



# COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God

## *Our Christian* **ADVENTURE**

Midnight Moments

What To Do About Sin  
*Moving Beyond Grade School Definitions  
Into Decisive Action*

God, Our Father  
*Not a Metaphor—A Relationship*

Overcoming the Bullies  
in Your Life

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## COMPASS CHECK

*Compass Check* is a biblically based magazine for young people of the United Church of God, an International Association (UCGIA). Our name, *Compass Check*, refers to pointing your spiritual compass toward God. Our goal is to inspire readers to respond to the gospel message.

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## COMPASS CORNER

*Dear Compass Checkers,*

As I write this letter, we are expecting a big winter storm this weekend. It seems we will likely have to cancel in-person services for the second time in a row. While that thought might be a bummer, a hefty layer of snow on the ground brings out a few thoughts I'd like to share.

As a young person, I always enjoyed the snow for the fun it brought—days off school, sledding, building igloos, snowball fights, etc. To be honest, I still love doing those things, even though I'm long out of school. The challenge is, I don't have any good hills to sled on and we rarely get enough snow where I live to build an igloo. Fortunately, my wife loves a good spirited snowball fight, so at least there's still that.

Beyond those things, what I love about a good, heavy snow is the sense of calm and refreshing it brings. You never really notice how much noise the rustling of leaves makes until a blanket of snow mutes that noise. And if you have a full moon and a clear night after a good snow, the way the moon reflects on the pure, white canvas of snow lights up the night to create a beautiful and surreal scene.

Why do I share all this? It was tempting for me to talk about the coming spring with flowers popping up, birds chirping and the signs of new life and growth everywhere. But in doing so, I would have rushed past an opportunity to reflect on enjoying the winter. My point is simply this—enjoy every season. Not just of the year, but of life. As a young person in the springtime, or when you are an old man or woman in winter, take time and enjoy every beautiful moment our loving Father presents us with.



*Dan Preston*

*Editor of Compass Check magazine*

# GOD, OUR FATHER



## *Not a Metaphor—A Relationship*

*by Amanda Phillips*

While talking with one of my driver's education students the other day, the student, whom I will call Anthony, mentioned that he was raised by his aunt and uncle. Anthony shared that he has a strained relationship with them. At age 23, he now lives with his brother. Further along in the conversation, Anthony explained that his birth mom was going to let him live with her, but he'd rather live on his own. His dad, whom he refers to as Pops, is someone that Anthony has tried to have a relationship with, but his dad only reaches out when he wants money. In a previous driving session, Anthony mentioned how after getting into some trouble when he was younger, he recently has started going back to church. He added that he wants to have a relationship with God.

In hearing Anthony's story, I felt compassion and empathy. I identified right away with Anthony because I had experienced similar parental figures in my life. I was raised by both my parents, but it was a highly dysfunctional home.

Anthony felt as if he didn't have a dad because his father had never earned that title. I shared with Anthony that his dad appeared to be self-serving, and that he likely didn't know how to deal with his own feelings or face his own mistakes. Because of this, Anthony could not expect his Pops to be what Anthony needed. I reminded him of our previous conversation in which he mentioned that he wanted to go back to church and try a relationship with God. I told him that was the relationship he needed to cultivate.

## OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Humans are social creatures. We crave social interaction. God designed us that way because He is social. The first interactions we have are the relationships with those that raise us. But do we ever think about God as our

Father? Or is He just a supernatural being that seems far away? God calls Himself our Father, and God made us to want direct interaction, conversation and quality time with Him. We often idealize what that should look like, and how it might transpire. We often base our expectations on our human reactions with our own earthly father figures. Therefore, learning to have a relationship with God as our Father can be difficult for many, especially if you grew up in a dysfunctional home. A functioning relationship may seem unattainable.

Like us, God wants good relationships with interaction, conversation and quality time. It's easy to go to Him in prayer when things aren't going well and we need something, but is that all God is to us? Someone to turn to in times of distress?



**GOD IS OUR FATHER, AND HE WANTS A  
RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS CHILDREN.**

If God is just a distant supernatural being not involved in our life, we are missing a big part of our relationship with Him. He gives us the opportunity to know Him by His word. He wants us to speak to Him. He wants us to see Him as the loving Father that He is. He is the source of knowledge and wisdom. He is the source of love. His plan includes us—and it's greater than any plan we could ever design for ourselves (see Jeremiah 29:11). These are just some of the reasons we need God in our lives and why it's important to develop a relationship with Him. Jesus Christ was the express image of the Father (Hebrews 1:3) and actually carries the title “Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6). Knowing Christ gives us a huge step forward in knowing the Father.

## HOW DO WE INTERACT WITH GOD?

God may seem distant at times, but is it because He *is* distant? Or is it because we distance ourselves from Him? For example, it can be easy as a teen to focus on your own life and take your parents for granted. Maybe you find yourself pushing your parents away by staying in your room, being on social media and talking to friends. You may not realize you could be excluding the people who gave you life and sacrificed so much of their own lives to provide for you. But in the end, you still know that when something is needed, your parents are usually there to help.

Is that what we do with God? We can create space and distance in the relationship. With that distance comes life's problems as we live the lives we think we want. Yet when we rely on our own thoughts and devices, we get trapped by Satan. It's then that we run to God to save us or, equally bad, we blame Him for the things that happen to us.

Consider this: Who is the first person you think of when something goes well and you want to share it? What

about when something goes wrong—who is the person you want to tell? When you get out of school, or off work, who do you call or text? Who is the one person you want to talk to when you wake up or before you go to bed? While we of course share good news or bad news with our best friends or parents, ultimately, we should turn to God in every situation. When we are going through a tough time, we should immediately talk to Him about it. And when things are going well, He is who we should thank.

### **CULTIVATE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**

In reflecting on that conversation with my student, I was reminded of Daniel and the example he set by seeking a conversation with God three times a day. Daniel 6:10 reads, “. . . And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before God, as was his custom since early days.” Notice that it was his custom since he was young to pray to God three times a day. I was also reminded of David as a man after God’s own heart. Acts 13:22 says, “And when He [God] had removed him, He [God] raised up for them David as a king, to whom also He [God] gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all my will.’” To be after God’s heart means he sought God’s heart, and God chose David to be king because of it.

