The Role of Laughter in the Christian Life

by Terry Lindvall, Ph.D.

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In the fourth century, a monk named Evagrius identified key temptations against living the Christian life. He named eight of them, and they became the eight deadly sins. Now we know that Pope Gregory the Great reduced them to seven to fit them in with the symbolic biblical number. But unfortunately the sin that Gregory conflated into sloth was the sin of sadness. Sadness in the face of God’s grace and mercy was a denial of faith and hope.

But it isn’t the vice that concerns me. It is its corresponding virtue, what Evagrius identified as the blessing of hilaritas as essential to Christian living, even if you were an ascetic monk and especially if you are a lawyer or accountant.

The place of humor and laughter in the Christian journey can lead one down the broad path of destruction, or it can lead up to the pleasure of God. One remembers that the Westminster Catechism defines the chief end of man as being “to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” How many of us have actually enjoyed God today?

Now one recognizes that laughter in the Scriptures is treated with ambiguity. Much of the laughter is mocking. Koheleth, author of the Hebrew book of Ecclesiastes, warns that although there is a time for laughing, there is also a time for weeping. It is better to attend funerals than festivals, advised the prophet of futility. It is better to eat thistles than to eat cake. It is better to be miserable than to be happy. “Sorrow is better than laughing, for sadness has a refining influence on us.” Koheleth does not seem to be the best dinner companion for when you are depressed.

In the very first psalm, we are warned not to walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the path of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers. However, in the very next psalm, we are told that “He who sits in the heavens laughs; The Lord scoffs at them!” Now, I argue with my wife, are we not to be like God in all things? Can we not imitate His holy mocking? When, she replies, you are as holy as God, you may mock like God.

“Woe to you who laugh now,” warned the great Jewish teacher, Jesus, in the Gospel of Luke. Was His admonition targeted against the practice of laughter? No, the context places the judgment against Pharisees who were arrogant and proud. Jesus denounced those who had hardened their hearts now, in the presence of God. He admonished those who asserted their superiority over others and neglected justice and kindness. Woe to them and to the lawyers who compound burdens as well.

As in all comedy, timing is key. Just a few verses earlier in the Beatitudes, a comic reversal takes place, a harbinger of hope for humor. Jesus promises laughter to those who suffer now. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh!” Laughter in itself is not a vice to be condemned; it is a reward for those who would follow Jesus. The significance (continued on page 12)
Dear Friends,

This issue of Knowing and Doing or “K & D,” as it’s known affectionately by some, may be one of our most diverse issues to date as far as the kinds of articles that you will find within. It may make you laugh as you read Dr. Terry Lindvall’s engaging article on the role of humor for the disciple of Jesus. And it may make you cry as you read C.S. Lewis Institute Fellow Leanne Martin’s beautiful commentary on C.S. Lewis’s poem that begins, “Love’s as warm as tears.”

There is a superb combination of articles on evangelism as Dr. Randy Newman, Senior Teaching Fellow of Apologetics and Evangelism, brings out in the open the hidden tensions that we often experience when we share the Gospel with our neighbors, and Dr. Gerald McDermott gives Christians an insightful thumbnail sketch of Hinduism. This is followed up by some practical tips on outreach to your Hindu friends written by Michael Suderman, an Oxford trained apologist serving in the Washington, D.C. area with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries.

Dr. Tom Tarrants, City Director for Washington, D.C., then takes us where many theologians fear to tread and helps us thoughtfully reflect upon the taboo topics of death and final judgment – the two things that we must all face in the end.

And then I wrap up the smorgasbord with an article on ways to discern the conversion of a child, a piece written in part to continue and honor the legacy of former C.S. Lewis Institute President Kerry Knott, who recently launched The Aslan Academy (available on the C.S. Lewis Institute website). Kerry not only saw the need to provide this resource to parents, godparents, grandparents and other adults to help them intentionally disciple the children in their lives, but he practices what he preaches with his own children.

I am indebted to Kerry for the gracious way in which he prepared the way for me to step into the role of President of the C.S. Lewis Institute this past January. Kerry is a model to me of what a leader should be and more importantly is a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. Please pray for me and the staff of the C.S. Lewis Institute as we seek to fulfill the mission that the Lord has given to us – that of helping disciples better articulate, defend and live their faith in Christ in personal and public life.

Grace and Peace,

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Is evangelism easy? Is it simple? Can it be comfortable? I’ve never been able to answer any of those questions in the affirmative. And I’ve tried. For many years, I listened to and read books by evangelists who have tried to encourage me to “just” share my faith as if it was like breathing or striking up a casual conversation. That never worked.

At one point I thought, “Maybe evangelism is difficult” and tried that concept on for size. It fit. I found encouragement from the apostle Paul’s saying his evangelistic efforts in Corinth were “in weakness and fear, and with much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). Now that’s my kind of evangelist!

As I’ve observed my own and others’ experiences of proclaiming the Good News, I’ve seen at least four tensions. I believe Paul referred to these very tensions toward the end of the Epistle to the Colossians. Consider his admonitions and see if these might shed light on your own efforts to reach out with the gospel.

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Col. 4:2

Tension Number 1: The Inseparability of Prayer and Proclamation

Did you note how seamlessly Paul flowed from the topic of prayer to the task of outreach? It’s easy to see why, given the fact that evangelism involves a human agent and a divine power. For some reason, God has chosen to have His gospel spread by people—vessels with less than perfect motives, methods, or track records. But He also comes alongside and softens hard hearts, opens blind eyes, and attracts wandering souls. Whenever one person tells another person about Jesus, at least two miracles must occur. In the unsaved person’s life, God must raise someone who is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). In the Christian’s life, He must provide the words, love, and wisdom needed because apart from Jesus, we can do nothing (see John 15:5).

Thus Paul urges us to “devote” ourselves to prayer in connection with his discussion of proclaiming the mystery of Christ. As many people have put it memorably, we need to talk to God about people and then talk to people about God. We should regularly lift up in prayer the “outsiders” that God has placed in our lives—in our families, at work, in our neighborhood, and wherever else His sovereign hand has led us. It is no accident that the other Soccer Mom on the sideline next to you or the guy sitting at the desk across from you or the family that moved into the house next to yours are all in your life. Pray for them and “watch” God pave the paths for you to strike up conversations, develop friendships, or offer help in times of need.

The fact that Paul tells us to “devote” ourselves to prayer might suggest that it’s easy to quit. If there’s one thing I’ve learned about prayer, it is that it takes devotion. It also helps to use some aids or helps for the task—a bookmark in your Bible with a list of names of nonbelievers you’re praying for or a set time in your day when you lift up the names of people who don’t know the Lord or a reminder on your phone that pops up their names on a regular basis. To be devoted to prayer for

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There is no such thing as Hinduism. (You now know more than the average Christian and will immediately stand out in your next theological debate). The word Hinduism presumes a religion in which the parts are consistent with one another. But such a religion does not exist. That will no doubt surprise you, but consider this: Hinduism is a word the British coined as a catch-all term for the innumerable and often contradictory religions they found on the Indian subcontinent.

Why do I say contradictory? Because, for example, some Indian religions are theistic (they believe in a personal god) and others aren’t. The latter think the divine is an it, not a Someone. It is an it that includes everything and contains everything (this is called pantheism), but it most certainly is not a Person who created the world or to whom we can pray.

That’s why I say some Indian religions contradict others. Theistic Indian religions contradict pantheistic Indian religions. And these pantheistic religions can actually be called atheistic, because they don’t believe in a personal god who created the world or can save us. They are religious (they have a reverence for the mystery and spiritual essence of the world) but atheistic (there is no personal god who created or rules the world).

Most Hindus probably would not agree that these different religions are contradictory. They would either say that it doesn’t matter, because religious practice is most important, or that what seems contradictory to us is really harmonious at the “highest” level of reality. (I will explain “levels of reality” below). Some of these Hindus talk about Hinduism as a journey in which they progress from worshipping a god, to realizing that that god is merely an image of ultimate reality in which there are no personal gods.

But back to my first point: instead of one religion called Hinduism, there are many religions in India, often contradictory and wildly conflicting in beliefs. That’s why I have titled this essay “A Thumb-Nail Sketch of Hinduism(s).” A more accurate title would be “The Native Religions of India.” I say “native” because Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism (as well as others) are also flourishing religions in India, with millions of adherents there, but they were founded elsewhere. This essay will focus on Indian religions that got their start on the Indian subcontinent.

There are many different religions that are called Hindu. The Hindu scriptures in fact say there are 330 million gods, and at least several scores of these gods have their own sets of beliefs and practices. So where to start?

I think the best way to make some sense of this huge number of competing and mutually conflicting Indian religions is to (1) look at two concepts about life and death that almost all Hindus believe, and then to (2) see the two major sets of Indian religions (all called Hindu) that try to resolve those two things.

