

## Dirty

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Chuck Swindol is a famous radio Preacher in America. One of his opening statements in his 1986 book called *Growing the Christian life* states

*show me a person who stumbles along in their Christian faith, and I'll show you a person who isn't exposing himself or herself to a consistent intake of the scriptures.*

To be fair, Chuck is not wrong. Reading your Bible consistently is helpful. In my mind, it is the number one way to know God better. It's probably the number one way to know yourself better too. For those who do not believe in a God, you're in a great place. Don't put this chapter down. Your right at that point on the map you need to be. Life's arrow says *you are here*. In the spirit of North American tradition, we are a Christian nation. On the flip side I get it, this land is certainly not Christian. If you ask most people, we are considered more Christian than Buddhist or Muslim.

The Bible is probably the lynch pin in that argument. Much of our fabric is based on the Bible. I bet it's by no mistake that Christian and the free world go hand in hand. This country of Canada prides itself on being divisive in religion. We are free to do so directly because our fathers had Christian core beliefs. Beliefs that were Bible centered. We might not a Christian nation anymore but it's still the fabric of our country.

Why mention the Bible, church, and traditional ways in a book about feeling dirty? To me, it comes down to this. On a map, you are always here. The red arrow will always tell you that this is where you are standing. You will never see a sign that says you are not here but over there. You are where you are. We have a history with the Bible and church. It may be faint now, but that is where we began. The building blocks of our morality and law were based off of the teachings of Jesus and the Bible. What I'm saying is that if we want to know the basics of

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goodness and love, it is found in the Bible and church. If we're stumbling as a nation maybe

Chuck is right that we don't take in the Bible anymore.

Imagine yourself hiking in the wilderness. Your map is vague and you're seemingly lost. Yes, you browsed through the compass orientation manual. How hard could it be? Visualizing that book sitting on the coffee table while you're lost is a bad thing. The best thing is to stay where you are. Getting more lost is not good. However, you come across a road. Thank God. One way or another the road will lead somewhere good. At some point, you come across a sign. The red arrow says *you are here*. I am where? Then a forest ranger pulls up and helps set you straight on where you are. That is what the Bible and church are to the world.

These two icons may be irrelevant to most, but we see their effects in our daily lives. Christians feed the poor. Christians have places of sanctuary. They counsel the hurting, and help the weak. Our laws reflect the Ten Commandments. If you feel dirty and neglected, you can find hope and rest in a church. The Bible will provide enough wisdom to make you feel encouraged. A good Christian book will lift you up. Chuck Swindol was not wrong. I heard a story of a Muslim man pointing to the cross on top of a church. He asked the pastor "teach me about that." The man probably did not know a thing about the cross or Jesus, but he knew where to go. He knew that something good was under that cross.

So here we stand on the map of life. They say you're either saved or not. You're following the teachings under the cross or not. Is one type of Bible better than another. Is it the Koran, Jewish Bible, or the Book of Mormon? One thing we know is that on the surface, each book will be sold as offering hope, love, and kindness. For a month after my Ex-wife and I had split up I floundered in life. I was lost. There was no red arrow. I spent four excruciating weeks of wandering in the wilderness. Then a friend of mine offered me the teachings of a Jewish lady.

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That lady got her teachings from the Bible. She was the ranger pointing me the way to safety in the wilderness.

There is a saying *the tide rises and floats all ships*. How did I know that the Christian boat was the right one? Frankly, I had remembered my little red Bible from the Gideon's. I remembered my mom talking about church. I remembered going to Sunday school. All these points in my life came together and directed me to church. I found myself in the company of the love people. James 4:8 says **“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”** The cross above the church represented the clean. They promised I would be clean if I believed. I entered a church dirty.

That is the story of so many. We send our children to Sunday school. We go to church every Sunday. They are fed and clothed by Christian organizations such as food banks, salvation army, and many others. This is what they show on the map. The Christian life has a red arrow towards the church. It may not be where you are but it points to where you should be to find love and hope.

