

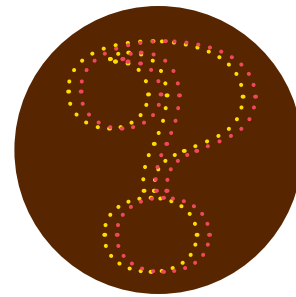


CONVERSATIONS



GUIDE

BY KIM ENGELMANN



THE JESUS WAY:
WHAT IS IT, AND WHY SHOULD I CARE?
EUGENE PETERSON

Eugene Peterson makes a wonderful analogy at the start of this article, citing an excerpt from *Winnie the Pooh*. Pooh finds an arbitrary pole; the animals and Christopher Robin decide he has found the North Pole and label it as such, and everyone goes home. Peterson says this is the way spirituality is in our current culture. There are many ways to live. New ways that attract many people are springing up every day. In this article Peterson defines the Jesus Way. Below are the points he outlines:

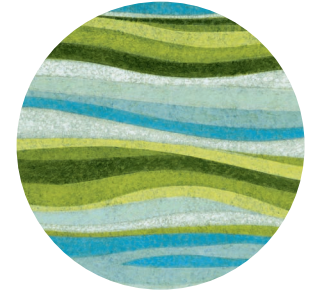
The Jesus Way is...

Human: Jesus was entirely human except that he was without sin. God revealed himself to us in this way so it would be easy for us, who are human, to understand him. We too must be human, which sounds easy at first. Yet sometimes in our spiritual quest we make God into our own image and become less human: less relational, less personal, less who we were created to be. We don't define our spiritual life in terms of categories and a map. It is defined in relationship with Christ. Do we believe we have a living Christ... or just a map of Christ?

Conversational: The words of Jesus that we have preserved are simple and personal. A child can understand them. At the same time, they use metaphor, comparing the invisible (God and the spiritual life) to things we can see: e.g., God is our rock. To understand metaphor, we need to participate in it by making our own connections of meaning through metaphor, and there is always some mystery involved in this. The process is not linear. In the same way, we must invest in language, conversation with God, listening, responding not as bystanders, but as eager participants who connect meaningfully and personally with our Creator.

Ordinary: No one is "kept out" of the Jesus Way. It is a public way, not a private one. The temptation is to create an inner ring of spiritual elitism. There is no such thing. The ordinary is sacred when infused with God. You cannot hurry along or create detours to becoming spiritually mature, any more than you can hurry the development of new life in pregnancy. Patient endurance to be spiritually formed as we follow the living Christ is the crux of the ordinary journey.

1. What is the difference between following a map of Christ and following a living Christ?
2. Which one sounds more exciting to you?
3. Is it easier in some ways to follow a map?
4. What are the risks of actually dealing with a living, present being whom you cannot contain?
5. Have you ever been aware of trying to hurry the spiritual growth process? Share together.
6. How has metaphor in scripture been meaningful for you, if at all?
7. What is the mystery inherent in metaphor?
8. How is the power of metaphor a part of "ordinary" life?



A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT:
LIVING LIFE IN THE SPIRIT
BY JOHN ORTBERG

The picture Jesus uses for life on His Way is the image of a river. This image is used 150 times in scripture and often referred to as a river flowing out of us; it is a rather bizarre image, but obviously an image important to God. There is a river in Genesis, in the Psalms, and in Revelation. It is the flow of life and grace, and it is a gift. Desert people were desperate for water. Without it they would die. We are all desperate for God. Without God we die spiritually. The Jesus way is the way of the Spirit, and a river runs from Genesis to Revelation and is meant to run through us... rivers of living water.

The spiritual life is not about doing or acting more pious or conforming to a set pattern of spiritual growth principles that have been mass-produced for the general public. Disciples are handcrafted, and what works for one person is not necessarily going to work for the next. What would grow an orchid would drown a cactus. Discernment is needed to find out what allows you to be aware of and submitted to the Holy Spirit so that you don't quench his work and derail the river of life he wants to have flow through you.

The deepest longing—the deepest thirst—is one that only Jesus fulfills. The way of Jesus is the way of the Spirit. Our job is to discern what spiritual practices keep us in touch with the flow of life and grace that is God's gift to us.

[Please see page 29 for questions for this article.]



TELLING THE TRUTH: DAVID, IMPERFECTION, AND THE JESUS WAY

BY CHRIS WEBB



SERVING THE JESUS WAY

BY DALLAS WILLARD



THE HUMILIATION OF THE WORD IN OUR DAY

BY RICHARD J. FOSTER

After talking with a homeless addict/prostitute, Webb asks himself what kind of church would work for this woman. A person with such a sordid history would be able to attend only a place where she could say, "I am Michelle, and I am a sinner." What is the church, Webb asks, if it is not "Sinners Anonymous"?