Two Things on Which Almost All Hindus Agree

The first thing most Hindus agree on is samsara. This is pretty much what we call reincarnation. For Hindus it is a combination of karma (literally, “deeds”) and rebirth. It means that after death we are judged by an impersonal law of karma, which determines what kind of life we will be reborn into. If we performed bad deeds and therefore have bad karma, we will be reborn into an unhappy life as a human being, an animal, or even an insect. If we led a good life and accumulated good karma, then we will be reborn into a happy human life. Samsara is the endless (and without beginning, either) cycle of life, death and rebirth: after each life, we die and are reborn into a different life.
Shirley MacLaine looks forward to her coming rebirths. But in the history of India, most Hindus haven’t. Life has not been very easy for most Hindus, and they sense that the next life is sometimes worse than the present one—especially if they haven’t earned enough good karma in this life. They also hope that eventually they will achieve the second thing most all agree on: moksha.

Moksha is Sanskrit for “liberation,” which in this case means liberation or release from the iron law of samsara. In other words, Hindus want to be released from the iron law of life-death-rebirth. They don’t want to be reborn forever and ever. They want to stop the wheel and get off—finally to be free of reincarnation. Most of the assorted varieties of Hindu religions can be seen as ways to get free from samsara and thereby achieve moksha.

Four Roads to Moksha—Two of Them Well Traveled

In Hindu religions there are four main avenues to moksha: the way of knowledge (jnana), the way of devotion (bhakti), the way of works (karma), and the way of meditation (yoga). We are going to look at two of these, because they are the best known and the most widely practiced. The first, the way of knowledge, is the best known and most prestigious intellectual tradition in “Hinduism.” The second, the way of devotion (bhakti), is far and away the most popular form of Hindu religion today. If you can get a basic idea of how these two Hindu systems work, you will be able to comprehend the basic ways of thinking of the vast majority of Hindus.

The Way of Knowledge: Advaita Vedanta

Take off your Western eyeglasses and be ready to imagine a way of looking at reality that is very different from your own. With a little patience, you can conceive a world that is seen by more than a billion people worldwide (because some features of this philosophy are shared by Daoists and Buddhists).

This way to moksha is called the way of knowledge because it promises that you can escape samsara if you come to see (know) reality in the right way. It takes a lot of work to come to this knowledge or spiritual vision, but the result will be the end to rebirths (and reincarnation).

The most famous teacher of this way was Shankara (AD 788–820), a Brahmin priest and philosopher from south India. Shankara’s system, which has become the most respected school of philosophy for Hindus, is called advaita vedanta.

Understanding what each of these two words means will help us understand his all-important philosophy. Advaita is Sanskrit for “non-dual.” This means there are not two (or three or more) things in reality; there is ultimately only one thing. That one thing is Brahman, which is the impersonal, unchanging spirit or essence of the cosmos. Everything that appears to our eyes and other senses is ultimately unreal. Only eyes that have been opened spiritually can see the underlying reality in all things.

Vedanta means “end of the Vedas.” The Vedas are the early set of Hindu (continued on page 19)
Each of us is moving toward two great experiences. No matter how much money, power, or influence we may have, we cannot avoid them. Each day brings us another step closer to what no human being can escape: the hour of our death and the day of our judgment. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it: “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

Why write on such unsettling subjects? In the Bible God repeatedly reminds us of these sobering realities, exhorting us to recognize the brevity of life and our accountability to Him and calling us to make any needed changes while we still have time. By doing so, we will be enabled to grasp more fully the glorious and joyful future that lies beyond them.

As important as they are, these two subjects are unpopular today. Among affluent, secularized Westerners, it has become fashionable to ignore death and judgement. Even to intimate one’s eventual death is considered crude, unenlightened, and morbid. And to speak of one’s accountability to God and the day of judgment is to risk social banishment. Even the church is largely silent on the two Final Things. When did you last hear a sermon on either topic?

In a short article, it would be impossible to do justice to what the Bible teaches about death or judgment; indeed, many books have been written about each. Nor does space permit a discussion of their relationship to other related topics, including the intermediate state, the rapture, and the millennium. So we will restrict our discussion to a few key biblical passages and how they can help us grow in grace and live with confident and expectant hope.

The Brevity of Life and Certainty of Death

In our fast-paced, high-pressured, stress-filled world, we easily lose perspective. Work, family responsibilities, social events, and various ministries and activities compete for our time and crowd out serious reflection on our mortality.

Yet throughout Scripture, God tells us repeatedly that our earthly life is short. Moses said, “The years of our life are seventy, / / or even by reason of strength eighty; / yet their span is but toil and trouble; / / they are soon gone, and we fly away” (Ps. 90:10). Centuries later, David echoed him when he said, “As for man, his days are like grass; / he flourishes like a flower of the field; / for the wind passes over it and it is gone, / / and its place knows it no more” (Ps. 103:15–16). In the New Testament, James notes: “You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (James 4:14). Many other passages speak to the same effect, reminding us that our life on earth is brief and uncertain and death is sure. Once we are gone, we are soon forgotten. Life in all its busyness goes on without us, having taken little notice of our departure.

David’s reflection on the brevity of his own life and the prayer it evoked can help us. He prayed,

O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am!
Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you.
Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah.
Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather! And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you. (Ps. 39:4–8)

Unlike David, most of us do not ponder the brevity of our lives or think about death, especially our own. But doing so can be healthy for our spiritual life and has been a common practice of great spiritual leaders and godly people through the centuries. Benedict of Nursia told his monks, “Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die. Hour by hour keep careful watch over all you do, aware that God’s gaze is upon you, wherever you may be.” Thomas à Kempis counseled,

Very quickly there will be an end of thee here; look for what will become of thee in another world . . . Oh, how wise and happy is he that now labors to be such a one in this life, as he wishes to be found at the hour of his death.4

Such recollections can help us stay grounded in reality, live a life that is pleasing to God, and give us great confidence as we contemplate the future.

You may want to consider the following simple exercise. Quietly ponder what you would like to be true of you at the time of your death. Your list might include a clear and firm grasp of God’s grace; assurance of salvation; intimacy with God, a morally upright life and works of love toward those in need; loving relationships with family and friends; and peaceful, reconciled relationships with others. Once you have identified your top priorities, begin making the changes that will characterize you at your life’s end, relying on the Holy Spirit to help you carry out your intentions. This simple exercise, consistently pursued over time and in prayerful dependence on God, can have profound effects. When your time comes, you will be much better able to face death with confidence and peace.

The Day of Judgment

Beyond the death of our bodies lies the final judgment, the day when we must appear before the tribunal of Christ and give an account of our lives. The prospect of giving such an account evokes fear and anxiety in the human heart. Who among us has lived such a pure and holy life that we would be comfortable with all the world knowing its every detail? Yet every person who has ever lived must one day stand personally and publicly to answer for what he or she has done or failed to do. No one can escape, no one can melt away into the crowd.

Most believers are well aware that the Bible teaches there will be a day of judgment in which all nonbelievers will give an account of their lives to God. Jesus made this clear when He said, “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to...” (continued on page 24)
Christian parents have one ultimate desire for their children—that they place their faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. However, what does the conversion of a child look like?

In The Chronicles of Narnia book The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, C.S. Lewis illustrates what the true conversion of a child looks like. He begins by describing the preconversion life of a boy. He writes,

There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it . . . I can’t tell you how his friends spoke to him, for he had none . . .

Eustace Clarence liked animals, especially beetles, if they were dead and pinned to a card . . .

(He) disliked his cousins . . . But he was quite glad when he heard that Edmund and Lucy were coming to stay. For deep down inside him he liked bossing and bullying . . . he knew that there are dozens of ways to give people a bad time if you are in your own home and they are only visitors.1

This is the picture of a child who doesn’t know Jesus.

Later in the story, Eustace falls into a dragon’s cave with horrifying results. Lewis writes,

[Eustace] had turned into a dragon while he was asleep. Sleeping on a dragon’s hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself . . .

He realized that he was a monster . . . He began to wonder if he himself had been such a nice person as he had always supposed.2

This is the point at which Eustace becomes aware that he is a sinful person, which of course is the first step in the conversion process. A child must recognize and admit that he or she is a sinner.

Fortunately for Eustace, he soon meets the lion Aslan (the Christ figure in Narnia). Eustace allows Aslan to “un-drangle” him by peeling off his dragon skin. Eustace describes the scene, “The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart,”3 which of course it had. Eustace’s heart has been changed by Aslan, and he is baptized in a pool of water and comes out a changed boy. In other words, the child has repented and confessed his sin, surrendered to Jesus, and the Lord has changed his heart and made him His child.

Lewis then gives us a realistic description of the post-conversion life of a child. He writes of Eustace,

It would be nice, and fairly nearly true, to say that “from that time forth Eustace was a different boy.” To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun.4

In other words, while the child wasn’t perfect, there was a marked change in his life now that he had allowed Aslan to “un-drangle” him.

While this illustration can give us an idea about what conversion looks like in a child, how can we know whether or not our child is a Christian?

