

# Maximum Faith

*May 31, 2011*

How does God transform the lives of Christians? If you think the answer to that question is easy, perhaps you should talk with George Barna. Six years after beginning what he assumed would be a relatively typical research process that sought to better understand how God transforms people's lives, he discovered he had tackled a deeply challenging and amazingly revealing journey. The end product was his new book, *Maximum Faith*.

After lots of research and exhausting surveys, he was able to describe what he calls ten stop points on the journey to wholeness. Stop 1 is ignorance of the concept or existence of sin. Millions of people grow up oblivious to the fact that God exists and that we have a sin nature. Stop 2 is an awareness and indifference to sin. As life goes on, people gain exposure to the idea of sin, but many do not accept it as valid or significant. Stop 3 is concerned about the implications of personal sin. And stop 4 is a decision to confess sin and ask Jesus Christ to be savior. It is worth noting that about 2/3rd of Americans are stuck in one of these four stops.

Stop 5 is a commitment to faith activities. A believer gets involved in church activities (church service, Sunday School classes, etc.). Another quarter of Americans are at this stop. This means that nearly 90 percent of Americans are stuck at one of the first five stops and are not therefore not experiencing the other five stops that George Barna has identified.

Stop 6 is a prolonged period of spiritual discontent. Stop 7 is an experience of personal brokenness. Stop 8 is a decision to surrender and submit fully to God. Stop 9 is enjoying a profound intimacy with the love for God. And stop 10 is

experiencing a profound compassion and love for humanity.

It is worth noting that only a fraction of a percent find themselves in these last two stops. In general, Christians in America are not experiencing what God intends for them. Put another way, most Christians are captive to the culture and therefore unwilling to seek godliness. I'm Kerby Anderson, and that's my point of view.

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## Feelings: A Lousy Idol

It's so easy to look down our 21st-century noses at the "primitive" peoples of biblical times, especially Israel's problems with idolatry in the Old Testament. "WE don't bow down before idols and false gods," we think. "That was when people were less evolved intellectually and spiritually, but we modern people are so much better than that."

I'm wondering if God agrees. I don't think so.

I think that idolatry is at least as rampant in our society, but it's more pervasive because it's so subtle; the idols we worship aren't physical, tangible items. We could create a long list of the abstractions we worship, but today I just want to focus on one.

Feelings.

Our culture treats feelings as if they were an inerrant internal compass that always points to truth and reality. "Follow your heart." "What does your gut say?" "You can't help who you fall in love with."

High school and college students flunk out because they don't **feel** like getting out of bed and going to school. Then they

become people who lose their jobs because they don't **feel** like going to work.

Young people of all ages dress, act, and talk in ways that will make them **feel** popular and accepted by their peers.

Married people find themselves attracted to someone other than their spouse, and they feed the marvelous feelings of infatuation because it makes them **feel** so alive and magical.

We indulge bodily appetites, whether for sweets or drink or overeating or sexual pleasure, because they **feel** so good and because refusing to indulge them **feels** so bad.

The materialism porn of magazines and newspapers starts an internal burning desire to buy and to accumulate. It **feels** so right to go out and get what we want! If we don't have the money, we put it on credit because, hey, "I should have what I want."

We are happily addicted to our comfort because we believe that **feeling** comfortable is a basic right of life. So we don't give ourselves away in service projects or missions trips or going without in order to use the money for someone who has less than we do, because then we wouldn't **feel** so comfortable.

Why is this? Why do we make our feelings into idols?

I believe it's because the toxic ["pickling brine"](#) of our culture puts a much higher emphasis on the immediate, the here-and-now, of the physical world (which our feelings are part of). The majority of Christians, the research shows, think just like the non-Christian world around us, and that includes ignoring the unseen, eternal world and focusing on the visible, temporal world.

When we recalibrate our focus to include the unseen sphere of life, we are aware of the spiritual dimension of life and not just the physical. It makes us more balanced people. We can

put feelings in their place: they are like lights on the dashboard of our car, indicating what's going on "under the hood." But if we focus on the dashboard lights while we drive, instead of on the road, we'll run off the road—or worse, crash. We can acknowledge them but refuse to let them lead us.

For example, Hebrews 12:2 tells us that the Lord Jesus "for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame." He focused on the eternal (the joy set before Him) instead of the temporal (the shame of the cross). Corrie Ten Boom wisely said, "Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it." This lady really understood how to put feelings in their place. This survivor of the WWII death camps also said, "Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart."

Feelings are not evil; we have feelings because we are made in the image of a passionate God who experiences a robust range of feelings. But they *are* fallen because everything about us is fallen ever since sin entered the world.