*Do we ever think about God as our Father? Or is He just a supernatural being that seems far away?*



God is our Father, and He wants a relationship with His children. But because as humans, it can be difficult to feel that connection with God the way we would with a physical person, some of us can find it hard to see God as He is. We see a distant being, instead of Him as our Father. Make no mistake, we cannot and must not equate the character of God with a human parent. God is love and full of grace and mercy. He is just, faithful and perfect. Get to know Him as your Father and cultivate that relationship—a relationship that is functional, rather than dysfunctional. Let’s do our part and seek Him as Daniel and David did.

### **A PROPER PERSPECTIVE**

Referring back to the conversation I had with Anthony, I made sure he knew that I was not recommending that he give up on his relationship with Pops. Instead, I recommended that Anthony have real expectations given Pop’s limitations, and that Anthony set boundaries and honor Pops as God expects us to. Taking these steps can help him begin to break the chains of family dysfunction. Moreover, I added, it was time to build a relationship with his heavenly Father. In James 4:8, we are told to “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” God gives us free will and He will not force a relationship with us, but He does deeply desire to have a relationship with each of us. Let’s cultivate a father-child relationship with a parent like no other: God the Father! When we do, our relationship with Him will transform our physical relationships, too. **CC**

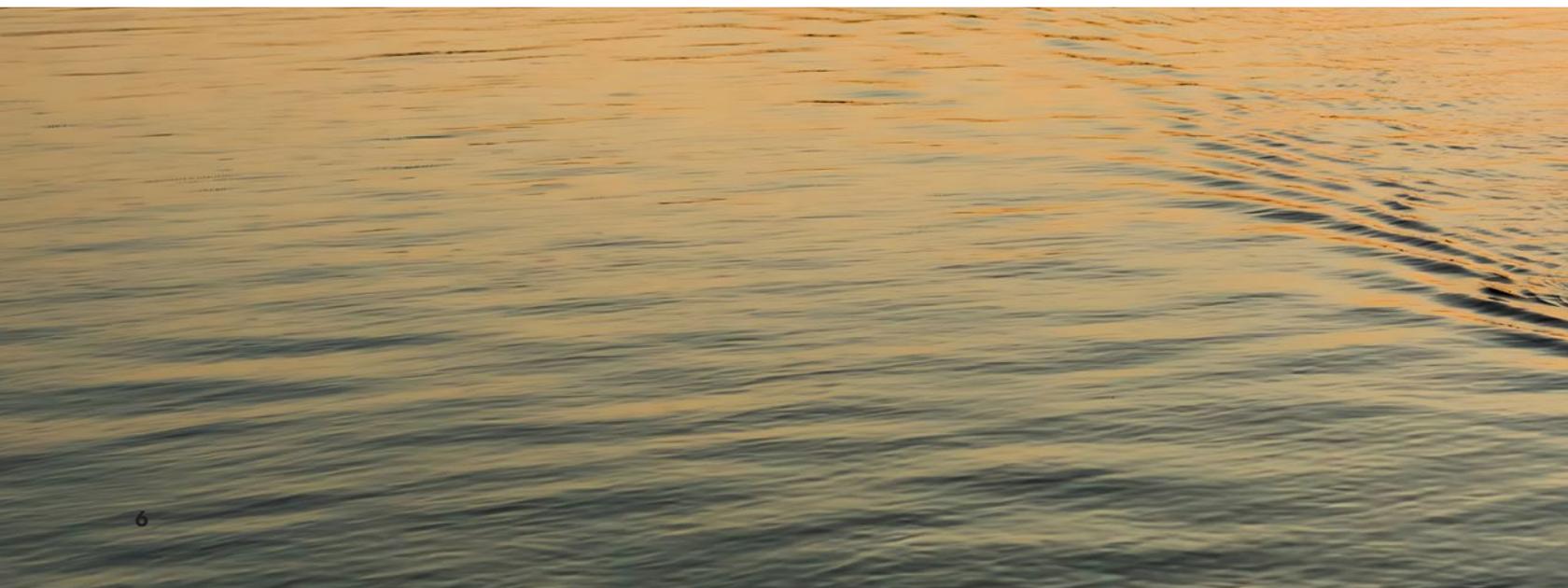


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*Our Christian*  
**ADVENTURE**

*by Lewis VanAusdle*





# *The quiet breeze,*

now at our backs, gave us a temporary moment of relief. All morning, we had battled against the strong winds coming at us from the southwest across the lake. The only thing we could do to prevent our canoes from tipping over was point the bow into the wind and keep paddling no matter how big the waves got. What an adventure!

I've survived the Boundary Waters Adventure five times, first learning the terrain and skills needed to later lead a group of young adults through the wilderness. I've paddled the lakes with the same winds and waves each time. Not to mention the challenge of portaging hundreds of pounds of gear up hills, through mud and into mosquito-infested forests. Each and every challenge was worth it to experience the beauty of the forests and lakes, the peace and calm of

moments away from civilization and the opportunity to spend some quality time with some of God's people on the same adventure as me.

Like traversing Minnesota's Boundary Waters in the heat of summer, our Christian walk is an adventure. God has called us to join Him on a journey to an unimaginably wonderful destination. Along the way we will experience all sorts of challenges. If we want to endure to the end of this adventure, we must be prepared with the essentials.

## **ESSENTIAL #1: VISION**

On the big lakes, with the wind blowing, it can be easy to mix up one point of an island with another. It can feel like your canoe has arrived at a turn when you still have an hour left to paddle. This can be very discouraging. As part of the preparation for the Boundary Waters trip the entire crew, especially the leaders, must be familiar with the path. They



need to know where they are going and what the path is like up ahead. Keeping the destination in mind is an essential part of a successful adventure.