Ok, back to Chuck Swindol. I used his phrase because that is common thinking inside a church. Read the Bible and everything will work out. I am a Bible believer. Trust me it has changed my life. Yet, reading, memorizing, and speaking the Bible does not make you a Christian. Chuck is right but he also is wrong. Reading and doing are to very different things. Seeing the red arrow is fine but then what?

I have never met Chuck Swindol. He may be a very nice man. I bet that he is imposing figure by the way he preaches. He is confident in his ministry, faith, and knowledge. He should be. Yet, the Christian world has been hurt tremendously by the teaching of those like Swindol. There is a stigma they have put on the building under the cross. It says come and be changed.

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Read and be changed. Worship and be changed. That type of teaching is why people feel dirty. It is why the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is failing all over the map. It's like this: you are here but the church red arrow is in a different place. A place that does not exist.

Whoa Patrick are you saying heaven does not exist? Do you discount the church? Discount the Bible? No, if you read me that way then I failed. I love what church has done. I love my Bible. The ideals of the Christian life do work. Yet, where we have come from and where we want to get to are a different story. In the Christian life, there is no *you are here*. You're always changing, developing, learning, and growing. You never arrive in the Christian life. The trouble is that preachers and Christian books appear to tell us we can arrive. There will be everlasting joy, contentment, and understanding in this life. It's skewed thinking.

Carrie Underwood has several songs that paint a less than stellar picture of the Church. She is a professing Christian. I suspect she is a believer in Jesus. Yet, why does she have a hang up with Christian actions? I believe it is because over the years she is fed up with Christians acting non-Christian. I bet she is done with the tears from the hurt. Done with the jilted. She has had it with the dirty being shunned inside church doors. I believe she grew up in church circles. Her writing makes me believe her eyes are wide open. The difference between her and some other Christians is: she is not shutting up.

Carrie has a song on her Storyteller album called *Church bells*. I don't know exactly her mindset, but it rings loud and clear to me. There are moments when we come to church hurting. We hide under makeup and dark sun glasses. In these moments, we want help. There should be prayer and understanding. This song rocked me because of the false hope. They prayed for her yet they never helped. They sang for her a song of hope but they never helped. The people under

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the cross knew her troubles but never moved a muscle to stand with her. She was the dirty. She was alone in a church of hundreds. Listen to the words.

*It was all bruises, covered in makeup, dark sunglasses and that next morning, sitting in the back pew praying with the Baptist. She could hear those church bells ringing, ringing and up in the loft, that whole choir singing, singing. Fold your hands and close your eyes. Yeah, it's all gonna be alright you just listen to the church bells ringing, ringing, yeah, they're ringing*

The Muslim man looked up at the cross and wanted to be taught. He knew the rumors of where love was. It is under the cross. It is in the people in the building. The woman in Carrie Underwood's song is fictitious. Is she? Are their people entering the doors of a church and finding that they leave feeling as dirty as they came in? The problem is perception. We have tough lives. On a map of life, a church has a red arrow saying hope is here. Understanding, and compassion is here. Acceptance is here. What we failed to see is that there are ten mobile data antennas on the cross. The church has evolved way beyond simply helping people.

What does that mean? It means that churches are a business. Each Sunday the ministry preaches just this close to reality, but avoiding the dirt. They talk a good talk so that the hearers leave happy. They leave content. They can fold their hands and close their eyes and feel safe. Safe under the cross on a building. Safe in the arms of the masses. Yet, to the dirty, there is little safety inside a modern Christian church. There is so much effort paying the bills and putting up the HD screens that the dirty in the back are missed. The intent of the gospel is missed, forgotten, and tarnished.

Read your Bible and you'll be ok. Belong to a church and you'll be ok. In Christian circles, there is a theme that is being taught. God is love, and yes, he is. Jesus is all about love, and yes, he is. People on the outside have heard the talk. This is the soft place. The safe place. Love is in the house. Toby Mac sings in his song *Love is in the house*

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*Love is in the house and the house is packed, so much so I left the back door cracked. Mama always said it's a matter of fact that when love is in the house the house is packed*

People assume that church is where love is. They assume the church is where a full house of loving people is. What you would not expect is a house that made you feel dirtier than you already felt. God does not promote that. Jesus does not promote that. The cross does not promote that. Yet, we assume that Christians have the answer. They say *Jesus is the answer*. The trouble is that the church is right about love, but they are advertising it in the wrong way. Reading your Bible won't bring love. Praying won't bring love. A packed church does not produce love. Yes, there is love to be felt in prayer, the Bible, and church. Then there are people.