That's why feelings make lousy idols.

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## **Ominous Ruling from the UK**

*March 14, 2011*

A landmark ruling in the U.K. will have a major impact on the

future of foster care and adoption in that country. The High Court suggested that Christians with traditional beliefs on sexual ethics are unsuitable as foster care parents. And they went on to argue that gay rights trump religious beliefs and freedom of conscience.

A key lawyer in the case was Paul Diamond, a prominent Christian barrister in England. I have had him on my radio program on two occasions to talk about how ideas in the U.K. often make it to the U.S. He has noticed that our legal system is going down the same path as England and has wanted to warn us about this trend. What happens in the U.K. doesn't stay in the U.K. It crosses the Atlantic to our nation. Many justices are interested in trends in international law and work to implement those ideas in our opinions. And when the Supreme Court takes a break over the summer, many of the justices go over to Europe to study and lecture.

This current case has ominous implications for Christians in England and could eventually have an impact in this country. A married couple (Eunice and Owen Johns) applied to be foster care parents in 2007. The Derby City Council blocked their application because the Johns were not willing to promote the practice of homosexuality to a young child. Both parties asked the High Court to rule on whether they could be foster parents.

The High Court Judges upheld an Equalities and Human Rights submission that children that might be in the care of the couple risk being "infected" (their word) by Christian moral beliefs. That stated that Christian beliefs on sexual ethics may be "inimical" to children. In other words, these Christian beliefs are harmful to children.

While it is true that this ruling merely applies to this particular couple, it signals that other Christians who hold to orthodox Christian views on sex, marriage, and family are likely to face difficulties in the future. This ruling will

likely be applied to any Christian wanting to be a foster parent or adopt a child. And it is possible that some day in the future we may see a similar ruling in America. I'm Kerby Anderson, and that's my point of view.

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## Psalm 8

*April 22, 2011*

If you study astronomy for very long, you can feel very small. We are a small planet in one solar system in one of many galaxies. Just consider some of the comments by scientists about our place in the universe.

Werner von Braun said: "We find that we live on an insignificant planet of a humdrum star lost in a galaxy tucked away in some forgotten corner of a universe in which there are far more galaxies than people."

Astronaut Neil Armstrong said he felt very small when he was in space. "It suddenly struck me that that tiny pea, pretty and blue, was the Earth. I put up my thumb and shut one eye, and my thumb blotted out the planet Earth. I didn't feel like a giant. I felt very small."

Stephen Hawking said: "We are just an advanced breed of monkeys on a minor planet of a very average star. But we can understand the universe. That makes us something very special." I don't know about you, but I don't feel very special just because I can understand the universe.

David asks the same question in Psalm 8. Are human beings special? Speaking to God he says: "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful

of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"

David then gives God's answer to this important question. "Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas."

Our significance doesn't come from being on planet Earth or even from understanding the nature of the universe. Our significance comes from the fact that an all-powerful, loving God created us in His image and gave us dominion over His creation.

Astronomy interpreted from a naturalistic worldview doesn't give us significance. Only a Christian worldview which teaches that we are God's special creation can give us true significance. I'm Kerby Anderson, and that's my point of view.

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## Funeral Myths

I went to a friend's funeral yesterday where I heard a number of things to add to my running mental list of "funeral myths." With the ever-increasing degree of Bible Illiteracy, combined with the growing number of believers who are "cultural captives," more conformed to the culture than to Christ (please see my earlier blog ["Are You a Pickle?"](#)), it's not surprising that people would have unbiblical beliefs about death, heaven, and God.

Several songs were played at my friend's funeral. One is called "Borrowed Angels," which started like this:

They shine a little brighter, they feel a little more  
They touch your life in ways no one has ever done before  
They love a little stronger, they live to give their best  
They make our lives so blest, so why do they go so soon?  
The ones with souls so beautiful  
I heard someone say—

There must be Borrowed Angels, here in this life  
They come along, into this world, and make this world bright  
But they can't stay forever  
Cause they're heaven sent  
And sometimes, heaven needs them back again

No, people are not “borrowed angels.” God created the angels before He created mankind. We are very different from angels; they were created to serve God and serve us, and we are created to be drawn into and enjoy the love, fellowship, joy and delight of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They made us in Their image (Genesis 1:26), which elevates us above angels. People and angels are two different kinds of creation, and one does not become the other.

Which brings me to another myth I heard yesterday: that Valerie is now “our guardian angel.” While this may be a comforting thought to those gripped by loss, no she's not. She's enjoying unhindered, face-to-face worship of Jesus and fellowship with those who now live in heaven.

