

HARD STUFF— *tough issues that are perilous to address*

[~editorial series: # 7]

CONSUMER CHRISTIANS— *gimme, gimme*

Christianity in Western culture, especially North America, has become an interesting hodgepodge of beliefs and expressions, hasn't it!? Once upon a time, churches were founded on a theological distinctive, or on a particular facet of faith, or around an individual charismatic leader. Today, churches are founded on relevance, style, or, again, around a particularly charismatic leader.

It's almost as if the faithful have become a nation of followers..., with few leading. This isn't new in the history of the church; but something else is—consumer faith.

What's in it FOR ME!?

To be sure, we all need to get something out of our faith; inner peace, a relationship with God, friendships with other Christians. But this is something that's gone beyond that to become something far more narcissistic, something that cancels out the very intent of Christian faith.

We've become **consumers**. Not just of Christian paraphernalia— like plastic Jesus', WWJD bracelets, luminous praying hands that dangle from our rear view mirrors, and books on the latest whatever. That's all just stuff. [Of course, if we would also give to mission equal to what we spend for that stuff our world might be a quieter place.]

No, we have become consumers of our faith. The *only* question we ask is— "**What can I get out of it?**"

Whether it's a time of worship, a sermon, a discussion group, a Bible study, or even a short term mission trip, the question remains the same— *what's in it for ME!?*

This primary focus, attitude, and approach to living the Christian life, has all but annihilated all other definers of what it means to be a follower of Jesus— like service, sacrifice, risk, community, & caring, to name a few.

The Holy Scriptures tell us that "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save those who were lost.*" (Luke 19:10) I'm beginning to wonder how many of us may still be included in that category. Saved..., but truly lost.

It must be said that the pressures on *all* people in North America, Christian & otherwise, are enormous. From financial to family issues, career paths to life transitions, starting out in life to finding your way..., there's just so much a person can handle. Many of us just shut down and do what's in front of us; others juggle what seems like organizational futility; some plan, budget, set goals, and get used to 60% fulfillment. And frankly, that's not too bad!

But what if the secret to making life more rewarding, more purposeful, meaningful, and alive is exactly what the Christian faith is all about? Being lights on a hill, shining into the darkness, homes that are open to others (in the midst of our exhaustion and over-commitments), giving when we don't have it to give, sacrifice, mission trips that are *not* about us.

It's not so much our actions but the core values we carry within. **John Stott**, former chaplain to Queen Elizabeth, once said "***That the proper order of things is God first, Others second, and Self, last. If we reverse the order of the first and the last, putting Self first, and God last, those in the middle will soon be squeezed out.***"

We've become **fat** in our faith. Try a faith diet for awhile. Serving, expecting nothing in return; caring, without discrimination in personality or relationship; sacrifice, yes, actually giving something up to give away; loving, just to love, especially people who are different from you.

Remember, God first, others second, Me last. Then be surprised at what God will do!

Christian Faith in a postChristian World

In cooperation with **The College Church**, in Northampton, MA, we are offering another training course— **Christian Faith in a postChristian World**.

The course will be **Wednesday** evenings, 7:00 — 8:30 p.m. from **September 19th — October 17th**.

Contact the NEED office for further details— 413 259-0077, or admin@needinc.org. You can also call the College Church office at 413 586-0057.

Did I mention this one is a FREEBIE?



SHIFT Tips

~culture clues that click

[Vol. 5, # 6.]

1. It's FALL. Don't over-fill your schedule. Make time for people and football.
2. Take hikes; meet hikers.
3. Bike; meet bikers.
4. Rake leaves (unless you live in the Southwest)..., in the other guy's yard.
5. Carve pumpkins with neighbors, kids, and anybody you can find.
6. Assemble a hayride.
7. Hot cider and faith discussions mix best with donuts.

Do you have any ideas for this column? Send 'em in.

encountered any genuine Christians in their daily paths. Either our paths just don't cross, or they do cross, but normal people just don't know us as followers of Christ.

If the last sentence is the fact of the matter, then truly, "Houston, we have a problem." Film at eleven.

INTERVIEWS WITH MY FRIENDS ~or not, sorta, friends

The first person we tried to interview felt she had been so jilted, judged, and discarded by Christians when she didn't convert to the faith that she had no interest in being interviewed. Then, off camera, she proceeded to rail against born-againers who come across as if "**if you're not one of us you're against us and you're going to hell.**" For an hour.

Now, the odd thing about this non-interview interview was that this was a person I had known since she was 13. Now, at 27, she had been in and out of church, youth groups, & Young Life, but nothing seemed to grab her. She was angry, discouraged and disillusioned with religion in general, and Christianity in particular.

She described her road to disbelief as one wherein she had *tried* to be a Christian, but it just felt like so much behavior modification and group approval ratings. When she wasn't accepted because she was a little bit edgy, she just quit the whole thing. "**Religion is nothing more than peer acceptance and judgment of others not like you.**" she said. I wondered just how far-reaching this sentiment might be prevalent. Her anger was hard to take.

We parted "friends," I think. Hopefully, she left with a better image of genuine Christian faith. Not *all* Christians are judgmental, intolerant of those "outside," and higher-than-thou. We vowed to keep in touch, but I kind of doubt that will happen.

Recording Interviews continues with somewhat calmer interaction. We're finding that people do want to express their opinion about the Christian faith, about Christians, genuine and otherwise. But we are finding that few people have

emPulse

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MILE-STONES AND MINISTRY— *taking stock of where we are in life*

September is "birthday month" within the Davis clan. [Except for Bethany, who is glad her birthday is November 12th because then we've re-couped enough \$\$\$ to buy her some nice gifts.] It truly *is* a time when Starr and I celebrate the passing or yet another year of life together and of service to others and to being of some use to Jesus Christ, our Lord of Life.

But as we get "up there" in years we find ourselves asking, "**what tasks of substance are yet to be done?**" Other than painting the house inside & out, replacing the roof, planting some new shrubs outside (see picture) and getting the place ready for winter, there are things in our lives we need to address as we approach the possible Fall (or winter) our lives.

Starr, having entered the ranks of the new phase of her life. NEED is on the threshold of just going to be passé. Now it seems we have though I face somewhat of a decrease in overall ing for emPulse invigorates me like never before.



Homework in the Northwoods

unemployed, is learning the warp & woof of this new ideas and expansion that I had assumed was more influence than ever. (Go figure.) Personally, energy, I find getting into biking and creative think- A new phase just crept up on me and stuck!

So Starr and I are spending a lot of time about critical things to do over these next 3-4 years, and who we need to be to face the challenges of getting older while feeling younger and confusing everybody around us. (Did I mention she broke her toes lifting weights this past summer?)

Life, at any stage is full of surprises. We are finding this phase full of excitement and surprises. We just go to bed earlier.

Our God gives joy,

Gary & Starr

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NEED^{inc}

Dr. Gary Davis, President
Amherst, MA 01002
USA

Voice- 413 259-0077

FAX- 413 259-0078

Email- admin@needinc.org

WEBSITE- www.needinc.org