Our Heavenly Father hasn't hidden His plan from us. His Word describes an amazing Kingdom filled with His eternal family and He has invited us to be part of that family: "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

When we can't see where God is taking us, we stumble all over ourselves. We can become discouraged when we come across difficult trials and can't see the end in sight. Knowing our vision and keeping it in mind is an essential part of a successful Christian adventure, because "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18, King James Version).

## ESSENTIAL #2: KNOWLEDGE

In preparing for any journey, especially one that involves specialized equipment and skills, it's essential to have knowledge of the equipment, terminology and terrain—as well as potential challenges up ahead. On the Boundary Waters there is a lot of knowledge needed for the adventure to be a success—parts of the canoe and the paddles, what to do if there is a thunderstorm, how to pitch a tent, how to get clean water, what to do if your canoe tips over in the middle of a lake and which path to take in the dark, to name a few.

In preparing for our Christian adventure through life it is essential to have the knowledge of who God is, what His plan is and how we can be part of that plan. The more we study God's word, the more familiar we will be with what is in it. The Bible is where we learn the skills and qualifications to be a follower of Jesus Christ. This is where we learn about the difficulties ahead and how to handle them. As Paul wrote, "be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Two signs that indicate we are truly knowledgeable about the Word of God is when we can put it into practice and effectively teach others what we know. Peter wrote to "... sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). Familiarizing ourselves with the word of God is the beginning of gaining the knowledge we need to be successful in life as God's people. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word



*We are on a spiritual journey, a Christian adventure through life. Our God has called us to this adventure, a way of life that will lead us to His glorious kingdom.*

is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path," and His word truly lights our path in darkness so we are never lost.

## ESSENTIAL #3: SUPPLIES

The Boundary Waters of Minnesota have a lot of natural beauty including a variety of fish in its various lakes. The water looks clean but it's not always clean to drink. While you can find food along the trails that are shared with bears, heading out on a week-long adventure without food and a way to get clean water is very dangerous. You need essential supplies to not only survive the journey, but to thrive. This includes basics like tents and canoes, adequate shoes and water filters, pots and pans for cooking, and something to light a campfire. One of the real challenges is taking only the essential supplies, otherwise the whole team is weighed down and it becomes more difficult to portage everything overland.

There are also essential supplies in our walk with Jesus Christ. We need water but not just any water. We need pure water directly from Jesus Himself: "But the water that I shall give [you] will become in [you] a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Upon repentance and baptism, God gives us His Holy Spirit through which we are led and refreshed.

We also need spiritual sustenance so we might grow and have the strength to succeed on our journey. Jesus said that His food was "to do the will of" His Father who sent Him, "and to finish His work" (see John 4:34). We must follow His example by focusing our efforts and attention on doing our Father's work. We

prepare for our adventure by taking with us only the proper and essential spiritual food and water. If we weigh ourselves down with unnecessary baggage, such as sin and pride, then we won't be able to complete our journey.

#### ESSENTIAL #4: TEAMWORK

While there are some very experienced solo adventurers who have successfully navigated the Boundary Waters many times, part of the challenge of the United Youth Camp's Boundary Waters Adventure program includes working together as a team. The more experienced leaders and the new participants all share in carrying each other's gear, paddling together, reading the map and identifying landmarks, and encouraging one another so everyone has a more enjoyable adventure. We are all on the same path striving for the same goal.

The same can be said for our Christian adventure. While we each have an individual relationship with God, and we must "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12), we are all part of the same spiritual body on the same spiritual journey. "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3). If we want to have a successful journey to the Kingdom of God and be prepared for working together with our spiritual family members for all eternity, then we must be prepared to work as a team right now.

Journeying as part of a spiritual team means learning how to forgive. It means learning how to avoid offending one another. It means sometimes letting others lead and encourage us and other times being the one who leads and encourages others. Working as a team means being willing to pick up the slack and humbly serve, not to be served. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). It personally gives me strength knowing that I am on this adventure with others, including my Father and Elder Brother, as well as countless brethren around the world praying for and encouraging one another through trials.

We are on a spiritual journey, a Christian adventure through life. Our God has called us to this adventure, a way of life that will lead us to His glorious Kingdom. If we want to answer that calling and have a successful journey, there are certain essentials that we must have: a vision of where we are headed; knowledge of how to get there; essential supplies that give us strength; teamwork to carry us through. **CC**



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## What is the Boundary Waters Adventure?

**UCG's** Boundary Waters Adventure is a transformative wilderness experience that helps young adults learn practical outdoor skills and experience personal growth and service. Paddling, portaging, camping, and biblical discussion activities help prepare young adults to lead and serve the Church of God, work as a team, and face difficulties with perseverance and courage. The program takes place in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Voyageurs National Park in northeastern Minnesota and is open to young adults ages 18-35.

To learn more or apply for the Boundary Waters Adventure (BWA) program, visit [ucg.org/member/uyc/Challenger/BWA](http://ucg.org/member/uyc/Challenger/BWA) or email the director, Frank Dunkle, at [frank\\_dunkle@ucg.org](mailto:frank_dunkle@ucg.org).



# WHAT TO DO ABOUT SIN

## *Moving Beyond Grade School Definitions Into Decisive Action*

*by Dan Preston*

*If I were to ask you, “What do you think of when you think of sin?”, I’m willing to bet there are*

a handful of answers your brain has been trained to give.

You might paraphrase them something like:

- “It’s the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4)
- “All fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)
- “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23)

Those are all good, biblically accurate answers. But let me give you a few alternate answers, equally valid biblically, and see if you detect a theme:

- “Seek and you will find” (Matthew 7:7)
- “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11)
- “He is faithful to forgive” (1 John 1:9)

Do you see the difference? The first set of responses all concentrate on defining sin. That’s something most of us are pretty good at. Everyone knows not to lie, use foul language, look at pornography, etc. But what’s different about the second set of answers? They focus on what to *do* about sin.

### **WHY DO WE SIN?**

Before we tackle the subject of what to do about our sins, we need to first understand why we sin. There are actually lots of reasons.

