

To reset ourselves means to come back to the beginning. Sometimes we need to revisit what messed us up. Spiritually, it is easy to get messed up. There is so much opportunity to explore the spiritual in our world. There are many vastly different kinds of churches. It's a smorgasbord for all types of people to feast on like Mormon, Baptist, Alliance, and hundreds of others. Dip into Astrology, Tarot cards, Satan worship, and many other forms of the spiritual. It's big business to read palms, tell fortunes, and look to the stars for answers. The spiritual is all around us.

What happens when your spiritual direction is not focused? It seems ok to be all over the map trying different spiritual things, right? Diversity means you will never be controlled by the religious. It is very important for people to control their spirituality. That seems all fine and dandy, but inside you, that does not work. The problem begins within the heart. Not your literal heart, but that place where your character and soul resides: somewhere deep inside you. I believe there is only room for one spiritual direction. There just is no more room. Once we add too much, that space gets jammed and cluttered creating confusion.

Think about it, why do we get confused sometimes? It's because there is too much or too little information in our brain. We love simplicity and being able to focus on one task at a time. Sure some people like to multi-task, but we all know they tend to be scatter brains like me. In the Old Testament people prayed to several Gods. It was odd for them to meet the Jewish nation that had only one God. These Jewish people seemed narrow minded, stubborn, and yes, focused. They refused to go beyond one God. In confusion who do you turn to with several Gods?

That is why God made us to be single minded. He encouraged one God, one spouse, and for one purpose. There is only His word, His will, and His Son. Yes they call God "The Trinity" (Three persons). There is God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Yet, somehow and

some way they work as one. They have the same goals, same love, and same purpose. It's similar to our body. We have a head, two arms, and legs. They all do different jobs but they serve the one body. We are meant to be focused; we were meant to be one.

When we invite spiritual diversity into our lives things get messed up. The different churches and religions have made a mess of a simple singular God in heaven. I don't believe it was really meant to be this way. People are who they are. They must be right, correct, and be in control. The Bible must be decoded. Theology must be correct. The church must be perfect like Jesus. Why? Well it comes back to what I just said. People must be right, correct, and be in control. The messy part is who is right, correct, and in control if many churches believe different things?

The life of Jesus is how we get what we have in religion. We have communion because Jesus did it. Jesus had compassion so we do. It never directly says Jesus drank so people don't. Jesus fasted, prayed, and served. Some dummies have even been nailed to crosses to be like Jesus. People say we must have the faith like Jesus or we are not truly Christians. The church must be sacred because Jesus is the head of the church. They say the Pope is the closest human to God. Is that because Peter was so close to Jesus? He was called the rock of the church. Just because Jesus said that does it mean a mortal man must be head of Christ's church?

There is another side of Christianity. People speak in tongues (Spiritual language) because the Spirit gave that ability to some as a gift. Some well-meaning Christians can lay hands on people and apparently heal them. They can speak prophesy and talk for God. People think they must do a great many things to be spiritual. In the end people have to feel important. We must display gifts of the Spirit to be real Christians. We must do these traditions in a serious and correct way to honor Jesus. We must be right, correct, and be in control of Christianity.

The Bible is quite clear on our behaviour. What we think, do, and believe has little to do with how God feels about us. Sure, God had enough of sinful people and produced a great flood. He was mad at Adam and Eve and expelled them from the garden. Several times God got angry with the Israelites in the wilderness. Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed. Yes God gets mad but he has always let someone survive. God cares enough to let that someone remain to carry on Gods will. Were they saints? Well no, they were not. Our behaviour does not determine Gods will.

Think about it. Adam and Eve sinned. Their first offspring became killers, yet God let the line continue. Abraham disobeyed God but the family grew. Moses killed a man but he is the leader God chose. David became the greatest king, yet his adultery and murdering ways haunted him. God however, wrote much of the Bible through these men. Paul killed Christians and Peter was a mess. Our Christian life comes from messy people. How we treat God seems to be of little consequence to God.

The traditions we have in church are good. The spiritual gifts God gives us are good. In many instances we use them in good ways. There are; however, people who took what were meant for good and used them for evil. God's ways are not our ways. We are made for the purposes of God, and not the other way around. God is not a Genie or Santa. We are spiritual and the physical. Our spiritual lives seem to get unglued when we try and mix the two.

Everything I am today comes from two places. Like I said before we are physical and spiritual beings. I have a physical life and a spiritual life. My physical existence is split into two: before 33 yrs. old and after. My spiritual side has two parts: the church side and my wandering in the wilderness side. As I look at both worlds (the physical and spiritual) I see how I am molded into the man I am today.

