

STOMPING THE WHINEPRESS

By Matt S.

This is a collections of things I have written, most of which have appeared on my blog. Some of it is pretty hard-hitting but my life hasn't been very good and writing is the only way of attempting to hit back.

A letter to my younger self

Dear Matthew,

I've got less of my life left but I think I've learned a few things..

Stop/don't bother obsessing over college girls

I've spent thousands of hours thinking about dating girls from the college I went to. It has gotten me less than nothing. Keep this in mind, college girls are not interested in dating regular men, at this point in their life they are looking for a knight in shining armor to whisk them off into the sunset on some kind of noble steed. It would be best to ignore these girls (but I know you won't because I'm you and I know you better than you do). College is irrelevant. If, after college you are successful, you'll have no problems with girls. If you're unsuccessful, get used to the sound of your own voice.

Be wiser than the serpents

Some of the most poisonous snakes can be found underwater. Dealing with employers is a lot like swimming with these snakes. Employers will exploit you, lie to you, and leave you high and dry. There are no unions in your line of work; the people over you are responsible for taking care of their bottom line, not you. Never find yourself trusting an employer. Remember that a job is just a place on a slice of the employment merry-go-round; always be looking to jump to a more secure slice.

There will be a battle between the comforter and the discomforter and the discomforter will win

Right now you think you're an unimpressible intelligent young man but this will change. The details are going a bit fuzzy; something about God putting you to the test, or maybe it was you putting God to the test. Actually I think it was that both of you putting each other to the test with failure all

around. First off you'll buy the pulpit-plied dreck that basically states that God will either keep you safe from harm, or if he does allow harm, his comforter will stay with you in your suffering. And lucky you, you'll get to put all of this to the test because our sponsor has generously provided a discomforter to torment you, it will take the form of hideous eye pain. I could save you literally thousands of hours of pain by giving you a few pointers but because of a non-disclosure agreement I signed (it said something like, a breach of this agreement will result in the unraveling of space and time) my lips are sealed (if I didn't have to sign that stupid NDA this letter would consist entirely of sports scores). But I digress, the discomforter will force you into the arms of the comforter and you'll find those arms closed. The discomforter will do serious damage to your mind. You've probably heard that before bullfights the bulls are gored to weaken them so they can be broken. That is what the discomforter's victory will do to your faith.

I now know that you should have boned up on your belief skills because if you go about it the right way, the chances of experiencing God go up. And the beliefs themselves have amazing power to sustain you... if they stay close enough to your heart and deep enough in your soul. It's kind of like a snowmobile zipping across a somewhat frozen lake at 60 miles an hour, breaking through the ice but moving fast enough not to sink. If you don't nurture your beliefs in times of plenty, they're not going to just magically appear and help you in times of duress. Unfortunately, the evangelicals make the experience of God out to be something that just automatically kicks in for the average Christian after things go dim enough (like a streetlight). This hasn't been my experience at all, maybe that's because I'm not one of the elect, I don't know.

Focus on Microsoft programming technologies

Bill Gates might not be your best friend right now but get over it. Learn the Visual Studio set of tools and only mess around with the opensource tools after you've mastered some of the Microsoft languages.

Floss

I'm serious, do it. I don't do it very often but maybe if I get you to do it, you'll turn it into an unbreakable habit.

Sincerely,

Matt

The perks of being an atheist

The ability to stare the chaos of life in the face. Your life is a Rorschach blot. Suffering and still being forced to fill the ears of expecting Christians with how “everything is working out for the best” just adds an extra layer of anguish.

No faith at all is better for you than broken faith. People who have left Christianity pray sometimes but they don’t expect God to actually do anything. As a Christian you are forced to pray in faith. Having this kind of faith works out great when God answers your prayer but the rest of the time it decays into hurt. Yes, there are Christians who say you should “pray God’s will” but I think this is as silly as praying for gravity to pull things towards the earth.

The likelihood of finding non-conditional friendships increases. Most friendships are conditional, you have to have a certain amount of looks, money, social status, or whatever else to keep the relationship going. However exceptions do exist. Unfortunately, Christian friendships generally add a layer of conditionality; if one party leaves the Christian faith, the relationship is either over or drastically scaled back. The Michael W. Smith lyric, “friends are friends forever if the Lord’s the lord of them”, takes on a whole new meaning.

The ability to wear pride on your sleeve. Generally humility isn’t a virtue people cultivate, it’s something forced upon them by circumstances such as getting taken to the mental hospital or becoming a janitor who relies on food stamps. It’s near impossible to beat pride out of people in non-humiliating circumstances. What Christian teaching does is mute the overt expressions of pride, causing Christians to express it in deeper, more insipid ways

The ability to be real. This piggybacks on the last two items. I don’t there is any commandment in the Bible that says, “Don’t be real”, but the Christian subculture generally brands everything that doesn’t conform to its norms as offensive to God. Everyone is afraid of the social fallout of “offending God” so they learn to keep things fake.

Atheists recognize that empathy and respect for the other are the only real tools we have for getting along ethically. To many who all their life had do’s and don’ts burned into their head this sounds like madness. Atheists and some enlightened Christians realize that lists of rules and the reward/punishment system are just a framework to build an empathy/respect based system on. The rules are there for you to fall back on, not to prop you up. However, most Christians throw “live by

faith” and “live by the spirit” jargon at parishioners instead of the easier-to-implement, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". Young believers have a tough go at empathy because they usually have had a transactional upbringing, learning to do and say things that paid and not do and say the things that cost. The church loves the results of this upbringing because it creates kids who say the right things and follow the church’s most important rules to the letter. However, in situation not “covered” by one of their rules, there is nothing internal keeping these Christian kids from doing the least empathetic thing. Atheists look at these Christians and say, “if this an external manifestation of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit then I don’t want to touch Christianity with a ten foot pole“.

Being able to disagree. There is little room for dissent and critical discussion inside the church. The church pacifies its core demographic by plugging its ears to legitimate criticism coming from outside its walls. Atheists are fools for not believing in God, therefore they cannot possess any wisdom on things such as global warming, peak oil, or workers’ rights.

easier

I have found that things are so much easier emotionally now that I am an atheist (I guess my beliefs fall more along the lines of agnosticism but my emotional core is atheistic).

Experience of God

As a Christian, in compromising mental states (severe depression/mania) I was unable to ignore the voice of God. Generally this voice was either telling me to kill myself or write crazy stuff depending on which end of the spectrum I was on. As an atheist I hope to build up enough deafness to God's voice to ignore him during the times my mind isn't working quite right. Being raised in an evangelical Christian culture, I cultivated quite a thirst for an experience of God. The experience of God came, and it was the toxic; it was like sand being poured down my throat.

Baggage

Many people leave Christianity because all the emotional baggage attached to their dealings with Christians and Christian institutions. I am one of these people. Christians and Christian institutions have screwed me over. I have a feeling atheists and their institutions would have screwed me over just as badly but at least they wouldn't have claimed moral superiority to "the world". Christians would like nonbelievers to believe that there is something transcendent about their religion. Get over

it. Christianity *is* Christians. That's how the non-Christians will always see it. The funny thing is, if I was raised an atheist, I would probably have all this emotional baggage dealing with fellow atheists and then converting to a religion would actually be a positive experience in this regard. Anyway, I have experienced so much peace by exorcising myself from a certain Christian institution which shall remain nameless here.

Off the Map

As a Christian you are supposed to figure out how events in your life are fitting in to God's "map" for your life. His plan to "prosper" you (materially and/or spiritually). In attempt to fit every conceivable human outcome on this "map" suffering gets romanticized--all sane assessments of a person's situation go out the window in search of some hidden "purpose". The first years of this millennium I was in a lot of eye pain (some of it pretty terrible) and had friends abandon me. While I didn't come out with the experience of suffering being God's megaphone, I can tell you that it will get you dialing God's number and leaving a lot of heavy-breathing voice mails. From a young age I thought it was God's plan for me to have a decent job and marry an extremely beautiful Christian girl (I had her picked out). The idea that God had this plan for me was burned into my brain growing up and cemented there during the years of my Christian college career. Things didn't happen according to this plan. I've never have had a full-time job or a girlfriend in my life, and have been unemployed for almost 3 years. There is no way I can erase the idea of this plan, (things that, with God's help, were "supposed" to happen) from my mind (no, my mind is not an etch-a-sketch that can just be shaken to erase undesirable sketches). The only thing that helps me is wholesale rejection of Christianity. Any exposure to Christian culture exposes me to this "God has a Plan for your life" idea. This exposure does to me the same thing "just one drink" does to a recovering alcoholic.

Lower Expectations

As an atheist I have lower expectations for myself and others. I don't feel bad because my life experiences don't conform to some kind of "map". There's this idea in Christianity that God is some kind of invisible Michael Jordan on your basketball team. Since you are drawing all this extra power from God, Christians believe they can put you under a greater amount of stress than your unbelieving counterparts. Some people can handle this kind of stress, me not included. Also, now I expect people to act in their own self-interest regardless of their creed. Things Christians did that used to make my blood boil now make me laugh.

Doubt is a vitamin to a skeptic but arsenic to a Christian

What I have found is that a skeptical skeptic still does well but a chronically doubting Christian

doesn't do so well. I've been both and fared much better handling life as a skeptic. I suspect that a Christian with really strong beliefs would also do well... but often one isn't aware of the strength of their beliefs until they're faced with a crisis or prolonged suffering (it's kind of like how you can't smell yourself when you have a cold and then somebody else points out how bad you stink).

hard things

Leaving the Christian faith is definitely not a bed of roses and it's not like I woke up one morning and said, "Gosh, it would be really cool to leave Christianity. I want to be an atheist!". For a lot of us it's just something that happens; slowly and imperceptively. Then one day enough of the faith is gone to declare yourself no longer a Christian. The feeling is like having let all the water out of a damn and then realizing there is no water coming from upstream to replenish the reservoir's supply. Some bad things coming to me for leaving the faith:

Sinking Relationships

"Friends are friends forever if the Lord's the lord of them", couldn't be more true. Pretty much all my family and friends are Christians (of varying degrees of intensity). I find that when I am open up about my reasons for leaving the faith (especially to Wheaton people), they back away from me or even cut off contact altogether. It's like I'm a big fucking failure in their eyes because I couldn't hold down all the beliefs poured down my throat during my 4 years as a Crusader.

While I don't think every Christian friend will cut off contact with me, I am very hesitant to befriend anyone who is a Christian because I feel I will attempt to steer them away from the faith. I've never hesitated to push my beliefs on friends, no matter what they were.

Reduced Career Opportunities

Leaving the faith throws quite a monkey wrench into my goal of working in a nonprofit setting since many times these organizations require you to be a Christian. This is an instance where my college degree would actually carry some weight (Wheaton College is a recognized brand in Christian circles). Heck, I almost got to teach in a mission school sight unseen just because I went to Wheaton (they went with someone who had more experience which I am glad for because I probably wouldn't have survived).

Family Matters

In my family, Christianity is big. My dad's a pastor and my mother's side of the family is pretty much all missionaries. I am the first one in the whole extended family on my mother's side (that's like 40+ cousins) to come out as not a Christian. There will be repercussions for my loss of faith from family, but I do not know what they are yet. Currently, I believe some people are writing me off as going through a period of doubt which there will eventually be a light at the end of.

