon that ushers in a kingdom where anything that does not prosper white, male, heterosexual, conservative Christian power and privilege is eradicated from the earth. Spiritually rationalized racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, nationalism, greed, violence, and hypocrisy are all merely pieces of a much bigger puzzle.

This is put on display perhaps in no more profound fashion than through the current television show produced by Hulu, “The Handmaid's Tale,” based on the novel by Margaret Atwood. This prophetic drama puts forth many images, occurrences, and realities that can be easily seen as reflecting the dystopian fruition of the fundamental beliefs and values of right-wing conservative Evangelicalism.

The truth is, this powerful show does not require a suspension of current reality to understand its message, but merely a gaze into the future of what could be if conservative Evangelicalism continues to get its way.

In fact, what should be most alarming to us all is this—if conservative Evangelicals were asked to publicly denounce every action and faith confession of the oppressors in “The Handmaid's Tale” that they believe are contrary to their faith system, I suspect many would find little of which they could accurately object and honestly deny. In fact, nearly everything displayed in this prophetic drama is already currently taking place in one form or another, largely at the hands and influence of right-wing conservative Evangelicalism.

Read the Bible the way they read the Bible. Pray the prayers they pray. See the world the way they see it. Believe in God the way the believe in God. Spiritually justify what they spiritually justify. Then you will see, through a simple glance down the hall of its future, the kind
of world conservative Evangelicalism envisions. For if conservative Evangelicalism gets its way, make no mistake, this is what the world would look like. To be sure, being “under his eye” won’t point us to the face of Jesus, but rather to the face of their evil.

Keep your soul vigilant, these are dark times for sure, and they’re only getting darker. Hear the call of Jesus upon your heart, “take up your resistance and follow me.”

America will die at the hands of men who exchanged a brown Jesus for white Christianity, and quite frankly, it’s beginning to seem like that’s just part of their plan—if they get their way.

Grace is brave. Be brave.

*photo courtesy of Hulu*

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**The Way – An On-line Pilgrimage for Life**

Hi all. This is a very special invitation from Ray Simpson about an online course he has written. This is a great tool for discipleship and application. I encourage you to consider it. I will be enrolling and look forward to what this journey has to offer. The way-marks are like sign posts along the way, guiding us to a deeper level of contemplation and transformation. The course grows out of a life-time exploring a Way of Life that could guide us through a new Dark Age.

Ray Simpson is the *Founding Guardian, The international Community of Aidan and Hilda*  [www.aidanandhilda.org](http://www.aidanandhilda.org)

*The world is at a cross ways. So is Christianity. The first Christians were called Followers of the Way. Where’s it going in our time?*
The Way

An On-line Pilgrimage for Life

for millennials to veterans from every land

This is not a journey about class, race, religious, money and power wars, the roads to untruth, fear, break-up – to nowhere.

This is a road TO A WAY OF LIFE for individuals, communities, the world.

The first Christians were called Followers of the Way.

This way is green, but will take us through dark valleys and heights of vision. This authentic way in a post-truth world leads us to edges and common ground, to Ground Zero and deep listening. It leads towards a divine cosmic love affair. Don't miss it.

This is part of a mass movement of people who care for earth, community and people.

TO ENROL

Go to www.waymarksoflife.com

The Course

This course will unfold insights, excite us to live in a whole new way, and help us to shape a whole new world. It suggests small, gentle, even playful first steps along the way, but does not shirk the hard things we shall sooner or later meet in life and in ourselves. Later, as the journey moves out of the sunny paths a soul friend or mentor may prove to be a vital support.

It is open to all without obligation.

Three Options

There are three ways to gain the benefits of emails from waymarksoflife:

Option One. Use the emails as an aid for personal growth only.

Option Two. Use the emails as an aid for personal growth but engage a friend or mentor as a support to discovery or growth.

Option Three. Use Option One or Two and join the Waymarksoflife Facebook page where you can read of the journeys of others or discuss with others your journey. This is a closed group and only open to those who enrol.

Course Originator

This self-guided course is written by Ray Simpson, Founding Guardian of the dispersed international Community of Aidan and Hilda. Sales of his books on Christian spirituality are approaching their first quarter million. See www.raysimpson.org

You may enrol free of charge and cancel at any time. It costs us money, so we invite donations.

