



identity

A PUBLICATION OF THE
CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHREN

TURN OFF YOUR PHONE: A HEALTHY APPROACH TO TECHNOLOGY

THEOLOGY

Loving People
who are Different
from You

TESTIMONY

Singleness

MISSION

Reaching the
Lost in North
America

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Dealing with
Depression

REBUILD IT
TROY TYSDAL

My oldest son loves playing with Lego blocks. He likes to build airplanes, cars, castles, and homes. He constructs small cities and develops complex story lines in which each Lego character plays an important role. It seems there is no end to his imagination.

My youngest son also enjoys Legos. But instead of building cities, he usually takes them apart. The destruction is not intentional. He does not set out to dismantle his brother's work. It's just the unfortunate outcome of a younger brother left alone with a Lego creation.

The cycle has played out in our home time and time again. The older brother builds it... the younger brother destroys it. Understandably, this is very upsetting to our oldest son. He laments the destruction of his beloved Lego creation, wishing the clock could be turned back. He demands justice against the perpetrator—suggesting a stint in time-out, or perhaps a lifetime ban from Legos. Self-pity and cries for revenge rule the day, but none of it is helpful. His behavior usually continues until his mother makes a simple suggestion: rebuild it.

Life since the COVID-19 pandemic arrived has been challenging for both individuals and for the Church. As individuals we have seen friends fade away, our plans for the future upended, jobs disappear, college classes moved online, perhaps even people close to us

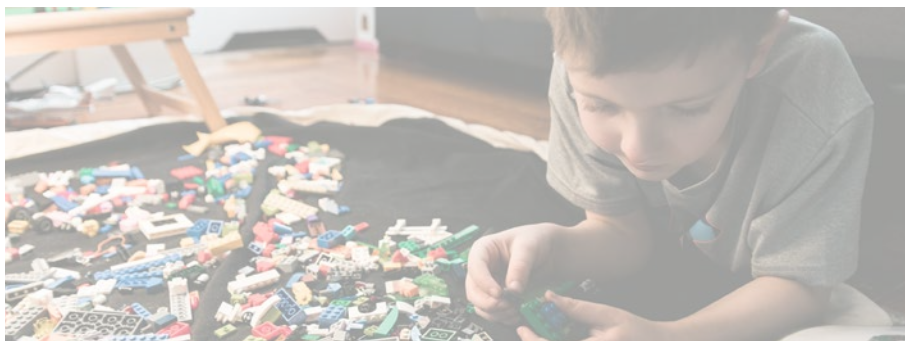


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have passed away. As the Church, we have been limited in our gatherings, despite our best efforts on social media, and it has weakened our fellowship and our ability to support one another in crisis.

If those facts have left you feeling a little bit like a Lego city left in the hands of a younger brother, you're not alone. Many of us have seen our best plans laid to waste and we are wondering where to go from here.

But God is not done with us. He is not done with his Church.

The Apostle Paul writes, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Brick by brick, your plans may have been dismantled, and you may feel uncertain about the future, but I assure

you that your Cornerstone remains. Jesus Christ is the author and perfecter of your faith, and he has placed you where you are for a reason.

It is time for us to rebuild our lives, and the Church. Each block might not be placed back exactly where it once was... and that's ok. Plans can change, even the Church can change. But find comfort in this: the Cornerstone cannot change. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever—relentlessly building, and occasionally rebuilding the lives of believers, that we may shine like a city on a hill to a world lost in darkness.

Do not grow weary, and do not give up. There is Kingdom work to be done.

AUTHOR

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INTO THE CHAOS
MICHAEL TITTERNESS

CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHREN

Today's world is full of uncertainty, frustration, unrest, and division. These things can wreak havoc on the human mind and mental health. For years, teens and those of the younger generation were somewhat protected from the ugliness of this part of life due to a lack of connection to the outside world. In today's world, everyone with a smartphone or computer can connect to information from virtually everywhere. They are subjected then not just to different points of view, but also the public consequences of holding unpopular opinions, and any conflict they happen to stumble across. This new culture, especially the culture that has developed over the last couple of years, has caused many to feel lost, confused, and possibly even scared to return to the outside world.

For the last year, we have all been confined to our homes, cut off from our friends and most of our family. This has caused us to turn to social media, news outlets, and memes to tell

us what is going on outside. Through this, we have seen our friends turn into enemies. We have seen family members who were once close disown each other over political views and their stance on current issues. Throughout this last year, the effects of this, however harsh, seemed to be somewhat distant as we have been able to keep on scrolling. The time is coming, however, for quarantine mandates to cease and our world to open up again. This is causing many to feel anxious and nervous about how to reenter society. At the beginning of the pandemic, all we wanted was to get back to normal. Now we face the struggle between wanting to stay inside and walking back out into a world we no longer recognize.