No Hope of Heaven

For someone like me who most likely will never have a job (due mostly to disability and disablism), never marry (due to not having a job), and never own a house (due to the other two) the hope of heaven would be.. well.. a godsend. There is a real possibility that I could end up in hell. Nobody knows what happens after we die (and we can't conceive of nonexistence). For some reason though I don't think parroting a few stupid little phrases on your deathbed will do much for you on the other side.

Less Chance of Dating

I can't date Christians and that's a crying shame because for every passive-aggressive gold-digging prig there is an awesome self-effacing compassionate woman, and some of the latter have trouble finding boyfriends. Part of the problem is generally they demand Christians (a very wise thing because as people age they tend to continue on the trajectory of their beliefs; the Christian and non-Christian trajectories are very different) and only 38% of born-again Christians are male. Being undesirable is I am, I need to get the odds working for me, and leaving Christianity does just the opposite of that.

FAITH

What is faith in the context of the evangelical Christian walk (this definition is coming from a non-Christian who isn't and never was beyond the Christian event horizon).

Faith is a mixture of particles of overfaith and the liquid of faithlessness. You've got to keep stirring it or you'll have a beaker with liquid faithlessness on top and a layer of overfaith on the bottom. What is overfaith? Putting God to the test, giving him timetables with prayers, putting out the fleece-things like that.

I put God to the test and we both failed. Particles of overfaith precipitated out of the surrounding liquid of faithlessness. Early 2001 I went through a period of excruciating pain and ensuing abandonment. I know Christians say that suffering deepens faith, but for me it just deepened overfaith. I was desperately needy--for an timely answer to prayer and I knew that if answers didn't come, my mental state would begin to unravel and become damaged beyond repair. I was too full of overfaith and it damaged my Christian walk as badly as the prolonged physical suffering damaged my mind. Particles of overfaith were gathering at the bottom of the beaker. It was the beginning of the end of my Christian walk.

Now I have completely lost my Christian faith. Most of the container is faithlessness and the bottom, all the particles of overfaith have settled. I only respond to things found to be extremely plausible by the scientific method. Does prayer work? I look at the double-blind studies. Does God really "take care" of uninsured Christians and keep them from being sick? Once again I look at the numbers. What you'll find is that numbers in the real world don't support the pulpit-propagated providential promises.

Faith is like an odometer that ends up flipping back to zero. Too much faith is the same as putting God to the test and it's as good to him as no faith at all.

How do you "stir up" the mixture of overfaith and faithlessness? That's an exercise left to those beyond the Christian event horizon. The only problem is, they'll come up with solutions that sound stupid or even idiotic to people who are on the non-Christian side of the event horizon.

What happens during a pitch when a runner wanders a little too far off first base? There's a good chance the pitcher will turn around and throw it to the first baseman and the runner will scamper back to his base. For me, only believing in things that have been shown to be extremely plausible through the scientific method is like first base, it's a safe place, but one I tend to leave too often--much to my detriment. Once you are off the base of rationality, all kinds of scary things can happen. Perhaps if I was mentally healthy, I could afford to "steal" second base--believe in a god that loved me and such but I don't have that luxury.

One thing I notice after almost a year officially gone from the faith is that it doesn't feel a bit of good when I pray anymore. I used to believe I was doing just a little good when I sent up a prayer--it gave

me a little moment of satisfaction. But now I don't feel that anymore. I no longer believe prayer does anything so why would I feel good about something that does nothing?

The son of the shoemaker is without shoes

I've heard that a high percentage of pastors' kids rebel against the faith, and for many, the rebellion sticks. I think part of this can be attributed to lack of access to a pastor's counsel. At first this sounds strange, because a pastor's kid is generally getting browbeaten by their pastor parent. But if you had a parent who was a therapist, would you go to them for counseling? I would say no, because their role of therapist has been upended by their role as parent. The requirements of counseling specify that the counselor doesn't have a controlling interest in and maintains a healthy distance from the client.

Christians say depend on God. So do my parents, but their actions tend to do all the talking. I may have a few loose screws but I guarantee you my parents aren't going to deliver me to some Pentecostal preacher. They are going to shove a medication in my face (or if things really get dicey, up my ass)

Discernment

“Never ask another person's advice about anything God makes you decide before Him. If you ask advice, you will almost always side with Satan.” - Chambers

Evangelical Christianity gives people the belief that if they pray about something and seek God's guidance, then they'll do the right thing. In reality it's not so cut and dried, many times you don't realize you did the wrong thing until after witnessing the consequences of your actions. Our selfishness impairs our ability to make wise decisions. The whole individual seeking God for guidance thing cuts out the fresh (usually more balanced) perspectives of other people. I know one could argue that a person's selfishness shouldn't be a factor because Christianity washes all selfishness away, but from what I've seen I wouldn't buy this argument.

Bringing this “divine leading” into a Christian marriage is a recipe for disaster. Suddenly a partner's justifying their decisions (wise or foolish) with “God said so”. You can't argue with God.

Snake Oil

Things with no scientific basis to work seem to work for a very simple reason.

1. Many people perform these rituals (The Secret, praying, cleansing themselves of thetans, offering food to an idol, etc..).
2. Some of these people become very successful.
3. These people attribute their success as a result of performing these rituals (the people who attribute their success to luck and things scientifically proven to bring in success are more levelheaded and not as vocal).
4. The successful people set the tone for everyone (especially in this day and age). The rest of us emulate them. We perform the rituals they do believing they will work for us (this is also why athletes can net multi-million dollar shoe advertising deals--we believe that because Michael Jordan wears the shoes we do, we somehow have the potential to be a better athlete).

MATING

It goes without saying that people are always on the take. When you ask them to give--even a little--they shrink back and look at you like you come from Alpha Centauri. And the people who are giving just get smothered, so much so that often their givingness gets smothered out.

I think a lot of the problems in relationships boil down to the fact that both parties involved want to take and neither party wants to give. It's like that classic scene in *Strange Brew* where Bob and Doug both don't want to get their parents a beer. They are both holding a beer and threaten to let go of it. They make good on their threat and the beer drops to the ground and shatters.

In this consumeristic society we are programmed to take (expecting everything to exactly match our needs and preferences). When we are asked to make a sacrifice we are insulted and unwilling. And

to make matters worse, when we do make sacrifices people start thinking they can take advantage of us. There's no give-and-take. Just look for the givers and take all you can from them while they're ignorant enough to keep on giving.

common phrases (and my response to them)

There are plenty of fish in the sea.

This is true. But the sea is HUGE and you won't ever be able to explore even a thousandth of a percent of it. With the advent of the internet which allows a lot of business to be done anywhere (usually in countries with cheap labor) it is easy to forget that you are still chained to your locale. The people local to you are really the only ones you'll end up starting relationships with. It's the same now as it was in 1958. This fact is just a lot harder to accept now because the internet makes it seem like relationships can be sustained at a distance. So in reality, depending on your locale, there may be few to hardly any fish in the portion of the sea you happen to be swimming in. The amount is made even less by the fact that the things that make you desirable (work, working out) also make you very busy which can limit opportunities to meet people.

There's a "special someone" out there just for you that will somehow "complete" you.

I don't know what came first, this myth or the romantic comedies and songs which perpetuated it. It's something that's so pervasive in our culture that I and many other people have bought into it. The results are sad. You wonder why you're not happy and blame it on your significant other (who really shouldn't have to shoulder all the responsibility of keeping you happy) and then things get nasty and the relationship falls apart. And it all started because of that myth baked into your subconscious. As Jackson Brown sang, "I don't know what love has got to do with happiness."

If you stop dwelling on relationships, they'll come your way.

There's some truth to this, a watched pot will never boil. The bitter irony is that the people who don't concentrate on relationships and instead focus on doing things that make them desirable (such as making more money or becoming physically fit) are seen as better catches. Plus, neediness is a real turn-off. The problem is, if you ignore relationships for too long you can become set in your ways and have a hard time embracing one if it comes your way. But in my experience it seems like it is impossible to concentrate on relationships a correct amount. For me, there have been alternating

periods of concentrating on them a whole lot and then periods of not concentrating on them hardly at all.

Dating advice for ladies over 24 from a man who never had a girlfriend in his life.

Do some homework

Get acquainted with your past through reading old diary/blog entries that pertain to relationships and infatuations. Look for a common thread, something that pops out at you. Try to compare the past you with the present you. Are both yous looking for the same things?

You may also want to make a list of all the guys who ever liked you that you didn't end up dating (I wouldn't post it on a blog) with a three columns. The first column is the guy's name (you may want to leave a few lines of space after each name so you have more room to write in the other columns), the second column is why you wouldn't date him, and the third column is why you wouldn't date a guy with characteristics similar to his at this point in your life. This is just a barnstorming exercise to get you thinking critically about your past.

Take advantage of your niche

I'm not a big fan of labeling but I think certain types of women attract certain types of men. Some women are geek magnets, others draw in athletic types, while others bring in musicians. You may want to plan your social life in such a way that involves occasionally visiting places where guys in your attraction niche hang out (unless you can't stand these types of guys).

Technology is your friend

At the very least, you should be using technology to augment communication within your existing social network. This could mean keeping in touch with people via email or Facebook or maybe even keeping a blog to let your friends know what you are up to. Sites such as MySpace and Facebook offer you the ability to learn more about and get in contact with people on the fringes of your social network. Online interaction is generally a front porch conversation, but a worthwhile one.

In some circles there is still a stigma attached to meeting people online but I think this comes from

people with a monolithic view of the internet. There are places online where a woman shouldn't be caught dead and there are places where a lot of neat people congregate. I think the stigma stems from that fact that there is some risk in getting involved with people outside of your existing social network. However, this risk is no greater with people you meet through a website than it is with people you meet on the street.

Have the numbers work for you

If you want to improve your chances, you could move somewhere where men outnumber women. If you can stand cold weather and darkness, Alaska is a safe bet.

The silent treatment is for the gulag

If a guy likes you and you don't feel the same way about him, don't break off all contact with him unless he is really creeping you out. I'm not suggesting you let this guy call you every night, and I'm also not suggesting you lead him on (though the do they/don't they like me signals tend to come out garbled at the other end of the wire). By keeping this guy in your social network you hold on to good things. This guy stays your friend; he may provide you with business contacts that help your career, he might hook you up with one of his friends (guys are oftentimes eager find their friends dates), and though he may not be what you are looking for now, he may grow into something you really like later on. Finally, if he's worth it, he almost certainly will say positive things to and about you that will come back to your mind as encouragement on bad days.

I think we all know that when a single woman befriends a guy it usually means he may be in the "batting order" to possibly eventually get a chance at dating her. Unfortunately, many women are too short-sighted and only stay in contact with men they would want to date at that particular moment. Psychological studies have shown that we aren't as good at knowing what we want as we think we are.

Widen the web

You've got to ask yourself the question, "Will I settle for less.", or, "How much less will I settle for.". There are scads of less desirable, more available guys out there. Some of them lack social skills, some are disabled, some are ugly, and others are poor. These guys run the gamut from total jerk to nicest guy you'll ever meet. Many times they blend in with the background and unfortunately,

since they are so undesirable, they get really excited when you pay attention to them. There is risk in befriending them, they might end up stalking you. At the very least, thinking about how bad settling for less would be should help you get over being depressed about your singleness.

Look for diamonds in the rough

Develop an eye for unrecognized virtuosity. There are thousands of starving musicians whose talent approaches Sufjan Stevens but women aren't crazy about most of them. Don't pass over a guy simply because your friends aren't attracted to him (however, if your friends sense that he's a total jerk, that's another matter).