TO ENROL and get more information Go to www.waymarksoflife.com

Seven days of emails are followed by resources and spiritual formation exercises to be tried out for a week. These emails will be sent for several years. They (with their follow-up material) may be returned to throughout life. An email is sent each day for seven days, then seven days for reflection, then the cycle starts again. The course is self-guided, but students may add insights and resources to our Facebook
Churches

There are millions of churches, thousands of church-based courses and hundreds of missional networks. Followers of the Way may be engaged with any of these. Although this course is designed for individuals it highlights some core principles and practices that churches can also adopt if they wish to be servants of The Way. It also identifies some things that distance churches from the people and it suggests ways of transforming these. We hope churches and networks will commend these emails to members.

Subjects for each two-week unit for the first three years

1. The World at a Cross Ways
2. World voices: can we travel this Way?
3. Questions at the gate
4. Is this a new monastic Way?
5. A Way of Life: What, why, where, but and how?
6. Introduction to a Way of Life
7. A Way of Simplicity
8. A Way of Purity
9. A Way of Obedience
10. The Fruit of the Three Life-giving Principles
11. Waymark 1 The wisdom of life-long learning
12. Waymark 1 Life-long learning from Scripture
13. Waymark 1 Ways of reading Scripture
14. Waymark 1 Life-long learning from inspired people
15. Waymark 1 Life-long learning from life
16. Waymark 1 Life-long learning through creative arts
17. Waymark 2 Journey
18. Waymark 2 Journey with a soul friend (1)
19. Waymark 2 Journey with a soul friend (2)
20. Waymark 2 Journey with retreats
21. Waymark 2 Journey with pilgrimage
22. Waymark 2 Journey through the seasons of life
23. Waymark 3 Rhythm
24. Waymark 3 Rhythm of Daily Prayer
25. Waymark 3 Rhythm of seasons
26. Waymark 3 Rhythm of Work
27. Waymark 3 Rhythm of Re-Creation
28. Waymark 3 All ways of praying
29. Waymark 3 More ways of praying
30. Waymark 4 Praying for God's will in God's world
31. Waymark 4 Overcome evil with good
32. Waymark 4 Interceders
33. Waymark 5 Simple Life-style
34. Waymark 5 Hospitality
35. Waymark 6 Creation – God's sacrament
Waymark 6 Creation – its groans
Waymark 6 Creation care
Waymark 7 Healing
Waymark 7 Healing inner wounds
Waymark 7 Healing wounded communities
Waymark 7 The trail of the true human being
Waymark 7 Live life to the full
Waymark 8 Open to God's Spirit
Waymark 8 Learn to Listen
Waymark 8 Prophecy
Weaving together the God-given strands
Church questions
Waymark 9 Villages of God
Waymark 9 Conflict resolution
Waymark 9 Building Community
Waymark 9 The Good Society
Waymark 10 Share Jesus and justice – the big picture.
Waymark 10 Authentic witness
Waymark 10 Indigenous and Cross-cultural Mission
Waymark 10 Stand with the poor
Waymark 10 Stand for truth
Waymark 10 Signs and wonders
Waymark 10 God-led lands
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Please help support my ministry and magnify my voice by pledging.

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Love Lisa
Who Is the Jesus of Easter?

Who Is the Jesus of Easter? by Lisa Hunt-Wotton

I hope that you have a beautiful Easter weekend however you chose to celebrate and remember it. I love Easter Sunday. I love the message. I love the man – Jesus. I don't mind the chocolate either.
Who is this Jesus?

Easter is the oldest and most important festival on the Church calendar. It is the remembrance of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But most of all it is about the hope that Easter brings. The fact that Jesus conquered death by love.

This is the message of Jesus, He is alive and He is alive in me. He brings freedom and life and joy. **He is safe and He breathes forgiveness. He doesn’t just forgive; HE IS forgiveness.**

There is nothing to be afraid of in the risen Jesus.

We have in him the perfect icon of a God who is safe and a universe that is safe. **We have a God who does not blame, does not punish, does not threaten, does not dominate.** We have a God who breathes forgiveness (Rohr).