Going back to school and work means that we may have to face those individuals whom we debated in the comment section, or who unfriended and unfollowed us due to our memes or posts they found offensive. Perhaps your friend group is gone. The group

that once seemed so strong is now divided, and you face the pressure of having to choose a side—knowing this choice will possibly alienate you from people you still genuinely care about.

So, we sit at home with constant anxious thoughts running through our minds on repeat, causing us to feel paralyzed and torn between wanting a life outside the house, or one stuck in the same four walls we have been looking at for the past year and a half.

But remember that *everyone* is feeling the stress of isolation and quarantine. Lack of social interaction, lack of physical activity, and being forced to stay away from everyone has taken its toll on us all. Many who have never really experienced low moods before are now experiencing symptoms of depression. This is especially true for teens. According to Psychology Today, a study in January 2021 revealed that the number of teens who experience depressive symptoms increased from 13% to 55% since 2019. That means

INTO THE CHAOS
MICHAEL TITTERNESS

that there are four times as many individuals feeling more irritable, having feelings of hopelessness, having trouble going to sleep or staying asleep, and experiencing more conflicts with families and friends than before the pandemic. Experiencing these symptoms affects the way we interact with people. So, there is a good chance that coming back into society may cause people's interactions to become softer and less harsh.

Also, you may have anxiety about returning to normal and being exposed to the world. The chances are everyone else does, too. COVID and the political climate have caused us to question and worry about everything. The thing about anxiety is, it thrives in the unknown. You are most likely asking yourself a lot of, "What if this...? What if that...? What about...?" It's the unknown and uncertainty that keep it going. Do your best not to hold those feelings to yourself. Talk to your parents, reach out to your youth leaders, pastors, teachers, and school counselors. Despite what you might think, they want to know what is going on with you and what concerns you. There is a very good chance that they have similar worries and feel just as lost as you do.

Lastly, remember that God is in control. Psalm 22:28 says that "kingship belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations" (ESV). The world has experienced extreme levels of civil unrest before, and sadly, it will again. But remember, God was there for his people back then, he is now, and he will be in the future. It says in Joshua 1:9, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not

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SINGLENES
CATHY BARLOW

When you imagine your future, what do you see? Where do you see yourself in ten years? Twenty years?

You probably see a spouse and perhaps some children. A job you love and a home of your own. Traveling, seeing the world. And perhaps, now that you think about it, sharing the gospel with some people? (I forgot that one, too, until I started writing.)

Let me ask you this: What if, in ten years or so, you're renting the house next door to your parents, working a full-time job you don't necessarily like, paying off student loans? No partner, no children, and sometimes looking like you have no life?

That seems kind of depressing. It sounds like no one loves you but your parents. You question, "Am I ugly, do I smell funny, is there something wrong with me?" Until you finally get around to, "Why am I single?"

No self-help book can answer this question. No literature on patience or singleness or finding your purpose will really help. Such things sound like they have answers, but it's just money out of your pocket, and, at the end, you're compared to the Apostle Paul and told to revel in your singleness—or to be patient. Even worse, you might be told that you're not living your life the way God wants you to, and you need to follow these five easy steps to determine what you're doing wrong.

All those books sum up what you're doing wrong in one word: control. You're putting yourself in control and assuming God has messed up somewhere along the way. The best thought to have in this situation is not of why but of thanks. Thank God for saving you from the abusive husband, the cheating wife, the heartache of divorce, or worse, the disappointment in marriage. Marriage won't fulfill you. Only God can. Remember, spouses are humans—sinners—just as you are. Looking for perfection in marriage is looking for a marriage that will collapse in the first fight or sign of discord.

Perfection is something that only applies to the Triune God. We fall far short of that. We will never be perfect until we get to heaven. Even then, we're a reflection of perfection, not really perfect in ourselves.

Beginning this article, I asked, "What do you imagine in your future?" Now, instead, let me ask you this: "Where is God in your future?" What if I told you that being single for God is actually an amazing thing? It opens up doors that married people can't access. It also protects you from the heartache of marriage. Read the story of Jacob and Rachel in Genesis 29. Imagine the heartache of that first wedding day after seven years of work.

Don't think I'm against marriage. I'm not. I'm all for it and can't wait for it someday, if God so chooses. That's how I feel today. For years, people told me to follow Paul as an example. That I should remember that he was content in his singleness, so why shouldn't I be content as well? If it's as easy as Paul said in his writings, why should it be so hard for me?