A problem can arise within each realm of the physical and spiritual. I call it the good, bad, and ugly. This chapter is going to be about how messing too much with the spiritual can bolster or ruin your spiritual side. Unfortunately our spiritual side has connections to what we call “The church.” This is certainly not a church bashing chapter. I don’t really care much for those who will say it is. The problem as I see it is that we criticize government, people, and anything we want, but not the church. Sure the outside world criticizes the church (Well get into that in a bit), but Christians are told not to. For now, I want to get personal about saving our spiritual side. Church has been used for the good, bad, and the ugly.

If I had a dime for every sad story I’ve heard about church I’d be very rich. People come to the church human, broken, wandering, and for many other reasons. They say in church that we are the disciple makers. It is the Christians job to replicate themselves: to make little Jesus’. Why is it then that many whom have entered church doors leave hurt, in pain, and lost? With that said let me begin with a two stories and they are not mine.

This is “The bad.” I used to teach children in Sunday school. I also did some outreach to engage the community. One day a girl (I will call Sara) came into the youth program and she was about 16. When you first enter church it is the most awesome experience. Everything is so new and exciting. It’s cool to unlearn all we know about the world around us. When God calls us to church everything changes. We look at our music, lifestyle, and entertainment differently. I myself just ate it up. Well this girl Sara came into church the same way. Evangelism and Sunday school seems to foster excitement in the children it reaches.

She joined the life group for teenagers, and went on all their trips. Most of the outreach events had Sara there. Sara had so many questions about life and the Bible. I could see it in her eyes how excited and hungry she was for God. As with all things there is always a down side. I

don't get why in the church community there is a down side but here we go. I don't really want to write this about the church I love but I must get it out in the open.

Sara wanted to serve in the nursery. She desired to do all she could for her church. The problem started when she was told: "No, you can't serve yet." You see Sara came from a non-Christian home like I did. She was not welcome into the youth life group with open arms. All the kids in that group came from good homes. Good homes meaning safe Christian homes. Their parents held positions within the church. The real problem was the parents. They only want good stock (Christian born children) to teach and care for the church. Sara was rough, different, and hungry for answers. Very few Christian children are hungry for God because they always believed they have a rite of passage. That passage is justified because of where they came from. They are trained from birth to never question the church.

Sara wanted to try different ways to bring in new kids, like her, to church. The youth pastor told her no. They wanted to train her first (take their sweet time). She tried to get involved with many things but the answer was always no or not yet. The way she asked questions, and looked at Christianity seemed dirty and foreign to church leaders. In time Sara began to not attend her group weekly. Once in a while she never even came to church. Her fire for God threatened the comfort of Christianity within those walls. Who was going to guide and encourage Sara? She does not go to that church anymore.

The second story is very interesting and certainly "The Ugly." I know a boy named David who did not come from a Christian home. We invited him to come to church with us. His mom (divorced) was thrilled for David. His dad was not very good and he had little contact with him. This church adventure just might be what he needed to fill that void. I realize that people come to

church for many reasons. Most of the time we come seeking to fill some hole within ourselves. Something is usually wrong or incomplete when we seek out God. That could be said of David.

As it was, David came to a youth night. It was supposed to be a time of seeking, learning, and fun with the kids from the church. I dropped David and my kids off and was quite happy with myself. Maybe this is a good thing for David. To make a long story longer I got a call some time later from my boy. He was scared, frustrated, and crying. What went wrong at church? They were in a safe place right?

On a youth night, at church, kids can be kids. I expected to be told that there was an altercation between children. What did take place I did not expect? A youth leader and senior Pastor had taken David into a corner of the church sanctuary and grilled him on giving his life to Jesus or he was going to hell. They cornered him and frightened him. To this day David has never darkened the door of any church: why would He. David now knows what they would do.

In both of these cases the children (And I stress children) were treated very poorly by those who say they promote love. Where were the friendship, trust, and safety within these church walls? Where was the fun, adventure, and learning from those who call themselves little Jesus'? I don't know what happen to Sara, but I do know what happened to David. He was hungry to be someone special. He was willing to give God a try. David was still searching for something. Well the church bombed his belief in Jesus. David proceeded to try the gay lifestyle and that is where his heart is now.