Try to come across as genuine (this is difficult)

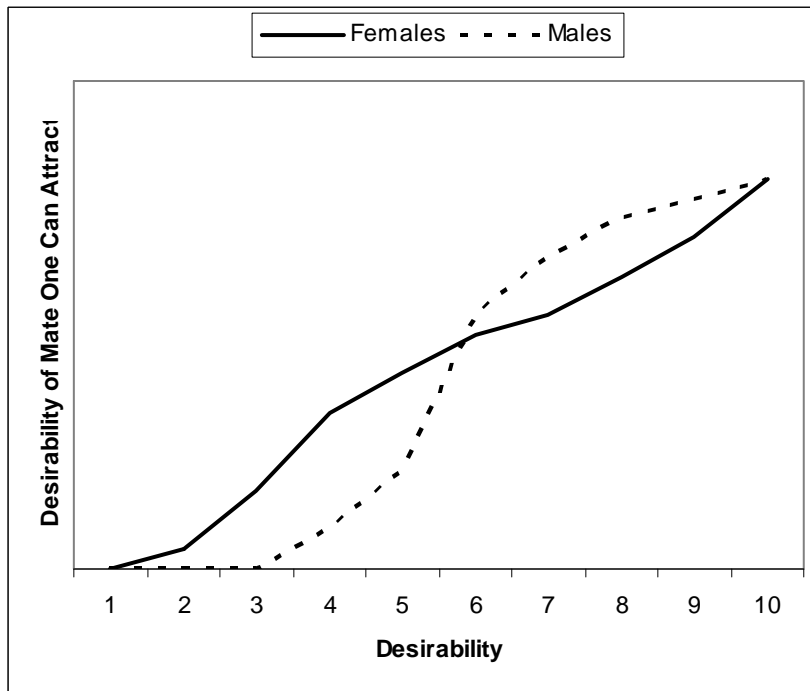
Guys can see through plastic friendships, most of us have befriended someone in order to play their Nintendo or swim in their pool, but these people knew we weren't really their friends. If you are trying to befriend desirable guys, they're very likely to write your friendship off as plastic. Less desirable guys will take your affection more seriously because they generally have less female friends and know the chances are higher that they are being liked for who they really are. If you are an empathetic, loving person, it will eventually shine through, even to the most attractive of cynics (but women tend to overestimate their character).

Just for born-again Christians

If you're serious about your faith, you face an uphill battle. Only 38% of those who identify themselves as born-again Christians are male and by the time you pass the age of 25 the good ones have long been taken. You also have to deal with the Christian culture that:

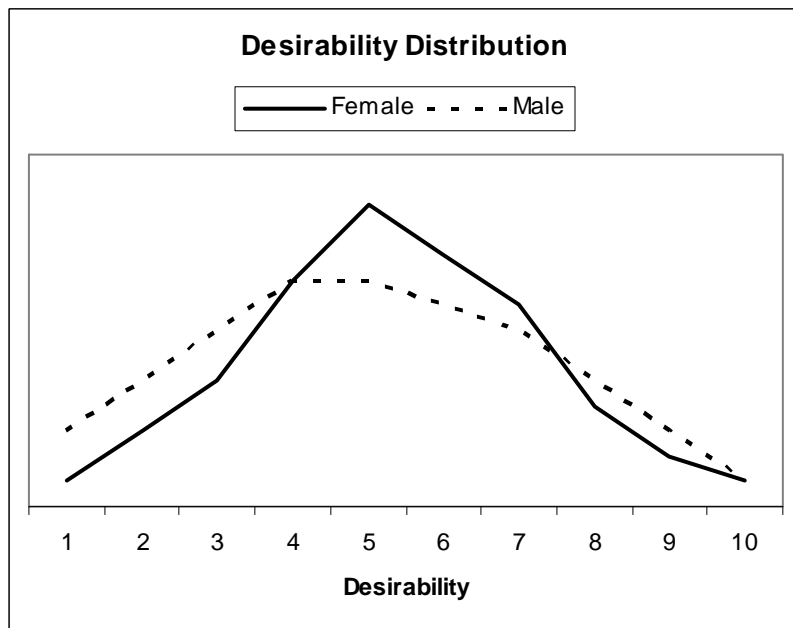
- basically treats a single over the age of 24 as half a person
- strongly discourages you from dating divorced men
- prevents you from second-guessing yourself, everything "God" tells you to do cannot be second-guessed ("God" generally tells you to date desirable Christian men)
- discourages singles from going to clubs and bars which results in the church becoming the primary (and sometimes only) place for them to meet potential mates

Desirability Diatribes



If you are a man of low desirability (I'm like a 2) dating a woman isn't even an option. This is because the things that generally make men undesirable, such as lack of social skills or the inability to procure employment, tend to have harsher ramifications as the relationship moves along. The women on the low end of the desirability spectrum tend to just be ugly which really doesn't disqualify them from dating their less desirable male counterparts but they steer clear of these men for reasons already mentioned here.

If a man can navigate away from the 1 through 3 desirability doldrums into 5 or 6 territory, all of the sudden things start looking up. This is because there are more women than men at desirability levels above five (plus you have all those women who turned their noses up at those below 3 trying to get with you). Just like with IQ, there is a difference in the amount of men and women at each particular level of desirability. There are more men at the highest and lowest ends of the desirability spectrum. This is because the things besides looks that make men desirable--wealth and social status--are distributed extremely unevenly throughout the male population. For every millionaire CEO and pop star, there are two janitors or unemployable men. This isn't as much of a case for for women--their desirability tends to be just tied to looks and social skills (which do vary at the extreme ends of the spectrum but tend to level off as you move towards the middle).



The moral of this rambling post with fake data--do what my siblings and friends with desirability levels between 5 and 8.5 have done. Hold out for a reasonably hot girlfriend (which they all did--it worked). If you are a woman with a desirability level below 3, don't lose hope... but don't be too picky either because anyone with desirability above 5 knows they can do "better" than you. And if

you are a male of desirability below 3, keep writing posts about desirability.

This has been somewhat misogynistic (derogatory towards woman). I'm just trying to point out the way things are, steering clear of politically correct bullshit. The women I do feel sorry for are the ugly ones who have done everything about their physical appearance they possibly could. The sad thing is even if a less attractive woman makes a lot of money, she doesn't stand too good of a chance at snagging a desirable man. I think this makes some women fatalistic. An ugly poor man knows if he can rise out of his circumstances (however slim the chance of this happening), he can find a woman. This provides him with a faint hope or at least a fantasy. Women don't have this.

Smart women who are unable to attract a male with a desirability level above 4 are saddled with a special kind of curse. Nerds chase them around. Let's face it, nerds are generally of at least reasonable intelligence and many of them are looking for a mate who is as smart or smarter than they are. Unfortunately, nerds are often bad at and/or don't put effort into things that would raise their desirability level above five (plus many of them have trouble landing good jobs--the IT market is tight).

If Wishes Were Trees, The Trees Would Be Falling

A woman generally doesn't look at an undesirable man and think, "oh boy, there's someone with a lot of unfulfilled wishes!". But it's true. You can bet your socks that if all the sudden a genie came along and gave every man on earth three wishes, a lot of the benefit would trickle down to women. All of the sudden the dating pool would team with wealth, attractiveness and wholeness (and probably length too). All the formerly undesirable men would be coming after YOU, single women. You'd have a field day!

And for all you Christian women who are reelin' in the years and not finding a guy that even meets your minimum specifications, some of you still believe in prayer--at least you say you do. So pray for the undesirables. What generally make men undesirable is lack of wealth and immaturity. The good news is you can pray for these undesirable men--that God would open up the storehouses of material blessing and rain it down upon them. Praying for someone's maturity is a little bit trickier but it could be done. You'd do a lot more good praying for five undesirable men than the conventional prayer most Christians women pray--that God would bring a desirable man into their

life. If your prayer works and a man becomes desirable, you may not end up with him but some woman probably will and she will be eternally grateful.

undesirables

People correctly point out that one of the negative aspects of polygamous culture is that all the women gravitate toward the desirable men and there are none left for the less desirable men. These less desirable men are more likely to join the military or lead a life of crime.

Anyway, I think liberated womankind has done something similar. Women can make it on their own financially and support each other emotionally so they are only willing to give up their singleness if someone really desirable comes along. Once upon a time the less desirable men paired up with the less desirable women. But today, less desirable women see singleness as a better option than settling for less.

high standards

Women want men to think that as they get older they have lower standards (and therefore the less desirable of us should get off our lazy butts and start pursuing them). It is true women's standards drop some after college but then they stabilize. Their standards appear to lower with age because if you plot the aggregate of all women's standards the graph does slope downward as they get older. But this data isn't that useful for the single guy. What he is going after is single women. That graph stays pretty flat. This is because women who lower their standards usually end up non-single pretty quickly (and stay that way). The ones left are more picky.

divorce post

I am fortunate to not be a child of divorce though my best friends were so I have been indirectly affected. Below I run my mouth on factors I think lead to the increasing prevalence of divorce:

Clash of Tastes/Routines: Hyper-individualism combined with technology and wealth have allowed us to indulge in array of very specific tastes and preferences. I like very specific kinds of entertainment and get my news from a niche site filled with people who think just like me. I'm in my own little world which means others' worlds seem almost alien to me. This presents a communication and relational handicap right off the bat. We get so used to having things "our way" that we look upon anything that disrupts this routine with scorn (like we aren't living our life to the fullest). A serious relationship often is a clash of tastes and preferences, superficial and not so much so.

Mate Choice: I'm not saying we should go back to the days of arranged marriages but there was something to be said about having the community weed out the douchebags. It didn't work perfectly then but it was better than what we have now. The rootlessness in today's society makes every mating interaction potentially dangerous. The way people choose mates has devolved--it's all about physical appearance and money now. And it's women going after the aggressive, attractive men without a further thought.

Putting Too Much Weight on the Bridge: People jettison their friends upon marriage. It's really sad because you are overburdening your partner if they're your only close confidant. No one was ever meant to shoulder all the emotional and fraternal needs of anyone else. Through history the expectation was you spread out your interaction and socialization among friends and extended family as well as partners/immediate family.

Feminism: I think we can all agree that men now get a raw deal in marriage to begin with (that's why they don't marry). Women used to do the shitty things like cook and clean. The arrangement might not have been fair but it worked a lot better for men than what we have now. Of course women often have to work so you can't blame them for slacking on domestic

duties. But there's something more pernicious going on--women expect more of men than they used to. They expect a level of emotional support that most men just cannot or fail to make the effort to give.

Sex: There is such a chasm between expectation and reality. Women are expected to look like porn stars and men are expected to perform like them. For men, the threshold at which they are turned on is going up because all the images they see. And that's in the good times. The sad truth is psychotropic and other medications, stress, and lack of physical exercise are wreaking havoc on men's sex drive. It's not talked about because it is an incredibly shameful thing.

Cheating: Men are and increasingly women are cheating. And as technology improves it gets more difficult for them to get away with it which makes for more divorce.

Work/Finance Stress: Double-digit gains in productivity take their toll. People are just trying to keep their head above water and have nothing to give their partner when they get home. The only thing they have strength to do is watch television and maybe mow the grass. Living and starting a family is so expensive and jobs are never safe. Many marriages run aground due to money trouble and with a recession imminent this is only likely to increase.