Fortunately, Jesus gives us some principles to follow in discerning the spiritual state of another person. First, He warns that we must be careful when judging another person; we must hold ourselves to the same standards of holiness with which we critique others (Matt. 7:1–5).
In other words, whether we’re trying to discern the conversion of our child or someone else, we must apply the same basic criteria to ourselves.

Second, Jesus says that it is possible to discern the spiritual vitality of other people by the “fruit” they produce in their lives. Those who are rooted in Jesus will produce good and healthy “fruit.” Those who have not experienced the spiritual healing that only Jesus can give will bear “thorns and thistles” (Matt. 7:15–20; John 15:4–6). Paul later elaborates on this idea when he says that the follower of Jesus will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in growing measure: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In contrast, the nonbeliever will continue to produce the fruit of the sinful nature: hatred, discord, jealousy, sexual immorality, anger, and lying, to name a few examples (Gal. 5:16–25). In other words, our actions are evidence of whether or not our hearts and mind have been transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit. This doesn’t mean that Christians will live sinless lives, or that non-Christians will always appear to be bad people. However, there will be a noticeable qualitative difference in the way the Christian lives following true conversion.

Third, Jesus makes it clear that salvation isn’t just intellectual assent, merely confessing that Jesus is Lord. He says that on Judgment Day, many will say, “Lord, Lord,” and Jesus will say, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:21–23). Authentic faith in Christ involves a heart that truly believes (Rom. 10:9) and is evidenced by changes in thought, word, and deed. So, while the profession of faith, kneeling by a bedside, or responding to an altar call at church is important, it must be accompanied by a transformation of the heart seen in daily life.

What, then, are some reliable signs that someone has experienced true conversion? The great American preacher and theologian of the early eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards, who preached in some of the revivals of the First Great Awakening, examined this question. In his work The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God, he found in 1 John 4 that the apostle points out five traits of an authentically converted believer. In modern language, such a person:

1. Acknowledges and exalts Jesus as Lord and Savior (1 John 4:2–3)
2. Recognizes the evil of sin in his or her life, the world, and the devil and seeks to overcome it (1 John 4:4–5)
3. Has a growing understanding and love for God’s Word (1 John 4:6)
4. Seeks for and discerns the truth in all things (1 John 4:6)
5. Loves God and others (1 John 4:8)

These five marks of true conversion will be present in the life of every true believer, although the marks may evidence themselves somewhat differently in the life of a child compared to an adult. (Immaturity and stages of development must be taken into account.) So how do these translate into the life of your son or daughter? Here are some questions to consider:

1. Is there a genuine affection and love for Jesus in your child’s life, or is your child just parroting your religious language? In other words, is your child in love with Jesus as evidenced by an infectious enthusiasm for the Lord? Does your child enjoy

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A Love Without End
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We say ‘God is love,’ but do we really understand how powerful those three little words are?

“Love’s as warm as tears,” wrote C. S. Lewis, “love is tears.” And so begins one of the most important poems I’ve ever read. I love it, not because it’s well known or because Lewis is such a popular figure in contemporary Christian thought, but because it reminds me of my wedding. Lewis is much more to me than an author, professor, novelist, and Christian apologist: he’s a matchmaker.

Ten years ago (roughly 40 years after his death), C. S. Lewis brought my husband Mart and me together. We both came to know his work long before we knew each other. Mere Christianity helped bring Mart back to the faith after years of wandering, and The Chronicles of Narnia enthralled me from the first time I read it. So when we crossed paths at a C. S. Lewis conference several months after we first met, we had a great deal to talk about. That weekend, we spent almost all our time together, telling stories, laughing, and discovering miles of common ground. We scheduled our first date for the following weekend, and exactly a year later, we married.

As we planned our wedding, it seemed only fitting that Lewis be involved. Though a brilliant writer and thinker, Lewis is not known for his poetry, but “Love’s As Warm As Tears” struck a chord with us. So, during the ceremony, while a dear friend of ours read the poem, I sat next to my groom and thought about the path that had led me to this day. Each stanza reminded me of some aspect of the love Mart and I shared and, even more so, God’s love for us.

Our wedding was in mid-March, with Easter in sight. Although the temperatures were still chilly, pink camellias at the house we would share had already bloomed, and forsythia offered blazing yellow blossoms against the tired grays and browns of winter. Similarly, this love of ours was bright and beauty-filled. It was, as Lewis would say, “fresh as spring.” I could see a lovely new life unfolding for us. And I wondered at the goodness of God—the everlasting kindness that was giving Mart and me a love to last a lifetime.

As I listened to the scriptures we’d selected being read aloud, I thought of the tears I had wept when my first marriage ended. In desperation, I’d clung to the Lord, and He never let me go. As He healed me, I felt nothing but gratitude for His grace and redemptive work in my life. He had given me so much, including a little girl who was my delight, and a family who loved and supported me. But the greatest gift in those years—or ever—was the Lord Himself, His presence with me.

Because God loves us, He allows trials in our lives to teach and grow us. Scripture and Lewis’s poem speak of the refiner’s fire and its resulting purity. Some trials are of our own making, but regardless, He uses them to mold us into the likeness of His Son. When I was at my lowest, God did not stand back or turn away in disgust. Rather, He walked through it with me. His Word says over and over that He will never leave us nor forsake us. The same God who stood in the furnace with three young Israelites stands in the furnace with us (Daniel 3).

When Jesus walked among us, He didn’t spare Himself the pain of this life. He immersed Himself in it. Early on, He taught from Isaiah 61, a passage that has brought me comfort and hope during hard times: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor” (v. 1 NIV). He was sent to bind up the brokenhearted, release the captives, and comfort all who mourn—to give them a garment of praise. Because He is our hope, He can turn our weeping into dancing.

On our wedding day, I was clothed in joy, my gown a garment of praise.
I celebrated the Father’s gift of love between this godly man and me. I couldn’t help nodding when our friend read 1 John 4:19: “We love, because He first loved us.” After all, God set the standard in 1 Corinthians 13, a passage often read at weddings (including ours), used in premarital counseling, and memorized by many. It’s a love we Christians speak of in a casual way, as though words could contain it, as though we understand it. But do we?

That’s why the final stanza in Lewis’s poem still stuns me. It begins, “Love’s as hard as nails, love is nails.” Mart and I chose the poem for that line, and it keeps drawing me back. God’s love compelled Him to allow human hands to drive nails into His Son’s flesh. In those moments when I see myself as I truly am, I wonder why He would do that for me. Moments like these: When I realize yet again I’m worrying about health issues, or my loved ones, or the future instead of trusting the Lord. When my hasty words nick Mart or hurt our daughter. When a stranger needs something I can provide, but I don’t have the time, or energy, or heart to give it. How many opportunities have I missed to share some of the hard-as-nails love that God has showered on me?

The Easter season urges me to examine my life and explore that love. How has it changed me? What has it made possible in my life, in my relationship with Mart, our daughter, and others? In what ways do I need to allow it to refine me? Easter encourages me—and perhaps you too—to discover how wide and long and high and deep (Eph. 3:17-18) is the love of Christ, a love like no other, a love without end.

Love’s As Warm As Tears

Love’s as warm as tears,  
Love is tears:  
Pressure within the brain,  
Tension at the throat,  
Deluge, weeks of rain,  
Haystacks afloat,  
Featureless seas between  
Hedges, where once was green.

Love’s as fierce as fire,  
Love is fire:  
All sorts—infernal heat  
Clinkered with greed and pride,  
Lyric desire, sharp-sweet,  
Laughing, even when denied,  
And that empyreal flame  
Whence all loves came.

Love’s as fresh as spring,  
Love is spring:  
Bird-song hung in the air,  
Cool smells in a wood,  
Whispering ‘Dare! Dare!’  
To sap, to blood,  
Telling ‘Ease, safety, rest,  
Are good; not best.’

Love’s as hard as nails,  
Love is nails:  
Blunt, thick, hammered through  
The medial nerves of One  
Who, having made us, knew  
The thing He had done,  
Seeing (with all that is)  
Our cross, and His.

— C.S. Lewis

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The Role of Laughter in the Christian Life

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of laughter is that it must know its time and place.

Laughter is a reward of humility and utter dependence upon God. It descends like rain upon a parched heart. Condemnation doesn’t shower people with a sense of humor but rather those rich, well-fed, and stiff-necked souls who assume superiority over others. So, too, the apostle James later explodes in his warning to hypocritical sinners: “Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom” (4:8–9).

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul warns against foolish talk (morologia), best exemplified by the fool who says in his heart “there is no God.” Such talk is damned folly. Paul also warns against a twisting of the good (eutepeelia), where virtue and justice are perverted for laughter.

However, in Philippians, Paul commands: “rejoice! and again I say, rejoice!” He calls forth the heart to sing out with gratitude and laughter. The great Roman Catholic journalist G.K. Chesterton, who would infect C.S. Lewis with the sanity of the Christian faith through his delightful paradoxes, explained how this laughter of joy was necessary. “Life is serious all the time,” he quipped, “but living cannot be. You may have all the solemnity you wish in choosing your neckties, but in anything important such as death, sex, and religion, you must have mirth or you will have madness.”