One of my favorite lines comes from the movie Jerry McGuire. Rene Zellweger says to Tom Cruise "Shut up, you had me with hello." I feel the same way with both of these children. They wanted you (The church). You had them with hello. Yet you couldn't shut up. You

couldn't just be friends first. You couldn't just love them first. No, you had to open your mouth and ruin hello.

The reason I began with these two stories is because we all want to believe in God. People find God in rocks, cults, and religion. Yet, each one of them is searching for something. The Muslim is searching just as much as the atheist. Christian children fall away and search for meaning in life. Non-Christian men and women search for the spiritual in drink, sex, astrology, and many other things. I truly believe that all people are looking for something (anything) to fill that hole in their hearts.

There are "Good" stories and I think I am one of them. For what it's worth I believe God made us. If you want to believe Darwin or fate, go ahead, but I feel God did it. I also believe God gave us 10% of who we are. The other 90% is in his hands just waiting for you to ask for it. We could not handle the whole 100%. I bet we would explode; however, brick by brick God will add to us if we ask. I am much of who I was before 33 yrs. old, but today, 15 years later, I am a better version. I know more about me than I ever did. I am quirky, weird, and funny. I love being me most of the time. God brought me there and yes he had me with hello.

There is not a single person ever born on this planet that does not search for meaning in life. Countless books and movies have been made about our desire for something better. We see it in Sinbad cruising around the seas in search of adventure. On TV, we love Star trek seeking out new worlds and new civilizations and to boldly go where no man has gone before. In books, we love the Harlequin Romance searching for love. We all want to be complete. The answer is really found in God. He completes us. It just kills me when Jesus stood outside the Jerusalem walls with tears in his eyes in Luke 19:42 saying **"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace,-but now it is hidden from your eyes."** I cringe at the

thought of you being so close and yet so far from the truth about who God is and who you really are.

So what happens when those entrusted to grow our spirituality bomb our search for meaning? For so many like Sara and David they never come back. They never find out what God had in store for them next. I have talked with church Pastors about these kids. Every single one of them shrugs their shoulders and say something like “Do you know how many people come through these doors”? “One guy said “Church is a revolving door; we just minister to those who come in.” is that what we are? People who come and go? Do you think Jesus would agree? I say to those Pastors “Did Jesus know Philip before he met him”? Yes Jesus saw him under the tree before he met him and that astounded Philip. Did God come down in the flesh to be impersonal with those around him?

The answer is no. Jesus got personal with everyone. He told the woman at the well who she is. He told Pilate who he is. He challenged everyone from Pharisees to Peter. Jesus got down and dirty with sinners. He only went, for the most part, to the places the church would never go. That was the point of his return (duh). Jesus saw that the synagogue church was going the wrong way. Why is the church today going the wrong way? The answer is simple “They don’t think they are, and Sara and David are just (acceptable) casualties within the bigger picture.

I do understand you can’t save them all. I have seen that in church as well as in my own Job. I knew a Canada Post supervisor who went home at night upset that some of the new people did not work out. He deeply wanted all of them to flourish at work. Some however, just couldn’t do this job. It’s not for everyone. He couldn’t save them all. That frustrated and bothered him.

I love that attitude. Were just postal workers yet this guy cared that we had a job. He never wanted to turn anyone away. I have met many Pastors in my time within the church. Every

one of them is willing to let someone leave their church. Now don't get stupid, I know people are people. Everyone comes to church for their own reasons. I believe however, that they really come for one reason: to find God. Yes I know churches can be very big. Then I ask you this: why did the first believers chose to call Christianity "The way?"

It's because it's the way they were. It's because people outside the faith saw them that way. 1st century Christians had a way or look about them. They loved more, cared more, and risked more for those they did not know. During the Black Plague it is said the Christians risked it all for the sick. One of the reasons Christianity grew was because of the prominent women. They were still considered second class people in their privileged world. In Christianity however, they were considered equal. The husbands of these prominent women saw the change and growth as women and wives through their faith. Christianity is supposed to be contagious and infectious. That was "The way" it was.

How can Pastors sleep at night knowing one got away? Sure I know people will leave, and yes Pastors sometimes do check-up. However, I have left two churches to find my place in ministry. Neither one of them checked up on my progress. Not one single person within a group of over 6000 Christians. To be fair I did get one call a year later. This was from an (at one time) close friend within my first church. He said "we (not I) noticed you have not given money to the church for over a year." "We (not I) were wondering if you are still considering this church as your home?" Then he apologized saying "This is just a book keeping thing on whether you are still with us, were not checking up on you for not giving."