The Resurrection of Jesus tells us that there is no victory through domination. There is no such thing as triumph by force. By his life, death and resurrection **Jesus stops the cycle of violence and challenges the notion of dominating power.**

This is a power that seeks to change things from the top down, from the outside in. Instead, Jesus invites us to relational or spiritual power, where we are not just changed but transformed. And not transformed from the top down but from the bottom up, not from the outside in but from the inside out. Transformed into God… (R.Rohr).

“You have to trust that inner voice to show you the way…You know that inner voice. Only by attending constantly to the inner voice can you be converted to a new life of freedom and joy” (Henri Nouwen)
Meditate on these words. Say them to yourself. Say them out loud.

Jesus is the one who speaks lovingly ‘I will never leave you. I am with you always’.

I will love you forever. My love NEVER fails.

I am faithful, I am righteous. I am just and I am truth.

Following Christ is both the safest and the most exhilarating thing that you will ever do.

He is: comfort, compassion, love, acceptance, forgiveness.

He is: good, peace, hope joy, gentleness, freedom.

He does NOT: reject, abuse, abandon, condemn, dominate or control.

HE IS: gracious, kind, merciful, creative, wondrous, ingenious.

He is rest.............

He fights for the oppressed. He hates injustice.

He came to set prisoners free from every trap that they have been caught in. Every addiction, every bondage, every fear and terror. He has the power and He can free us.

He knows the beginning from the end. His love NEVER fails. When we fail, he lifts us up. By HIS power we can stand.

He knows us intimately. He knows we weep and grieve and that we are frail.
My hope is in Jesus.
My trust is in Jesus
My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus Christ, my righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

He is alive and He lives in me.

We see in Jesus the divine being who is also the perfect human being. Jesus comes in a human body to show us the face of God, the One who is eternally compassionate and eternally joyous, who stands with us in our sufferings and our joys.

As Christians, our vocation is to unite with both Christ crucified and Christ risen. (Rohr)

When you think on these things you can feel hope rising in your heart.

SELAH

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Recommended Reading:
Henri Nouwen: The Inner Voice of Love

This is Henri Nouwen's “secret journal.” It was written during the most difficult period of his life, when he suddenly lost his self-esteem, his energy to live and work, his sense of being loved, even his hope in God. Although he experienced excruciating anguish and despair, he was still able to keep a journal in which he wrote a spiritual imperative to himself each day that emerged from his conversations with friends and supporters.
Does the Holy Spirit Speak Today?

Lisa Hunt-Wotton

*I want to bind you all together in love, to stir your minds so that your understanding may come to full development, until you really know the mystery of God, in whom all the jewels of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.* —Colossians 2:2–3

Does the Holy Spirit speak to us today? My first reaction is to say: well yes, of course he does. The Holy Spirit is a person, the third person of the Godhead and yes he speaks to us.

Although the question of whether the Holy Spirit speaks to us today is seen as a controversial topic in some circles, we can see biblically that the person of the Holy Spirit does indeed speak to us today. Let's have a look at the many ways in which he does this.

- Gods Spirit lives within believers (1 Cor 3:16, 1 Jn 3:24).
- We carry the very presence of God and His anointing resides within us (1 Jn 2:27). This means then that the Spirit of God is in the perfect position to be able to communicate God's will to us.
- God has chosen to communicate to his children through the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:12), and communicate through his children to an unbelieving world.

“The answer to prayer is always the same – it’s the gift of the *Holy Spirit.*” Richard Rohr

What does the spirit actually say to us?
We know that ‘he will not speak on his own; he only speaks what he hears’ (Jn 16:13). The Spirit speaks what he hears the father saying. The spirit is able to ‘communicate heaven into our hearts’ (Hinn, 1990:70). He is the perfect translator of the words of heaven. God the Father speaks through the spirit (Matt 10:19-20), as does Jesus in Acts 1:2 when he gave instructions to the apostles through the Holy spirit.