The David in scripture is a far more accomplished sinner than most. After citing examples from scripture of David's obviously fallen nature, Webb then tells us that this was not all of who David was. He was also, Scripture tells us, "a man after God's own heart." This is revealed in the psalms, where David acknowledges his sin, but loves God more. David is revealed as a sinner in recovery. He tells the truth about his sin and throws himself down at God's feet, mortified, just as the prostitute threw herself at Jesus' feet in Simon's house. There is a raw honesty in David's psalms that even prays for his enemies to die. He trusted God enough to tell the truth in every circumstance.

"When will our churches become places where we can tell the truth to God and to one another?" asks Webb. He then shares a story about a monk deeply respected by others, who ministers to a reprobate monk by first confessing his own sin. When he confesses and tells the truth, the other monk is also able to confess his sin. Telling the truth heals, allows us to be real before one another and before God, and is the bedrock of Christian community.

- 1. When you think about telling the truth to God, is the idea comforting or scary for you? Is it perhaps both?
2. What is it about David that made him a man after God's own heart?
3. What does David teach us about sin in our own lives?
4. Where is the hope?
5. What is the posture of David's heart that causes him to be a man after God's own heart?

Willard begins by brilliantly challenging the "WWJD?" slogan and suggesting the additional "HWJDI?" that asks, "How would Jesus do it?" That is the point: not just what we do, but how we do it. This leads into Willard's explanation of servanthood, which powerfully illustrates the way of Jesus in the world. We have to follow a servant God, and make his kingdom, his way, our way. It means we give up our self-centered kingdom for God's kingdom. Often we need to experience exile before we can give up our personal kingdoms for God's kingdom. Exile is a formative experience because it is in exile that we allow our kingdoms to be torn down.

When we acquaint ourselves with God's kingdom, we find that the way of this kingdom is servanthood. To serve is to perform an act of love, but most people fail to serve because they have a sense of scarcity in their own lives. Willard reminds readers that we can serve only out of abundance. We learn in exile that God is enough, that his kingdom is sufficient and will never pass away. Finally, Willard says that when we live as servants, we are servants with our whole lives; servanthood is not just a set of generous actions. When we die to our own kingdoms and to ourselves, fruit comes from strength that comes from life that comes from an inner source of vitality that comes from being a servant in God's kingdom.

- 1. Have you ever known somebody whose entire life was one of servanthood for God's kingdom? What makes this person stand out in your mind? Was it what he did, how he did it, or both?
2. What is one area in your life where you can relinquish control to God? What does it mean for you personally to give up your kingdom in order to be a servant in God's kingdom?
3. When have you experienced a time of exile in your own life? What was your experience of God during that time? Was God enough? Was your kingdom torn down? Share together.

Foster begins this article by emphasizing the importance of the word of God, the debar Yahweh. It was by the word of God that creation was brought into being. Jesus was the Logos, the eternal word of God become flesh, active and alive for us today. The Bible is a book of words inspired by God. Moses was the one who was the "architect of the huge, sprawling house of language" in the Bible, and he was "slow of speed and slow of tongue." Still he wrote and assembled the Torah, the founding document for the faith of Jews and Christians.

Words are important to create, to inform, and to make meaning; God uses words. However, words have become cheapened in our culture. Our culture is visual, and words have been overshadowed by the visual. Talk radio is a place to express trivialities; blogs are places where whatever I think in the moment can be seen in print. Thinking things through and solid, profound reflection and dialogue that goes deep are not prevalent. Silence can be a great asset in allowing meaningful, thoughtful words to germinate and then be spoken at just the right time.

Too much cacophony and distraction are in our world. Silence reclaimed as a spiritual discipline can allow us to wait, hold our tongues, think, observe, and ponder. Foster challenges us to be like Moses and use words that are crisp, clear, and imaginative to communicate the gospel. He encourages story telling and empathy in order to make words effective vehicles for communicating the gospel.

- 1. When have you heard words used in a way that touched you personally? How were they used? What about the speaker's delivery made you want to listen?
2. Why does God put such a big emphasis on words? Scripture is the word of God; Jesus is referred to as the Word; and when God speaks, creation comes into being. What about words is core to our identity as human beings and children of God?
3. What is your favorite story in the Bible? Whom would you choose to read it to you, and why?

NOTES

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