That was the wrong answer. Yeah, you never once checked up on me for a whole year. Would you be surprised if I had died? Would it shock you if I had been in an accident? Did you notice my seat empty? Did you care to check up? Yes, I know you have too many people coming

and going (The revolving door thing), but we were in ministry together as friends weren't we? Was it the absence of money that got your attention (finally)? Why must Pastors sleep well at night knowing one got away? I certainly don't think Jesus slept well with anyone walking away. Didn't the Bible say God hoped that not one would be lost in 2 Peter 3:9?

Patrick, I have walked away from the church. I am done with them. All they do is love money and power. Patrick, you just gave me even more reasons to stay away from that stupid place with your two stories. I'd like to counter your answer if you will let me. Church is not the problem, people are. Throughout history people in church and government have abused their right to rule. That does not mean that government or church is bad. Religion is not bad. People make it bad.

I know people say "Don't throw out the baby with the bath water." I am saying that too. The reason I shared these two stories is because church is supposed to be a safe caring place: a loving building that grows little Jesus'. There are churches that do those things. The problem has been that those churches are few and far between. I went to a small church of about five families. I was welcomed in and they greeted me warmly. At the end of the service they held what is called communion (Eating of bread and drinking wine together). They asked us new people to not partake with them. Do you think Jesus would have done that? I highly doubt he would. Jesus certainly would welcome anyone over earthly traditions.

People are still chasing God. People are still searching for something. As each person is born they begin to look for themselves. We find ourselves in many things. I see myself these days in Taylor Swift's songs. They are speaking to me. Does she make me whole? No, but her words have encouraged me. People can get consumed in church too. They take the traditions and

Bible understanding way too far. The reason you are on the outside the church at this point in time is because of those people. They had you with hello until they opened their mouths.

Ok, I could go on and on about problems with in the church. It's not fair to the good churches to just tell the bad stuff. If you're done with religion; if you're done with church just look at me. I have been severely bombed by those who call themselves Christians. For some reason God wanted me to experience what so many of you have with Christians. However, I love what church represents. I love what church can do for the community. I just want to touch on a few more examples just so you know that you're not alone in being church bombed.

It's like this "Out with the bad air and in with the good air." To reset or begin again at first you must be rescued. A doctor must know what happened before he can treat you. Jesus does know what has happened. I can confidently say he is not pleased with what the church has become. How can I possibly say that? For two reasons: one is that Jesus attacked the church in his day, plus He also blasted the church in Revelation 2 and 3. The smallest verse in the Bible is "Jesus wept." I think if there was another one that small it would say "Jesus knows."

The second reason is that many (but not all) churches are clearly dying in our world. In Calgary the biggest Bible store just closed their doors. Attendance within many churches is dropping. The money flowing into churches has dwindled in most of them. Why? I believe it's because the Spirit of God is not within a vast number of churches anymore. They have gone the wrong way. That Bible store said they exhausted all efforts to stay afloat. Why didn't a church or denomination rescue them? Why did people stop buying there? Why didn't God save them? It's about church focus and mandate. It's not going into the places Jesus would go.

I have a friend who felt a passion to reach people on the streets. He wanted to spread the gospel to those who did not know God outside the church walls (Jesus mandate alert). To spend

time preaching he needed money support. His church said no. He asked them how they wanted to reach people outside. The church Pastor said “We do want to reach people just not your way.” My friend asked “Then what is your way”? This Pastor replied “I don’t know but I do know it’s not your way.” The real answer was “Go away because we don’t need you.” He did and since then that same Pastor was also let go because of lack of funds.

Ironically that Pastor was the one in control of the finances and staffing in the church. I bet he was so consumed with church business that he signed his own pink slip and sent it to himself. I wonder if the next day he got home and realized (In the mail) he had inadvertently fired himself. I wonder if he thought it was cold to not get a reason. I wonder if he thought it was cold to do it through the mail and not in person. I wonder if he felt hard done by like Paul was.

Paul makes a pitch in 2 Corinthians 11 that he was punished in several ways for his belief. I myself have been told to take a hike from the church members. They have accused me of being insane, unbiblical, needing Jesus, a rebel, and several more things. Sometimes I have felt like Paul. I remember going to a conference to listen to the hottest new Christian author Alan Hirsch talk about his book “The forgotten ways.” My Pastor ate it up. He even tried to get the whole church to read it (tough read). Within a year those same Pastors had pulled his book from the shelves. They scoffed at his name because they said “We don’t agree with that philosophy”, yet a year before, they did.