1 John 2:16 summarizes them, “For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.” There are carnal lusts that lead us to sin (sex, drugs, etc.). The lust of the eyes is akin to covetousness (wanting something you shouldn’t really have, like someone else’s possessions, friends or life). The pride of life could be summarized as vanity, such as thinking so highly of ourselves that we can choose what is right or wrong, and don’t need God’s guidance.

You know better than I do the temptations you will face each day, whether that’s someone offering you drugs, the desire to look at pornography on your phone, playing

sports on the Sabbath, or whatever it might be. You know what the temptations that lead to your sins are. You know where they come from and what they lead to as well. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:13-15). While Satan might be the one throwing the temptations out there (1 Peter 5:8), ultimately, it is our choice to succumb to them.

### **CAN SIN BE PREVENTED?**

So, if we understand sin is so bad, and it’s ultimately on us to decide whether we sin or not, why not just avoid it in the first place? That might sound like a far-fetched, unrealistic goal, but it’s actually a good place to start.

No, you won’t be able to overcome every temptation to sin you might face, but think of it like a ping pong game. You might be playing someone who is more experienced and skilled than you are, but does that mean when they serve the ball, you should just stand there and watch it go by? Of course not! You should at least try to return the serve. Likewise, we need to try to resist sin.

One way to do that is strengthen ourselves spiritually via prayer. Matthew 7:7-11 tells us: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”

Evil in this sense means human and carnal, as compared to spiritual and perfect, as God is. The point Jesus is making is that if we ask God for good things, like help with avoiding sin, He is glad to help.

Bible study is another way to help us avoid the sickness of sin. You know you should honor your parents, right? You probably know you can find the command for that in Exodus 20. But do you know *why* you should do it? Obviously, it’s a command from God and we should do it, but consider what Ephesians 6:1-3 says: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’”



*Try as we might, we all do sin and fall short of the glory of God. The question we need to answer once we inevitably sin is, what now?*

Sure, we all know the short form “Honor your mother and father,” but Paul points out that the command is actually worded more specifically than that. He cites Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 in more detail which points to the reason why we should keep this command as well. It’s not just out of obligation that we obey, but out of respect and love that we show honor to parents. It’s those kinds of details we can easily forget if we don’t regularly open our Bibles to read and study scripture.

### **RECOVERY FROM SIN**

Try as we might, we all do sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Sometimes we know better, sometimes we are ignorant, and as such, the consequences might vary. But in either case, we sin. The question we need to answer once we inevitably sin is, what now?

Consider one of the alternate answers from earlier, “go and sin no more.” This is taken from the account in John 8 where a woman was caught in the act of adultery. There was no doubt she was guilty. The law of Moses said she should be stoned to death.



*God and Jesus' ultimate goal is our repentance and a change from the ways that led us to sin. Repentance is a change in your mindset that says, "I'm not okay with doing sinful things and I want to stop."*

But what did Jesus Christ think should be done to her? That was the question on the mind of scribes and Pharisees that brought her before Him (verses 1-5). His answer wasn't to put her to death or administer a physical punishment of some sort. It was to "go and sin no more."

Did she deserve death? Yes. Do we deserve death? Yes. But it's important to note, that is not what God and Jesus Christ *want* for us. What They want is that we change our habits and stop sinning. We are reminded of this in Peter's writings as well, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God and Jesus' ultimate goal is not our death, but our repentance and a change from the ways that led us to sin.

### **AN INCREDIBLE PROMISE**

Repentance is a key part of recovering from sin. It's something we must do after we have sinned. "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). Repentance is more than just saying, "my bad" or "I'm sorry;" it's a change in your mindset that says, "I'm not okay with doing sinful things and I want to stop."

"For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation,

not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter;" (2 Corinthians 7:10-11). Feeling bad because you got caught is not enough. Feeling bad and not ever wanting to do it again—*that* is what repentance is and what God desires. It's with that mindset that God can work to develop holy, righteous character in us.

That's our part, what we must do about sin. The exciting part is that there is one more step. A step that God takes. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This is one of my personal favorite scriptures in the Bible. What an amazing promise and gift from our awesome God!

Everyone does indeed fall short of the glory of God and sin. Scripture says so and your own personal experience no doubt supports that. The question is about what sin is, why we do it, and most importantly, what we do about it.

The next time you find yourself dealing with sin, take time in prayer to repent, ask God for help to understand why you sinned and what you need to do to change. Then take a moment to rejoice, knowing your God is faithful to forgive! **CC**



*Dan Preston tries to ask himself the hard questions in life and is still struggling to understand why he does the things he does sometimes.*



# OVERCOMING THE BULLIES IN YOUR LIFE

*by Sal Cimino, Jr.*

**W**hen I was in junior high school, I was approached by the school bully. He was much bigger than me and enjoyed picking on kids who were smaller and weaker. One Tuesday morning, he met me in the hallway and demanded that I pay him \$100 or he would hurt me badly. To prove his point, he showed me the knife in his back pocket. He said I had until Friday to pay, and if I told anyone, he would “take care of me” sooner.

I was petrified. That whole day, I could barely focus in class. My stomach was in knots thinking about what would happen if I didn’t pay up. When I got home, I went straight to my room and prayed to God for help. I told Him everything that happened and reminded Him how much smaller I was. Since I didn’t have the money, I was sure I’d get hurt—or worse. After praying, I felt some peace. I believed God would take care of it.

The next morning, I went to school with

that hope. But as soon as I walked through the doors, there he was—waiting for me. He smirked and reminded me what would happen if I didn’t pay. I remember thinking, God, why is he still bothering me? Didn’t You hear my prayer?

This went on for several days. Each

*“He showed me the knife in his back pocket and gave me until Friday.”*

morning I prayed, and each day he reminded me of the deadline. By Friday, I was worn out. He told me I had until lunchtime to pay or else. I prayed one more time: “God, please . . . I can’t handle this. I need You to do something.”