I stated that *when the tide rises all boats float*. The key is "all." The Christian church assumes and promotes that all Christians love because they are loved by God. Those outside the church assume that all Christians love because their God is love. The problem is people. We are a part of everyone. That means people love, hate, judge, hug, and hurt as humans. These are the characteristics that we all share. Being Christian should change all that, but being human is what human does. I fear that the rotten side of humanity is allowed to run amuck inside church walls because we assume too much. Unfortunately, bad behavior floats just as well as good behavior.

Is this church bashing? From the Christian point of view the answer is yes. Rule number one is never dish the church. Yes, Jesus did but that was Jesus. Jesus followers are not allowed to. What that means is that bad behaviors are ignored inside the church. The blood on the pews is wiped up as if nothing happened. Where that becomes a problem is with people who feel dirty. People who have lived dirty lives. They are coming into the heart cleaning business called the church. The best way to keep a house clean in Christian circles is keep the dirt out.

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But Patrick, in the church, we promote clean living. We promote love. We promote saving sinners. It comes back to my map in a forest. There is a red arrow that says *here you are*, yet you're still in the forest, lost. The building under the cross has lost its way. They are so deep in the wilderness that they believe they are found. Home is where your rump rests. Yes, but the church rump is sitting in a dreamland of ideals. Subconsciously, they believe they love in the name of God. They believe they care in the name of Jesus. They promote clean living. The key to me is normal people. They believe they have cornered the market on normal. Jesus always said that Christians were the abnormal.

Two stories to build a case for a needed rewiring of Christianity. I met a man who was the conduit for a denomination. To become a pastor, you had to go through him. We met for three months on building a new church. It was an awesome experience. However, one day he said he does not willfully sin anymore. He asked if I believed in that. I said no. Three months down the drain in 10 seconds. I said no and he closed his Bible and left. I sat there stunned. Stunned he believed he was clean. Stunned that I thought we were friends. Is that Christianity. Did I feel less dirty in 10 seconds?

Then there is a second story. A friend of mine loved to preach to the unsaved in the big city. He quit his job and decided to live a life promoting the church and Jesus. He approached his home church to support him. They declined his offer. Why? He asked them how they were going to reach the unsaved. One pastor said "I don't know but regardless, it is not your way." That's a nice Christian way of saying we won't, don't care to, and are unwilling to talk to people in need of Jesus outside the church.

That same pastor was challenged by me to ask the community to come to church. The answer was we have no room, we have no structure, and it would create problems. Yes, the

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inside of the church would have dirty walls and dirty pews because of dirty people. Read

Matthew 23. It is the ugly side of Jesus if there is one. It's not that he was ugly or acted ugly.

Jesus just exploded on the church in his day. These two verses depict where we still are today in the modern church.

*Matthew 23:27:28*

***Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. 28 So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.***

If I had a chance to be anyone in the Bible, then who would I choose? I would love to be David. A king with all the power and riches. I'd love to be Solomon with his concubines, horses, and vast wisdom. Maybe I'd be Moses carrying a staff. Performing great acts of wonder from God. Yet God has made me a little weird. I don't get the staff and beautiful women. I get what John the Baptist got. He received no miracles, no wisdom, and no wealth. What he did get was camel hair coats and an insect diet. Fine, I don't have those clothes or diet, but I do look more disheveled than normal people.

John gets to proclaim a message that heaven is near. Did you ever notice that he preached in the wilderness? He preached among the weeds. My ministry is very similar. It seems this thought is true: if your abnormal then God has big plans for you. If you think your normal, then God needs to shake you up. Being normal is fine but being abey-normal is better. I am preaching that the church is going the wrong way. It's just as John did, Jesus did, and the prophets did. I am not a prophet. I am just one of the dirty that believes the church is too clean. Maybe it's time to invite John in. Call him out of the wilderness.