Paul thought he was being a good young Pharisee until his mentors tried to stone him years later? It’s Jesus being the saviour drawing in thousands, and then finding him hanging on a cross with insults being hurled his way from those same crowds. How quickly Christians turn against the next popular thing. I wanted to do outreach as a ministry. They said yes but nobody

came and they refused to promote me. In the end the Pastors feared the crowds. I was told “Where would they sit”; and “Who would minister to them”; and on and on the excuses came

You see in the end it comes back to my two original stories. People must be right, correct, and be in control. All the church does is to feed its self. It must exist at all costs. To do that it must be right (never criticize), correct (even if we split friendships), and be in control (filter who is inside these walls). Weird people like Jesus, the Disciples, and my evangelistic friend are not accepted. There is no way (In hell) that Jesus would be accepted by the church today. Jesus always said “They would bring false claims in his name.”

That’s it. I’ve said my peace on the church. There is plenty more to tell but this is not the time. Again, I really don’t want you to hate the church or Christians. I love the church and love many Christians. I saw a man just the other day that has been jerked around by the Christian community. He is still in ministry. Why? He believes in the message. God still is all about love in his mind. He is a really good man for many reasons. My evangelistic friend still preaches in Calgary, Alberta on the trains, and in the streets. He still believes in Jesus and the good news.

I believe you believe. Ok that sounds weird but it’s true. You still want to have faith and hope that God is good. So many people say God is supposed to be good. Heaven is a nice place. Church is supposed to be safe. Pastors are good people. To reset your spiritual life means to separate God from people. Separate God from the actions of the church. There is a commercial that shows some kids playing hockey. They smash a window with a puck. In that moment the Edmonton Oilers star Taylor Hall arrives to play. One girl seizes the moments and says “Hall did it” and they all run away leaving Taylor Hall holding the bag.

Men and women have abused tradition and the church. They have done things the Christian world can never recover from. Priests have abused and Pastors have cheated. Insecure

Pastors have neglected those God has given them. Christian leaders have lied to you and others you know. These are the facts so they say. In the end it is Jesus standing there in his church holding the bag. One Pastor seizes the moment to say “God or Jesus did it” and then, in a flash, they all run away. The world sees the results of bad people within churches and Christian organizations. The church says God is in control. People link God to the actions and rightfully so. That’s how deduction works. The evidence is clear. If it’s Jesus church then he is responsible for this mess.

In the Bible it says Jesus left this church for us. The Gospel message is to be administered through this place called the church. Christianity is the way we do business in this world. The Spirit works through us. I hope you see my point. What God meant for good some people have used for evil: even the church. God is still the same God of love. Jesus is still the same saviour and lover of our soul. It’s people who have ruined it. I know people think church is a building and it is, yet in the bigger scheme of things, the church is so much more than a building.

To reset is to rethink about who did it. God set it up and provided all we need. He is willing to fuel our lives with the Holy Spirit. We must separate the actions of people with the actions of God. God gave but “WE” did it. We abused, cheated, and lied. We have agendas, theology, and sins. One thing is for sure. If Jesus is holy and sinless then who sinned in his church: WE DID!

We are accepted by God. Are you any different than all the great sinners of the past? Didn’t Paul say he was the chief of sinners? Wasn’t Moses denied to enter the promise land because of his sin? Wasn’t David denied to build God a house because of his sin? They did it but God still loved them. People can trash you and say they do it in the name of God but in the end

they did it. Church can say they are justified in how they do business but in the end they did it. That does not give you a good reason not to believe. Do you know that?

Again I know you want to believe. God did have you with hello. The actions of the church and miss-guided Christians ruined that hello. God is still here waiting for another chance to be your God. Throughout the Old Testament God pleaded with the Israelites to return to him. God always wants to make it right. To fix what went wrong. From the Garden of Eden to the cross on Calvary God is trying to fix our mess. Why do you think God would kill his only Son? In the Bible it says to seek and save the lost. We are the lost but not forgotten. I mean it when I say “God would do great things but people get in the way.”

In the next chapter I want you to breathe again: to reset your thinking about God. In my first encounter with my home church I heard a message on sin. It’s not the best way to embrace a new place. That is a harsh message. I am going to offer the same olive branch to you. I want you to believe again. I know you do too. Does it mean entering a church again: maybe, but maybe not, we will see in the coming chapters? To reset is to know what sin is. Church is in the sin business. Who enters their doors, may to heaven, and is their friend by talking about sin. It shouldn’t be but it is. Let’s talk about sin before you reset.