

# Unrealistic Expectations

Lots of things can keep us stuck in places that are hard to get out of.

Like harboring unrealistic expectations.

When my first son was four years old, I found myself angry and frustrated with him a lot. One day I “happened” to see a book on the inspirational display at the grocery store, *Overcoming Hurts and Anger*. I don’t remember anything else from that book except the wise counsel to adjust your unrealistic expectations. I realized that although my son was four, and a smart, prodigious four at that, it was still not fair to expect him to be and do things appropriate for a twelve-year old. It was amazing how much happier I was when I decided to expect four-year-old things of him!

Many people have unrealistic expectations of what growth and change should look like. The downside of our microwave culture is that we expect things to be fixed instantly. Last week a friend who is just starting out a long journey of overcoming a lot of hurts from her past asked what she could do to speed up the process. I suggested she work to build daily the always-popular habit of saying no to her flesh and yes to self-control, loving others, and doing the opposite of what comes naturally. Fifteen minutes later she texted me with a question: “I hate people today. Can I stay home from church?”

So much for the fast track!

One of the most dangerous places for our unrealistic expectations, though, is what we think God should do. Some of the most bitter and angry people I know, or who have loud voices in the culture (think of the [“new atheists”](#) like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris) are those who feel betrayed by God, so they decide He isn’t there.

That sense of betrayal and disappointment comes from having expectations of God according to how we *think* He should act:

- Protect the innocent from pain and suffering
- Protect the people who maybe-aren't-so-innocent-but-not-as-bad-as-axe-murderers from pain and suffering
- Show the same grace to all of us by treating us all the same
- Give us an easy life
- If I do all the right things to be "a good person," God should do His part to make life work the way I want it to

When we pray fervently for what we want and He doesn't answer the way we want, many of us get angry with Him. That's a part of [my story](#). It's easy to decide God doesn't care, or He is evil, or He isn't there at all.

Many times, we pray in faith, believing God will give us what we ask for, but we ask for things He never promised in the first place. Or even worse, we "claim" them on the basis of a scriptural promise wrenched out of context, such as "all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). Jesus never promised that if we believe *in our prayers*, we would receive what we ask for. *Believing* in the Bible is all about trusting in and surrendering to the goodness and character of GOD, not our prayer list. We will always receive an answer to our prayers because God is good. Sometimes the answer is "No, beloved," because we ask amiss. Psalm 84:11 promised, "No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly." If God says "no," it's because it's not a good thing *for us*. [His "no" is a "yes" to something else.](#) But because we have such a limited perspective, it is essential that we trust in the unlimited perspective of the God who sees everything.

When we feel disappointed in God, when we think, "God didn't come through for me," that's the time to take a step back and ask, "What kind of unrealistic expectations did I have in the first place?" That may be a great question to talk through

with a mature trusted friend who can see things more clearly. Then we can place the unrealistic part of our expectations into God's hands as an act of worship and trust . . . and watch our anger and frustration subside.

I'll share some thoughts about why those expectations of God are unrealistic in [my next blog post](#).

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## Why Our Expectations of God Are Unrealistic

In my last blog post I talked about "[Unrealistic Expectations](#)" and promised to explore some of the reasons our expectations of God are unrealistic (and thus why we get frustrated or even furious with Him). I mentioned several ways in which we think God *should* act. Here are my responses to why those expectations are unrealistic.

- *Show the same grace to all of us by treating us all the same*

No child ever has to be taught about fairness. The heart's cry for justice is part of our design. But we are broken in our understanding of so many things, and we usually equate fairness with equality. We want God to treat everyone the same way. But God isn't doing the same thing in everyone; He is creating a masterpiece that will bring glory to Him and goodness to us for all eternity, and His means and tools will differ from person to person. Creating a masterpiece of

sculpture in a piece of marble takes different tools and techniques than creating a masterpiece of an oil painting. It's a good thing that God doesn't treat us all the same.

- *Give us an easy life*

Easy, sheltered, enabled lives produce spoiled, entitled children. God's intention is that we grow up to maturity, which necessitates learning to survive the bumps in the road and the harder aspects of living in a fallen world. He is creating an adult, glorious bride for the Lamb, who is fit to reign with Him. An easy life is completely inadequate to the task of preparing us as the church to become the bride of Christ.