Ignominy of backing down: Something inside of you is being ripped apart when you back down and let the other person have their way. I think it might have always been this way somewhat but recent generations who have grown up with a sense of entitlement which exacerbates it.

Inability to be Real: In subcultures (such as Christian culture) you have to be fake and plastic to fit in. Sometimes this fakeness seeps into your personal life and you lose the ability to be blunt with yourself and others. This causes all kinds of problems in a relationship. Of course being blunt isn't a cure-all. If you are being a jerk the delivery method (be it passive-aggressive or direct) isn't the problem. You are.

Leaving Religion: Sometimes people's marital fidelity is tied so closely to their religious belief that when they have a crisis of faith, they cheat.

General Poisonous Undertone of the Culture: I can feel it. You can feel it. It seeps into our homes. We ingest some of it and try to build a resistance to it but by building a resistance we are the ones who become poisonous.

Significant Other Fantasy: We think we will be satiated by just finding the right person. When this (inevitably) doesn't happen, we think something's wrong. There is no happiness magic bullet. Two unhappy people are not going to have a happy marriage.. $-1 + -1 = -2$

DISABILITY

I don't know if you heard of it, but there was some controversy over a family's decision to give their profoundly developmentally disabled six year old daughter Ashley hormones to keep her from growing up. I do not have enough information to have a really good opinion of this but I have an idea of where the family is coming from.

The DIS in disability grows as you grow older. At least that's been my experience.

Childhood: DIS right out of the gate

I was born blind, with cataracts in both eyes. They were removed at three months of age (I was fortunate to have been born in a time, place, and circumstance where this surgery could have been done, if cataracts aren't removed near birth, vision is lost for good) . I gained eyesight but it was still poor, I had to wear glasses the power of a magnifying glass. Despite the vision problems my childhood was good. I had a loving family and once I explained my disability to kids I didn't know, they generally treated me normally.

The teen years: The DIS begins to surface

By junior high I was in contacts and looked quite normal, though I was still painfully awkward in social situations. I sucked at sports though, and wasn't spared the wrath of regular bullies. I got pushed into urinals a couple of times but one call the the vice principal fixed this. In high school the

bullying subsided but DIS began to raise its head. My vision just wasn't good enough to really drive. I was 20/50 corrected (piloting was never a career option). I couldn't make left turns onto busy streets when driving alone (I needed someone to see far for me and give the all clear). Not driving cut me off from dating which was really a shame because this was the time in my life where I was the most attractive. The first two years of college were good, nobody noticed that I couldn't drive.

The grownup world: DIS at the best of his ability

After being 20 awhile I lost the ability to wear contacts (because my eyes were too dry). Immediately people (friends and strangers) began treating me badly. Many of my friends now looked at me as a pariah; girls pretty much stopped talking to me. After college I held a job for a couple of years but was an eyesore (with sore eyes, the dryness got so bad it was killing me). I contracted biipolar and lost my job (now I have to be constantly watched for craziness). Finding employment while appearing disabled has been hell for me. Smart people know that employers hire on their first impression, and companies **don't** discriminate based on disability. I'd say the difference between disabled adulthood and disabled adolescence is that in disabled adulthood there is no vice principal to step in and try to bring about dignified outcomes.

Ashley, stay a kid, you're not really missing anything.

Why is ableism harder?

What makes ableism (being discriminated against on the account of disability) harder?

It slips under the radar. Nobody's lynching individuals with disabilities. You'd have to be paying close attention to spot most of it--a lot of it manifests itself simply as being treated as if you're invisible or treated like you are retarded. Even workplace discrimination is nearly impossible for non-disabled people to spot. I was discriminated against for at least one position this year and nobody else seemed to think it was because of my disability. The blame me for not being a functioning member of society instead of the perpetrators of the discrimination.

It is usually handled alone. Just like with racism the incidents themselves generally happen when it's just few or one of us against all of them. Then there is the matter of having a group of other disabled individuals to hang out with for mutual edification. Yes there are blogs and forums and the like but for many--perhaps the majority of--the disabled only have themselves for like company. There are no bars for the disabled, no barber shops, no labor temples, no clubs, and no churches. Everyone feels somewhat alone but when you are a member of one of the most oppressed minorities (who haven't seen as many gains as others have) it can be soul-rending.

The memory doesn't go away. Many ways ableism manifests itself are isolating things. Humans are social animals by instinct and think about their social life. When they don't have one they tend to think of the critical junctures--the on-ramps--which would have allowed them to have one (job interviews, dates, times with potential friends, etc.). If these junctures happen to be negative as ableism often makes them thoughts of these negative things will be swirling around in the heads of the disabled.

There is little or no recourse. The only option for the disabled is filing an ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) discrimination lawsuit. It's a long, costly, and (in the vast majority of the time) fruitless process. Besides, you don't tap on a nail with a 13 pound jackhammer. Most ableism doesn't warrant a lawsuit. What it does warrant is some kind of softer but still significant measure but nothing like that is in place.

Guarded Bridges

I'm not Napoleon but I've played enough realtime strategy war video games to know that you always secure the bridges (and many times take them out entirely). I think as a disabled person enters the adult world, ableism regroups. As juveniles, the abled world peppered us with derision and the occasional act of violence. But as adults the attacks generally become less frequent but more sophisticated, the abled world concentrates its resources on preventing the disabled from entering their world at critical junctures. Whether it's the job interview that ended before it began, the curt turn-down, or the despicable way the disabled are treated in many churches, ableism makes a show of force. It's smarter than it used to be, striking with surgical precision and then vanishing.

Misc. Poetry

wherever I go my disability follows me
it speaks louder than I do
its voice drowns mine out

the disabled dig a shallower well
when drought comes
they're the first to die of thirst

Hope is like a rope. It has to be anchored to something real to pull you up.

Openness Diatribe

Sometimes things are so simple they literally explain themselves. Take for example my little sister who is trying to shut me up. She doesn't want me to talk or write about being disabled--despite the fact that is the salient attribute of my life. Granted I don't look as disabled to the non-employer eye as someone in a wheelchair but I have suffered a lot on the account of my disability both directly (eye pain and depression) and channeled through society (discrimination in the workplace, school, and church). The fact that my little sister (an intelligent, educated, Christian young woman) would basically tell me to keep my mouth shut tells you how little headway the disability community has made in securing rights. The sad thing is--she has good reasons. People will dislike or hate me for being openly disabled and I'll face even MORE discrimination in the workplace than I already do if people find out how messed up I am.

Folks, it's really simple.



If you are a member of an oppressed minority, people are going to try to suppress all of your expression. Even after slavery they killed African Americans who stood up and organized people in the fight to be treated fairly. They used to institutionalize and try to "fix" people who came out as gay. Granted the disability community will probably never do as well as other communities as we actually have something qualitatively wrong with us which makes us of less value in the eyes of a culture that defines who you are by what you do, how sexy you are, and how normal you act. But we can't have an open and honest discussion about our disability? Come on.

Imagine prisoner under house arrest back in the day before they had GPS tracking ankle bracelets. When he's at home he doesn't have to wear anything special but when he goes out he has to wear a ball and chain.

I am that prisoner. Except my ball and chain is called PREJUDICE and it's generally invisible to

everyone but me. Whenever I go out, I drag it along. It keeps me out of the employment world and keeps people from befriending me. The last job interview I had was actually pretty good but they did assume I was single because of my disability. Previous interviews were a lot worse--one guy didn't think I was capable of doing the job because of my visual impairment and he KEPT BRINGING IT UP.

One thing about being a person with a disability is that it brings out the true colors of other people you interact with. Most of the time it's not that pretty but there are some good people whose goodness shines through by their interaction with individuals with disabilities. The important thing here is that it's almost impossible to be neutral in your interaction.

Yes, people with disabilities are an oppressed minority. But one that through a twist of fate you could become part of.

Openly Disabled

I've been taking a lot of flak lately for coming out as openly disabled. I guess technically my visual impairment and bipolar together only make me partially disabled but in the eyes of employers and potential friends/mates, I'm considered disabled (but not by the government--kind of ironic, getting screwed both ways). My little sister in particular hates it that I consider myself disabled and has told me to shut up about it (with reason--she says people will dislike me even more if I'm open about my disability). My parents don't seem to get it either. They don't see my failure to find employment, friends, and mates as largely a result of being discriminated against on the account of my disability. They just see it as bad luck. To add more insult, people who culture truly considers disabled (ie. in a wheelchair) don't see me as disabled at all. So I lose the one thing that makes being a member of an oppressed minority somewhat bearable; the ability to associate with others enduring the same kind of oppression.

Being able to empathize with members of an oppressed minority has actually gotten more difficult as the expressions of racism/ableism have grown more subtle and difficult to detect. Back when the oppression involved dogs and fire hydrants it was easy for justice-minded

people to sound the alarm that something wasn't right. But now, the oppression tends to slip under the radar. A subtle breath laugh, nefarious gestures, and or just being ignored upon the account of your race/disability are just some of the more obvious ways it is expressed. Being locked out of social networks is perhaps the most damaging expression of oppression. And we all know that most of the things that give joy (friends, employment, mates) are usually procured via social networks. The sad thing is there is no way to really accurately measure the new oppression. It's not like someone is dressing up in a sheet and burning crosses on your lawn.

Just because secular academia has beaten the racism horse half to death doesn't mean that they weren't barking up the right tree. I think Christian culture has a lot of work to do with regards to treating people of different races and disabilities with dignity. At least that's what I've heard and experienced. Just like a Stealth bomber, things that go undetected by the radar can still attack with deadly force.

On to something different. I think evangelical Christianity itself is deeply discriminatory against people of mental illnesses. Even telling mentally healthy people to take the voice of God seriously is getting toward the edge. When you tell MENTALLY ILL people to take the voice of God seriously that's going way over the edge. Then you backpedal and tell the mentally ill that they should cherry-pick which experiences of God to take seriously. This is a daunting--if not impossible--task. For one, the damage has already been done subconsciously; however many conscious gymnastics one performs to try to wash it out. In moments of mental weakness these voice of God will be taken seriously (this doesn't mean that the person would actually act on what they're hearing though). I think a question I took from one of my favorite blogs and reworked expresses it best. Who cares if God loves you if he doesn't express it in a way you can feel and cherish?

Depression, Nonsignals, and Death

When you're depressed you can't be repentant the same way when you're naturally dark-skinned you can't have a tan. Being "sorry" for your sins is absolutely meaningless when you're depressed because you're sorry for everything. Your being "sorry" isn't an expression of repentance, it's just an

affect of the depression.

I think one of the cruelest things I was brainwashed into believing was that prayer actually worked. It's like in my mind there's a warm front of bullshit bumping up against a cold front of truth and the weather is nasty.

What made it particularly cruel is that in my case is I am in a particularly prayer-averse situation. People want to make prayer look like it works so they generally don't pray for people with disabilities (because the prayer won't reap any newsletter-worthy results). And you might as well forget about mental illness, the church hates us EVEN MORE than the world does (I know, it's hard to even imagine that's possible but it is).

I think it's funny how people aren't just satisfied with controlling people's life--they want to control their death as well. On one side you have the Catholics and most of popular culture who are all against suicide. Then you have the right to die folks who want suicide to be an option when suffering gets too great. What the right to die people don't get is it's human nature to control people, especially vulnerable people at the edge of suicide. You either push them off the edge or pull them from it. I know it's slippery slope but the "right" to die for the disabled quickly turns into the compulsion to die (70% of Kevorkian's assisted suicides were disabled).

