

RELATIONSHIP OR RELIGION? By Perry Bowers and David Andes

Yawn... stretch... scratch... sigh...

Man, that was some party last night. Feel like death warmed over. Head hurts. Whoa, 10:45 am already! What day is it? O yeah, Sunday. Better step out here. Let Rita sleep a while longer. Where's the stupid remote? Here it is.

Click... 9. Naw... who wants to *Meet The Press*? Who are we supposed to believe, anyway?

Click... 10. Home Shopping Network... forget it! Don't need a Thigh Master. But hey, love that spandex.

Click-click... 12. Hate reruns! Too early for the Eagles-Redskin game. Pregame show not 'til noon.

Click-click-click 15. Yo, Barney!... If I had a Howitzer I'd wipe that stupid grin off your purple dinosaur face!

Click... 16. Weather. Drizzle. Overcast. Only 51? Forget mountain biking.

Click-click-surrffff-click... 43. Hey Mr. preacher man. You can't make me feel any more guilty or confused about God than I already am! So just pass that plate, smile in that camera, do your little religious dance for those church hypocrites. No room for God in my lifestyle. Preach on brother!

Click-click... 45. Nascar. 400 laps in a circle at 189 mph. Crashes, pit stops, beer and noise... mute. Sorta like my life. Driven. 200 mph 7 day circles Frequent crashes. Weekend pit stops. So much noise I can't even think. No real direction.

Click... Budwieser... Just great, another commercial promising a better life with their product but all we ever get is foam! Like me. Lookin' for a high to fill the lows in my heart. Nothing seems to really fill my soul. Gotta be more! Job doing OK, but hate the pressure. Marriage OK, but really just doing our own thing. Couple of decent friends to hang with but hollow and same ol' stuff.

Click...mute. Wish I was like Jim. Great friend. Wish I had his peace and contentment... his focus and fulfillment even during those tough times last year. Got to be more than just a positive attitude. Something deeper. He prays a lot. Seems pretty religious. Maybe if I offered up a quick prayer I'd feel better too. Perhaps this gnawing hole would heal over. Who am I kidding? Been too long since I last prayed... Suppose I could recite the Lord's Prayer. After all, if it was good enough for Jesus, it could soothe my conscience, and, with a little luck, get me through the week. Let's see... fold hands... close eyes... this feels weird. Embarrassing. Hope Rita doesn't catch me prayin' in my boxers! OK, here we go...

'Now I lay me down to sleep' ... No, no. That's not it! OK. Try again. 'Our Father, who art in heaven...'

Yes, Karl. Here I am.

What the... who was that? Nobody. OK take two. 'Our Father, who art in heaven...'

Karl, here I am. What do you want?

Don't interrupt me... I'm trying to pray. 'Our Father...'

There you go again. You called for Me.

Called You? What do you mean I called You? I'm just praying. C'mon, let me get through with this so I can feel better... 'Our Father...'

Karl! Here I am. What's in your heart? Tell Me all about it. Every detail. I'm very interested in your life.

Well, I was just praying. Didn't mean anything by it. Doing my spiritual duty. Never meant to bother You. You're very busy.

All right, carry on!

'Hallowed be Your name...'

Karl. Stop for a moment. Do you even know what that means? It's important.

Know what that means?

'Hallowed be Your name.' Do you know what that means?

Yeah, sure... it means... aaaa... don't have a clue, God. How should I know? I didn't write this! Jesus did. Just part of the prayer. By the way, what does it mean?

It means honored, respected, revered, holy. When you pray 'hallowed be Your name' it means that you stop to think about Who I am. And when you stop to reflect on My character you'll want to walk with Me throughout the day. You'll want to call on My power, wisdom, provision, grace, and love to deal with all the demands on your life.

Hey, that makes sense. But why is it so important?

Because over the past 37 years you have become like your culture. Most people worship the god they want rather than Me, the God Who is. They want a god they can control, manipulate and will not demand much from them. They want a convenient god who does not interfere with their agendas or hold them accountable. They serve a cheap imitation of their own imaginations rather than honor Me as the Priceless Original, the Creator God of the Universe.

Lord, you nailed it! Described me! I've pretty much made up my own concept of You. I've taken a few qualities from my parents, a couple concepts from my friends and a few highlights about You from the media. Basically, I've created a watered down god that allows me to be my own god and call the shots! I just keep You on retainer for times of crisis. Like a vending machine god. Pop in a prayer. Pull a lever and out comes some candy to give me a spiritual high. I guess I want a consumer god who will prosper my bottom line without asking me to get my life in line.