- *If I do all the right things to be "a good person," God should do His part to make life work the way I want it to*

That linear "A ensures B" kind of thinking makes sense to our limited, immature minds, but reality doesn't work that way. We cannot manipulate God to make life work the way we want it to. We are part of a much bigger picture that involves spiritual warfare, the battle against our own flesh, and God's purposes that can only be accomplished in ways we don't understand in the process.

One of the most important places of understanding God wants us to reach is the profound truth I saw on a t-shirt once:

2 essential truths:

1. There is a God.
2. You are not him.

God is God, and we are not. We don't get to dictate the way life works, and God will lovingly bring us to the point, as many times as necessary, where we let go of the illusion that we are in control.

He is in control. We are not. And that's a good thing.

But the granddaddy of unrealistic, albeit understandably so, expectations are these:

- *Protect the innocent from pain and suffering*
- *Protect the people who maybe-aren't-so-innocent-but-not-as-bad-as-axe-murderers from pain and suffering*

This is really the bottom line issue for most problems with our understanding of God, the age-old difficult question, "How can a good and loving God allow pain and suffering?"

The bottom line answer is that because of the sinful choices of Adam and Eve, we all live in a world where evil and suffering were unleashed. Our world is now fallen and corrupt, and bad things happen all the time. Part of the equation is that God honors our choices, which are significant and real—even the choices that bring unintended consequences of pain and suffering. Yet God is in control, and He can redeem even the most heinous choices and the most awful pain and suffering. He delights to exchange "a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (Isaiah 61:3).

We have a hard time imagining how God can bring good out of evil, and especially out of our pain. Sometimes it's even harder when we look outside ourselves, to the suffering of innocent children such as the growing number of children abused and murdered by their mothers' boyfriends. And I really don't have an answer for that; I just know that God is good, and He is loving, and my inability to see how He will make it all okay in the end does not affect whether it's true or not.

One of my favorite stories comes from my dear friend whom I'll call Emily, who was not only raped repeatedly by her father from the time she was two years old, but he would take money from his friends so they could abuse her as well. Emily has a vibrant relationship with Jesus, especially because she has

learned to listen to Him.

One day after the Holy Spirit gently restored a vivid memory of one of these gang-rape sessions for her to process, she said, "Jesus, I had a sense of being covered in something heavy, like a stack of blankets, while the abuse was going on. What was that about?" The Lord lovingly told her, "That was Me lying on top of you, protecting you from the full brunt of the abuse you were experiencing. The men had to come through Me to get to you, and I took a portion of their evil into Myself before it got to you." Through her tears, she asked, "But why? How could there possibly be any good to come out of that horrific sexual abuse?" Jesus said, "Beloved, you are a diamond of great value. Every incident of abuse that you sustained was a hammer and chisel in My Father's hands, creating a new facet in the diamond. When you see the finished product, you won't believe the stunning beauty of the jewel that you are. And you will say it was worth it."

(Incidentally, Emily hasn't had to wait till heaven to start seeing the value of her horrific suffering. She has been able to be "Jesus with skin on" to other wounded women and children because she understands their suffering.)

The reason our expectations of God are so often unrealistic is because He is so much bigger, so much more glorious, so much more loving, so much more in control, than we can possibly comprehend. May we grow in our understanding as He continues to prove Himself faithful and good—in everything.

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# Judge Shows : Spiritual Reality TV

I've been listening to a lot of TV lately.

I'm a [calligrapher](#), and November/December is my busy season. I look for the kind of shows that don't need to be watched because I'm focused on my hand lettering. So I've been listening to quite a few of the courtroom shows: Judge Judy, Judge Alex, Judge Marilyn, Judge Lynn, Judge Joe, and the others.