When lunchtime came, I went to the cafeteria with a knot in my stomach, expecting the worst. But to my surprise, the bully wasn’t there. Later, I found out that he had been caught smoking in the boys’ restroom. When the principal searched him, they found the same knife

he had shown me. The police were called, and he was removed from school property. Even more amazing, he was sent to live with his grandmother—in California, over 3,000 miles away! I never saw that bully again.

That day I learned something powerful: God had heard my prayers. He didn’t answer the way I expected or with the timing I wanted, but He handled it completely. My fear and worry were

unnecessary—God already had the solution in motion.

## THE NATURE OF A BULLY

According to the dictionary, a bully is someone who habitually seeks to harm or intimidate those they perceive as vulnerable. That definition fits the kid from my story perfectly—but it also applies to many things in life.

As humans, we are all vulnerable. Life is full of situations, people and even spiritual forces that try to intimidate or weaken us.

## Your worth doesn't come from what others say—it comes from what God says.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He put them in a perfect environment—but there was still a bully present: the biggest one of all time, Satan.

God knew the only way they could overcome that bully was to eat from the Tree of Life. But they didn't. Instead, they gave in, and sin entered the world. Along with sin came pride, fear, doubt, lust, envy, jealousy, strife, hatred, anxiety and selfishness. From that moment on, humanity has faced “bullies” of all kinds.

A bully doesn't have to be six-foot-two, two hundred pounds and wearing a leather jacket. A bully can be fear that controls your choices, worry that whispers, “You're not enough,” temptation that won't let go or anger that keeps you bound. Sometimes, a bully can even be a person who constantly tries to tear you down.

So let me ask you: Who or what is your bully?

Is it fear of failure? The pressure to please others? Addiction?



Loneliness? Financial stress? The voice in your mind that says you'll never be good enough?

Whatever it is, God doesn't want you living under intimidation. He wants you to overcome your bullies. In fact, God wants us to do the opposite. He wants us to live an abundant life, free of fear and worry (John 10:7-10).

## HERE ARE 3 WAYS TO OVERCOME THE BULLIES IN YOUR LIFE

### 1. Know Your Worth

*“I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made . . .” – Psalm 139:14*

Bullies—whether people or problems—thrive on making you feel small. They want you to believe you're weak or powerless. But God says otherwise. You were created in His image, handcrafted by the Creator of the universe. Your worth doesn't come from what others say—it comes from what God says.

When you know your worth in Christ, fear loses its grip. You stop seeing yourself as a victim and start seeing yourself as someone God loves and empowers. The bully in my story thought he could scare me because I was smaller than he was. But the God I prayed to was much bigger than both of us combined.

When you face your own bullies—whatever they may be—remind yourself: You are a child of God, loved, chosen and protected. Confidence in your God-given worth is the first step toward victory.

### 2. Don't Fight Fire with Fire

*“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” – Romans 12:21*

Bullies want a reaction. They feed on anger, fear or frustration. When you lose your cool, they win. But when you stay calm and controlled, you take away their power.

This applies to more than just people. Maybe your “bully” is stress, temptation or a toxic friend. Fighting fire with fire—meeting anger with anger or hate with hate—only fuels the problem. Responding with faith, patience and goodness is real strength.

Jesus modeled this perfectly. When He was mocked, beaten and betrayed, He didn't retaliate. He overcame evil with love, forgiveness and truth. You don't have to match your bully's energy—let your peace speak louder than their noise.

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### 3. Pray for Strength (and for Others)

*“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” – Matthew 5:44*

When we face bullies—real or symbolic—our instinct is to ask God to remove them. And sometimes, like in my story, He does. But other times, He doesn’t remove the bully; He strengthens you to stand firm.

Prayer isn’t just about changing circumstances—it’s about changing you from the inside out. When you pray for strength, you’re inviting God into the fight. And when you pray for your enemies, you release bitterness and make room for peace.

It’s not easy to pray for those who hurt you, but it’s freeing. You start seeing them the way God sees them—not as monsters, but as broken people in need of God’s love and mercy. Prayer keeps your heart soft and your spirit strong.

So whatever your bully looks like—fear, temptation, anger, insecurity or a real person—talk to God about it. Ask Him for strength, wisdom and peace. And trust that He will fight for you, just as He did for me.

### THE BIGGER PICTURE

Looking back now, I realize that the experience with the school bully wasn’t just a random childhood memory—it was a lesson. God showed me early that He is faithful. Even when I’m scared; He’s in control.

Life will always have bullies. They might change faces or forms, but they’ll always exist. Sometimes they’re people who try to tear you down. Other times they’re fears whispering, “You can’t do this.” But no matter how intimidating they seem, they’re no match for a God who loves you and fights for you.

The next time you face a bully, remember these truths:

- You are valuable. You are fearfully and wonderfully made.
- You don’t have to fight with hate. Overcome evil with good.
- You’re not alone. God hears your prayers and gives you strength to endure.

Sometimes, like in my story, God removes the bully completely. Other times, He uses the situation to build your courage and faith. Either way, you can trust that He’s working behind the scenes.

The same God who protected a scared junior high kid from a knife-wielding bully is the same God who watches over you today. That means no bully—no fear, no person, no sin—has the final say in your life.