In 1 Corinthians 7:8, Paul writes the famous line, "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to stay unmarried as I do." He

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INTO THE CHAOS
MICHAEL TITTERNESS

be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (ESV). No matter what this world faces, no matter what you face, God will be with you to help you through it, as he has promised and has always done. God has proven that he will hold nothing back when it comes to saving us. We know this because he sent Jesus to the cross for us. Imagine what he will do for us now.

While this world may seem scary right now, we as believers know that we do not have to fear. But when we do fear, we turn to the Lord in prayer for things such as wisdom, discernment, peace, understanding, and love for his people. Remember what God spoke to his people through the prophet Isaiah, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (41:10, ESV).

So go ahead. Head back into the world in all its chaos. The Lord is by your side and Christ is in your heart, and therefore, you can be the light in this dark world as he has called us to be.

AUTHOR

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SINGLENESS
CATHY BARLOW

doesn't say we should be joyful in our singleness, or happy, or even content. But he says it is good. Just be single as he is. God can use you in your single state to further his kingdom. You may not know why—ever—but we know God has a great plan for each of us!

Some people wrongly understand this to mean that Paul loves singleness and would not want anyone to marry. He does say in the next verse that you should marry if you “burn with passion.” But may I recommend not marrying the first person you want to have sex with? Or the second or third? Don't settle for the lies your heart tells you. According to C.S. Lewis, a long-single atheist turned agnostic turned great believer and apologist for the Christian faith, in an essay called *The Weight of Glory*, wrote:

“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

In your time as a single person, make sure you keep your focus on God and not on the rom-coms in movies or in real life around you. We tend to reenact what we see on TV and it's scary. Nothing seems genuine anymore (but I'll continue that thread another time). When I was in my twenties, my girlfriends were looking for their Mr. Big. Today, scarily, females of all ages are looking for their Christian Grey.

I wish someone had told me earlier in life that having a boyfriend/husband would not complete me. If anything, because of my weak personality and sense of self in high school, I lost my identity in each relationship and struggled to find myself again after each break up. So here I am to tell you, dating and marriage are serious. They take time, effort, and work. Your focus should be on God and finding contentment in whatever situation he has placed you in.

The big picture is... in the end, this world and everything in it is temporary. Will you be content with God's timing? Or will you squander your time and talent chasing the temporary things of this earth?

AUTHOR

CATHY BARLOW

Until November 2019, Cathy Barlow was single, rented the house next door to her parents, worked a full-time job she did not necessarily like, and was paying off her student loans. At the age of thirteen she decided she was going to have ten children—five naturally, five by adoption—and a husband who adored her. She believes God found this entertaining and now thanks him that she didn't marry young. Her life changed when God introduced her niece and nephew into the world, and her heart is full of love for him and for them. She knows there's a plan for her life and works hard to accept that a husband isn't in the picture for her—for now. The only differences in 2021 are: she's moved away from her parents and now has a job she likes.

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A LESSON FROM SPICY FOOD: LOVING PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT FROM YOU
BEN BIGAOUETTE

I can remember a time in my life when I did not like spicy food. And it's not as though I didn't like it because I didn't like the flavor. Embarrassingly enough, I just never allowed myself to try anything that was deemed "hot" or "spicy" because I *assumed* that I would not like it and that we would not get along. That was until I finally did try something that was spicy. And you know what? It was delicious! I couldn't believe it! What had I been thinking?! There was so much flavor and zest that was suddenly unleashed in my mouth and my taste buds rejoiced! Now this doesn't mean that I carry around a personal bottle of hot sauce with me to every meal, but I can say that my appreciation for spicy things has increased dramatically.

There is a similar principle to be learned when it comes to our relationships with people, especially people who are different from you or me. We may have taken a similar approach to the way that I foolishly

considered spicy foods and avoided them for some really silly reasons. You probably have those "spicy" people in your life. You tend to avoid, ignore, or even look down upon them because of some preconceived notion or assumption that you won't click with them, or that the differences between you are just too great. But often, when we do this, we have the wrong perspective and are missing out on something great the Lord might show us. We see this reality in 1 Samuel 16:7b, "...The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Many times in life I have stopped at the outward, instead of seeing the beauty that was on the inside. I grew up in a small town in rural Minnesota. I saw, as major differences between people, things like whether you preferred Ford or Chevy, whether you listened to rock, rap, or country, or whether you lived in town or out in the country.