Lessons to be learned from judge shows:

- Some people don't know how to communicate without interrupting and talking over each other where neither can hear what the other is saying.
- When people roll their eyes and spit out contempt for each other, it's okay.
- There's nothing like money to break up friendships and family. Especially if you don't get \_\_\_\_\_ in writing.
- People go to court because there isn't an adult (read: parent) to mediate the way mom and dad used to referee sibling fights.
- People don't mind being exposed as foolish as long as they get their 15 minutes of fame on TV.
- People who watch judge shows will call into the program to give their opinion on a case that was closed long before it aired, and then listen to a sales pitch of their own free will.

I watch TV with a [biblical worldview filter](#) in place. I'm constantly comparing what I see and hear to what the Bible says. There's nothing like the judge shows to support a biblical view of people and of life in a fallen world. The brokenness of people doing life by their own rules, apart from God's wisdom and power, is just *so sad*.

People want to be loved and respected and valued and honored, and those are legitimate desires. But when they don't feel loved or respected, they'll act in unloving and disrespectful ways toward others.

People's hearts are hungry for what will fill them, but if they refuse to turn to the One who promised to "make their joy complete" (John 16:24), they will take the counterfeit of greed and materialism.

People haven't been taught biblical conflict resolution, and their pride often keeps them from taking responsibility for their part in a conflict and asking forgiveness for it.

Sin makes us messed up people, and part of the messed up-ness involves a willingness to make it public.

So these shows are a kind of painfully true "spiritual reality show."

How God must wince—and weep.

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# Mommy Blogger Outs Her 5-Year Old Son

Last week, a mommy blogger caused a firestorm with her blog post [“My Son is Gay”](#) about how her 5-year-old dressed up for Halloween as Daphne from Scooby Doo. Her little boy had had second thoughts about wearing the costume, afraid that people would make fun of him, but she pushed him to wear it to his preschool. “Who would make fun of a child in a costume on Halloween?” she wrote.

Well, lots of people. And she was angry.

“If you think that me allowing my son to be a female character for Halloween is somehow going to ‘make’ him gay then you are an idiot. Firstly, what a ridiculous concept. Secondly, if my son is gay, OK. I will love him no less. Thirdly, I am not worried that your son will grow up to be an actual ninja so back off.”

Her post generated more than 26,000 comments and has gone viral as people blogged about it (like this one).

This mom doesn’t have any problem with the idea that her son who likes bright colors and is attracted to a female costume might be gay, but I wonder what his dad thinks.

There is another way to think about boys like this. They don’t have to be gender-confused; they are just created by God to be artistic, creative, and emotionally sensitive. They love color and texture, they revel in nuances in sound and light, touch and smell. They are God’s gift to us: the musicians, the artists, the poets, the actors. When these boys are supported in their God-given flavor of masculinity (especially by their fathers), they can grow up to be great men who contribute their gifts to the church, to the world, and to their families. They make great counselors, pastors, teachers—and

husbands and fathers.

My dear friend Ricky Chelette from Living Hope Ministries wrote an insightful article "[Parenting the Sensitive Soul](#)." He allays the fears of a growing number of parents of young boys who come to his office concerned that their boys are too girly. And Ricky, an incredible artist, writer, singer, cook—and devoted husband of 20 years—tells them their boys are not being effeminate, they are merely expressing their giftedness. He writes about what he explained to a worried dad:

"I reassured the father that his son did not want to be a girl and the only person that was really saying anything about him being a girl was the dad. But why then was this boy drawn towards things which were typically identified as more feminine than masculine? Simply, he was a very sensitive soul.

"Sensitive boys are real boys. They simply are extremely gifted with particular giftings that manifest in emotionally and aesthetically expressive ways. His little boy's obsession with women's shoes were not because he wanted to be a girl, but more because he was aesthetically and visually oriented—and women's shoes are much more visually exciting than the black, brown or burgundy of men's shoes. Women's shoes have sparkles, bobbles and bows. They come in every color imaginable and are in different shapes and textures. They are an aesthetically gifted boy's dream! And he was not trying to identify as a girl when he grabbed his mother's skirt, put it on, and twirled around. To him, it was similar to our experience of going to the fair and doing drop art projects where we drop paint on a spinning paper and watch it splatter, but even better. As he moved, he created art and beauty as the colors whirled around him and flowed up and down in the air. Better yet, he was the center of it all!