I'm in a vexing position because I'm for the right to die--I'd like the ability to be able to end my life if I so chose--but at the same time I realize that though that would be a wonderful choice to be able to make, it would be devastating to the disabled community and others who society hates with white-hot fury.

Failure

I highly recommend not becoming a failure. Failure will eat you alive like the blob. It does so through various poorly-documented methods.

Hope-Poverty

The hope-rich receive 50 units of hope. The hope-poor receive 3. When the hope-rich put their hope in something, only 2% of their hope is out on loan. When the hope-poor put their hope in something, 33.3%. Add to this the fact that hope is rarely an act of will--it just kind of piggybacks on to things. You write a letter to someone close to you and after sending it you realize that a unit of hope will

burn up if that person ignores your letter. The interviewer that never calls back--a beginning of a month's worth of depression.

in your mind, she's a wall infinity feet tall / you'll never get over her

I'm bad at a lot of things but I'm ever worse at getting over girls than all the things I'm bad at. This is where my undesirability lays a devastating blow. Since I'm not very employed, I have a lot of time to think about, well... you know who. And my desirability level is too low to date girls, I can't move on like the desirable folks in my family have. My thoughts just swirl and she's always in them, but usually below the surface. To add to this the fact that the internet allows me to contact her and visit her Myspace--I know contacting her is the absolute worst possible thing I could do, but it's like poking a hole in an air mattress, all it takes is one moment of weakness and BAM. I depart with 100% of my hope units--if she writes back, I get them back. If not, woe is me.

The Vortex of Negativity

Most things feed off of other things. Not negativity. Negativity can feed off of itself and grow to full-size. I do something shameful. I feel bad about it. Because I feel bad about it, the shameful act successfully makes the transfer to my long-term memory. I'm periodically fed the memory of the shameful thing many times when I feel bad (which is a lot because I haven't done what I need to do to get depression treatment). People break off contact with me because I'm a failure--they don't like failures and don't like hearing me talk about being what I am. Losing their company makes me worse. I lose units of hope--I get hope-poorer and the vortex just keeps on swirling.

Things in American culture that work against the disadvantaged

The taboo against being able to pay someone for rides (particularly short-distance ones). This takes away a useful option for the disadvantaged in cities without adequate public transportation. They must either take on the expense of a car or attempt to rely on the good graces of those willing to take them places free.

The difficulty of spelling English words. This ensures that the disadvantaged will communicate in a way that makes those in control perceive them to be less intelligent than they really are.

The double standard that rules conversations about money. It's seen as socially inappropriate to talk about wages and debt but discussions about profits and investments are fine.

The inability to talk about politics in polite conversation. This ensures that the rich's exposure to the political views of the disadvantaged remain limited to corporate-spun sound bites.

The societal taboo against the shame system. Americans beat the guilt-absolution system into the heads of their young. These kids grow up unable to "swim" the shame system, becoming victims of peer pressure. Ask an average disadvantaged 17 year old what he thinks the consequences of stealing a car are and he may tell you 5 years in prison (guilt-absolution speak). But the permanent price of this felony is being locked out of any job that pays more than \$10 per hour (shame speak). Shame is a powerful weapon and advertisers and classroom peers seem to be the only ones able wield it.

The social taboo against tattoos. Many employers won't give you a second glance if you have any kind of visible body art. Actually, most employers won't hire anyone who looks a little different (and many of the disadvantaged do look different).

The fact that most disadvantaged people identify more closely with fellow members of their race than with fellow members of their social class. As you ascend the class ladder racial barriers become less pronounced.

Evidence that seems to point towards God hating the mentally ill

The way God speaks to us. To the mentally ill, one of God's salient attributes is his gregariousness. Whether he's telling us to drown our children, walk a mile in the nude, or drink our own urine, God just can't resist getting a word in edgewise. I know the more sane of you would say that one should filter out the bad things the voice of God says and attribute them to the devil or some other force, but you have to understand that part of being mentally ill is having these filters go down precisely when you need them the most. If God didn't hate us, he wouldn't speak to us the way he does, or at least he would apologize for the way his voice has done so much damage to our lives.

The church. If you want to find out God's opinion of you, the best thing you can do is ask some of his people. The church has long since exhausted its role as a place of refuge--now

it's a place where social conformity and the plastic smile are all-important. Those of us who are mentally ill tend to be bad at conforming and smiling and the wrong answers tend to come out of us. Add to this the perception in many conservative Christian circles (these are the people who claim to be closest to God) that mental illness is a spiritual problem--saddling blame on the sufferer for not doing the spiritual legwork needed to be up to Christian standards--and you see why the church is hostile waters for us. Some people would say that God loves you even when the church hates you and I admire their thinking but salvation comes through the church (something the Catholics acknowledge and Protestants try to play down so they don't seem like Catholics). So even if God loves the mentally ill, his infrastructure stands in the way of them being saved.

Suicide. While regular illnesses can kill, our illness can kill and damn (according to most of Christendom including the Catholic church). I don't care how good of a person you are or how close to God you are. I also don't care how mentally ill you are. If you kill yourself, you go straight to hell for eternity according to most Christian denominations. Now I realize that death by suicide is more of an act of will than death by something like diabetes. But a good portion of the times the will is hardly involved in a suicide. It's almost a reflex.

HUMOR

Good things about having a stalker

Having a stalker isn't generally a positive experience but you've got to admit there is a silver lining to this cloud:

Being persistently pursued generally means someone thinks you're worth being in long-term relationship with. Since you are in their thoughts all the time they generally aren't going to be satisfied with just a one-night stand.

Stalkers are often free of artifice. Many times they're likely to like you more for who you really are instead of an ephemeral first impression. You might be insecure but your stalker probably thinks you're the greatest thing on earth. Try thinking of yourself the way they do and you'll exude confidence.

Having a stalker means you're quite the catch! When you mention you have a stalker it piques the interest of other more desirable potential mates.

You may get special gifts. You might not be too thrilled with the intentions of the giver but it's nice to have someone who is thoughtful enough to get you something special.

Worst "What You In Here For" Stories

The Note

Anyway, my girlfriend works at a bank teller. She was really into her job so I had this idea to propose to her at work. I would hand her a note with a ring in it and hopefully she'd give a positive response. Anyway, the day I was going to do it it was freakin' cold out and I had walked eight blocks to the bank from the bus stop so I had a ski mask on. So I go into the bank and drop the note off but unfortunately my glasses fogged up so I slip the note to the wrong teller. The note didn't even get read, the teller just pressed the silent alarm button and security immediately grabbed me.

Pants

I have a really heavy cell-phone that makes my pants sag. I was in the park running to catch a Frisbee and my pants fell down and took my underwear with them. A cop just happened to be there writing a parking ticket so I got busted. My other two indecent exposure offenses were my fault but this one was just fate giving me the finger.

Animal Rescue

I noticed a lizard in the middle of the road so I stopped and picked it up. Later on the trip I stopped at a doughnut shop (it was freezing cold--not a good habitat for lizards) and was accosted by a cop. Apparently I had a stolen endangered Costa Rican lizard in my

possession. I tried telling them it wasn't my fault but they wouldn't buy any of it.

Plants

It was springtime and I saw it said pot plants in the Five and Dime sales circular. I thought they just meant potted plants and didn't have the space to include the extra letters in the item title.

MP3's

A friend sent me a link to download a Kevin Federline MP3. I downloaded it but halfway through the download a S.W.A.T. team in full riot gear and semi-automatic weapons busted in the door. They tasered me and took my computer and monitor and threw them out the window. Then they hung me by the chord of my headphones until I confessed to every illegal download that had ever wormed its way into my modem.

Pillows

I was in Bed Bath and Beyond buying a couple of pillows and I noticed a cop behind me in line in the checkout. I was feeling a little defiant that day so after finishing the purchasing process I brazenly ripped the tags off of them. The cop immediately handcuffed me and threw me to the ground in front of all the other shoppers to make an example of me.

Bill

I tried paying for my Taco Bell taco with a two dollar bill. The cashier (who had never lived through the seventies) was having none of it and notified some rent-a-cop (who also had never lived through the seventies) and he brought me here. I didn't know rent-a-cop's could arrest people but he was no ordinary rent-a-cop, he was a Department of Homeland Security rent-a-cop.

If the world were 20 people:

10 would be male, 10 would be female

all 10 females would like the 1 richest, most attractive of the 10 males

1 of the males would still be a virgin, the other 9 would laugh at him

8 people would think the other 12 were headed for eternity in hell

16 of the people would lead a pretty miserable existence but most of them would lack the sense of entitlement of the other 4

15 people would be close to their extended family

13 of the people would live under an oppressive or dysfunctional government

1 person would be a thief and steal or destroy the possessions of the richest 4

2 people would have access to universal healthcare

0.15 people would love George Bush and think Israel could do no wrong, 19.85 would not

Quotes

IQ can also stand for "I quit"

Don't get between a bear market and her cubs!

Suffering is just the hors d'oeuvres of being deserted.

The church thinks I'm human enough to be responsible for my sins but not human enough to be treated with dignity.

Today is the last day of some of your life.

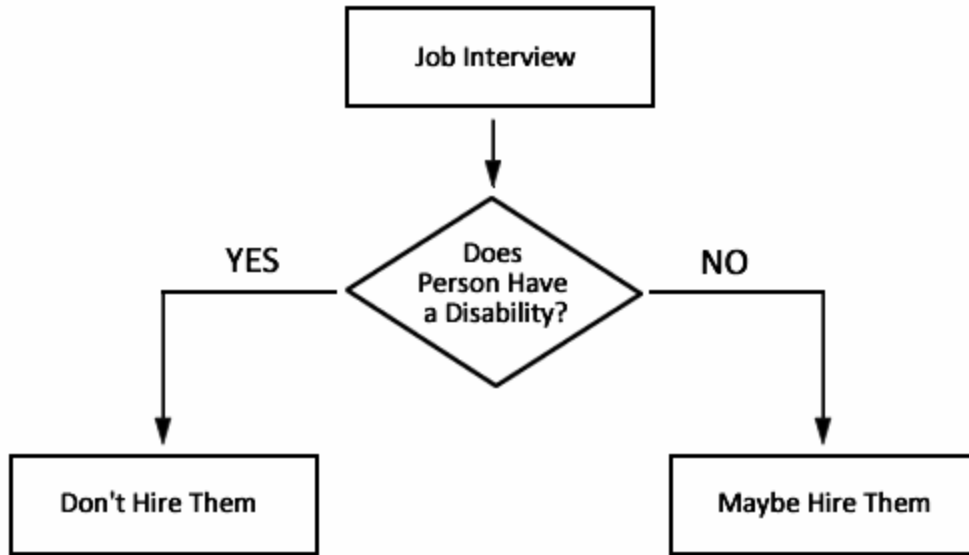
Always look down because mother earth is the only one who thinks you're attractive.

silver linings are things seen by people aloof enough to be flying over the clouds

Great music sees the future

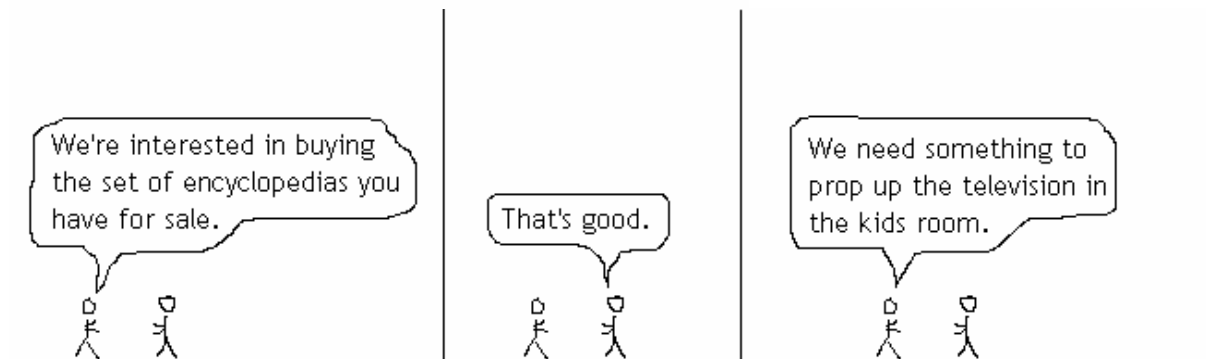
Life is like a package from the Unabomber—you never know what you're going to get.