When I graduated and went off to college, my worldview was expanded quite dramatically. I encountered numerous people who did not grow up sharing my beliefs or experiences. They thought about and processed the world completely differently than I did. This was eye-opening, to say the least. As I began my first career job as a young adult, the variety, diversity, and "bigness" of the world was opened before me. I had to decide how I would respond to people who were different from me, who saw the world through a different lens, or preferred or enjoyed different things than I did.

This is what I found to be the most surprising, even though I shouldn't have: The Lord used people who were different from me to give me a deeper understanding, to move beyond my own assumptions, to broaden the scope of my vision. The more I talked with and worked alongside someone who had a different worldview than I did, the more I was blessed by having them

“The Lord used people who were different from me to give me a deeper understanding, to move beyond my own assumptions, to broaden the scope of my vision.”

in my life. It was incredibly humbling.

This was not always easy and it provided plenty of challenges, but God used these friends to shape, equip, encourage, and teach me more about the love he has for me and for all people. The reality is that each one of us, no matter our differences, are unique and wonderful creations of God. We are his image-bearers, and we reflect his beauty in our uniqueness. This is what you are invited to see each time you encounter someone who is different from you: the beauty of God’s creation in the life and personality of that person and the special ways that God has fashioned them and loves them.

The second part to this is that God has called and invited you and me to love them too. In Romans 15:5-7 (NLT), the Apostle Paul encourages and reminds believers with these words:

May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ. Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.

As followers of Jesus, we have the unique opportunity and privilege of sharing and showing the love of Christ to those around us. This love is for people both similar to and different from you. The word Paul uses to describe the posture we are to have in this is to “accept” each other. This word was translated from the Greek word that means “to extend a welcome or receive into one’s inner circle of acquaintances.” This gives us a beautiful picture and reminder that this kind of love and acceptance was first shown to each of us by God. Paul writes that we are to accept, or receive others, just as Christ has accepted and received each of us. He loves us even when we are unlovable. He receives and welcomes us into relationship with him despite our differences from him—compare his perfection and holiness to our ugly sinfulness. Jesus now invites us formerly spiritual outcasts into his inner circle, offering us his friendship and a place to belong as a member of God’s family.

So, how about you? Who are the people in your life that you have been avoiding or keeping at arm’s length due

to some assumed incompatibility or personality difference? Who in your life needs to be shown the love and acceptance of God? It’s amazing to see what God can do in us and through us when we reach out in love to the “spicy” people in our lives. And it’s even more amazing to see how God uses those individuals to shape and bless you and me.

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GOD EQUIPS
RYAN NILSEN

Hannah grew up around the world as the child of missionaries. She spent three years in Kenya in her early years and moved approximately fifteen times before graduating high school. She attended Hillcrest Academy, served on summer staff at Inspiration Point Bible Camp, and then attended their one-year post-high school program called CheckPoint. One day, a pastor from North Dakota visited her class. Pastor Ryan Nordlund shared about the kids’ ministry that Grace Lutheran Brethren Church, in Bismarck, had started in nearby Lincoln, a rapidly growing community on the edge of the state capital.

Pastor Ryan shared about this ministry to a largely unchurched community, and then invited Hannah and her classmates to move to North Dakota to join their effort. Part of the CheckPoint program includes a calling on students to find a way to serve the mission of the local church following graduation. This was exactly the kind of calling that they would be seeking... and no one responded.

“This poor dude drove all the way from Bismarck, and no one was interested,” Hannah recalled with a laugh. And Hannah wasn’t interested either. She had plans to move to Fargo to be near her community of friends. She remembers praying, “God, you’re going to have to change my mind if you want me to go.” Having grown up in a missionary family, Hannah had always felt a strong connection to Isaiah 6:8: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”

Pastor Ryan left Inspiration Point that day, and CheckPoint continued for

Hannah. As time went by, Hannah’s plans to move to Fargo slowly fell apart—yet the ministry in Lincoln to kids who had never heard the true story of Jesus remained in front of her.

God changed her mind. And her heart.

Hannah joined Grace’s staff as the Lincoln Youth Director for 6th-8th graders. Their weekly program held at the school included games, food, and a Bible lesson. They were reaching students who, for the most part, had no direct experience with Christianity. Her first year serving, there were usually 50 kids total, with eight in her group. By the second year, they were routinely hitting 90 kids, with 30 in her group. Managing that many kids brimming with energy was a challenge, but over time, as the group grew, Hannah learned more and more about leading students and keeping their attention.