“The dad looked at me with disbelief, but with a sense of relief. ‘Do you mean he really isn’t trying to be a girl?’

“‘Absolutely not,’ I replied. ‘He is simply trying to express his giftedness as best he can. You have a very artistic young man with amazing potential to make this world a more beautiful place. He has the creative and masculine heart of God. You have the privilege of finding ways to affirm those gifts and channel them in a way that he can grow as gifted man of God!’

“It was as though I just found the lost key they had been searching to find for years; suddenly despair was replaced by hope and relief. But those feelings of relief were just as quickly followed by a look of bewilderment.

“‘But how do I do that? How do I affirm him in those gifts when I obviously don’t even understand what he is thinking or why he is doing what he is doing?’”

Read the rest of his article to find out: [Parenting the Sensitive Soul](#).

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## Christian View of Politics

*October 13, 2010*

If you are wondering how Christians should think about politics, a new book out by Dr. Wayne Grudem provides a comprehensive answer. In his book, *Politics: According to the*

*Bible*, he first provides a framework of biblical principles concerning politics and then sets forth his perspective on how the Bible informs our views on approximately sixty specific issues.

When [he was on my radio program recently](#) he said the major impetus for the book came from two people with the Alliance Defense Fund (Alan Sears and Ben Bull) and also from the president of the Center for Arizona Policy (Cathy Herrod). They encouraged him to write the book in order to educate Christians who often had wrong views about the role of Christians in the political process.

It is no surprise then that he begins the book by addressing five wrong views about Christians and government. They are: government should compel religion, government should exclude religion, all government is evil, we should do evangelism not politics, and we should do politics not evangelism. Dr. Grudem answers each of these views as well as related questions within that particular view. He then develops the key biblical principles concerning government and also delineates the elements of a biblical worldview.

A major section of the book provides a biblical perspective on nearly every issue imaginable. Dr. Grudem is certainly equipped to deal with these topics since he has been teaching biblical ethics for nearly 30 years. Most of these ethical issues also have political implications. And he is certainly able to handle the biblical material as the author of *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* and the general editor of the ESV Bible.

Dr. Grudem's warning to Christians during this election season is, "Don't fall asleep when the future of your nation is at stake!" I would agree. Who we elect in November will determine the future of this nation. A great way to get educated and motivated is to buy and read his book. I'm Kerby Anderson, and that's my point of view.

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# Your Board of Directors

At a conference several years ago I was given a thought-provoking challenge, to identify the people on the board of directors of my life: whose voices do I listen to? Whose counsel do I follow? Whose values do I respond to?

The speaker pointed out that some people ought to be kicked off our board—like parents, if their voices of shame and criticism still control and restrict us. So should voices of much of the media, especially TV. And we can replace them with wiser, more godly voices who can offer us direction and perspective. There was a discussion of categories of potential board members. They don't have to be alive, and we don't have to personally know them, either.

The Lord Jesus, of course, needs to be the #1 board member. If we're married, our spouse should be on our board. The Apostle Paul is a good board member. Peter and James are good too, as is Solomon. So are some of the church fathers and Christian writers like C.S. Lewis. Or a pastor, and not necessarily our own. (I have a friend in a distant city who has adopted my pastor as hers, and listens to every audio recording my church puts online.) Mentors are great board members, and so are wise and trusted friends.

A few weeks ago, John Townsend, one of the co-authors of [the Boundaries series](#), was at my church. I love what he writes and listen to him on the radio show "New Life Live" whenever possible. I had a chance to talk to him briefly, so I told him about my board of directors. "John," I said, "Several years ago I installed you as a permanent member of my board. Other people have come and gone, but you're always there. I really appreciate your wisdom and godly perspective, and you have

equipped me to respond to various life challenges. Just wanted you to know how you've blessed me even though we've never met."

(To my delighted surprise, he lit up and asked if he could hug me!)

Who's on your board? Who can you kick off to the glory of God? (Hint: magazines that make you unhappy with how God made you as you compare yourself to the celebrities and models inside, certain internet sites, particular TV shows. . .)

Who can you put on your board? Let's hear it.