So, what’s your bully? Name it. Face it. And hand it over to God. Because with Him on your side, you’re never outnumbered—you’re already victorious. **CC**

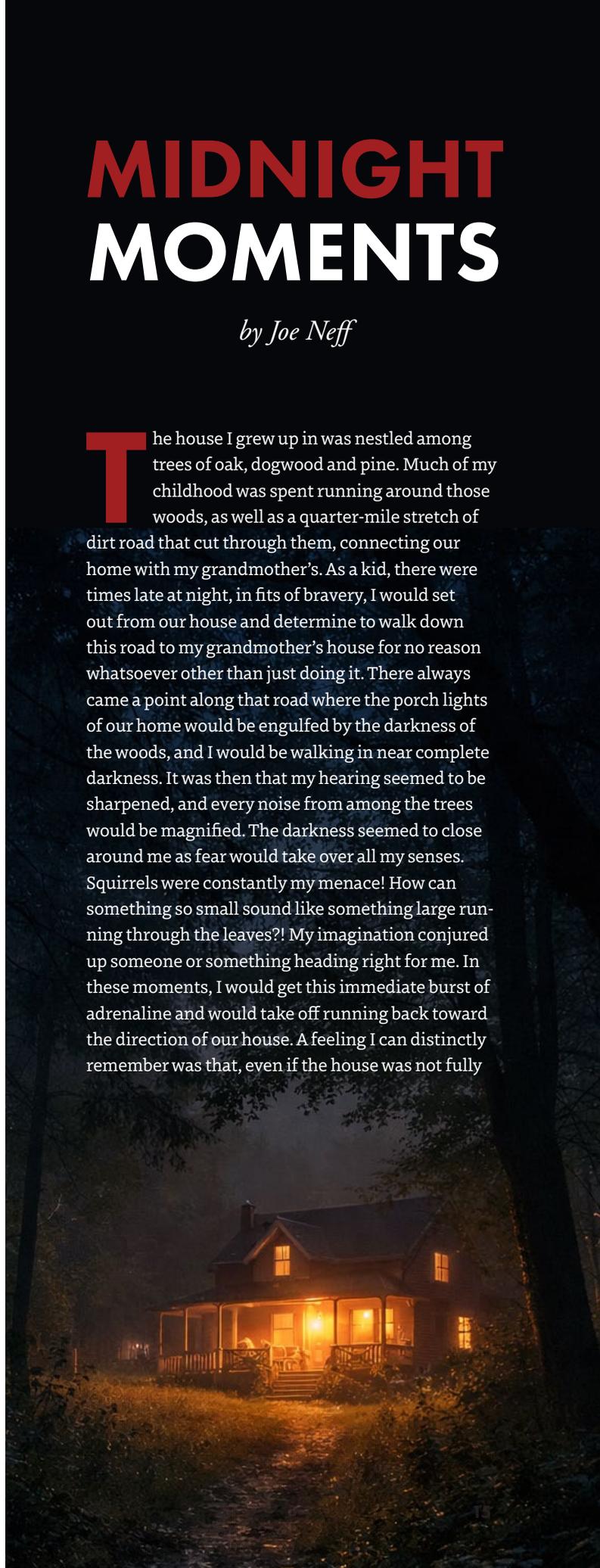


*Sal Cimino Jr. lives in Tampa, Florida, and attends UCG with his wife, Tina. He is the proud father of three grown children and cherishes every moment he can spend with his four grandchildren.*

# MIDNIGHT MOMENTS

*by Joe Neff*

**T**he house I grew up in was nestled among trees of oak, dogwood and pine. Much of my childhood was spent running around those woods, as well as a quarter-mile stretch of dirt road that cut through them, connecting our home with my grandmother’s. As a kid, there were times late at night, in fits of bravery, I would set out from our house and determine to walk down this road to my grandmother’s house for no reason whatsoever other than just doing it. There always came a point along that road where the porch lights of our home would be engulfed by the darkness of the woods, and I would be walking in near complete darkness. It was then that my hearing seemed to be sharpened, and every noise from among the trees would be magnified. The darkness seemed to close around me as fear would take over all my senses. Squirrels were constantly my menace! How can something so small sound like something large running through the leaves?! My imagination conjured up someone or something heading right for me. In these moments, I would get this immediate burst of adrenaline and would take off running back toward the direction of our house. A feeling I can distinctly remember was that, even if the house was not fully



**TO TRULY APPRECIATE  
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in view, the moment I would see the familiar and warm yellow glow of the pre-LED lights, I felt safe. Before I even entered the front door, just the fact that I was now within the light gave me comfort. The comfort became even more real as soon as the screen door was closed and latched behind me, keeping the darkness out there with the trees and shadows. To truly appreciate and know the light, one sometimes must first face the darkest hours.

Perhaps you've had moments like this or still do. Darkness can be unsettling. It represents the unknown: what we can't see, predict or control. In the absence of light, our senses strain to fill the gaps, and imagination often takes over, projecting fears or uncertainties we might otherwise suppress. This reality makes it a relatable analogy, which you often find used in literature or poetry. Authors often use darkness as a way to describe emotions, feelings or even situations. In many instances, the concept of midnight is used symbolically to speak of the darkest hours of night, or the darkest hours of life, or "midnight moments" as I call them. Those circumstances where hope feels distant, all the voices around and all the voices within are telling you it's not worth it, and you're tempted to believe that the light of dawn will never come. These moments are, more than anything else, moments of decision. In the face of the darkness, you and I can decide to stop moving forward. Or despite the darkness, you and I can decide to keep moving forward in it by submitting to God's help and His light.

The word midnight simply means "the middle of the night," but there is another way to view midnight. It's the time when



darkness reaches its deepest point, before yielding to the promise of a coming dawn. It is in this sense that I invite you to consider midnight. Not everything is bad or dark, of course. However, whether it's our external circumstances or our internal thoughts and emotions, somewhere between the fact of darkness and the hope of light is where we are and who we are.

Acts 16 tells of a midnight moment for the apostle Paul. He and Silas are joined by Timothy and Luke as they travel to Philippi. Along this journey, they encounter a young woman possessed with a spirit of divination, "... who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling" (verse 16). Paul frees this girl from the evil

influence, yet the men who profited from her fortune-telling felt no joy at a fellow human's restoration to health. Rather, they saw their hope of profit slip away! As a result, they seize Paul and Silas, dragging them before the magistrates, saying, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe" (Acts 16:20-21). The multitude arose, tore off the clothes of Paul and Silas, beat them with rods and threw them into prison, fastening their feet in the stocks. There Paul and Silas are, clothes torn off, laying in prison, beaten, bloodied and chained. A dark hour indeed. A midnight moment.