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That passage in Matthew above says it all. Chuck Swindol preaches that reading the Bible will fix bent lives. I love Chuck but what do bent lives really mean in Christian terms: *Jesus are us; John are us*. The perception of Jesus and John are the key: these two do not represent the clean. They represent the saved. Matthew 12 has dialogue from two Jewish men towards Jesus and John. The topic was purification and being saved by baptism. Both Jewish men struggled to understand a difference between clean and saved.

We never get unbent or clean in this lifetime. There is never a moment where we can say we never willfully sin. Jesus said they called him Beelzebub, glutton, and a drunk. They called him crazy. John was a wild man. They were never called clean. Paul of the Bible always called himself the chief of sinners. Why? It's because of what Jesus said in Mark 2:17 **“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”**

I would bet that Chuck Swindol would be so angry with me for taking him out of context. Chuck, I agree with you. It's just that modern day preachers are setting up church to be a clean house. They are setting up Christians to believe that they can be clean. It's not that the current church can't help people. That the Bible can't help people. No, it's the message were selling that is bent. It's the broken message Jesus and John hated in their day. The real message is that Christians should be shouting *we are the dirty. We are the broken. We are the disheveled*. Why? Because those people need the love of God. They need the miracles. They need friendship, care, and compassion. The message they are receiving from the church is that you can be clean “if.” That is not the message God was promoting. Jesus asked us to let him carry our dirt not get rid of it.

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The church in Jesus day felt it didn't need friendship, compassion, and care. They promoted being clean. Oh, they made sure they appeared to care, but Jesus exposed them as fake religion. How did he do that? Jesus hung out with the dirty. To make matters worse it was mostly the dirty outside the church. Pharisees and Sadducees continuously harassed and followed Jesus wherever he went. Bashing him and accusing him of being dirty. They were consumed with purity and righteousness. Those are all good things if put into context. These rulers were using them as a club.

I tried to become a church planter. I wanted to be in a denomination. I wanted to be supported by fellow Christians. I was asked to attend a week-long boot camp. It was a Christian fishbowl. They put me in it and watched me for a week. They wanted to see if I looked, acted, and lived the part. I was a Christian fish. It's just that they were looking for a fake one. They were like the religious rulers. Always looking for dirt rather than the things they could use.

I saw a cool toy in a store. It was a fish in a tank that was fake. You put batteries in it and it swam around like a fish. Best part is that you did not have to feed it or take care of it. It did what you expected. I was not that fish to this boot camp. I had different ideas. I had different thoughts. They were really angry I would not just swim around like normal fish do. Like controlled fish do. What I realized is that there are fake Christians and real ones. There is fake Christianity and real faith. Reading your Bible helps but practicing your Bible is better.

Carrie Underwood's song *Church Bell's* rings in my ears. We are willing to pray but not get involved. We give to missions but don't get involved. We send money to foodbanks but don't get involved. I had a hauntingly sad discussion with an Elder of a church. He heard my sermon and believed with all his heart that God wanted this church to step up its community presence. I told him it would involve getting dirty. It would involve inviting the dirty parts of society inside

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his church. I will never forget his eyes becoming downcast and the subject changed. He only wanted to be involved as long as his church remained clean.

Jesus conversation with the young rich man boomed in my heart. I felt so sad for this elder. He was so close to the gospel but refused to enter. It's nuts to think that the one place we need to find love has none to give. Oh, they will give it with a ten-foot pole. Well send help but don't touch our Christianity. You might be unclean, you might be dirty. I have left many places in my time. I have left plays, weddings, funerals, and movies to name a few. I have never felt as dirty leaving anywhere as I have in a church. The message was, be clean like us and well invite you in, well accept you. But if your dirty...