As she got to know the kids, she realized that they didn’t have a lot of spiritual relationships in their lives, and she looked for ways to further engage them with the gospel of Jesus. “I only got to see them once a week, so I brainstormed—what could I do to spend more time with them?” Hannah came up with a “Sundae Monday” program that brought kids from the school in Lincoln to the church in Bismarck where they would have ice cream, play games, build relationships, have spiritual conversations, and then head home.

Hannah remembers a day when she showed a short video that told the story of Jesus and Barabbas—how the innocent Christ took his place and the guilty Barabbas was freed. “The main lesson was that we are Barabbas, and Jesus took our place,” Hannah shared. “And then I had the kids spend

a couple of minutes thinking and praying silently.” Hannah had never tried anything like this before and didn’t know how it would work out. She had a number of rowdy kids that she couldn’t imagine would sit still like that. During the prayer time she looked up to check on the students—and to check on one in particular, who had a knack for being disruptive.

But when she looked up, she couldn’t believe her eyes.

Instead of getting into trouble, the 6th grader was *praying*, his eyes closed and his lips moving as he prayed silently. Hannah played a role in this young student having perhaps his first conversation with God. “The growth and success of this ministry was not because I was super-equipped, but because God was doing it,” Hannah said.

Hannah now works at Hillcrest Academy as a Residential Life Staff person and is beginning a career in the painting trade. She is thankful she went to Bismarck. Some of the students keep in touch with her, and a few months after moving she returned to be a sponsor for one of her students who was being baptized. She was challenged and stretched, learned practical ministry and life skills, and grew in amazing ways—and she would do it all over again.

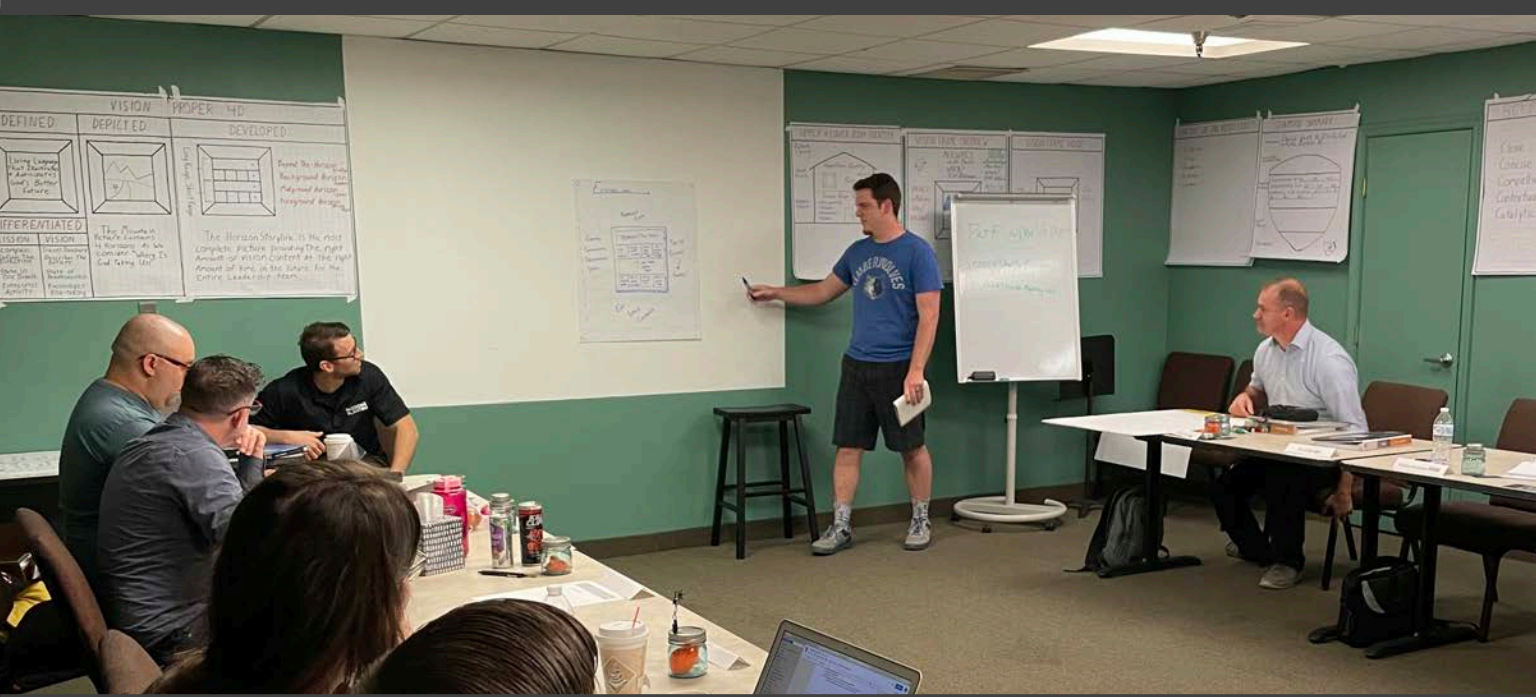
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LIVE A LIFE OF ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE
DANIEL PRESTON

I recently asked a classmate from Moody Bible Institute what his biggest desire was for his future after college. His response: to find a community where he felt as though he has a place to belong.