The Holy Spirit interprets the voice of the father and the son so that we humans can hear and understand without fear of death (Hinn, 1990:71). The voice of the Father is described as ‘thunder’ and many times when he spoke people fell on their faces and were greatly afraid (Job 37: 2, 4-5, Jn 13:29-30, Matt 17:6). Though the voice of God had come for the benefit of the people they were not able to hear it (Deere, 2001:90). The voice of Jesus is described in Revelation 1:15 as the ‘sound of rushing waters’. When John heard the voice of Jesus he fell down dead (Rev 1:17). Paul also fell to the ground when he heard the voice of Jesus (Ac 9:4). The Holy Spirit therefore because of his nature and his dwelling within us, is the translator or transmitter from the Godhead to us.

There are many accounts in the bible of the Spirit speaking. The Spirit gave Philip a command and ‘told him to go to that chariot and stay near it’ (Act 8:29). In Acts 13:2, ‘the Holy Spirit said; set apart for me Barnabas and Saul’. These are direct words from the spirit. The Holy Spirit testifies to us (Heb 10:15), he warns us (Acts 20:23), guides and instructs us (Jn 16:13, Ne 9:20), teaches us and reminds us (Luke 12:12, Jn 14:26). He also at times speaks on our behalf, ‘just say whatever is given to you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit’ (Mk 13:11). He speaks in a way that is understandable and for our encouragement and wellbeing.

How does the Spirit speak?

The Holy Spirit speaks to us directly and personally through our conscience, our hearts and our spirit. Conviction of the heart. Rom 8:16, Matt 24:34 heart the mouth speaks. – Lk 6:45, Gal 4:6, rom 10:10 ‘With your heart you believe’. Ex 25:2 his heart prompts him.

Eyes of the heart being opened.: Gen 3:5, 2 Kings 6:17,” and the lord opened the eyes of the young man and...behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire’ (p235 Virkler) Mark 8:18

Inner inspiration of the heart

The Holy Spirit ‘witnesses to our very conscience’ (Hinn, 1990; 76), as Paul says ‘ My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom 9:1). The Holy Spirit communicates and converses with our spirits, ‘the spirit himself testifies with our spirit’ (Rom 8:16). ‘The voice of God is Spirit to Spirit communication; the Holy Sprit speaking directly to my spirit. It is sensed as a spontaneous thought, idea, word or feeling (Virkler, 1986:27).

The Spirit will also speak to us in dreams, visions and in pictures to express what he wants to say. As we see it in our minds eye, then we are able to describe or interpret. There are many accounts in scripture of revelation being given through a dream – Or picture “Watch and see what he will speak to me” Hab 2:1,2, Num 12:6 Ez 40:4 “Speak all that you see.

Journalling.
He speaks as you write. – Hab 2:2,3 “Write the vision down”. 1 Jn 1:3, 2 Cor 13:14 “the fellowship of the HS be with you’.

Revelation; John recorded the visions, questions and answers. Daniel 7:1

How do you know that the Holy Spirit is speaking?

The Holy Spirit is a ‘personal, immediate, dynamic and perfect guide. He speaks so we must listen to him’ (Warrington, 2005: 221). If the Spirit speaks to us it is for a reason. It is important that we know how to get the mind of the spirit, that is why we must learn how to recognise his voice apart from all others. Wigglesworth Smith says that ‘it is the easiest thing to get the mind of the spirit when your whole heart is only desiring the will of God’ (Liardon, 1998:11). If our desire is the will of God for our life or for the life of those we are ministering to, then we can expect the spirit to instruct and teach us what to say. For such a ministry there needs to be a relationship with the Spirit in a person’s life. Hence this statement:

“We have not received the spirit of the world, but the spirit who is from God: that we may understand what God has freely given us: we speak…in words taught by the spirit. Expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

The spirit will speak a word, a sentence, a dialogue, or impress a scripture. What are these words like? ‘They are like my own thoughts except that I sense them as coming from my heart rather than my brain in that they are spontaneous, not analytical or cognitive’ (Virkler, 1986: 29).”

The Holy Spirit speaks through us to others.

The Holy Spirit speaks through us to others by (a) using our voice to interpret what the spirit is saying to us, ‘he that has an ear let him hear what the spirit says’ (Rev 3:6); and (b) through the gifts he has given us (1 Cor 12:7-12).