Great insight Karl! Appreciate your honesty. I hope that you will soon come to realize that life is not just difficult apart from Me... it's impossible! Oh how I long for you to experience the exciting life I have called you to live. So, never forget that 'hallowed' means that you acknowledge ALL of My character... the whole package. Like a lion, King of the jungle you have to accept My purr as well as My roar. My love, grace, forgiveness and patience as well as My justice, discipline, holiness, wrath and sovereign control. By the way Karl, where do you take your SUV when it breaks down or needs a check up?

To the dealer on Woodrow Street.

Why?

I guess because they best understand its design. They know how it's supposed to work.

Exactly! Karl, I created you and I alone know best how you work. Every detail of your life is according to My divine design. I fashioned your emotions, abilities, aptitudes and skills. I wired you, your heart and mind, to work best in relationship with Me. Think about it, Karl. I invented marriage. I invented the family. I created work. I ordained your future. So Karl, why is it that you never come to Me when you break down or need repairs?

God, that makes so much sense. No wonder there is such a void in my life. Better start thinking when I pray rather than just ripping through the words. Let's see, where was I? Oh yeah, 'Your Kingdom come, Your will be done...'

Karl, do you realize what you just asked?

Don't know. What exactly is 'Your Kingdom' and what does it have to do with me?

My Kingdom is My rule, My dominion, My supremacy over your life. It means admitting that I am God and you are not. It means being humble enough to walk with Me hour by hour and rely on Me to guide every aspect of your life.

But Lord, I'm so afraid that if I surrender my will to Yours that You'll screw up my life. I'll be enslaved to some outrageous set of religious rules. Life will become a drag. No fun. I'll lose my friends.

Karl. Why would I do that? My love frees. It does not imprison. I want you to score in life, score big! As coach, I see the whole field, I know the opposition. I have the play book. I don't send you

plays to enslave you. I give you plays that guarantee a winning season. Or, think of a father, Like a father, I want you to grow. So I give just enough guidelines so you can mature into the man, husband, father and businessman I created you to be. It's not 'My way or the highway.' It's 'My way IS the highway!' All other ways put you in the ditch or over the cliff.

Father, can we chat about this for a minute more? Are You saying that surrendering to You is not defeat, it's really victory? Are You saying that yielding to You puts me on top, not on the bottom of the heap? C'mon. Who's going to buy that?

Well Karl. At some point you are going to have to trust Me. You've lived long enough to know that all other gods will not come through for you. All other gods will let you down. I alone will be with you at all times. I alone have all the power, wisdom, truth, and resources you will ever need in life and it's all yours if we walk together. Karl, do you want to remain as a homeless orphan trying to survive on the streets or will you come home and live as My son?

Oh God, I don't know if I have enough faith.

Karl, it's not about the amount of your faith. It's the object of your faith... Who or what you put your faith in is the key. All faith is based on fact. I'm not asking you to take a leap of faith into the unknown darkness. I'm asking you to step into the light on the clear facts about My character. Go ahead... put Me to the test. Continue!

Oh, yeah. The next part of the prayer... 'On earth as it is in Heaven...'

Karl, will you align your will here on earth to My will in Heaven?

Well, I sometimes go to church and I pray...

I know, I've been listening to your sporadic monologues, I mean prayers, for years. But that's not what I'm asking. Will you allow Me to direct every area of you life so together we can accomplish the best outcome for your life both in this life and the life to come? Your thought life, your family life, finances, time, relationships, goals, dreams, desires, schedule.

Hey, stop picking on me! I'm just as good as some of the rest of those phonies at church.

Excuse Me. I thought I heard you praying for My will to be done so you could experience the life I offer.

Lord, you're right. Would You please free me from my pride so that I can start to understand and do Your will for my life... and my family?

Absolutely! We'll work on it together. You and I. Every day. Now we're getting somewhere. You're starting to move beyond mere information about Me to transformation by Me. Good. Very good. Carry on.

Look, Lord. I need to get going. This is taking a lot longer than I thought. Let's see... 'Give us this day our daily bread.'

I will, but when are you going to start thanking Me for some of the things I have given you already? Sincere thanks is a foundational quality if we are going to develop a good friendship. Or are you content to keep a surface level with Me.

Hey! That's not in the prayer. Are you trying to change me or something?