Do we have guardian angels? The Bible doesn't give a definitive answer on that, although the Lord Jesus did say, “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). And Psalm 91:11 promises, “For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways” (from my article [Angels: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly](#) at Probe.org).

At yesterday's funeral, people stood up to make comments about

our friend. One distraught lady concluded her remarks with an angry, "God, You'd better take good care of her." My heart went out to her, not just because of her grief but because she doesn't know that God is good and doesn't need to be cajoled, much less threatened, into caring for His beloved daughter. Sometimes people get angry with God for taking someone home earlier than they want, and the anger comes from a sense of betrayal—as if God doesn't have the right to determine the length of a person's life. Yet Psalm 139:16 says, "All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be." None of us lives a single day more, or less, than God had determined before He even created us. *A loving God is in control*—and that extends to the days of our birth and our death.

The man who conducted the funeral told a story about how they used to keep a little girl in their family in line by threatening that Valerie would get after her with her spanking switch. "Well now Valerie's not here," he told us, "so we tell the little girl, "Valerie's got her spanking switch with her in heaven and when you get up there she's gonna bust your butt."

Uh, no.

Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Valerie's not busting any butts in heaven, and part of the good news is that God isn't either!

When my aunt died, someone tucked a deck of cards under her hands in her casket because Aunt Maggi loved to play cards and they were sure she was having a great time up in heaven playing pinochle with her brothers. When my mother died, several relatives comforted each other by laughing about how Mom had finally joined the great heavenly card party. This is another myth about heaven, that it's a lot like our human activities on earth, only better. People who believe this myth

usually have no concept of the greatness and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, or they wouldn't be willing to settle for images of unending card games and fishing and bowling tournaments.

What funeral myths have *you* come across?

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## Shadow Scholar

*April 28, 2011*

A few months ago, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published an expose written by a man who makes his living writing papers for a custom-essay company. His article is getting even more attention now that *Readers Digest* has printed an edited version. He has written roughly 5,000 pages of scholarly literature for students in college and graduate school. You won't find his name on a single paper.

The article follows his experience with one student who wants him to write a 75-page paper on business ethics. It later became part of a 170-page graduate school thesis. Her e-mail reads as follows: "You did me business ethics propasal [sic] for me I need propasal got approved pls can you will write me paper?" Yes, her English and grammar are that poor. I will spare you all the other e-mails she writes to him.

He has found there are three demographic groups that seek out his services: the English-as-second-language student, the hopelessly deficient student, and the lazy rich kid. He admits

that he lives rather well “on the desperation, misery, and incompetence” that our educational system has created. He remarks that “my company’s staff of roughly 50 is not large enough to satisfy the demands of students.”

Perhaps the greatest irony in his work is that he does lots of work for seminary students. He says: “I like seminary students. They seem so blissfully unaware of the inherent contradiction in paying someone to help them cheat in courses that are largely about walking in the light of God and providing an ethical model for others to follow. I have been commissioned to write many a passionate condemnation of America’s moral decay as exemplified by abortion, gay marriage, or the teaching of evolution. All in all, we may presume that clerical authorities see these as a greater threat than the plagiarism committed by the future frocked.”

Anyone looking for evidence of moral decline in America need look no further than the willingness of students (including seminary students) to hire ghostwriters to do their work and then claim it as their own. I’m Kerby Anderson, and that’s my point of view.

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## **Praying for Japan**

I don’t know about you, but the continuing news stream (March 15, 2011) of devastation in Japan just breaks my heart. The compassion of even the most tender-hearted person in the world, I believe, is just a drop in the bucket compared to the infinitely huge compassion of our God. He weeps over the death and destruction unleashed by the effects of sin in a fallen world. I cannot imagine the sound or the size of the tears of God.

But I think Jesus invites us to take His yoke upon us (Matthew 11:29) and co-labor with Him in intercessory prayer. How can we pray for such an unspeakable tragedy?

I think we can pray on a scale big and small. "Oh God, help Japan and the Japanese people" seems like such a pitifully inadequate prayer—and in our own puny human strength, it is. But the Word tells us that "the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26). We can trust the Holy Spirit to translate our inadequate, too-small prayers into the language of God. We can rely on Him to be faithful to His promise.

But then, we can also pray with the newspaper (or website) in hand, guided to pray for specific people highlighted in the news. I keep thinking about the man rescued on the rooftop of his house two days after the tsunami and almost ten miles out to sea. I think about how Jesus was with him on his roof as the house floated away from land, and when his wife slipped into the water. I pray for him, that he would be granted grace to sense Jesus' presence and comfort, and turn to Him in faith.