As a 2017 graduate of Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, Hillcrest instilled in me their mantra to “live a life of eternal significance.” This begs the question: “What does it mean to truly live a life of eternal significance?” For my classmate, significance in this life is found in a community where he would no longer be an outsider/foreigner to his surroundings. Ultimately, I believe this taps into the biblical significance all human beings can find in loving God and loving others. (See Deuteronomy 6:4-6; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:36-40; John 13:34; Romans 13:8; 1 John 4:7.)

The year 2020—with its COVID-19 induced lockdowns and quarantines—has especially highlighted the importance of community and the inherent need for humans to love others. The pandemic hasn’t impacted the health of most young adults, but the social and economic ramifications have made it more difficult for us to

get a jumpstart on life, during a time when we should have been doing so. While many young adults may view this difficulty to jumpstart our lives with anxious uncertainty, I would encourage fellow young adults that our central conviction remains unchanged no matter the external circumstances: we live our lives to love God and love others and his creation.

As a young adult, the personal question of “significance” has been heightened in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. There are many significant unanswered questions, such as: Where should I go to college? What should my area of study be? Who should I marry? Where should I move? What career path is best for me? In all of these, our choices will significantly alter our course of life. This past year has flipped upside down how we go about answering most of these questions—so drastically that we had to change the way we went about living in community and making future decisions. Many colleges no longer met in person. People were quarantined, making it much more difficult to interact with others. Travel became restricted or shut down, making it more difficult to find employment. Businesses reduced

capacity or shut down completely, meaning fewer jobs available.

Despite these external uncertainties, it is important to find grounding and meaning in living in our design. We see throughout the biblical story that God created human beings for fellowship with him and with others. This is a stark contrast to other ancient religions in which a god, or gods, created human beings for the specific purpose of slavishly serving the needs of the gods. For Christians, this is not the purpose for which God created us.

Instead, God created us to partner with him in our unique way by utilizing our gifts, talents, and surroundings to take care of his creation. This reality is where we find true eternal significance: Partnering with God, taking care of his creation, loving him, and loving what he has created. As my classmate has found, the journey is much easier and impactful if done in community.

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TECH ADDICTION:
 WHY YOU PROBABLY HAVE IT, WHAT IT'S DOING TO YOU AND OTHERS, AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT
GABE LARSON

I am a Millennial, but I am still old enough to remember, as a kid, seeing a man sitting in a pew at our church, looking at an ancient device called a pager—and he suddenly hurried out the back. After church I asked my mom what that was all about. She explained to me that Dr. Greg was “on call,” which meant the hospital could call him in at any moment.

I remember thinking that sounded awful! How could you have any freedom? The funny thing is, we now live in a society where everyone, not just doctors, are constantly “on call” to the world. Everywhere people are constantly being pulled away from their lives. Taking the call, answering the text or email, updating the Facebook status, scrolling the news feed.

Over the past couple of years I’ve been slowly feeling some disgust and a bit

of guilt over all the time I spend on my phone. I decided to do a little research to see just how much time we all spend on our devices. *10.6 hours a day.* Yep, you read that right. 10.6 hours is the current average that Americans spend on screens every single day. Over half those hours (5.4) are spent just on smartphones.

Then the average American adult spends another 4.5 hours a day watching movies and shows on TV. That’s a whopping 10 hours every day between TV and phones alone. If you were to line up your yearly screen time end to end, you would wake up, engage with screens without ceasing, get tired, go to bed, wake up the next day and do it all over again for... *243 days straight!* 67% of the average American’s waking life is spent staring at a screen. And that number is rising each year.

But certainly we must admit that technology brings many wonderful things to our lives. Connectivity, productivity, and entertainment to name a few. If the research around our tech use indicated positive health and social effects, we would call this a major societal win. However, the data overwhelmingly points in the opposite direction:

- **MRI brain scans of Facebook users demonstrated a significant reduction in gray matter in the amygdala correlated with their level of addiction to Facebook. This loss of brain matter is similar to the type of cell death seen in cocaine addicts.¹**

“If the research surrounding our tech use indicated positive health and social effects, we would call this a major societal win. However, the data overwhelmingly points in the opposite direction.”