There was a man who came and sat in church one day. I guess he was considered troubled. The church pastors investigated him because he had caused trouble before in other churches. He sat at the front of all things. For two weeks, they squirmed over him. The fear he might say or do something got the best of them. Leadership decided that one person should go talk to him. They had to. The risk was too great. So, one poor sap went to this man. In Jesus day, they cast lots to win. I bet those church authorities cast lots to see who had to approach the man. This pour sap sat down with the troubled man They offered him help. They an offered him solutions over rumors. I think they were so blinded with being clean that they never said hello. They never said welcome. I doubt it ever entered their mind that God may have actually brought him to church. The one place that could save him.

I remember that moment in time so well. We were given a twenty-minute meeting as ushers on how to handle him. Did you know that he had never said a word that whole time? Yet, we spent hours debating and preparing for him. Does that sound like Pharisees and Jesus to you? They called it the incident without even an incident. He was considered dirty and outcast. He was

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making this church the home of the unclean. In the end, they asked him to leave and never come back. My goodness, even the police were involved, yet he had done nothing, but he might have. Restoring normalcy was paramount in that church at the expense of love and friendship.

Christians are training their children to be normal. They are training their children to be clean. My wife and I decided not to sleep together before marriage. We asked the church leadership to mentor us on this issue to help us keep our vow. What we found is that all the leadership had fallen. Nobody were virgins into marriage. I was stunned. Maybe I was more stunned because they promoted chastity in dating. Christians promote the Bible yet, they say about 5% read it. They promote tithing 10% to the church yet about 5% do. They promote love in the church but as I have gone deeper in ministry about 5% do that too.

In Christian university, I heard a message from a woman pastor. She had mentioned that women and elder pastors have had a hard time in ministry compared to the others. The others being men and the young. The young are an interesting topic. They are the PK kids (Pastors Kids). Recently I saw two promotions from that university in commercials. Both times they promoted students that were PK kids. This is not a cheap university. I bet that over 80% of the students are pastors kids. I have been in Christian circles where the term PK kids comes up. They are the clean. They are the promoted. They are the church future.

I know so many older students like myself that felt the calling of God to go to school to be a pastor. Almost every one of us is not employed in a church. Were all working in ministry on the outside just like Jesus. We want to reach those like us. We are the former unsaved. The trouble is that we are not clean. We know things. We don't talk like born Christians do. We don't think like they do. They know it too. The hill to get into Christian ministry outside of the PK kids is a mountain that is impossibly steep. They never touch us and we can't touch them.

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So, here's the problem. There are those who feel dirty. They may or may not be crazy. They don't feel normal. They have a different upbringing. They come from dirty places. Ironically these days their skin is white too. We are the lepers. The church wants us to shout "unclean" very loudly. We can work outside the church but there is a problem. I believe that we are no different than the Muslim man looking at the cross. We know that the building under the cross is something good. We want to be taught about that. The problem is the so-called normal clean Christians are in the way. The dirty are trying to enter locked doors.

Church ministry has become a cesspool of corruption. They will do anything to believe they are the clean, the normal. They preach clean living. They preach love. They do everything to look, smell, look, and taste the life of God. Yet, here we stand on the outside. Unable to sit near the front. The rich elder has the inside. The PK kid has the inside. The people born into Christian families certainly have the inside. They build structure and programs to look clean. They create theological points and doctrine to look clean. The last remaining generation of Christians are being trained to believe clean living is possible. They are nuts.

My book is called *dirty*. Reason being, is that we all feel a little dirty. Some of us abnormal people just willing to admit it. Some of us just have that look of the unclean. Some of us; however, hide it. Yet, the dirt remains. The elder that slept with their spouse before marriage is dirty. Charles Stanley divorce became dirty. The alcoholic is dirty. My life outside of Christianity is very dirty. The choice is clean and clear. Hide the dirt or wear the dirt. Another part of the choice is this. We can spend our lives trying to be clean. We can spend our lives pretending to others that we are clean. You can do any of those things all you want. In the end, I believe we can never be clean. We will always have a little dirt.