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## **Zap the Lies, Hug the Truth – 1**

As the scriptures tell us that King Saul stood head and shoulders above everybody else, there is one aspect of the spiritual growth process that seems to stand head and shoulders above the rest: identifying and renouncing the lies that hold us in bondage, and embracing God's truth which sets us free.

Recently, I have been blessed by the experiences of two dear friends, both dealing with the fallout of trauma, as Jesus lovingly takes them through this process.

One of them is a college student whose parents wisely equipped her in how to think through negative thoughts and feelings:

1. Is \_\_\_\_\_ the truth? [No.]
2. That makes it a . . . [Lie.]
3. Where do lies come from? [Satan.]
4. God tells us truth because He is truth. So what does He say about it?

Armed with this powerful weapon, my friend successfully handled a molestation that happened in the middle of the night while she spent the night at the home of a friend. Wounds like that are “lie factories” that pump out pain and destruction. But she was able to pull out the arrows that had pierced her heart and let Jesus’ truth bring healing.

**Lie #1:** “You got what you deserved. It’s YOUR fault, because you didn’t lock the door.” **Truth:** I did NOT deserve it. That man is responsible for his own sinful choice to violate me. 1 Corinthians 6:18 – Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

**Lie #2:** “Ha! Hypocrite! You make everyone think you’re leading a pure life, but you’re nothing but a soiled dove.” **Truth:** I’m a hypocrite when it was something done TO me?? 1 Timothy 5:2b – [exhort] younger women as sisters, with all purity. He did not treat me with purity. I did not invite his mistreatment of me.

**Lie #3:** “You want your husband to be a virgin on your wedding day. Why should he be? You only have your ‘technical’ virginity left.” **Truth:** My innocence was not freely given; it was taken. My “full” virginity has been restored. Psalm 147:3 – He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

**Lie #4:** “No guy will want a soiled dove. That guy you are growing to love? Ha! You aren’t good enough for him.” **Truth:** I may not be good enough for HIM, but Jesus thinks I’m to die

for! John 3:16; Jeremiah 29:11-13...

Since this was the biggest lie and the deepest wound, God also provided these powerful verses: Psalm 37:4 – Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 84:11 – For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Praise God that His truth is powerful enough to show lies for what they are, and destroy their power to shackle us! His word is sharper than any two-edged sword, able to zap lies and allow us to embrace the truth that gives life and light.

[Next time](#) I'll share the way Jesus revealed truth to zap the lies binding the heart of my other friend.

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## Zap the Lies, Hug the Truth – 2

In my last blog post [“Zap the Lies, Hug the Truth – 1,”](#) I shared how one of my friends faced the lies of the enemy in the wake of a molestation, and successfully stood against them in the truth of God's word.

Today I will let another friend share how the Lord Jesus has met her on prayer walks, addressing the lies that have held her in bondage since her trauma-filled childhood and then adulthood.



This is what she wrote to me:

Jesus said, "First I will take off the lie you have believed, then I will wash you with the water of the word of truth, then I will put on your real identity in Me."

I saw a picture, and realized it was me—as a beggar. My whole body was covered in rags and filth. The filth was garbage and dirt and waste that had been there so long it had hardened into a thick leathery shell all over my body. This shell adhered to my skin like glue, penetrating the rags I was wearing as clothes.

"This is going to hurt some," Jesus said, "and your soul will be naked and exposed before Me, but it will be all right."

I nodded my assent.

He then reached out and pulled off a piece from my shoulder to my elbow on the front side of my arm. The skin underneath was very pink and soooo tender.

Jesus: "Tell Me the lie you believe about your weight."

Me: "I'm fat and it makes me ugly and undesirable. I'm huge and when people look at me they just see the fat lady. I'm gross."

Jesus (commanding tone): "NOW, tell Me the truth I have shown you about this." (With that, He put water on the exposed skin, and it healed and tanned.)

Me: "That I'm 20 lbs. overweight, that I have a sedentary lifestyle due to chronic pain and damaged joints. That I am making appropriate efforts by walking and watching what I eat. That my body type will NEVER be 5'5" and 100 lbs. and that is okay with You because You made me to be this size."

Jesus: "What is another lie you believe?"