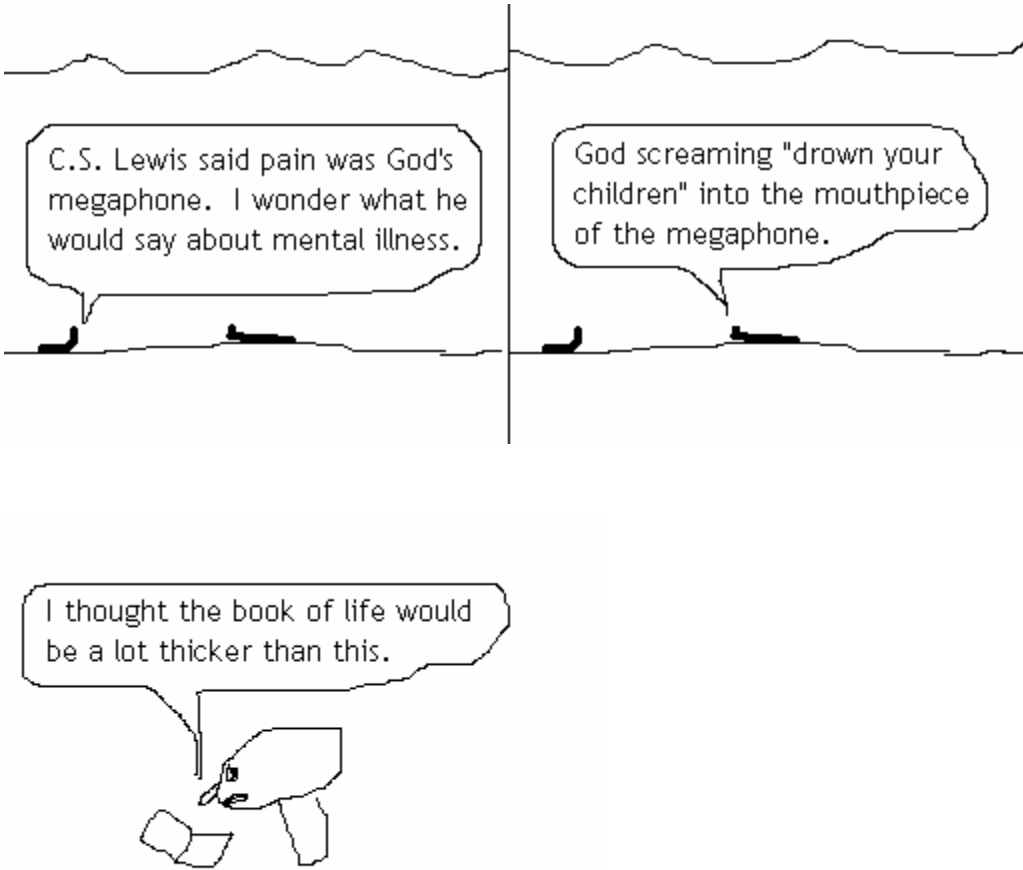
Business Process Flowchart





Jesus' junior high guidance counselor had a special charge--had Jesus stopped believing in himself the whole universe would unravel in an instant.



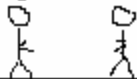


C.S. Lewis said pain was God's megaphone. I wonder what he would say about mental illness.

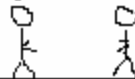
God screaming "drown your children" into the mouthpiece of the megaphone.

I thought the book of life would be a lot thicker than this.

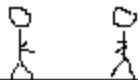
Marriage is like radioactive decay.



Fantastical notions of your partner decay into realistic ones as you continue interact with each other day after day.



Eventually the relationship is of a completely different consistency from when it began.



So that's where that glow you seem to see around people in love comes from.



God answered my prayer for a bike.



Really, where's the bike?



I didn't get a bike, he made me content with not having a bike.



Christians tend to view their religion as a talisman guaranteeing them success in marriage.

Well the divorce rate among Christians is just as bad as it is among their secular counterparts.

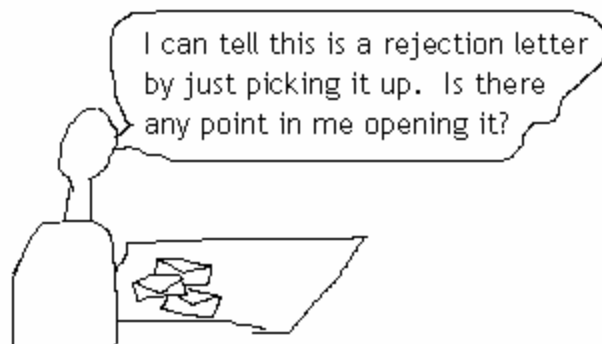
They tend to anchor their spousal fidelity to their religious devotion. Sometimes they cheat while falling away from the faith.

If your religion is the only thing keeping you from cheating, you never should have been in a committed relationship in the first place.

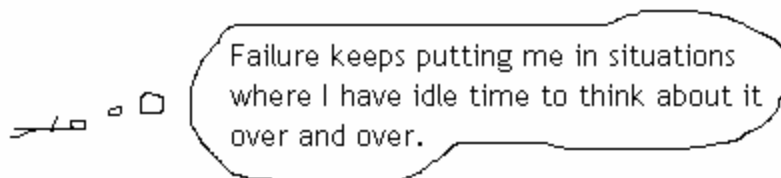
Most fears can be mitigated by exposing people to the thing feared a little bit at a time.




But fear of failure is a different animal. More exposure to the bitter consequences of failure make a person that much more fearful of it.




So now you can see why the "face your fears" motivational claptrap doesn't do much for those cowering behind the eight ball.







I decided to give my cool
cloths budget for this year
to starving children in Hati




Well, you can't hang
out with us anymore




We upper middle class Evangelical
Christians don't preach the health
and wealth gospel



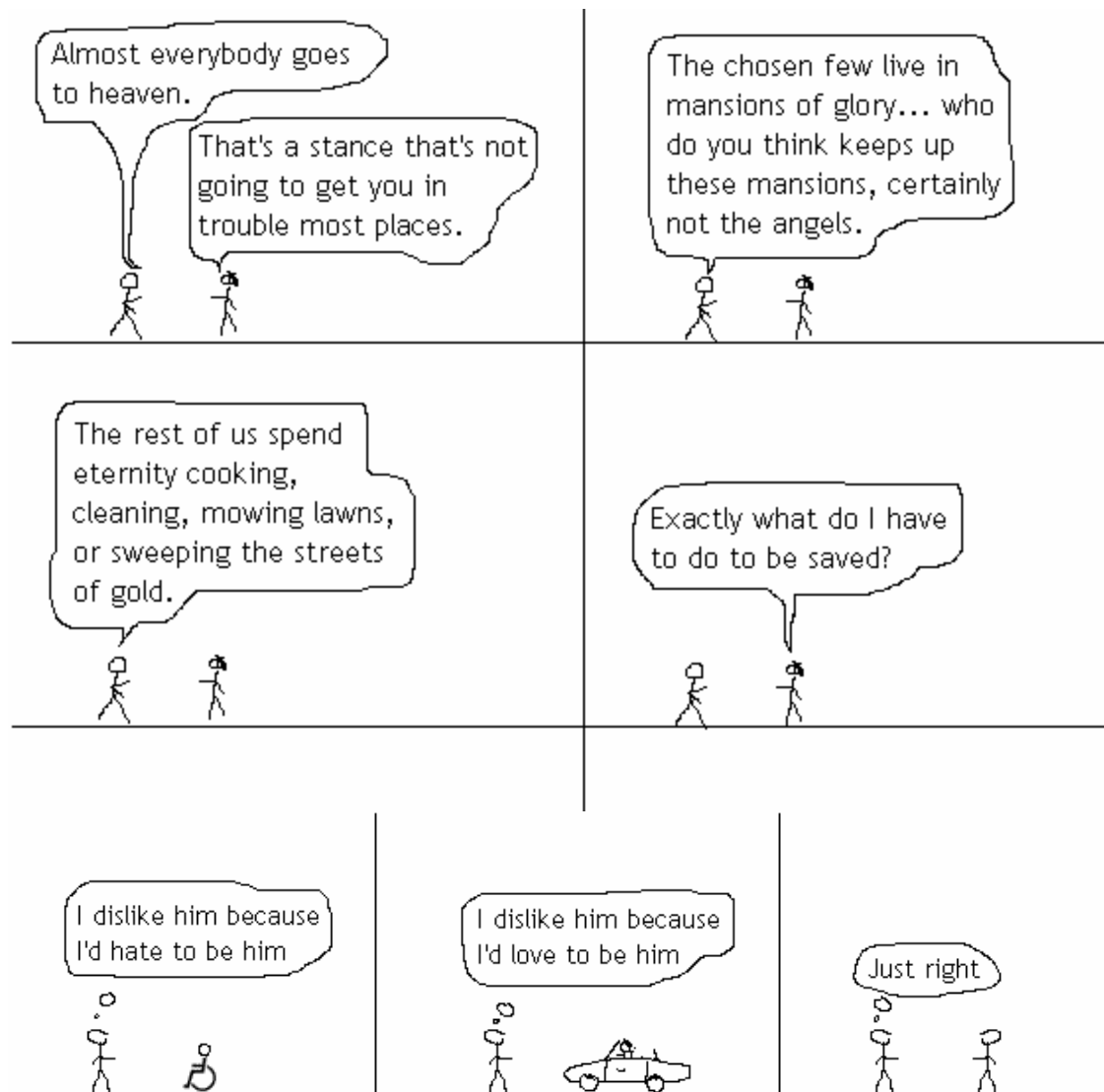
But we do treat those who haven't
had a fruitful time shaking God's
tree of blessing like they are
number two

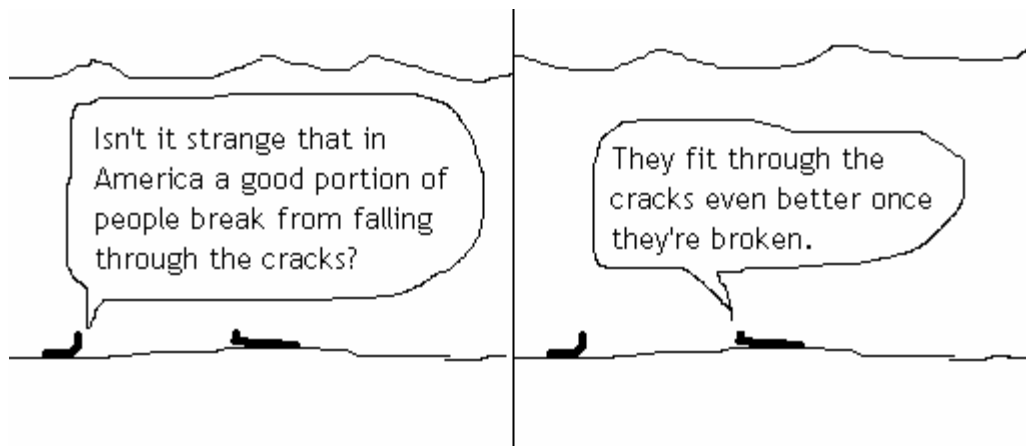


Well, the less blessed aren't
usually number one



I'm not talking about second
place, I'm talking about the
other number two





That was a smart decision to keep Midas locked away. We shudder to think what having him running free touching everything would do to the price of gold.