However, there have been those who believed that Christian laughter should be forbidden. Certain Church Fathers did hold dim, frowning views of laughter.

The sixth-century Rule of St. Benedict declared: “As for coarse jests and idle words or words that lead to laughter, these we condemn with a perpetual ban.”

On the other hand, in the “Inferno” of his Divine Comedy, Dante buries melancholy people in black mud in hell, because they had remained so stubbornly gloomy in the sweet glad air of God’s Sun. As he leaves the realms of Purgatory and follows Beatrice into Paradise, Dante hears a sound he has never heard before: celestial laughter, the laughter of the heavens.

Doctrinal Laughter

Culling insights from orthodox Christians from St. Augustine and St. Aquinas to Chesterton and Lewis, we can find laughter to be grounded in three major doctrines of the church: Creation, the Fall, and the Incarnation.

In the beginning everything God created was good. And laughter was a gift, created before the fall. When someone like philosopher John Morreal suggests that God could never laugh because He is omniscient and one could never surprise Him with a punch line, he misses the point that we all laugh at jokes we already know. The key is the delightful incongruity which catches us off guard and reminds us of our creation. In the Garden of Eden, God placed two jokes, two grand incongruities that make us laugh even today.

The first incongruity is our own created nature as human beings. We are a mix of dust and divine breath. God breathes into humus, earth, and presto we are that amazing oxymoron—a spiritual animal. Spirit and earth make one comic being. On one side, we are related to the angels, the transcendent, the spiritual, the Amish—on the other side, we are cousins to jackals, weasels, skunks, and lawyers. The heavens and the earth are married, and the union is a marvel, a mystery, a matter for much mirth.

“What is man, O Lord? that Thou should crown him with glory, and bathe him in folly? But it is being truly serious about our miserable condition and about the hope of salvation that introduces an unexpected surprise—comedy.
When we said that God as His own critic declared everything in creation to be good, we were wrong. There was one condition that God did not pronounce good; there was one joke that was not yet good enough to share. It is not good, He said, that man should be alone. That’s only half of a very good joke; so the second joke of creation is that God split His image in two: that He made man and woman in His own image. The comic possibilities about and between male and female have yet to be exhausted. Comedy resides in the creation of genders, of two beings so divinely alike and yet so frustratingly different.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis explored the relations between the fallen human condition and humor. Humor, he wrote, involves a sense of proportion and seeing oneself from the outside. The comic muse teaches us to humbly see ourselves as others see us, to have a perspective outside our own myopic view. We will be happier when we see and confess our sins. H. Allen Smith defines a humorist as a “fellow who realizes, first, that he is no better than anybody else, and second, that nobody else is either.”

The reason for the fall is the sin of pride—where everyone takes him- or herself too seriously. Satan, Chesterton reminds us, fell through force of gravity. He took himself too seriously. Pride drags us downward into an easy solemnity about ourselves. Thus we picture hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and where everyone lives the deadly serious passions of envy, self-importance, and resentment. In short, a college faculty meeting. As Garrison Keillor said, “Some people think it’s difficult to be a Christian and to laugh, but I think it’s the other way around. God writes a lot of comedy—it’s just that He has so many bad actors.”

But it is being truly serious about our miserable condition and about the hope of salvation that introduces an unexpected surprise—comedy. And grace arrives for Christians in the Incarnation, and it arrives with a Body. The Incarnation strikes a staggering blow at the Pharisees, the Gnostics, and anyone who denies the value of the physical world or those who try to be more spiritual than God. It is significant that, for Augustine, the Devil and the bad angels are without bodies.

For the Christian, the comic spirit is one of new life, feasting, banqueting, eating, drinking, and playing. This paradise is regained where heaven is described to be like a wedding feast or a sumptuous banquet.

God established Israel herself on a foundation of laughter. In the fresh tradition of C.S. Lewis, Frederick Buechner captured this genesis in all its wild, holy, and hilarious splendor in his *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale*:

*The place to start is with a woman laughing. She is an old woman, and after a lifetime in the desert, her face is cracked and rutted like a six-month drought. She hunches her shoulders around her eyes and starts to shake. She squinns her eyes shut, and her laughter is all wheeze and tears running down as she rocks back and forth in her kitchen chair. She is laughing because she is pushing 91 hard and has just been told she is going to have a baby... The old woman’s name is Sarah, of course, and her old man’s name is Abraham and they are laughing at the idea of a baby’s being born in the geriatric ward and Medicare’s picking up the tab... Maybe the most interesting part of it all is that far from getting angry at them for laughing, God told them that when the baby was born he wanted*
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them to name him Isaac, which in Hebrew means laughter. So you can say that God not only tolerated their laughter, but blessed it and in a sense joined in it himself.

As I have mentioned, I believe that a divine incongruity exists in our nature as spiritual animals. For Lewis, the oldest joke is that we have bodies. It makes us into buffoons; it humbles us when we try to be too dignified or too spiritual. St. Francis called his body Brother Ass. “Exquisitely Right!” observed Lewis,

because no one in his senses can either revere or hate a donkey. It is a useful, sturdy, obstinate, patient, lovable and infuriating beast; deserving now the stick and now a carrot . . . . So the body. There’s no living with it till we recognize that one of its functions in our lives is to play the part of the buffoon.

It ushers us into humility. Humor, humanity, humility, all find similar roots in *humere* and *humus*, in the moisture and earth of our existence.

Kinds of Laughter

Lewis found the sounds of laughter in four overlapping realms. In his eleventh Screwtape letter, he outlined these four kinds of laughter: Joy, Play, the Joke Proper, and Flippancy.

Joy is the laughter of heaven, the secret of the Christian life. Woven out of sorrow and woe, from the crucibles of suffering, absence, and separation, comes the deep, abiding laughter of joy, without tears, promising health, wholeness, and reunion. The desire of joy haunted Lewis, until he found its source in God. Lewis confessed that he didn’t go to the Christian faith to be made happy. For a brief time, happiness can be found in worshipping yourself or in a good bottle of port. But only for a brief season. God does not allow any settled happiness or security in this life. He provides inns along the journey, but He wants us to know that we are pilgrims, strangers in a strange land. This is not our home.

Laughter, like music, percolates as thanksgiving and praise. Our enjoyment bubbles up and overflows with gratitude. Our rejoicing should be robust, virile, and spontaneous. In fact, our praise is verbal laughter. Whenever a husband praises his wife or a reader praises a book, that praise completes, consummates, the joy. Wasn’t that a good meal, talk, walk, evening? The praise is a blessed reminder of our love and laughter.

The ultimate laughter of joy is in the reunion. In Narnia, whenever the children return, there are hugs and kisses and laughter all around, celebrating reunion. Think of what happens every time you unexpectedly see someone you love at an airport or train station: think of how you
laugh for no particular reason other than seeing the other, being reunited. So our great reunion with God Himself, in heaven, conjures up images of a fun and festive wedding feast, a giant banquet. Never an interminable church service or academic lecture, even on laughter.

The second category Lewis defines is fun, the laughter of the earth, of our bodies. It is laughter of play in its best sense. As I previously noted, the Westminster Catechism reminds us that our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Enjoy! What a delightful task to be set before us. As Eric Liddell in Chariots of Fire expressed it: “I feel God’s pleasure when I run.” So when we laugh in enjoying God, we know His pleasure.

Chesterton points to the habit of children to want things again. Whenever you read a child a book, what does he or she say? “Read it again.” Whenever you throw a child into the air, and strain your back, what does the child shout? He claps his hands in glee and shouts, “Do it again!” Because children have such abounding vitality, they want things repeated and unchanged. “They are not bored with the same thing. So, too, God exults in monotony. “The sun rises every morning. It might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life.

It is possible that every morning, God claps His hands in glee and says every morning to the sun: “Do it again.” And unlike many of us, He jumps up and starts the day.

The laughter of fun has its roots in humus and humere, in the earth and moisture of our lives, where humor dwells with the lowly, the common, the vulgar, and all the animals in the manger. That cheerful humility opens us up to the humor of our own lives.

Now the fact that man was made from the dust of the earth seems to imply to me that our humor thus will be earthy. The fact that women were created from a rib, above the waist and nearer the brain, seems to suggest a different kind of laughter. Such a juxtaposition leads to the third cause of laughter Lewis identified as the Joke Proper.

As I have mentioned, I believe that a divine incongruity exists in our nature as spiritual animals. The fact that we make coarse jokes, jokes about sex and bodily functions, was for Lewis evidence that we are animals that find our bodies either objectionable or funny.

Laughter, like any other good gift bestowed by God, can be corrupted, bent, spoiled, ruined. Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds. Laughter begins to be a demon the moment it begins to be a god. If we make laughter a god and worship it, it takes its own revenge upon us. It dies. Laughter is not enough to sustain us. It must be recognized as a simple gift; not the gift of life itself.