(a) Using our voice: The Holy Sprit inspires us to speak. ‘It is not you who speak but the Spirit speaking through you’ (Matt 10:20) and ‘I will put my spirit on him and he will speak’ (Mat 12:18) When we receive something from the spirit it is usually to pass it on to someone else. Peter says that ‘if anyone speaks he should do it as one speaking the very words of God’ (1Peter 4:11), other translations say ‘as the oracles of God’. ‘Oracular speech is the rendering of a message considered to have been imparted...directly by the spirit in...word or vision’ (Turner, 1999: 306). These impulses come with the conviction that they originate with the spirit and should be passed on. (Turner, 1999: 308). Just as the Holy Spirit is the voice of the Godhead we in turn are empowered through the Holy Spirit to be Gods representative in speech and in ministry (Baxter, 1983:37).

(b) Gifts are a vehicle the spirit uses to speak to people. Prophecy, a word of knowledge, a word of wisdom and teaching are just a few of the ways that the spirit speaks to us through the gifts that Christ has given for the edification of the body (1Cor 12). These gifts are not something that we can do naturally, they are ‘supernatural capabilities given by God, the Holy Spirit’ (Baxter, 1983:40).

Prophecy (1 Cor 12:10): Prophecy is the Spirit of God speaking through you (2 Sam 23:1-3). It is a way for the inspired message of God to be delivered, prophecy is ‘utterance under divine inspiration; delivering inspired exhortations, instructions or warnings’ (Vincent, 1975:98). The Holy Spirit inspires prophecy and is present during prophecy (Lk 1:41-42, 1:67-69, Acts 19:6), it is always for the edification of the reciever (Eph 4:12, 1 Cor 14:26).

A word of knowledge: This is a gift given by God the Holy Spirit which goes far beyond the ‘normal and natural capabilities of the individual’ (Thomson, 1960: 109). Some examples of this would be the revelation of sin in Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:3-4). Paul's trip to Rome on the doomed ship (Acts 27; 21-24). This knowledge was revealed supernaturally to Paul and his speech was therefore ‘the word of knowledge’ (Thomson, 1960: 109). Elisha without seeing it or hearing about it, knew the location of the Syrian camp and all that went on there (2 Kings 6:11-12), and was able to warn the King.

A word of wisdom: James Thomson explains the meaning in these words: ‘this gift would communicate the ability to receive and explain “the deep things of God”’ (Rom 11:33). In God's dealings with men much is mysterious, and the ordinary Christian is often in need of a
word that will throw light upon his situation; the person fitted by the spirit to fulfill this ministry is through the spirit given a word of wisdom (Thomson, 1960:103). “We speak of Gods secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it” (1 Cor 2:7-8). The wisdom Paul used was the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift is ‘knowledge rightly applied by the Holy Spirit and brings a supernatural answer to a problem’ (Holland, ).

Preaching: Through the preaching of the word of God you may believe that the Spirit is speaking just to you. If an evangelist is speaking you may feel or hear a prompting of the Holy Spirit to have faith to believe (Ac 21:8). This is a given gift or calling on a life. “An evangelist has the particular gift of preaching the gospel to unsaved men so that they can hear and believe”. Men or women with a great knowledge of the word can get up and speak and give a call for salvation and nothing happens. Another man preaches and there is a great response. What is the difference? One has the gift of evangelism and the other does not” (Dwight, 1970:173).

The Holy Spirit can speak through a sermon or through teaching. ‘While peter was speaking…the holy spirit came on all who heard the message’ (Acts 10:44). If someone ministers, they do it with the ability which God has given them (1 Peter 4:10 -11). Sermons are a common means of spiritual speech. It is the Holy Spirit who provides the message that is needed to be proclaimed (1Pet 1:12).

The Holy Spirit speaks to us because he loves us and because we desperately need him. He desires to partner with us in this journey of life. He empowers us to do the work of the Lord and to testify of Jesus. He uses us to edify one another and he reveals to us supernatural knowledge and information. He does this to direct us, to lead us, and to equip us. The Holy Spirit aids us in our life and loves to encourage us. He acts as the mouthpiece of God and reveals the things which are to come. This prepares us and helps us in our daily life.

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