I pray for the people named in the *Dallas Morning News* stories, that they would not rest with the fact that their lives were spared, until they come to Jesus in faith. I pray for the spiritual cataracts that would keep them blind to His reality to fall from their eyes so they can see the truth:

God loves them personally and passionately, and saved them from death for a reason.

I pray for the people not named, but mentioned: those searching for bodies. The survivors of lost loved ones. The officials responsible for cremating an unrealistic number of bodies. Those trying to restore water and electricity. The workers in the nuclear power plants who knowingly expose themselves to the risk of deadly levels of radiation. Those securing and those passing out food. Those plagued by nightmares that don't go away, and those who will help the traumatized process their terror. All of them need God's help and grace. Their ancestors will not help them. False gods will not help them. Only the true God is there for them.

And so I pray for the Christ-followers and the churches in Japan, few though they be, to shine in this time of breathtaking need, to be "Jesus with skin on" in this crisis.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, show up in Japan in a way never before seen.

And Lord, what would You have ME do?

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## Prayer Notch-Bumpers

This weekend my understanding of the power of prayer was bumped up a notch.

I was at a retreat that was being bathed in prayer; 50 young

people, all battling unwanted same-sex attractions, gathered to find fellowship with each other and pursue greater intimacy with Jesus. The fact that they were there at all is an evidence of the power of God and the fact that He answers the prayers of their loved ones. The fact that so many of them are experienced some degree of change in the way they think and act, with a resulting change in the intensity of their feelings, is also evidence of the power of God. Nothing builds my faith like seeing His love and grace and power released into the lives of precious people like these dear friends of mine.

But the “notch-bumper” came in the form of two incidents.

Several of the board members of this ministry, of which I am one, came to teach seminars. After we finished, I visited with two of them, both pastors. We were talking about how spiritual warfare rages in the weeks before, during and after our retreats. One pastor said, “I confessed to the Lord the other day, ‘I know You say to pray without ceasing, but I just don’t.’ He said, ‘If I let you see for just one second the battle that rages around you, you would never stop.’” Whoa. It was a good reminder to not remain content with simply looking at the physical, material world as if that were all that exists. There are angels and demons at work and at war all around us—all the time!

That night, while we were all singing worship songs, a young lady asked to speak to me outside in private. She asked permission to leave the building because she needed to be alone with God. I had a sense there might be something else going on even if I didn’t know what it was, but the Lord didn’t give me a “red light” in my spirit about letting her go. So we agreed that she would be back by 9:00.

By 9:10, she still hadn’t returned. I started praying that the Holy Spirit would draw her back to the rest of us. I envisioned a rope tied around her heart, and in my spirit I

kept pulling on the rope. A few minutes later she walked in the door with a funny look on her face. I walked over and gave her a long, warm hug, whispering, "I'm so glad you came back."

The next day a group of us were talking with her about her time alone with God. Apparently, she was unhappy with Him and was arguing with Him about something. I told her about my prayer and my pulling on the rope, and her eyes grew big. "That was *you??*" she asked. "I didn't want to go back, I had no intention of going back, but all of a sudden I found myself on my feet, and then I was walking back to the building where everyone was, and I was saying, 'What's going on? I don't want to do this!'" But then I found myself in the room with everyone."

It gave me spiritual goosebumps. When we abide in Jesus—the theme of the retreat—our prayers are His prayers, and He answers them. In ways that bring Him glory. . . and bring us goosebumps.

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## **Dangerous Worldviews**

Warm greetings from cold, cold Belarus, a country which is part of the former Soviet Union (between Poland and Russia). My husband and I are here this week to teach Christian worldview and apologetics to Christ-followers. One's [worldview](#) (and everyone has one, whether they know it or not) is comprised of a set of beliefs or presuppositions that are like

a pair of glasses through which we interpret the world and our experiences in it.

In order to help our friends understand the importance of viewing reality accurately, which is only possible with a pair of glasses that consist of truths that align with what God has revealed in scripture, we brought along a prop. We brought a pair of goggles called "Drunk Busters" that give the wearer a dizzying approximation of what being drunk does to your vision. State police and drivers' education programs use them to demonstrate why it's deadly to drink and drive.

We ask for a volunteer to first navigate a simple obstacle course of chairs, catch an object we toss to them, and pick up that object from the floor. No one has any trouble doing these things.

Then they put on the goggles. They usually say, "Whoa!" It's very disorienting.

Navigating their way around the chairs, catching the objects we toss, and picking up anything from the floor suddenly becomes not only difficult but comical to those watching. Nothing is where they think it is. Their eyes lie to them about reality. If they were behind the wheel of a car, they would be very dangerous.