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I chose to pick on Christians and the church because they matter to us all. If we see a Christian, then we must have seen something. It's either clean or dirty. Did they act kind or treat us badly? If we see a church building acting kind, then it is worth a re-post on Facebook. If a church group acts terrible does that get a re-post too? Oh, yes it most certainly does Why do you notice them at all? It's because we all know what they should be like. Many of us have heard the stories and rumors. A Muslim man wonders about the cross because he has heard the good news.

I have had pastors tell me to hide dirt in my life. I have heard them tell me to clean it up. I have heard them say they have none. They promote and teach clean living. Those of us searching for redemption can find it in the words of Jesus, but it won't be found in life or in a church. Jesus saves. Jesus cleans. Jesus bears our burdens and sins. The bears part means we have something to give him. We have dirt. We have sin. We have trouble in this life. There is, was, and will always be dirt in our lives. This world is messy. Hiding in a clean church will hurt the cause of Christ more than help it. Why? Because Jesus spent his time outside with us, the dirty.

I know I'm beating a dead horse. Church is constructed now to only pick worthy people to run it. Worthy in deeds and worthy in tithings. Incorruptible and sustainable is what the church requires. The other day I heard a sermon on the difference between process and project. Process takes a life time. We walk together helping each other up as we stumble through life. Real Christianity calls us Satan and a Saint. We are all those things in the choices we make.

The church is built on projects. I was rejected by the church planters because I needed work. They said they were willing to make me a project. Oh, how sweet of them. I knew a girl who grew up non-Christian. They refused to let her serve. They said in time she could. She became their cleaning project. Here is a cool thing. Jesus asked his disciples to go from town to town preaching the good news. They came to every town with dirt on their feet. If they were not

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accepted they were to shake off the dirt and leave. That is interesting. Was Jesus asking each town to accept dirty people. He certainly never asked the disciples to be clean first.

We need a dirty church full of dirty people. Alan Hirsh an Australian author said once that his church group of prostitutes, drug addicts, and pimps might have felt the presence of God more than his established church. Do dirty people need cleaner lives? Yes, we all do. Yet, something seems to be lost when we believe were clean. Can the Bible make us cleaner? Yes, it can. The words of God can change our perspective on living poorly. Augustine wrote in his Biography that he felt that every now and then we need to let go and feed our sinful desires. Wrong or right he knew our nature. You can only hold on to the sin tiger's tale so long.

I titled this chapter *hands*. It seems like I barely mentioned them. Hands to me are the Christians. Like Carrie wrote in her song *we fold our hand and close our eyes*. Are Christians willing to do that? To ignore the real work. Our hands as Christians should be rough and worn. I suppose our hearts should be the same way. We probably should be tattered and torn from too much work done touching the dirty. Christians should be weathered by the dregs of this world. Who needs kindness and a hug more: Sunday morning or the dirty? They say that Jesus walks beside us in our struggles. Who needs a *hand in hand* walk more? Jesus said he would send another in the Spirit. That word means beside us. Are not Christians supposed to be like their savior and walk beside others?

Proverbs 16:27-29

***Idle hands are the devil's workshop; idle lips are his mouthpiece. An evil man sow's strife; gossip separates the best of friends. Wickedness loves company—and leads others into sin***

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I will end with this. I have heard it said that we are to live with the wheat and tares. What that means is that Jesus said to keep the weeds and wheat together for fear of ripping up too much wheat. I get it. There is a little good and bad in our lives. I just worry that Christian leadership is looking the other way on tares of bad behavior. They equally refuse to accept a few weeds. It's gut wrenching to realize we need the good and the bad. Somehow, they go together. The modern church hates that.

Spending a life time trying to create a weed less life or church is ridiculous. We are sinner's stupid. We are human stupid. There are not two kinds of humans: the clean and dirty. The tide floats all boats. If the church embraced the dirty, we might get a dirtier church and a cleaner society. Somehow tares and wheat are supposed to stand together. Church was designed to be a place we looked for love and hope. The red arrow should point to the church for understanding. Many know what the church should be. Does the modern church know what it should be? The universal church should have a slogan *We are a part of everybody*. How novel is that!