Remember that the opposite of serious is not comic, but trivial; and the opposite of comic is tragic.

Lewis warned of the laughter of Flippancy. Flippancy jokes about goodness, virtue, justice. It is cruelty disguised as joking. Our throats are like open sepulchers, graves where dead laughter exists. The weed of flippancy grows in the soil of superiority and pride. Its grubby root is in meanness. Over a cup of coffee and a sneering wink and a rolling of the eyes, we mock others. We laugh but know we should be repenting.

Lewis denounced flippancy so thoroughly because it was so close to his heart. It was his thorn. He knew its power, of wink-wink, nudge-nudge, know what I mean smirks toward others, living in what he called his own great puddle of naughtiness and meanness toward others. Yet, just because a good gift can go bad, one should not reject it. Laughter must be enjoyed in its goodness and fullness. In fact, laughter contributes to our physical as well as spiritual health.

The therapeutic benefits of laughter to health have been well documented: When we laugh, chemical endorphins are released into the bloodstream; as laughter provides a workout for the diaphragm, they increase the body’s ability to use oxygen. Laughter enhances blood flow, reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, stimulates alertness, dulls stabs of pain, fosters a sense of relaxation, provides cardiovascular benefits
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such as aerobic exercise, and loosens your bowels. Laughter truly may be good medicine.

Lessons of Laughter

As the proverb tells us, a happy heart makes the face cheerful. So what might one do to enhance one’s laughter? C.S. Lewis and other writers offer some hints.

First, habits of humor require an encounter with the God of laughter. Seek Him and seek to enjoy Him and His people.

Second, spend time with laughing saints. St. Teresa of Avila prayed that God would deliver her from gloomy saints. The father of Methodism, John Wesley, preached that a “sour religion is the devil’s religion,” inspired no doubt from Jesus’ admonition for men not to look dour when they fasted. Be with saints who see God’s grace interrupting their lives, who take time to give thanks for a meal, a conversation with a friend, a kiss from a spouse.

Third, read and listen to historical saints who display the gladness of God in what they write and say. And when you read the Scriptures, don’t imitate the voice of a shouting televangelist but use a wry Jewish accent. It will vivify the Word with chutzpah and joy.

Fourth, do not take yourself so seriously. Remember that the opposite of serious is not comic, but trivial; and the opposite of comic is tragic. Thus one can be comic and serious at the same time. With this, retell your own story as a comedy. Some of the best tales come from a tragic beginning, or middle, or even what seems to be the end as in a romantic relationship. Refashion your biography with God as the Director staging a divine comedy not a pathetic tragedy. What this does is put us into a fresh perspective. It allows us to see ourselves from the outside and God on the inside. Even though some of us may be faltering and stumbling through the valley of tears, we can still see the Celestial City up ahead.

The light of God’s gift of laughter can lighten our load on this pilgrimage. It will bless the company of pilgrims and infect others who want to join the joyous throng. Like the gospel, laughter is contagious and can draw people not only to God but to each other. And that, Evagrius would tell us, is a forgotten virtue that we should practice.

Laugh and fear not, creatures. Now that you are no longer dumb and witless, you need not always be grave. For jokes as well as justice come in with speech.

C.S. Lewis

RECOMMENDED READING

Terry Lindvall, Ph.D., Surprised by Laughter: The Comic World of C.S. Lewis (Thomas Nelson Inc., 2012)

For C.S. Lewis merriment was serious business, and like no book before it, Surprised by Laughter explains why. Author Terry Lindvall takes readers on a highly amusing and deeply meaningful journey through the life and letters of one of the most beloved Christian thinkers and writers. As Lindvall shows, the unique magic of Lewis’s approach was his belief that explosive and infectious joy dwells deep in the heart of Christian faith. Readers can never fully understand Lewis, his life or his legacy until they learn to laugh with him.
non-Christians’ salvation may seem more like a wrestling match than a comfortable ride, but it’s worth the effort.

**Tension Number 2: The Complementarity of Words and Actions**

There’s plenty in this passage about the verbal nature of evangelism. Paul uses the term *proclaim* twice and speaks about “our message,” “your conversation,” and the need to “proclaim it clearly.” He also speaks about “the way we act toward outsiders.” There may be a tension between words and actions, but it’s foolish to debate which one is more important. Just as we would want both wings on an airplane to function well, we should value both the verbal and nonverbal aspects of our witness.

Some people like to quote the slogan “preach the gospel at all times; when necessary, use words” and often attribute it to Francis of Assisi. But Francis probably never said such a thing. He did urge his followers to make sure their words were backed up by actions and we would certainly agree. But Francis was a bold (and, based on at least one historical account, a rather loud) evangelist who always used words. It is doubtful if he ever would have suggested that, under some circumstances, it was not necessary to use words.

Regardless of who said that pithy slogan, we should reject it. The nature of the gospel message requires words. If you bring a plate of chocolate cookies over to your new neighbors, they will not connect that act of kindness to the deadliness of sin, the necessity of the cross, the atoning work of the crucifixion, and the validating nature of the resurrection. Somewhere along the line, your neighbors will need to hear words.

So, to live with this second tension in evangelism, we need creativity to display deeds of friendship, compassion, and care as well as preparation with what to say, how to say it, and training in answering common questions that are likely to come up after the cookies are gone.

**Tension Number 3: The Dynamics of Grace and Salt**

I’ve heard some gospel proclaimers who sound angry. In fact, in our polarized society today, it seems that a lot of people are angry; some Christians have joined in to the noisy mess. How ironic that the word *gospel* means “good news,” when it sometimes sounds like condemnation. On the other hand, I’ve heard some so-called gospel presentations that sound like all good news without any hint of the severity of sin. But the message of salvation found in the Scriptures contains both bad news and good news. There’s a problem (sin), and there’s a solution (the cross). Without a clear understanding of the problem (we’ve rebelled against our Creator and told Him to leave us alone), the solution seems unnecessary or absurd.

The challenge of evangelism in our day is to assert both the good and the bad, the need and the solution, the problem and the provision without minimizing any aspect of our message.
Tensions in Evangelism

It takes a great deal of thought and effort to make sure the message is clear.

If our words are “full of grace,” they’ll sound appealing. People will want to hear more. Some of us have been trained to offer reasons why we believe the gospel is true. That is vital. But we also need to prepare ourselves to articulate why we think it’s good. We should not back away from stating that our faith is based on truth. We should also add why we’re glad it is. We believe the gospel because Jesus really did rise from the dead, and we can offer arguments that validate our convictions. We also believe the gospel, because it transforms us and makes us better friends, more sacrificial spouses, gentler parents, kinder neighbors, and more joyous people all around.

Our words should also be “seasoned with salt.” This description may be more difficult to grasp. But words that have salt make people thirsty. They intrigue, raise curiosity, surprise, or sting just enough to convict. Perhaps an example might help.

I’ve often been asked why there are so many hypocrites in the church. I’ve wrestled with just how to respond, given that people can ask this question with a wide range of motives. But if they’re sincere, and they’re really puzzled by the gap between what Christians say about how they should act and how they actually do behave, I try to mix grace and salt in my answer. It can sound something like this. “You’re right. There are a lot of hypocrites in the church—probably for the same reason that there are a lot of hypocrites everywhere else. I think, to some extent, we’re all hypocrites. I know I am.” (So far, I’m hoping that’s “grace.” Now comes the salt.) “But my problems are far worse than hypocrisy. They’re anger and bitterness and pride and arrogance and . . . well, I’d rather not keep going.” (Then I hope to add more grace). “And that’s why I’m part of the church. Because we’re all a bunch of hypocrites who have found forgiveness and cleansing for our hypocrisy and things that are far worse.”

Tension Number 4: The Realities of Reception and Rejection

There is one more tension that, if we can remember it, will help us in our uncomfortable evangelism. Some people will respond well to our words. Others won’t. In the first chapter of Colossians, Paul recounted how the recipients of his letter heard the gospel and “understood God’s grace in all its truth” (Col. 1:6). But in chapter 4, he says he’s “in chains” (Col. 4:3) for his preaching. That should not surprise us. Everywhere Paul went, some believed and some tried to kill him. Jesus always received similar “mixed reviews.” Since those who proclaim the gospel are to one group “the fragrance of life” and to another “the smell of death” (see 2 Cor. 2:16), we must anticipate both responses. This will protect us against discouragement while stopping us from taking credit.

It would be nice if evangelism was easy, simple, and comfortable, but that’s simply not the case. It is, however, miraculous, powerful, and amazing. While full of tension, it also brims with wonder. If we relinquish our desire (demand?) for ease, we can trust God to use us in the most eternally significant enterprise imaginable. That’s well worth any amount of tension.

Notes:

1. All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version 1984.

The glory of God, and, as our only means to glorifying him, the salvation of the human soul, is the real business of life.