Then we make the point that having the wrong worldview, the wrong set of beliefs and assumptions about reality, is also very dangerous.

It is dangerous eternally for a person to believe that God does not exist, or that God is anything other than what He has revealed Himself to be in His word and in His Son. It is equally disastrous for someone to believe in no God (atheism), and for someone to believe in a divine impersonal force that permeates everything (variations on pantheism).

But the wrong worldview can also be dangerous for Christians whose pair of glasses consists of a prescription with some

truth and some error. The majority of American Christians who claim to be born again do not have a biblical worldview. What they believe differs from what the Bible says. For example, many believe in reincarnation. Many trust in astrology. Some believe that God is distant, angry, and doesn't particularly like us, that this "Gee-Oh-Dee" will begrudgingly let us into heaven only because Jesus died in our place. They don't understand that God is Father, Son and Spirit, Who have always loved us and welcome us enthusiastically into the circle of Their divine love, fellowship, joy and camaraderie.

Some believers think that they put their trust in Christ to save them when they die, but Jesus has nothing to say about their life between salvation and death. So they live their lives depending on the surrounding culture to give them wisdom and instruction about how to be educated, how to choose a mate and be married, how to parent, what kind of job to get, how to spend their money and other resources, and where to find satisfaction in their lives while they wait for heaven. They miss what Paul meant by "Christ, who is our life" (Col. 3:4). The phrase "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27) is only an abstract concept unrelated to the way they live their lives: essentially, "Jesus is in my heart, and I keep Him stashed there till it's time to go to heaven."

It's dangerous to have the wrong worldview that misses the glorious truth that real life is only found in Jesus, that any love we give or receive comes from Jesus to and through us, that light comes from Jesus and all else is darkness. And it's far more tragic than bumping into an obstacle course or dropping a ball tossed to us.

How's your worldview? If your beliefs and the things you assume are not corrected and established by God's word, invite Him to change your prescription, and expect Him to joyfully start to transform your thinking!

*Lord Jesus, transform me by renewing my mind (Romans 12:2). I*

*don't even know what I don't know; I don't know what my blind spots are, and I don't know what I have wrong in my thinking. I invite You to change me from the inside out so I think like You!*

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## **Pods, Aliens, and the Incarnation**

There is a moment in the 1985 sci-fi movie *Cocoon* that has haunted me for 25 years now. Senior citizens discover that the water in the pool they've been swimming in has a marvelously rejuvenating effect on them. Aliens have stashed the cocoon pods of their cohorts in the bottom of the pool of a rented house, awaiting their return to the mother ship.

These aliens are light-filled, radiant creatures who cover themselves in human skin to pass as one of us.

The moment in the film that has stayed with me all this time is when the lead alien, played by Brian Dennehy, checks his human disguise in the mirror. He pulls down his lower eyelid, revealing the light within that shoots out in a beam. I gasped internally: what a picture of the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ!



*Now the Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We*

*saw his glory – the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father. (John 1:14)*

When the Lord Jesus wrapped Himself in human flesh and entered our world, He did not leave His glory behind—He covered it up. “Glory” can mean splendor and brilliance and magnificence, but it also connotes the essential nature of a person or thing. Jesus brought His essential nature of the eternally existent Father’s Son into His human body, into our world. John 1 tells us that Jesus brought with Him—because He is—life, light, truth, fullness. He embodies the things our broken souls long for.

I love the Incarnation. I love the fact that Jesus entered into our “garbage pail” of human darkness and brokenness to redeem it all. I love that He brought His light and His glory into our blindness and lifelessness. But (in the famous words of the TV infomercials) . . . “That’s not all!”

I am still amazed that not only did the Lord of glory “tabernacle among us” (John 1:14), not only did He pitch His tent in our midst, He gladly sets up house inside us! When we accept the Father, Son and Spirit’s invitation to join Their circle of divine love and joy and fellowship and community, He brings His glory *inside of us!* Literally!

Suddenly, the image of the light inside the Brian Dennehy/alien character is not just about Jesus being light on the inside and human flesh on the outside, it’s a picture of “Christ in [us], the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). He brings HIS light inside of us.

Amazing. Staggering. And yet it’s real, it’s true, and if we lived it out, if we lived an incarnational life of allowing Jesus to express the love and glory of God through what we think and say and do, the people in our lives would think, “Where do I get me some of that?!”

*Oh Lord Jesus! Deepen my understanding of this truth so that I*

*continually choose to let You live Your glory through me,  
drawing others to Yourself!*

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