Me: "That I am worthless, of no value, that I benefit no one and that people would be better off without me. I am refuse."

Jesus: "Now what is the truth I am showing you?"

Me: \*tears\* "That You, Lord God, wanted spiritual offspring, and I am that. You, God, benefit, You gain a daughter. That my kids gain because they needed a mom who could make it alone (with You) with five kids. That my students benefit because others have given up on them. That my pastor benefits because he is seeing someone walk out of sexual brokenness first hand. Sue benefits because she sees how my relationship with You works. The online community of women benefit because You speak through me to encourage them."

Abba: "You are Mine, My daughter, heiress, friend. Your purchase price is set, the holy blood of the son of God. I did not find that price too high. You are precious in My eyes."

So my friend writes me these healing scriptural truths she hears from the heart of God as they go walking, and then when she forgets them, I have the privilege of reminding her what He has said. It's like that old saying, "A friend is one who knows the song of your heart, and will sing it back to you when you forget the words."

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# Swords of Blessing

This Father's Day weekend, my to-do list included personalizing almost three dozen wooden swords. A dear friend has a wonderful boys' summer camp called ["Warrior Week"](#) where men sow love and truth (along with a fair share of messy fun) into the souls of boys. I am privileged to use my calligraphy experience to letter each boy's name and a prayed-over character trait that is a blessing for each boy concluding his last year of Warrior Week. So I lettered blessings like "Justin the Magnanimous" and "David the Faithful" and "Cooper the Strong," under which was lettered "Dangerous for Good."



The camp leaders asked each boy's father to write a letter affirming his son, in his own handwriting, and walked them through what to say. Affirmation is a mystery for many dads, who never received it from their own fathers. "You can say whatever encouraging words you'd like to in your letter," the dads were told, "but we would like for you to at least include these four points:

1. I love you.
2. I am pleased with you.
3. I am for you/in your corner no matter what.
4. God has a plan for your life."

Wow. This is powerful stuff! I rejoice in the power of a father's words of affirmation because I have seen firsthand what a difference it makes in the lives of our sons. For all our gifts and strengths, women cannot imprint masculinity on the souls of boys and men. We can confirm what we see, but we

can't put it there. And a father's voice, whether spoken or verbal, can have a "weight of glory," to use C.S. Lewis' term, that lasts for an eternity.

While I'm thrilled for the boys who will be receiving this amazing blessing, I am also reveling in the truth that my heavenly Father delights to affirm each of us. He says, "I love you, I delight in you, I am for you, and I know the plans I have for your life!"

Even if we don't get a sword. . . at least we get the letter. It's bound in a Book.

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## Try Jesus???

The other day I saw a bumper sticker: "Try Jesus." *Try Jesus?* Whoever wrote and printed that soooo doesn't get it. They don't get Jesus, they don't get the Christian life, they don't get the relational aspect of biblical Christianity, they don't understand the Cross.

Try Jesus? We might as well print bumper stickers for plants that say "Try Light." Or for appliances: "Try Electricity." Or for pens: "Try Ink."

*Try Jesus.* The mentality of this thought permeates our culture, and even worse, it permeates many churches: Jesus as God's best self-help tool. Jesus as an addition to our lives, like vitamins or exercise.

The other day I was having a texting conversation with a young lady when I had reason to suggest that she was a functional atheist: claiming to love God but living and thinking in ways that are no different from an atheist. She said, "Sue, how can you say that? I have God in my life!"

I responded, "YOU have God in YOUR life. . . can you see how backwards that is?" God as an additive completely misses the point of why He made us, why He calls us to be reconciled to Himself. Not so we can "have us some God in our lives," as they say in the South, but so that we can join the love-fest of Father, Son and Spirit in an ongoing dance of friendship, fellowship and celebration.

Recently, I've been thinking a lot about the Trinity and how the Three-Personed God wants us to join in on Their party. It has impacted my prayer life: now, when I pray for someone, I envision her in the middle of a divine group hug, surrounded by Father, Son and Spirit loving each other with the person caught up in the middle, getting "loved on" on all sides.

It's so much bigger, so much better than the puny "Try Jesus."

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