It's not in the prayer because it's not in your life. And yes, I am trying to change you. Prayer is a dangerous thing. You could wind up a radically different man. A real man. My man. That's exactly what I'm trying to do. I love you just the way you are, Karl, but I love you far too much to let you stay that way. Keep going. The next part should be really interesting.

I'm scared to continue.

Why?

Because I know what You're going to say.

Try Me.

Ok. 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.'

Karl... what about your friend, John?

I knew it! I just knew You'd bring that up. Lord, he's lied about me, trashed me behind my back and cheated me out of money. I'll get even with him.

But what about your prayer? Did you mean it or are you just playing religion?

I guess I really didn't mean my prayer. I started out this prayer just wanting to feel good and now you have me actually living out my prayer. This is not what I expected.

Well, at least you're honest. Let Me ask you, how will you get rid of that resentment and bitterness eating away at your peace and contentment?

I'll get rid of it as soon as I get even with John!

That's not going to work. It never does and you know it. Think of how unhappy you are already. Revenge isn't the way. But I can change all of that.

How?

If you expect Me to forgive you of your sins, and they are many... do what you just prayed. Forgive John, then I'll forgive you!

Lord, I can't forgive John.

Then I can't forgive you.

God, You sure take this prayer stuff seriously. You're right. You're always right! More than getting back at John, I want to be right with You. Alright... I forgive him... and purpose to forget and put behind me all that he has done. And Lord, now that I think about it, help him! He's miserable. He has a ton of problems. Help him especially rebuild his relationship with Mary and change his priorities so that he can be at home more with his kids.

Great! How do you feel now?

Hmmm. Not bad. Pretty good. In fact, this conversation with You has really changed a few things in my life.

Yes, I know, and you're not even finished.

Oh yeah. 'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...'

Good. Very good! I'll do just that if you do your part.

What part?

Well, I'll make sure to help you steer clear of life's land mines if you promise to follow Me and let Me lead you. But let Me be honest. My goal is to transform your life. So expect Me to start rearranging some questionable areas of your life!

Ok, Lord. I agree, but please walk slowly as You lead. This is so new to me. The more I talk with You, the more I sincerely desire to stay away from evil. I'm so tired of blowing it. I better plan to come to You a couple of times a day because I'm constantly tempted. I just can't resist on my own.

I delight to walk with you. Go ahead then, finish.

'For Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen.'

Karl, do you know what would bring Me the most glory and thrill My heart?

What, Lord? I'd really like to know. Having spent this time with You I can now see that all these years I thought it was about religion. But it's not. It's about relationship! It's about knowing You, not just knowing about You!

Exactly! That's what would really please Me! If you'd recognize Me as your Father, treat Me like your friend, come be with Me, walk with Me, talk with Me, get to know Me and let Me make you the man I designed you to be! These would truly delight My heart.

Lord, I want to do these things. But what do I do now?

Karl, if you really want to begin a relationship with Me first, ACKNOWLEDGE in your head and heart your need for Me as the only true God because there is no other. "Now this is eternal life, that you may know Me, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom I have sent." (John 17:3) Then, CONFESS that your sins have caused you to stray far from Me breaking our relationship and that you rightly deserve My judgment by spending eternity apart from Me. "Your sins have made a

separation between you and Me.” (Isaiah 59:2) Next, BELIEVE that My Son, Jesus, took your sin upon Himself at the cross so that you no longer have to carry the burden and guilt for all you have done against Me. And believe that He rose again from the dead to prove that all of this is true. “For I so love the world that I gave My only son, so that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) Lastly, RECEIVE the gift of My forgiveness and walk with Me as I shower you with My grace and love to help you grow as My child! “To all who receive Me, I give the right to become My children.” (John 1:12)

Lord, thanks for interrupting my prayer... and my life. Wow! 30 minutes in Your presence is powerful stuff. As You were telling me these steps I affirmed each of them in my heart. Based on the truth of Your Word, I now have a new life. A new relationship with You! Thank you! Thank you!

Welcome home, Karl, My son!

Father, this is great stuff! What do you think about another prayer like this again tomorrow? You and Me together.

I have a better idea, Karl... what about tonight?

Dedicated to those who recognize a hole in their soul and are willing to consider a relationship with their Creator God to fill the void.

November 2003. This story has been adapted and developed from an idea sent from someone over twenty five years ago. Because of the time elapsed I have been unable to trace the author in order to give proper credit.

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