Have you had any, "Is all of this

really worth it?” moments? I have! That’s not where Paul and Silas were, though. What was their response? “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God” (Acts 16:25). You and I are to be the sort of people who pray at midnight. You and I are to be the sort of people who sing at midnight. Within the text of the Bible, prayer and singing are often spoken of together. After all, what is the book of Psalms? Is it not a collection of songs, which are prayers? Singing hymns might not be something we think of much through the week, but it’s not only for church!

Let’s return for a moment to my midnight childhood adventures down that road. As time passed, and more attempts like this were made, I began to discover a curious and effective thing. If I sang some of the encouraging hymns from our hymnal, or if I prayed out loud, I could muster up the courage to make it all the way down to my grandmother’s house and back up the road to our house. If you are singing, you can’t hear the noises in the dark. If you are praying, you can’t hear the noises of your fearful thoughts. For me, it interestingly had the same effect as stepping into the light of the porch lights. I felt like I had light with me as I walked in the darkness.

The apostle James writes: “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms” (James 5:13). The word used for suffering carries the idea of experiencing painful hardship, especially in a way that tests endurance. It’s not just about pain—it’s about persevering through the difficulty with purpose. Sometimes brokenness is the road to breakthrough. What does James say should be the response to this hardship? Let him pray!

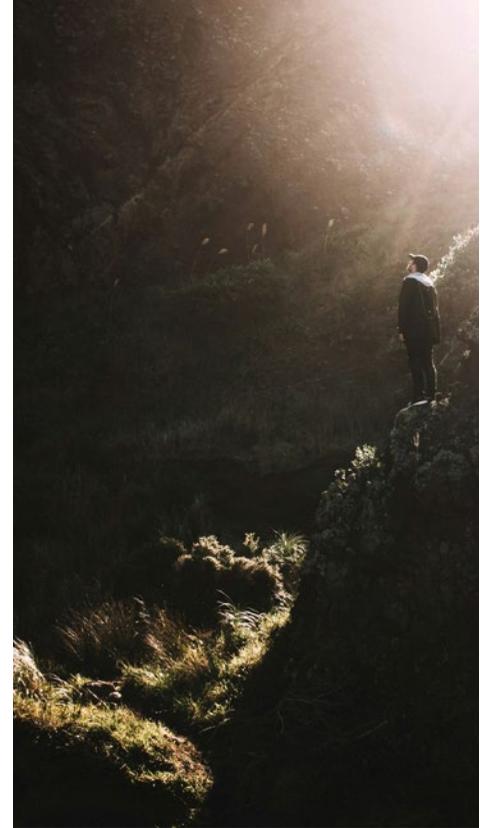
The use of the word cheerful can on the surface seem misleading. The Greek word used does not speak of a

**WHEN WE SING INTO THE DARKNESS, WE DECLARE, AGAINST ALL OUR FEELINGS, THAT GOD IS GREATER THAN ANY DARKNESS.**

surface-level happiness. When broken up into two parts, the first part means good or well. The second part means soul, mind or passion. So, it literally means to be “well-souled” or “in good spirits.” It’s a deep, settled encouragement. It’s a verb that appears often when someone is urged to take heart or be uplifted in spirit—to be of good courage. Is anyone cheerful? James asks. Let him sing psalms!

Jesus prayed much on that last night before His arrest. Matthew and Mark also tell us that Jesus sang a hymn with the apostles before they went out. With a hymn, they all went out and went forward into the dark moments they would face. In the midst of varying degrees of hardship . . . pray. To take heart, to be of good courage . . . sing psalms. Paul and Silas broke the silence of the night with prayer and with song, which brought the light they needed.

It also brought light to others: “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed” (Acts 16:25-26). The prisoners heard, and they were intrigued, perhaps even moved. With the earthquake, their chains were loosed as well, and the account tells us that because of all that occurred that night, the jailer himself was moved to ask, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”



(Acts 16:30). Paul was then willing to open the door of salvation to the very man who had shut the door of the prison on him.

When we sing into the darkness, we declare, against all our feelings, that God is greater than any darkness, that God is at work even amidst the darkness, and that God alone can lead us back to the light. Revelation tells of the coming Kingdom of God, when we will no longer have darkness to fear or to endure. We won’t have to run back to the light: light will simply be there. “There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5). With this future in mind, with a prayer and song in our hearts, we can face our own midnight moments—those times when darkness reaches its deepest point, before yielding to the promise of a coming dawn. **CC**



*Joe Neff serves as an Assistant Pastor in Eastern Washington state where he enjoys getting lost in the mountains and woods. Husband, father and pursuer of the written word.*

# Notes On The Way



## **KATHRYN WILLIAMS** *Environmental Engineer*

### **How were you called to the Way?**

I am a third-generation Christian in the Church. My grandparents and my parents were in the Church, so I grew up going to church and never really knew anything else.

But, like many people, I reached a point where I felt like my growth was stagnant, and I realized that I couldn't become the kind of person I wanted to be on my own, that I needed the Holy Spirit to achieve the kind of fruit I wanted to have in my life. So, it became a natural decision of something that I'd known my whole life, but realizing that I needed to take that next step and commit to this way of life through baptism.

### **What is your line of work?**

I'm an environmental engineer. I work for a research lab at a university, and we do a lot of applied research. We help communities try to make evidence-based decisions about improving their waste management systems and reducing plastic pollution that's entering the environment.

I do a lot of international development work, including consulting with communities to help them develop plans to address their challenges around waste management and pollution.

### **What drew you to this field?**

I think, like many high-achieving kids in high school, I thought about the medical field a lot. If you make good grades, people tend to think that's what you should do.

And I think that's a wonderful career. I have a lot of really close friends who are in the medical field. But I reflected on that and realized I don't really like blood. I don't really like bodies.

And I really wanted to work on more systemic problems. I always really wanted to be able to use my career to help people. But I think engineering is really cool, because it allows you to solve those problems at scale. So many of the systems that give us the quality of life we have on a day-to-day basis are from these complex engineered infrastructure systems that kind of run underneath everything. We don't even think about them until they stop working. Things like our clean drinking water or energy systems.