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scriptures, the last set of which (the “end” of them) are the Upanishads. These writings, composed between 600 and 400 BC, teach that the human self (atman) is the same as the essence of the cosmos (Brahman).

Shankara taught that we typically think that what is real is distinct from other things and is always changing. So, for example, I think that I am separate from the computer at which I am now looking, and that both the computer and I are constantly changing. But if I were to attain spiritual knowledge, I would “see” that both the computer and I share an unchanging inner reality, and that this inner essence is more real than the outer forms people see when they look at me and my computer as two different things.

Notice I said “more real.” We in the West usually think in terms of reality and unreality. I am real and a character in a movie—say, Spiderman—is unreal. But in India people have thought in terms of levels of reality. They would point to a nightmare in which a bogeyman is chasing someone; this is a dream I confess I have from time to time. When I am dreaming this, my heart beats faster, and I may even sweat because I am afraid. Is the bogeyman real? To my dreaming mind, he is very real! That’s why I sweat, and my heart beats faster. But to my conscious mind just after I awake and realize in relief that it was only a dream, the bogeyman is unreal. Hindus would say that, at least while I was dreaming, that bogeyman was real—but at a lower level of reality.

We Christians might say that Jesus Christ is more real than I am. He was and is the fully real human being, fully actualized. Christians connected to Him are also real, but because of our sins and incomplete sanctification, our humanity is far less real than His. In other words, when we look at Jesus, we see full humanity. When someone looks at me, she does not see a full man, because I am not what God fully intended a human being to be. I am not as really human as Jesus was and is. Humans are meant to love always and love deeply, and my love is sporadic and often superficial. So in this sense we too might say that I am less real, or on a lower level of reality, than Jesus.

This Christian way of talking about levels of reality is different from the Hindu one. But it might help you imagine how Hindus can talk this way. For example, Shankara taught that the gods, human beings, and the world are all real, but only at a level of reality lower than what is at the highest level—Brahman. Each member of these three groups (gods, human beings, and physical world[s]) exists, but only as that bogeyman in my dream exists, or as a murder in a stage play exists. In the drama on the stage, there really are people fighting one another, and there is a murder weapon and (at least fake) blood, and there are cries of pain. And the people in the audience really do feel excitement and shock and sadness—but only at the level of the play. They know that at a “higher” level (as Hindus would say) or in “real life” (as Westerners would say), there was no murder.

So too for the gods. They have a “certain” reality in our lives here and now. But when all is said and done and we see reality as it really is, we will realize that they are not part of what is fully Real.

Neither is this world. It is like when we are walking in the forest at dusk and look ahead on the trail and see what looks very much like a snake. We get scared (if you’re like me, I hate snakes!) and stop walking forward, wondering how in the world we can get to our destination by another route. When we realize there is no other way, and we inch forward to get a better look, we suddenly are relieved to discover it was only a rope. We conclude that the snake was only an illusion (maya, in Sanskrit). Shankara said the separate human individual and even the world itself are also maya. The only thing that is “really” real is Brahman, where there are no distinctions between any one thing and anything else.
A Thumb-Nail Sketch of Hinduism(s) for Christians

Hard to understand? Some Hindus have used the illustration of a drop of water falling out of the sky over the ocean. While that drop is falling, it is an individual drop, with unique characteristics, like no other drop in the world. It has a unique weight, density, shape, taste, color, and even smell—though the way in which each of these is different from those of other drops is infinitesimally small. Nevertheless, it is a drop like no other in the world. So it is a distinct, individual drop.

Yet when that drop hits the surface of the ocean, in less than a second it loses its individuality. No longer does it have a shape or weight or density. Now the atoms of that drop are dispersed throughout the ocean. Does the drop still exist? Yes and no. No, as a drop with individuality. But yes, insofar as the particles and molecules of that drop are still around, but they have become merged with the ocean itself. There is now no distinction between the drop and the ocean.

Hindus who adhere to this advaita tradition compare us in our individual selves to that drop, and our future in Brahman to the ocean a moment after that drop has hit the surface. In Brahman, there is no “I.” But in some way that you and I (and even Shankara!) cannot understand, “we” still have some degree of existence. Yet not as individual selves.

Let’s sum up by considering how Shankara thinks we can solve the basic human problem. Every religion says this world is not the way it is supposed to be, that the cosmos has been screwed up in some way. This is what I mean by “the basic human problem.”

Every religion also prescribes what it thinks is the resolution to the basic human problem. I will explain for Shankara, and for bhakti in the next few pages, answers to both of these questions: What is the basic human problem? And how can it be resolved?

Shankara said that the basic human problem is ignorance. (By the way, most religions of the Far East say the same, though each differently defines the object of the ignorance—what we are ignorant of. So while most Hindu and Buddhist religions say the human problem is intellectual, Christianity, Islam and Judaism—the religions that began in the Middle East—say the basic human problem is moral. Of course to a certain extent, the moral and the intellectual are connected—ignorance leads to immorality, and enlightenment can lead to morality. But still there is this difference: in the Far East more emphasis is placed on our intellectual ignorance; the religions of the Middle East stress more our moral failure).

What are we ignorant of? Brahman, or ultimate reality, which of course contains no distinctions and therefore is finally only one thing.

How do we solve the problem? By meditation and asceticism (keep reading). That means we must meditate on the nature of reality until we finally “see” that everything is Brahman, even the individual self (atman). But we will attain that final vision only if we combine asceticism with the meditation. This is when we deprive ourselves of the pleasures of the flesh, such as tasty food and drink, a soft bed, sex and marriage, and other sensual enjoyments. Hindus seeking Brahman will often go into the forest to meditate, where they will sleep on the ground and eat the barest of foods, often fasting.

The Way of Devotion: Bhakti

Now that we have explored the most prestigious Hindu path to moksha, let’s turn to the most popular path. It is called bhakti, which is Sanskrit for devotion. This path is a way to liberation from samsara (remember, this is the endless cycle of reincarnation) by means of love and surrender (devotion) to a personal god.

Notice I use the adjective personal. This is because the previous path, advaita, says that the gods are not real at the highest level of reality. So there is no personal god at all. Brahman is not a person (having mind, will, and emotions) and not a god as we tend to think—a Someone who created the world and controls it and will finally put an end to it. No, Brahman is impersonal, something of an It that is behind and in

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and molecules of that drop are still around, but they have become merged with the ocean itself. There is now no distinction between the drop and the ocean.

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the world, and in fact is the only thing that is unchanging and fully real.

But bhaktas (devotees of bhakti) believe there are really gods, and they are there at every level, if there are levels at all. Some of them are very powerful and can actually save us from samsara. They do this by forgiving our sins and getting rid of our bad karma, so that we can live with them forever in one of their heavens. And rather than going through many lives trying to build up good karma and getting rid of bad karma, they will do this for us after this life if we turn to them in sincere faith!

It is no wonder that bhakti is far more popular than advaita or any other way. It is easier (by far!) and much faster.

Take Krishna, for example, who is the most popular of all the Hindu gods and the main character and speaker in the most beloved Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita. Krishna is said to be an incarnation (avatar) of Vishnu, who came to earth to right wrongs and restore righteousness. If one of Krishna’s devotees serves him with love and praise, the devotee will be released from samsara and not be reborn, but enter one of Krishna’s lovely heavens.

As you can see from the previous paragraph, Hindu bhakti contains the idea of incarnation (a god coming “in the flesh”). Its chief god (different from its most popular god, who is Krishna) is Vishnu, the god of order and righteousness, who comes down from the heavens whenever evil is especially bad on earth, so that he can set things aright. Bhaktas believe Vishnu has come to earth in various incarnations nine times and will come again at the end of time in a tenth incarnation (avatara). His previous incarnations have been as a fish, tortoise, boar, man-lion, dwarf, high-caste hero, Rama (another god), Krishna, and Buddha.

We’ve already seen that although advaita does not believe in the final reality of personal gods and therefore is essentially atheistic, bhaktas are theists. Another difference is that bhaktas believe the human self is real and will retain its individuality even after release from samsara. For bhaktas, there’s no dissolution of the drop of water into the ocean! But bhaktas add that the human self is divine, in fact, a “finite mode” of God.

Still other points of difference: bhaktas say the world is real and change is real, without different levels of reality. But this world is not a place of hope or fulfillment. As we have seen, most Hindus have been pessimistic about their ability to have deep or lasting happiness here on earth. That is changing some, as India joins the global economy and more and more Hindus are becoming prosperous. But philosophically Hindus are taught that true and deep happiness cannot be found in this world system.

For bhakti, the basic human problem is being stuck in samsara. What keeps us stuck is the combination of our karma and our ignorance of a personal god. The resolution to the problem is to get rid of karma by practicing love and surrender to a personal god (bhakti) and getting grace (prasada) from that god.

Many Christians have thought that their faith is the only one that has taught salvation by grace. You can see now that this is not the case (though Hindu bhakti might have developed after coming into contact with Christianity).