- **Children who have been cyberbullied are three times more likely to contemplate suicide.** ²
- **30% of people ages 18-44 feel anxious if they haven't checked Facebook in two hours.**
- **Children with higher levels of screen time show greater delays in development.** ³
- **High depressive symptoms for teen girls (13-18) rose by 65% between 2010 and 2017—the timeframe that Facebook became mainstream in American culture.** ⁴
- **One in five mobile internet searches are for pornography.** ⁵
- **One in five youth pastors and one in seven lead pastors report they are currently struggling with porn (2016, Barna Research).** ⁵
- **About one in four teens receive sexts, and one in seven are sending them.** ⁵
- **On average, the first exposure to porn among men is at age 12.** ⁵

Besides lust, it's easy to see other sin patterns that stem from our technology use. Here are a few examples from my life: Anger at friends sharing their political opinions on Facebook. Covetousness and greed seeing how great the Joneses have it on Instagram. Hatred and fear of “The Other” while

reading the 24-hour news cycle. Gluttonously piloting the couch for 4-5 hours every night watching TV and movies.

Maybe you can relate. During my research, a question kept coming to mind: “Compared to my screen time, how much time do I spend with God, in his Word and in prayer? How much time do I spend with my wife?” Not 10.6 hours a day, that's for sure. The math of my life paints a convicting picture.

Jesus was very radical in his Sermon on the Mount when he said if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Better to go without an eye or a hand if it is causing you to sin (Matthew 5:29-30). Maybe you're like me, when I read that verse: Usually I am shocked, but then quickly settle on, “Jesus was just exaggerating to make a point.” I move on, and *completely miss the point*.

Clearly the research shows devastating effects linked to our current tech habits. But what are some of the spiritual implications?

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TECH ADDICTION
GABE LARSON

Jesus is telling us to be willing to radically alter our lives to follow him. Would God really ask us to cut off the hand that holds our smartphone or gouge out the eye that watches our TV?

What if we keep our eyes and hands but change how we use them?

AUTHOR

GABE LARSON is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Brethren Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

SOURCES

1. MRI brain scans, facebook addiction, gray matter reduction, similarities to hard drugs etc: <https://www.nature.com/articles/srep45064>
2. Children who have been cyberbullied 3X more likely to commit suicide: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/1840250>
3. Children with higher levels of screen time show greater delays in development: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2722666>
4. High depressive symptoms for teen girls rise by 65%: <https://journals.sagepub.com>
5. All of the porn stats: <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats>

6 Humble Suggestions for a Healthier Tech Life

1

REPENT

First, repent. No lasting change of action happens without a change of heart—and only God can change a heart. Confess your addiction to God and ask him to give you a desire for a healthier life. All too often we jump straight to action steps and bypass addressing the root problem—a sinful heart. If you do nothing else, pray.

2

MONITOR

Monitor your screen time. For iPhone users there is *Screen Time* (it's in your settings), which sends you weekly reports of your screen time.

3

REMOVE

Remove all social media apps from your phone, and yes, that includes e-mail. You won't die, I promise.

4

DISABLE

Disable all lock screen notifications and vibrations, except calls and probably text messages.

5

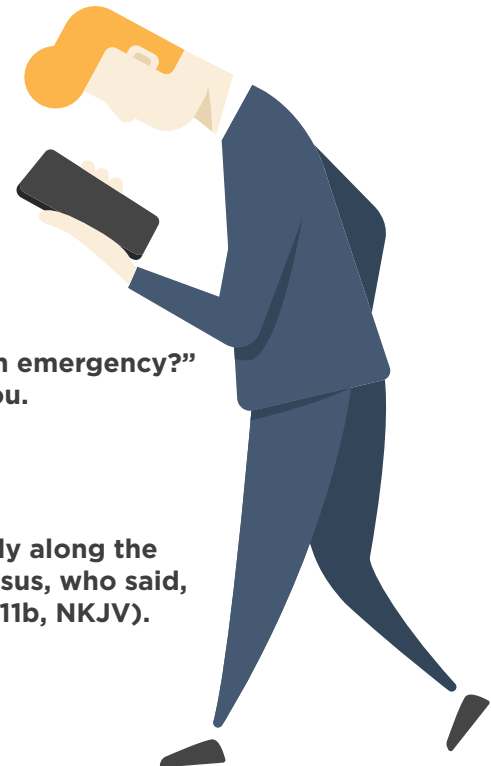
REST

Take a weekly Sabbath from your phone. "What if there's an emergency?" If there's an emergency, whoever it is should call 911, not you.