So, that was the driving factor of realizing that I really liked these big messy problems of working in systems. And I also was really excited about the scale at which I could potentially help people and make an impact.

### **What sort of education did you get to prepare for your career?**

I have a bachelor's degree in environmental engineering and just finished my master's degree in civil engineering.

Engineering doesn't really require a master's to get started. One nice thing about engineering is that a lot of master's programs have fully funded research assistantships. But you really just need a bachelor's degree to get started.

### **What has been your career path?**

I toyed around with different ideas. But by the time I got to college, I knew that this is what I wanted to do. But that said, engineering is a really broad field. It was one of the reasons I picked it, because there's a lot of flexibility. You can take it a lot of different directions.

So, I did a lot of internships. When I was in college, I worked for an Environmental Education Center. I worked at a manufacturing plant doing environmental control. And then I interned at an engineering firm that I really enjoyed and that hired me for my first job.

So highly recommend internships as a way to feel out your career field and get a sense of what you're actually interested in, even within one specific area.

And then I also did a lot of undergraduate research. I worked with a lot of different professors while I was in college. I'm a big believer that college is very much what you make of it, and you have to build the experience you want. So, I would find professors that were doing interesting work that I thought was exciting, and I would get involved with their labs as a research assistant.

### **What elements of your work do you enjoy?**

There's a lot of things about my job that I really enjoy. I get to travel to new places. I get to meet new people and experience new cultures. But it really



*Interviews showcasing a diverse range of experiences and career stories, with helpful notes on the way of life as a Christian.*

comes back to doing work that feels meaningful and impactful.

I also really like my team. I think that makes a big difference. I have a really great boss who's a good mentor to me, and who wants to see me succeed. And I think being in that kind of environment is also really valuable to your career growth as an early-career professional.

**What are some of the elements of your job that are a challenge?**

Being in this kind of consulting role, you're doing a lot of recommending. But it's ultimately up to the communities that we're working with to actually do the implementation. So that can be difficult.

Sometimes I think there are a lot of under-resourced areas that just don't have the ability to move things forward in some scenarios. And so that can be kind of discouraging when you spend a lot of time working with the community to develop a plan, and then they can't execute on it. That's kind of the curse of development work in general, that it can be very slow. It takes a long time to achieve systems change in communities. These are not easy things to build and develop, and so it can be discouraging, sometimes.

**In your work, have you ever encountered a situation where you faced a moral dilemma? And if so, can you describe a situation and how you handled it?**

Yeah, I think so. There are a couple of things that come to mind here.

One, working in an academic setting, and even in working in development, I think it's a fairly secular field. I'm normally the only Christian in the room, and figuring out how to represent myself in a positive way in that environment, that can sometimes be negative towards Christianity, has been a little bit of a navigating path. But being willing to be the one who's different and not hiding the reasons that you're out for the Holy Days, or that you can't work on Sabbath, and just being

transparent goes a long way.

And then the other thing that comes to mind is, I very much feel called to do this type of work. I've always wanted to do development work, to be able to help people who are in less fortunate circumstances, and from a lot of people in the Church, I hear things like, "that problem really can't be solved until the Kingdom comes." But is that a reason to not help other people?

And for me, this kind of work feels really aligned with my calling, and I think that doesn't always resonate with other people. Everyone's not called to do the same thing, but for me it does feel really aligned to be doing this kind of work as a Christian.

**You mentioned earlier that your first job was with a different company from where you're working right now. Was that change intentional? And what did you do to pivot to something different?**

My first job I mentioned was working for an engineering firm. I actually really enjoyed the work and my coworkers. But I got the opportunity to pivot into my current role because the professor that I work for now had offered me a role on a National Geographic Expedition team to travel along the Ganges River in India and Bangladesh to study plastic pollution. So, it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience and opportunity.

I didn't anticipate how difficult it would be. That part of the world is not easy to travel in. There's a lot of heartbreaking poverty and people who face incredible challenges. It was more difficult than I anticipated, but I am really glad I did it. I think I learned a lot.

That was a couple of years out of college. I wasn't married. I didn't have a mortgage. I didn't have that responsibility, so I gave myself the space to be able to have those adventures with my job when I was younger, and I don't regret that at all.

**What advice would you give someone in high school or junior high about**

**pursuing a career that is personally fulfilling?**

The best advice I got when I was looking at colleges and trying to figure out where I should go was that when you're not completely sure what you want to do, that you should pick the next thing that opens the most doors.

And I really took that to heart. It was one of the reasons that I picked engineering. I mentioned the flexibility that comes with that. I think we put a lot of pressure on ourselves, especially when you're 18, 19, going into college, and you're trying to plan out your whole life. And I think God knows our paths sometimes better than we know them, right? I think we have to put a little bit of trust and faith in that.

And I also think, sometimes just picking the next thing that can get you the next step towards where you want to go, like you don't have to have the next 25 years of your life planned out. There's a lot of room to pivot and make changes and adapt if you don't like something. So, I think picking the next thing that opens a lot of doors is good advice.

**Is there any advice you would give someone who wants to do the same kind of work that you do?**

What I said earlier about development work being sometimes discouraging is something that holds true in this space. It takes a lot of work to create change in the world. It's not an easy thing, but it is possible. There are many ways in which people's lives are different and better now than they were a hundred years ago, and I think God can use our actions for good in the world.

So, not growing weary in doing good and being willing to realize that this is a long-term process would be my biggest advice to someone who wants to get into this space.

**Kathryn, thanks so much for your time today!**

# COMPASS CHECK

United Youth Magazine

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## UNITED YOUTH CAMPS

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#### Preteen Camp Program Dates

Florida	May 25-29
Gilmont (TX)	May 31-Jun 3
Colorado	June 21-24
Ironwood (MN)	July 12-15
Ochoco (OR)	July 12-15
Buckeye (OH)	July 26-29
Seven Mountains (PA)	July 26-29

#### Teen Camp Program Dates

Cotubic (OH)	Jun 21-28
Pinecrest (MO)	Jun 28 - July 5
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