Interestingly, there are two kinds of bhakti; one teaches grace more radically than the other. The first is the monkey school (think of the baby monkey clinging to its mother) that says the god will give us grace only if we cooperate by purifying ourselves. You could say that the monkey school teaches salvation by grace and works.

The cat school (think of the kitten doing nothing while being carried by its mother’s teeth) says that salvation by, let’s say, Krishna (there are other bhakti gods, such as Rama) is entirely by Krishna’s grace. Whatever we do to serve and love Krishna is also only by Krishna’s grace.

Most bhaktas believe human effort and merit are necessary. Krishna and the other gods wait to see who makes good efforts before they confer salvation.
Christian Analysis

What can we say as Christians about these Hindu religions?

The first thing we can say is that there are obvious similarities. *Avatars* are similar to the Christian incarnation of Jesus Christ. Both Hindus and Christians say that God has come to earth to help and save.

There is also the idea of grace—which technically means God doing for human beings what they cannot do for themselves.

But there are profound differences. The *avatars*, as even Hindu scholars concede, are based less on historical reality than theological story. The stories about Krishna (stealing butter and having amorous affairs with cowgirls), for example, seem to have been a conflation of accounts of several krishnas (heroes) in real history, with supernatural elements added later. Second, there are ten incarnations in history, unlike the one incarnation of Jesus, which did all that was needed to save human beings for all time. Third, these Hindu saviors are less than morally perfect, while Jesus was sinless.

Christian grace is also different from bhakti grace. In the latter, grace is in the context of an impersonal law of the universe (karma) that even the gods cannot change. In Christian faith, on the other hand, Jesus Christ is the author of the law, and He has canceled the power of that law over us.

But more important, a self-indulgent Krishna forgives sins at no cost to Himself. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, was sinless and gives us grace only by an infinitely painful atonement. Grace cost Him everything.

There are other differences as well, between both Hindu schools and Christian faith:

1. Ultimate concern: freedom from guilt, sin, and the devil (Christian) versus escape from the human condition (Hindu)
2. Human nature: creaturely and sinful (Christian) versus divine (Hindu)
3. Human problem: moral sin (Christian) versus intellectual ignorance (Hindu)
4. Resolution: divine act at infinite cost to God (Christian) versus human effort sometimes mixed with grace, without cost to the god (Hindu)

... Hinduism seemed to have two disqualifications. For one thing, it appeared to be not so much a moralized and philosophical maturity of Paganism as a mere oil-and-water coexistence of philosophy side by side with Paganism unpurged... And secondly, there was no such historical claim as in Christianity.

C.S. Lewis

**RECOMMENDED READING**


This is what Subramaniam, a real-life Hindu of the twentieth century, wonders as he enters a fictitious conversation between two religious figures who have changed the lives of millions.
How To Speak To Your Hindu Neighbor
by Michael Suderman, M.A.
Fellow with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries

Here are five guidelines on how best to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with your Hindu friends and neighbors.

1. Be prepared to listen and ask questions.
As in any evangelistic conversation always remember that you are speaking to a person. Be prepared to ask questions when talking to a Hindu and respectfully listen as they explain. Do not hesitate to take notes, as this will show keen interest.

2. Use stories to explain grace and forgiveness.
It is important to remember that the Hindu religion has come through stories, not creeds. When sharing the gospel with Hindus we need to be prepared to enter into their stories and then retell them from a Christian perspective. For example: Discuss the differences between Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and Krishna’s advice to Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita, or to use a parable like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) to explain forgiveness.

3. Keep in mind the personal and relational nature of God.
Explain that God is not an impersonal entity, but a holy, loving, just, and forgiving God who intentionally created each human being for relationship with himself. God did not reveal himself in a philosophy, but chose to reveal himself most fully in the person of Jesus Christ.

4. Carefully emphasize the uniqueness and exclusivity of Jesus
Help the Hindu understand that their salvation is not found by amassing knowledge that is one with the divine, nor attained by way of devotion, nor earned by good works; rather, it is found through faith in Jesus Christ with whom we can have a personal relationship (John 14:6).

5. Pray and be patient.
Prayer is essential to evangelism. Pray for your Hindu friends and neighbors and journey alongside them as you share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Remember that a great cost comes with their decision to leave the religion of their family and culture.

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Two Final Things, Then Home at Last
(continued from page 7)

what he has done” (Matt. 16:27). What is perhaps less well known is that “each person” includes believers themselves. They must give an account of their lives. The Bible affirms this in very clear terms. Writing to the believers in Rome, Paul said, “For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:10–12). To the believers in Corinth he said, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10). Regularly pondering our accountability to God is a proven aid in maintaining a sober, godly perspective on life and holding on to God’s priorities.

What will the final judgment be like? As Matthew’s Gospel describes it, the final judgment follows Christ’s second coming and the resurrection of the dead. Jesus Himself gives a graphic picture. After describing in detail His second coming in Matthew 24, He described the Day of Judgment in Matthew 25:31–46:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” Then the righteous will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?” Then he will answer them, saying, “Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

This awe-inspiring account of Jesus returning to earth in power and great glory, to judge the living and the dead, is intended to be sobering. God the Father “has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man” (John 5:27). In this passage He takes His position on a glorious throne and conducts the judgment of all who have ever lived, whose bodies have
been raised and reunited with their souls. After separating the nations into two groups, the sheep and the goats, Jesus focuses on a list of specific deeds and how each group performed or failed to perform them. The deeds are simple works of love such as giving food, drink, hospitality, clothing, and personal care to “one of the least of these brothers of mine” (His followers) in their time of need. These works of love are things that anyone can do. The sheep, whom Jesus calls “the righteous,” are welcomed into “the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Their welcome is based on how each person has treated Jesus as that person has unknowingly encountered Him through His humble representatives on earth. Not surprisingly, some people have read this as teaching that the sheep were saved by their works. But a closer look shows that this is not the case. The sheep are astonished by the Lord’s commendation and are completely unaware of having served Him in this way. Clearly, they were not seeking to earn salvation by their works. More important, however, Jesus never taught salvation by works; rather, He taught that it was only God’s grace that could draw people to believe and trust in Him for salvation (John 6:36–40, 43–44). He also taught that genuine faith in Him produced inner moral change and outward righteous conduct. That is precisely what we see in the sheep He commends. Their deeds are the fruit and the evidence of God’s grace and love in their lives. They are not the cause of but the fruit of their salvation.

The failure of the goats (the wicked) to perform works of love toward Jesus is prima facie evidence of their lack of God’s saving grace. While much more sin characterized their lives, the omission of these key works of love for Jesus infallibly reveals the true state of their hearts. They have rejected Jesus and the revealed will of God and have walked in a way of their own choosing. Now God will ratify and confirm their decision. Jesus says, “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46). This is the fulfillment of Jesus’ earlier teaching, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matt. 7:13–14). C.S. Lewis sums it up well,

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.6

Jesus promises that the sacrifices His followers make for Him and His kingdom in this world will be rewarded in the world to come.

A significant but often neglected aspect of the final judgment is that there are degrees of punishment for the wicked and degrees of blessing for the saved. Regarding the wicked, Jesus makes this clear in His condemnation of three cities in which He performed amazing miracles.

Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you. (Matt. 11:20–24)

The punishment of these three cities would be greater than others because they sinned
Two Final Things, Then Home at Last

against the light they had been given, that is, the mighty works of Christ and His call to repent. Paul expresses the same idea when he says of the unbelieving, “But because of your hard and impenent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom. 2:5). By their rejection of God’s truth, these people were accumulating more and more punishment for themselves. They would be judged by the written word of God if they had it, or by the light of conscience and the word written on their hearts if they did not (Rom. 2:12–16).

Jesus also speaks of degrees of reward for faithful believers. In one instance, Peter said to Jesus,

“See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (Matt. 19:27–30)

In another place, He says to those who care for the poor and needy, “and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14). Jesus promises that the sacrifices His followers make for Him and His kingdom in this world will be rewarded in the world to come. He rewards our works, imperfect though they be, out of His abounding grace and love toward us, not because we deserve it. This is a cause for great rejoicing and encouragement in our earthly pilgrimage.

However, rewards can be missed through our neglect or forfeited through faulty work. Some people are too busy with other things to serve the Lord. Others are lazy and negligent. Still others are building their service on a faulty foundation. In each case, there will be little, if anything, for the Lord to reward. This was a problem in Corinth. Paul warned the believers there of the very real risk of losing rewards if they built their ministry on a flawed foundation:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:10–15)

We don’t know the specific details, but from what we do know of the Corinthian church, glib, shallow, flashy, self-serving ministry may have been the problem. This warning is just as applicable today as it was in the first century. Some people in the church today are not serving Christ at all; others are poorly grounded and caught up in various religious fads, fleshly excitement, worldly thinking, or erroneous teaching. They may be saved, but their ministries are unworthy of reward.