Top Jobs I Would Be Great For

Life Ruining Consultant

You want to ruin your life as quick as possible but you need help. I come to the rescue. I sit down with you and get all your information. Then I come up with a life ruining plan. The quickest way to ruin your life is fake a mental illness but we can come up with other ways if needed.

Cult Leader Sidekick

I couldn't be the charismatic leader that ropes in the followers. What I could be is the guy behind the scenes that makes up the crazy stuff. I already have a store of crazy stuff that could be put to good use but I think my real talent lies in taking existing crazy stuff and embellishing it so it has more appeal.

Toilet Tester

These men and women have to boldly go where no one has gone before. One talent I do possess is the ability to clog toilets. I should put it to good use.

Mattress Evaluator

This job would involve lying in bed for long periods of time. This is something I'm good at.

Worst Thing Sayer

In almost situation I encounter the worst possible thing to say often pops up in my mind. If you are looking to burn some bridges or stir up trouble I can give you that phrase that will do the most damage.

are you worried about the impending collapse of the U.S. economy? me neither

You see it in the headlines, (at least on reddit) America is borrowing more than it is lending, people who push a lot of money around are dropping the dollar for the euro, energy prices are going to go through the roof, America isn't making anything except loans, lawsuits, and dirty movies. Some people add things like these up and are all gloom and doom but I'm not, thanks my telepathic knowledge of various top-secret government operations.

Operation Rumpelstiltskin

A Utah State professor wrote an email to his colleague detailing how he had discovered a process that would turn ordinary rock into gold at the cost of 43 cents a pound. As many of you know, government computers read all of your e-mail, checking it for certain keywords like Al-Qaeda, bomb, or Air America. This prof's email set off a bunch of red flags, causing a real government employee to read it and report the details to her superior. Spooks were sent to Utah State the next day to offer the prof an ultimatum. He could either give up his research or provide the government with the details of his process in exchange for a cushy job in Virginia. Lucky for us he chose wisely. America's currency fears will melt away when every new dollar printed (and a lot of them will have to be printed) is backed by gold. America will amass so much gold that the new Scrooge McDuck cartoons will show him working for the government.

Operation O'Tierd Irish Joke

A Dublin bioengineering company recently figured out how to genetically engineer four-leafed clovers. The U.S. government immediately bought it and moved its headquarters to Nevada (not the best place to grow clovers, but you get the idea). The flow of these four-leafed clovers will be restricted to government officials and members of The Carlyle Group (as you may know, the good luck you get from four-leafed clovers is more like winner's luck because in this world you run up against the limits of absolute scarcity a lot so your good fortune often comes at the expense of someone else). An average American citizen will eventually experience better luck that will trickle down from the powers that be. Legislation criminalizing the possession of rabbits' feet is in the works.

Operation Everybody Loves Fruit

Some people think Operation Iraqi Freedom is all about oil, pointing out things like how we secured the oil ministry while leaving museums and weapons dumps to looters. Nothing could be further

from the truth. Our Fearless Leader is a man of God and has sent our troops to the cradle of civilization to secure the country in hopes that soon we will be able to excavate the Garden of Eden and find remains of the Tree of Life. From these remains the government will resurrect this tree, selling the fruit at a hefty profit (besides, giving it to the boomers will really save on Medicare costs).

Operation Search and Seize

The government could create a big corporation and use eminent domain to seize every other corporation's assets. This is kind of a stupid idea but these government employees have a certain quota of ideas they have to come up with and at the end of the month things get a little desperate.

Operation Cheap Bubblejet Printout

To alleviate consumer debt, the government is thinking of making counterfeiting legal. The money still has to look like money though, don't expect to scribble \$1,000 on a post-it note and exchange it for a Playstation 3.

Prey'n

The proof that The Prayer of Jabez doesn't really work: the fact that you can actually buy a copy of the book. Perhaps people have stumbled upon secret formulas for getting God to give them what they wanted. However, these folks weren't stupid enough to let the secret out into the wild. The irony of the whole thing is that if the prayer of Jabez actually worked, Bruce Wilkinson could have done a brisk business selling the trade secret to companies and the government, but he probably wouldn't have made as much money in this as he has marketing the \$15 book through Christian bookstores.

In prayer you may be dealing with an infinite God but many times you are sill dealing within the limits of absolute scarcity. When God answers your prayer to get that job, remember that you're muscling someone else out of it who may have prayed just as hard if not harder. In the same vein, God may grant you a shiny new SUV but the damage that vehicle will do to the atmosphere will help cause drought in Africa deeper into the 21st century.

One of the beliefs I hold is that God can be manipulated, even by people we wouldn't consider Christians. People like Prophet Yahweh (who calls UFO's out of the sky) come to mind. Balaam comes to mind. Those who get turned away, even after doing signs and wonders in Jesus's name come to mind (I believe these folks wouldn't have been surprised at their rebuke had they been

apostate).

Myths about atheists

Atheists are angry, bitter, and vindictive.

True: Don't you dare shove all atheists in a little conceptual box like this! A good portion of you Americans think you're better than us because of your casual religiosity (saying God every once in awhile without the succeeding damn). Well you suck. Grow some balls and either get serious about a religion or become one of us. You're lucky enough to sit on the fence now but it won't always be this way.

99% of the prison population identify themselves as atheists

False: That estimate is on the low end. It's more like 99.99%. Everyone who doesn't believe in God takes the law into his or her own hands. That's why we have police in the first place. If everybody was religious, we wouldn't need police or the army for that matter.

Myth: A force field of darkness tends to emanate from atheists.

True: You can tell someone's an atheist just by getting within five feet of them. You don't even have to look into their eyes, you'll just feel something. A darkness, an emptiness, something no scientific instrument could ever measure.

Touching an atheist will give you an 440 volt electric shock, but poking them with a stick is safe.

False: The kind of electricity atheists are charged with passes through sticks, so you'll get quite a jolt poking us with one. On the positive side, we can plug ourselves into the wall and send power back into the electrical grid, saving the environment and a few bucks off our utility bill.

All atheists are for stem cell research

False: Many atheists are dead against stem cell research because of what it does to fetuses. We have our own secret chain of restaurants where fetuses are friend and eaten. We are opposed to any research that diverts the supply of this yummy delicacy elsewhere.

Atheists drink the blood of children out of human skulls.

False: Human skulls make surprisingly poor liquid consumption vessels. We drink childrens' blood out of red disposable party cups.

commutiny

The difficulty getting along with someone is inversely proportional to their physical distance from you. Living together is hard, that's why when people make enough money to live by themselves, they usually do (even though it's financial idiocy). Often the biggest things are the little things. The unattended cat vomit drying on the floor, the broken door, the curt poison-voiced reply, the late-night indiscretion that draws a mock, all these things can only happen in close quarters. Some people would say that when you live with people, you find out who they really are, but I don't think this is fully true. Someone can be the coolest person but a total asshole to live with; I think being able to live with someone is a social skill that really can't be taught. It's a social skill relationships can live or die by. A lot of people realize this but it often takes a broken relationship to really drive the idea home.

Some time ago I posted the question, is a marriage more like a friendship relationship or a roommate relationship. I think the question is still worth asking.

It is a common to hear that the reason there is so little community is that there is so much fragmentation. He likes 4-wheelers, I like computers, they like guitars, she likes Justin Timberlake. I buy this, but fragmentation begets fragmentation. The less people are brought together, doing or being exposed to things outside their demographic slice, the more fragmented they will become. The more fragmented people become, the more hostile they are to experiences outside of their slice. It's a vicious cycle.

CHURCH

Mental Illness and The Church

There is an intractable spiritual problem--the experience of mental illness doesn't fit into what's being promised from the pulpit. Christians generally agree that God will protect you from the pit of suffering, or sustain you while you are down in it. Mental illness throws a monkey wrench into this whole idea. When mental illness and what a Christian has been taught mix, the results are often poisonous. The voice of God (that Christianity encourages one to listen to) is no friend to many of

the mentally ill, telling them to do crazy and sometimes harmful things. God simply does not work as advertised and most non mentally ill Christians can't even get their mind around this. On top of that, many Christians see those with mental illness as not having enough faith--they misdiagnose their mental problems as a spiritual problem (they see the mentally ill as unable to tap into the God's sustaining power). Intoning that someone already overburdened with a mental illness is reprobate because they don't "have the joy of the Lord" can devastate that person.

People with mental illnesses (along with those with other disabilities) tend to exhibit socially awkward behavior. In many social context, especially those with more "upright" people, these behaviors are seen as shameful. Many times sin and shame get conflated, especially in the minds of people for whom fear of shame has been the engine that has helped drive their morally upright behavior. Shame aversion becomes an all-consuming force, creating a Christian culture which is stifling. This culture forces people to talk like Oswald Chambers all the time and conform to status-enhancing cultural norms--being smiley, sitting up straight, not cussing, not having tattoos or piercing, shaving often, etc... If normal Christians have a hard time living inside these norms, imagine how difficult the mentally ill have it! People struggling with severe depression generally don't have the capacity to keep a smile or assure people that, despite all evidence to the contrary, the glass really is half-full. Conforming becomes even less possible for those with worse illnesses. The non-conformers are eventually booted out of the Christian culture--and many times are made to feel that they have sinned against God for their nonconformity.

Praying for the mentally ill is tricky. Praying publicly for someone with any mental illness worse than depression is disastrous because of the stigma associated with mental illness. It could cost them friendships, their place in the community, and even their job. Basically, if you're mentally ill, you need someone's confidence before allowing them to lift your condition up in prayer. In many churches people who you can safely confide in are hard to come by and it only takes one breach to potentially ruin a life. Biblical admonitions against gossip weren't put there for nothing!

Don't Love the Player, Love the Game

The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, then walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable. - DC Talk

My faith was dragged through the mud by how I was treated by many Christians. Most of these folks didn't know what they were doing to me so it would be impossible for them to level with me.

Some Christians use an effective tactic to keep themselves from being dragged down by others of the faith who are complete jerks. Through soterivision goggles they can see whether others who profess Christianity are wearing the helmet of salvation. If a Christian doesn't measure up to their preset level of sanctification, they are not Christian, and don not enter in the "why are there so many jerks in the faith" equation. It works wonders for keeping the faith but Jesus told us not go judge.

