ESSAY · JANUARY 22, 2015

Searching for a Simplified Faith

Written by Bill Perkins

It might not come as a surprise to learn that I'm fairly driven. I set goals and relentlessly pursue them until they're accomplished. It's how I've always been—even as a kid, I took pride in my focused discipline when it came to sports and video games. As I grew older, it propelled me to reach my most unlikely dreams, even after countless rejections and failures.

By and large, this quality has benefited me throughout my life.

When it comes to faith, though, my type-A personality hasn't always worked itself out in a healthy way. There have been times I've read the Bible to simply check the box. I've occasionally prayed just because it's on the agenda. And, perhaps most destructive, I've often strayed from the simplicity of the gospel in pursuit of a more complex faith.

Our efforts always complicate the core message of Christ

I suspect others share my problem. In fact, I imagine every one of us slips into a sort of works-based salvation model, even if we don't realize it. We stack layer upon layer of complication and regulation onto the basic, core message of Christ.

We don't like simple explanations or tidy resolutions. We don't want to be "saved" without our own effort. We can't simply accept grace, because it runs against our every instinct. It's a reversal of the world's rules. It's an inverse of karma. We want to work hard and strive and sweat and try and try again, all to finally prove ourselves worthy. As deserving. As justified.

But we're not deserving—we can't justify ourselves. Which is exactly the point.

Christ's message is shockingly simple

If you read the Bible, and particularly the New Testament, it's easy to miss the point. Not because it's hidden or glossed over, but because it's so simple. It's not what you would necessarily expect.

Jesus died so we might live.

That's it. That's all there is to understand. Everything else flows from this central point. Nothing we do adds or subtracts from this reality.

That doesn’t mean nothing else is important—doctrine *is* essential to our spiritual and personal growth. But anything that touches the simplicity and purity of this message diminishes it.

God isn’t drawing us to a complex theology, but a simplified faith

Most of us don’t need a more complex and weighty faith. We don’t need to worry about resolving every uncertainty or arriving at a life-changing epiphany. We don’t need to concern ourselves with adding more doctrines or rules, or memorizing another prayer or liturgy. We don’t need to try harder. We don’t need to exert more effort.

If anything, we need to subtract. We need to let go. We need to simplify.

We need not a more complex and complicated faith, but a more genuine and sincere faith. We need not a more heady and intellectual faith, but a faith better connected to our heart and soul.

Most of all, we need to return to the basic message of Jesus. A great way to do this is by taking a month to read all four Gospels, then repeating that process for a year. Join the Story of Jesus Facebook group to connect with others on the same journey.

Thomas Wells writes about living intentionally.