Paul reinforced his warning to the Corinthians, saying, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10). The aspect of Christ’s final judgment, to which Paul here referred, is not their salvation, which he considered secure. Rather, it is the fruit of their
salvation, their life and service to the Lord after being saved. Paul Barnett says, “The teaching about the judgment seat before which all believers must come reminds us that we have been saved, not for a life of aimlessness or indifference, but to live as to the Lord (5:15).” God calls us to glorify Him by bearing much fruit in a life of love (John 15:8). Barnett continues, “The sure prospect of the judgment seat reminds the Corinthians—and all believers—that while they are righteous in Christ by faith alone, the faith that justifies is to be expressed by love and obedience (Gal. 5:6; Rom. 1:5), and by pleasing the Lord (2 Cor 5:9).” At the judgment seat, the Lord will examine the works of His people and confer or withhold rewards accordingly. Lest we wonder, His rewarding of our works does not conflict with His grace. As Calvin observed: “There is no inconsistency in saying that he rewards good works provided we understand that that implies no denial of the fact that it is by free grace that we obtain eternal life.”

To Paul the judgment seat of Christ was a serious matter that helped motivate him to live a life that was pleasing to God (2 Cor 5:9). It can have the same effect on us. Periodically pondering the totally unwarranted grace and love God has poured upon us and our accountability to Him will propel us forward in grateful service to Him.

**Home at Last**

The book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, concludes with a picture that each of us should hold fast in our hearts and minds. It portrays the end of this present evil age of sin, suffering, and death and the final triumph of the kingdom of our God and His Christ. God’s work began in a garden and has now come to fulfillment in a city, the city of God. As we enter that city in our resurrected bodies, we are coming home at last, welcomed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, greeted by the holy angels and joyously united with all of God’s people. There we shall enjoy everlasting life in a world of love.

Amid the apocalyptic visions and symbolism of Revelation, we are given a vivid description of this glorious homecoming. Chapter 21 opens with judgment day now past, evil vanquished, and those whose names are written in the book of life entering into the joy of their Master:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (vv. 1–4)

The former things have passed away, and the future things lie ahead. This is not the end, but the beginning. And the future things beckon us to a life that is richer and fuller and more glorious than anything that we can even think or imagine. This is the inheritance and great hope of all God’s children. All the sacrifices we ever made for our Lord in this earthly pilgrimage, even to the giving up of our lives, will then seem as nothing in comparison. In *The Last Battle*, C.S. Lewis paints a deeply moving picture of this through the image of the lion, Aslan (Christ):
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And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.10

Frequent contemplation of this vision will fuel our zeal for God and His kingdom. And periodic reflection on the brevity of our life, the certainty of our death, and the judgment seat of Christ will loosen the world’s grip on our lives and strengthen us to live a life that is pleasing to Him. Let us then seek to live such a life and to bear as much fruit as we can in the days that remain to us. For as Amy Carmichael said, “We shall have all eternity to celebrate the victories, but we have only the few hours before sunset in which to win them.”

Notes:

1. Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version. Any added emphases are mine.
2. Differences of opinion exist among equally serious believers about certain aspects of these topics and are too complicated to address in an article of this size.
5. In Matthew’s gospel, “little ones” are disciples of Jesus (Mt. 10:42). In John’s gospel, receiving those who are sent by Jesus is actually receiving Jesus himself (Jn. 13:20).
8. Ibid.

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.

C.S. Lewis

RECOMMENDED READING

John Piper, Don’t Waste Your Life (Crossway 2003)

A passionate call for this generation to make their lives count for eternity. Piper discusses the risks for those who seek to accomplish something in life for the sake of Christ.
Is My Child a Follower of Jesus?
(continued from page 9)

talking about Jesus and demonstrate sincerity in the worship of Jesus as seen in prayers and corporate worship?

2. Is your child truly sorry when he or she does something sinful or harms someone else? Does he or she get upset when bad things happen to others and have a desire to do something about it? Is your child’s conscience working in a way that leads to repentance—a change in actions and desire to live like Jesus?

3. Does your child enjoy reading Bible stories, and is he or she growing in the understanding of Scripture? Does your child seem interested in knowing more about God, and does he or she ask appropriate questions?

4. Is your child growing in wisdom, and is he or she better able to discern good from evil as evidenced by what he or she enjoys doing and choosing? For instance, does a child turn away from media choices that are offensive, recognize and make comments about the bad behavior of adults or peers, stand up for a friend being bullied, and confront or walk away from negative peer pressure?

5. Is your child growing in kindness toward friends and siblings and demonstrating greater obedience toward you as a parent? Is your child respectful toward adults? Does your child play well together with other children—doing kind and thoughtful things for others without being asked?

While the discernment of true conversion isn’t an exact science, since only God knows the true state of the human heart, I trust these questions can help you recognize the presence of God’s grace in your child. Always keep praying for your child and know that God hears your prayer.

Notes

2. Ibid., 91–92.
3. Ibid., 109.
4. Ibid., 112.

If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you, and I hope you may always do so.

C.S. Lewis, in a letter to a child

RECOMMENDED READING

Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, Parenting is Heart Work

If you’re like most parents, you have developed your own parenting strategy—sometimes it seems to work, and other times—based on the way your child behaves—you wonder if it’s working at all. There are countless ways to try to get a child’s attention and to effect change—but here’s the truth—unless you deal with a child through his or her heart, you are not likely to see lasting change.
1. Tell us how and when you came to Christ. There has never been a time when I wasn’t involved in church. I was born, baptized, and raised in the Presbyterian Church. My faith was fairly typical of an average Christian. I continued to attend a church in my college years, but no Bible study or reading. Post-college, I fell away from my faith, but during that time God began to pursue me. After mucking through some horrible choices and difficult years, in 1995 I went to a church and said, “OK God. I need your help.”

2. What led you to enter the Fellows Program? I kept seeing notices in our church newsletter that were promoting speakers and programs at CSLI. I had the chance to talk to another acquaintance who had just started the Year One Fellows Program and she said it was a wonderful challenge. I prayed about it and talked to people who I respected to get their advice. They encouraged me to apply.

3. How did the C.S. Lewis Institute’s Fellows Program equip you to become a more mature and effective disciple of Christ? The program gave me the tools to think of a response when someone would question me about my faith. The primary reason I applied to the program was to sharpen my apologetics. I knew what I believed, but I didn’t have a firm answer if someone would challenge me. Now when I’m involved in a discussion, I can gently communicate my faith, understand more where the other person is coming from, and ask the right questions. Because of the books that we’ve read, my own faith has been strengthened as well.

4. Give an example as to how the Fellows Program helped you in your life as a follower of Jesus. In order to train my kids to avoid making the same mistakes as I did (losing my temper, having nothing factual or valid with which to counter a point), I build apologetics into regular conversation with them and their friends. I ask them to think. We practice by talking about the day’s events and listening to the radio. What would you say if someone told you that God doesn’t exist? How can you find the motivation behind the words? What about that person on the radio? What do you think they believe? What’s wrong with their logic? What is their understanding? What could you tell that angry person about Jesus? Actually, I do the same thing with my own friends!

5. How has your experience with the Institute influenced your approach to sharing the gospel message with others? The solid, challenging monthly Bible studies have filled out what was once a very skeletal knowledge of scripture. The picture of grace and mercy, and seeing the thread of Christ throughout the entire Bible, has built my faith and given me a bigger and eternal vision of God and why we are here. I can encourage others, especially people who have no hope, that they are loved by a God who has their lives in His hand. It keeps me praying, which brings me closer to God.

6. How did the Fellows Program help you integrate your faith and your professional life? Your family life? What I’ve learned has become an integral part of my teaching and personal life! I never imagined that it would alter the way I teach, talk, and think every day. Near the end of my Year One program, I had prayed for a way to use what I had learned through the year. As I sat and listened to one of our Saturday lectures, I noticed that many adults had questions that should have been answered when they were in school! I felt called to teach teens how to critically listen and evaluate what people say and how to keep their Christian worldview in an increasingly difficult culture.
I teach several homeschool enrichment classes at Harvester Teaching Services—art from K-9th, science for K-1st, and a Humanities/cultural history class. After talking my idea over with several other people who I respect, I dropped one art class in order to teach a logic/apologetics class for 9th-10th grade. This is the point in a child’s education where they have serious questions and when they may start slipping away from Christianity. I use quite a bit of what I learned in the Fellows Program to engage my students to think and discern. Near the end of the year, after we’ve discussed how to identify several types of fallacy and how to find fact, we will use the CSLI Conversational Apologetics course for discussion. The kids are really enjoying it!

**7. What was the biggest impact of the Fellows Program on your life? What would you tell a friend or work colleague about the Fellows Program?**

“Every scrap and every view of my life has been changed for the better!” That best sums it up. I would tell a friend or co-worker to pray about the decision to be involved in the program. Then I would tell them that all of the reading, writing, and study was worth every second. It is a serious commitment, but the richness of what it offers is priceless.
In the legacy of C.S. Lewis, the Institute endeavors to develop disciples who can articulate, defend, and live faith in Christ through personal and public life.

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