

Religion



I'm often asked about my religious views because they seem to some, conventionally unconventional. Here goes:

I am a Christian who believes that organized religion often does more harm than good. Why? Because religion *is* people and people are broken humans looking for something to believe in and trust. That combination can really mess up reality, logic, humility and mercy in a lot of people. Now that, doesn't mean I don't participate in some forms of religious expression that are meaningful to me, nor does it mean that I think all "religious" people are the same. Simply stated, I feel that some people get too deep into "religion" and not deep enough into God and *His* character. Everything we need to know was modeled by God himself. Do I believe in the Bible? You bet. Completely! I make no apologies for what I believe though I often find myself explaining the "religious" actions of others, who supposedly share my general beliefs.

Having grown up in Dallas, Texas, I can say with conviction that I feel that a majority of people suffer from some form of spiritual damage. Myself included. Who hasn't had some injury in this area? It could be from attending a church that didn't walk the talk, or maybe just talked too much. Or a church that asked for money or that made you feel judged. Perhaps you were raised by parents who took you to church and then lived in a way that conflicted with what they said they believed in? Maybe rules and legalism made you feel left out or judged or perhaps you were harmed by a spiritual leader who was someone you trusted. The bottom line is, it doesn't matter who you are or what you believe, most people have experienced some form of spiritual injury.

Here is a little test we do in the Boot Camp so you can see if you have any spiritual damage. It's a simple litmus test. Finish the sentence: All religious (or Christian) people are_____

. Did you finish that sentence with a negative thought off the top of your head? If you did, that is spiritual damage.

I think many people forget that the actions of people are JUST that.....the actions of people. Just because a person does something in the name of God, doesn't make it God's. The basis of my personal belief begins with the Greatest Commandment given to us by God. He told us to "LOVE one another" as He loved us. He didn't tell us to push our beliefs on others or to judge their actions but he did tell us to *love* others. In fact, the best way to represent our faith is simply by loving others just as Jesus did. Only through love do we reflect God to the world. God didn't ask us to love others. He said "the greatest commandment I give you". There were no "IF's" in that statement.

I think my greatest beef with religion, is that it gets into rules, right, wrong, legalism and judgment. Not surprisingly, the people who lie in the wake of those judgments are left feeling anything but loved. Why would they have any desire to know a God whose followers behave that way?

In the Bible, Jesus was verbally assaulted for His beliefs. He was challenged, He was antagonized He was berated and do you know what he did? NOTHING. Do you know why He did nothing?? Because Jesus just didn't have time for stupid! When I hear people getting on a soap box about religion and rules, I remind them of the Greatest Commandment and then, I just don't talk to stupid!

When I'm asked why I give so much of my time to help others, I have an easy answer and that is, that I love people. I don't care what they believe or what path their life is on.....I just love them. Only by loving, can I demonstrate to others what God is about for me. Showing love in a very unloving world, is the way I share my faith and beliefs with others.

How do I experience God? Here's a little story that might help explain. A few years ago, I was spending so much time rushing around and worrying about life that I felt disconnected from God. One day, I decided to slow down and talk to God so I parked my car in a park near my house and I asked God where He was! When I looked up from my fretting, I saw a woman sitting in her car and I could see that every possession she had in the world, was loaded in her car with her. Her car was her home. As I sat there with my \$5 cup of coffee in my luxury car, I realized that I'd seen her before in this same park but just blew past her without noticing. I backed my car out and went back to the coffee shop to get her a cup of coffee. She was shocked and confused that I took the time to bring her coffee. I realized she was used to being invisible and probably had very little contact with others. She was grateful for the coffee but frightened so she said 'thank you' and quickly drove off. Perhaps that Latte' was all she had to eat that day?

Where was God when I couldn't find him? He was right where I left him as I rushed around ignoring things around me. When I slowed down and opened my eyes, I saw God. God was in

my showing love to a total stranger. I felt him. From that day on, I began asking God each day to "show me the smallest person I encounter today". I went on a quest every day to speak to the invisible people of our society and every time I do, I experience God. I don't tell that story to toot my own horn but to share what I believe in. I don't do it right all the time, but I love feeling aware of people around me.

YES, God gave us some do's and don'ts but doesn't any good parent have rules and boundaries that protect their children? I don't believe we can really make our lives work until we look to God. And remember, he only wants the faith that we have at that moment. The Bible says that *WE* cannot increase our own faith, so God only wants the faith we have right now. If we trust him with what we have, then we've done our part and he'll show us the rest on his own time.

So, my religion is LOVE. Corny? Probably, but I've been unconventional my whole life so why change it now? I hope you'll consider looking for God in the small encounters you have each day. If you're one of those people who measures others based upon how they fit into *your* religious beliefs, I hope you will do some research into what God said and start loving. If you're one who feels judged or is experiencing hurt by people in "God's name", I hope that you'll stop talking to and listening to "stupid". And if you're one who's avoided God all your life because you didn't want to be like "those people", I pray you will hear that God loves you and know that those who treat you unlovingly in God's name, are NOT speaking for God.