6

REPENT... AGAIN!

Repent (first and last). Ask God for a new heart continually along the way. Confess, and live in the freedom of grace through Jesus, who said, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11b, NKJV).





IMAGINE THE IMPACT
DAN VENBERG

I was sitting on a bench made of bricks in the back row of the classroom. The floor was sand. The walls and roof were made of woven thatch, the structure supported by poles cut from tree branches. The teacher had just shared the story of creation, Adam and Eve, the Fall, and the “protoevangelium” (first gospel) of Genesis 3:15, the promise that the offspring from Eve would crush the head of the serpent. And then the teacher asked the class a question about the story. Immediately, the 50 students in the classroom, almost without exception, shot their arms up into the air, simultaneously clicking their fingers, indicating their desire to speak, and exclaiming, “Moi Monsieur! Moi Monsieur,” effectively pleading with the instructor to pick them to respond. The eagerness of the students to engage with the class

discussion about the story they had just heard was amazing in and of itself. The context and implication of this scene sent shivers down my spine.

I was visiting an elementary school in Chad. This school was started by Nathanael and Carrie, Lutheran Brethren missionaries in a remote community located just south of the Sahara Desert in central Africa. The core ministry of Lutheran Brethren International Mission is to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of Jesus Christ among unreached people groups. In Chad, this means that our missionaries live and serve among people and in places that have limited access to the gospel message. Nathanael and Carrie and their family live in a region that is predominantly Muslim. Most of the people living there

have never heard a clear presentation of the gospel message.

This community felt the need for quality education for their children, so we decided to start a primary school that would offer a firm social, academic, and Christian foundation to the children. Terach, a trained Christian teacher, was hired as the first director of the new school in 2017. He moved to the community and, along with Nathanael, opened registration for first grade. The community responded enthusiastically and enrolled their children. The class filled up and the waiting list grew. The first-grade class graduated in the spring of 2018. Both parents and students were thrilled with what the school had accomplished. A second

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IMAGINE THE IMPACT
DAN VENBERG

teacher was hired the following year and a new first-grade class was started, with the previous students moving up to second grade. Today, the school has four teachers and four classes. The school plans to add another teacher and class each year until we have at least six classes... and then we will pause to evaluate whether we want to continue to grow the school or not.

This school has not only been blessed with an increase of students and teachers, but also with a growing infrastructure. A perimeter fence, teacher housing, office and bathrooms have been constructed. A well and water tower that runs off solar energy is used to water the school's garden and orchard. The current grass thatch classrooms will soon be replaced by six new permanent classrooms, currently under construction.

The community is very supportive of the school. The chief of the village is often found sitting in the courtyard

of the school, smiling as he listens to the enthusiasm coming from the classrooms. One of the parents is an imam (an Islamic religious teacher), who sends his two daughters, as well as some of his Quranic students, to the school. The imam was asked what he thought about the school and the biblical teaching his daughters were receiving. He responded, "This school is good for my daughters. And I welcome the Bible teaching. I want my daughters to learn the Bible and the teachings of Jesus. Then they can compare that with the Quran and the revelations of the prophet (Mohammed) and come to their own conclusions."

The students at this school are not only learning how to read and write and do math, but they are hearing the gospel every single day. I reflected on this as I sat in that classroom, observing the teaching. I praised God and was filled with awe. Most of the kids in this classroom were Muslim. And they were hanging on every word from the Bible

story that had just been shared with them.

The Bible tells us that faith comes through hearing the message about Christ (Romans 10:17). The Bible tells us that the Word of God, as it goes out, will not return empty (Isaiah 55:11). The Bible tells us that the Word of God is alive and active, penetrating the soul (Hebrews 4:12). I am so excited to see how God will use this school for his purposes.

Imagine the impact!

AUTHOR

DAN VENBERG serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as Director of International Mission.



Her name is Habiba. Her name means beloved. She is a member of the Fulbe people in central Chad. She will never hear about the God who loved her first UNLESS someone like you enters her world and tells her.

WHO'S NEXT?

www.LBIM.org

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

Romans 10:14-15



The Church of the Lutheran Brethren has identified three people groups in south central Chad: the Bagirmi, the Bilala, and the Fulbe. These people groups do not have a church planted among them and are 99% Muslim. We are looking for missionaries to join those already called to this crucial task. Who's Next?

Contact LBIM at: LBIM@CLBA.org

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- 37% Literacy
- 141 People Groups
- 72 Unreached People Groups
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