I find it funny that some people will say, "Don't focus on people, focus on God." Then you open up a Bible and a good portion of it focuses on how peoples' lives should change in light of God's revelation. If those outside the church have an idea of the transformative power of Christianity, imagine what it is like for the churchd who have had this idea burned into their heads from an early age. Then you've got people saying one's faith shouldn't be hurt when they see those inside of Christianity acting worse than their secular counterparts (usually in areas other than sexual purity). I think it would be a bad thing if peoples' faith wasn't hurt by this because that would show they didn't really believe Christianity had any redeeming power at all.

Speculation as to why people with disabilities are oftentimes excluded from evangelical Christian churches (especially Willow Creek clones)

Xenophobia

People, especially those in the suburbs, generally haven't been exposed to people with disabilities so when they see one they have a visceral negative reaction (I have even caught myself having these reactions). It's unfortunate but we are conditioned to have an automatic negative reaction to anything that looks different. There are a lot of good people who shy away from people with disabilities simply because they don't know how to approach them.

Spiritual Discomfort

The very presence of people with disabilities flies in the face of the the health and wealth gospel which is being preached (to various degrees of intensity) throughout the evangelical world. Christians are trained to be hopeless situation averse--prayer is best suited for times of crisis where there is pretty good chance of resolution. But how do you comfort/pray for someone whose problem is never going to get better. A classic Christian response to suffering is, "for every cloud there is a silver lining". But disability is a cloud with little or no sliver lining and this fact alone throws Christians for a loop. And for many of us with mental illnesses the evangelical Christian idea of an experience of God is a very negative thing--we experience God all right, but he tells us to do crazy things instead of spiritually mature things.

Perspective

People with disabilities see the world differently, sometimes frighteningly so. Many see the world as a much darker place, due to their life experiences and reading about the poor treatment of their compatriots (Ashley X anyone??). The daily life of many with disabilities makes for gross dinner conversation--this alone could offend some. Also, they tend to hold more complicated political views (leaning Democrat on healthcare issues but many times Republican on abortion/assisted suicide).

Money

Let's face it, people with disabilities constitute the poorest minority in America. A church that is constantly spending millions on building projects is going to have to go to great pains to bring in and satisfy a heavy-tithing higher class demographic. If you have a disability that makes you poor, you are seen as a waste of space in the church, not paying your fair share and making the rich parishioners uncomfortable (it is to be noted that some of the same forces that push people with disabilities out of the church also push out the elderly).

A good portion of church buildings aren't even wheelchair accessible which would keep many with disabilities from even getting to the church greeter.

How many church growth books have chapters devoted to reaching out to the disabled and/or mentally ill?

Churches should pray for the unemployed in their flock

I think churches should pray for those in their flock who have become unemployed. In many churches we lift up the sick and those serving in the military, but we forget about the unemployed. Becoming and remaining unemployed can be a devastating blow to a person; it can ruin them financially as well as spiritually.

Implementation Suggestions

If your church is small enough, you could pray for your unemployed during the main service. A good idea before doing this would be to get permission from these people as they may be so ashamed of their situation, not wanting it to be trotted out in front of other parishioners (those who don't want to be prayed for publicly will still most likely want to be prayed for privately by the pastor). If the church is larger you could pray for them during prayer meeting and have a list of names of unemployed to pray for (get their consent before doing this of course). On this list you could even have a column for profession and skills.

Why do this?

The church is admonished to encourage and supporting brothers and sisters in need at least a few times in scripture. And on a practical level, a well-connected member of the church may have a job lead for an unemployed member with skills that match this lead. It also makes sense fiscally. An unemployed parishioner who gets a job after being specifically prayed for--and perhaps even getting a successful lead from--their church would be more likely to tithe faithfully.

A personal note on this, I've been unemployed for almost three years and prospects don't look very good (I'm also disabled so that throws people for a loop when they see me at job interviews). It has done very bad things to me spiritually. Fortunately I don't have a mortgage or kids. I can't imagine what throwing those things into the mix would do.

On Encouragers

Multiple times, in the Bible, Christians are told to encourage one another and bear each others' burdens. Then why are encouragers rarer than unicorns both in and outside of the church? I submit

some reasons:

You don't get anything for being an encourager. Encouragers run the wrong way. The old adage about the police man running towards danger while everyone else runs away applies here. Encouragers run towards people others run away from--the people that generally have very little or nothing to offer in return. Add to this the fact that being an encourager generally doesn't do anything positive to your pocketbook, social status, or your attractiveness to the opposite sex (especially if you are male).

Needy people can be nasty to deal with. Let's face it--many times there are good reasons why people run from those desperate for an encourager. They have mental problems or they're just socially inept. Many times they're ungrateful and sometimes they're smelly.

Your social status will suffer. When you spend a lot of time with people of low social status, some of that low social status rubs off on you. Every minute spent with someone of low social status is one you could be spending with someone of high social status.

You get smothered. The lack of encouragers makes being one that much harder. You can tell a true encourager from someone who is just BSing by the fact that true encouragers will get smothered like a quarterback with a weak offensive line. This can get overwhelming really quickly--many encouragers get worn out really quickly by all the people trying to get involved with them.

It hurts to care. If you go outside of your comfort zone and open yourself up to sorrow, you will be a less happy person. Obviously a requirement for being an encourager is a lot of empathy but opening yourself up to others' problems will often be emotionally rendering.

You might be putting your property or life at risk. Opening your home to people who are down and out may result in some of your stuff being stolen. Coming alongside a suicidal person can be one of the most dangerous things you can do. Part of their suicidal fantasy may involve murdering those close to them--possibly you.

Why do Christian marriages fail so much?

As you may know, evangelical Christian marriages fail about the same rate as do their secular counterparts. I have no hard data so I'm just playing pundit here giving you speculation as to why it is hard for Christian marriages to succeed.

Less Grace. A Christian looking for an excuse to divorce will do so for reasons that people in the secular world would forgive. For example, looking at pornography is considered adultery in many Christian circles. A man may divorce his wife because "God" is calling him elsewhere (basically following the all-too-common interpretation of human emotions as God's voice).

Overestimation of one's uprightness. I can't hold individual Christians culpable for believing they are more upright than they really are because the church in its quest to survive and propagate has drilled this idea into them. When every interaction inside of a marriage is coated with false valuation of righteousness it makes the tough spots in the relationship harder to identify and work through. Being steeped in the non-confrontational Christian culture really doesn't help here either.

Sense of entitlement. This pulpit propagated idea that God has plans to "prosper" Christians really stokes an already blazing sense of entitlement to a whole new level. When the unthinkable happens there is a whole extra layer added to the suffering. After all, God wasn't supposed to make things like these happen. When people go into a marriage with (usually unacknowledged) expectations of how things are going to be and then they turn out drastically different it is a recipe for divorce. I'm definitely not saying Christians are the only people who do this, but I think that they have less of an excuse to be. If one reads the Bible for any length of time it will dawn on them that life is tough and things aren't all roses and strawberries. If the church will willing to communicate this I think some marriages might be saved.

The tension between abstinence and the primacy of sex. Many Christians still stay virgins until marriage. While this might be noble in some circles it prevents a couple from finding out if they are sexually compatible. Long ago when sex wasn't seen as so important this

might not have mattered but in this day and age the expectations are higher and it does matter. Sex can be a big Pandora's Box and Christians generally are hog-tied when it comes to frank and honest discussions of it.

Less real friendships. This definitely doesn't apply to every Christian but I think many Christians (especially Christian males) form shallower friendships than their secular counterparts. When you are afraid of being judged for some "sin" you generally play your cards closer to your face. But doing so is harmful for the relationship. So what does this have to do with marriage? The more practice you have being in a real relationships the better you are going to be at them, and this includes your marriage. Also, having friendships takes a load off your significant other because you pile less of your concerns on them. And chances are, you're never going to find a significant other that shares all your hobbies. If you find friends to pursue these hobbies with than you become a more complete person are less likely to fault your significant other for not liking all the things you do.

Apostasy. When one partner leaves the faith it can put serious strain on the relationship. Sometimes people's religion was the "glue" that was keeping them faithful so when they have a crisis of faith, they cheat.

Christian Men

Why are only 38% of evangelical Christians men? I can't answer that question thoroughly but one theory I have is that men are assholes. I try to expand this below.

passive-aggressive bullshit: In secular environments such as bars and clubs their the assholes are pretty easy to spot and have a disincentive to express their assholeness fully as they could run the risk of getting beaten up. Go a church or other nonconfrontational Christian environment the assholes (which there are many) blend in with the rest of the men and have free reign to express their assholeness passive-aggressively. The average twenty-something is unwilling to put up with passive-aggressive bullshit at the local bar so why should they at the local church?

pecking order: In yesterday's America you made money; in today's America money makes you. Never in American history has there been a time where more classism existed than today. The church is no different than anywhere else. If you don't make enough money you will be ignored or treated with contempt. The church pretty much takes care of racism for you--churches are so segregated they won't give you a chance to get to know a diverse array of people.

intolerance: You're gay, forget it. Men are already incredibly intolerant of gays--the church just takes the bigotry one step further claiming their opinion comes from the Bible. If you're different in other ways you'll be booted out. Disabled? Don't come around here!

mating ground: When it all comes down to it, most of the evangelical Christian men are just at church to please their wife or pick up one. Other men are just seen as competing for the pool of women.

Christian men generally make their friends elsewhere, via work, school or other common interests.

Why are so many women insecure--even a women with good jobs!

Advertising. Although women are responsible for over two thirds of consumer spending, the advertising world is still dominated by male creatives and ad buyers. The results are as you'd expect. Female stereotypes like the overworked domestic or the perfectly airbrushed model dominate. There are liberated woman's voices speaking but they don't reach the airwaves and minds of the common man.

Rationality. A lot of times women don't put forth the effort to be rational. All of us are born superstitious. It takes a lot of work and science education to become a more rational person.

There are advantages to being rational though, especially as a women. You'll be able to cut through a lot of the bullshit in this culture and see yourself in a different, better light, especially if you are a smart women with a good job (if you are a complete failure then being rational might just point that out to you more clearly).

Competition. If there were separate race tracks for men and women (with regards to mating) we would find that the lots of space between the cars in the men's track but more cars neck-and-neck in the women's. This is because for men, there is more of a disparity between the things that make them desirable and undesirable. Things like money and status are incredibly unevenly distributed throughout the male population. On the women's track you have looks and personality which are distributed unevenly but not drastically so. Think of it this way--the ugliest twenty-five percent of women would never date the least desirable twenty-five percent of men (these men would be disabled/homeless/unemployed/incarcerated/etc..). So right off the bat only two thirds of men are really in the dating pool. Add to that the fact that most women are just interested in the top ten percent of men (who have good jobs/good looks) and you'll see why the competition heats up and gets nasty so fast.

Outmoded gender roles. The pace of change now moves much faster than cultural mores. Women with money will be looked upon more favorably as time goes on but right now we are in a transition where the dust has yet to settle. The losers are ultimately going to be the males (who are dropping out of the workforce like flies). Ultimately most men will occupy a lower place in society than they do now but it will take time and there continues to be a backlash (expressed as misogyny and other ways).

Insecurity feeds on itself and compounds the negative effects. Women starve themselves because they think that's what men want (admittedly a lot of men really do like thin women, but not skeletons). Their insecurity keeps them from ever dating less desirable men (because they need an alpha male to make them feel like a worthwhile human being).