

This Nowhere Man Is Here

Name Withheld

Editor's Note: *The following letter was written by a person who has been a Christian for over 30 years—a Christian who has desired little more in life than to walk with God. He writes to two close friends who have ministered to him. I publish this letter for three reasons: First, we see incredible value and beauty when one Christian sacrifices his time to refresh another who is stuck in a spiritual desert. Second, the letter articulates one Christian's personal journey that I know speaks for many, perhaps millions, who struggle in their relationship with God. Because a Christian's ability to abide in Christ and His love (John 15) is one of the devil's greatest fears, it's no wonder this writer says what he says. But certainly he is not alone. I am confident that many people—men and women alike—will read this letter while shaking (and crying) because parts of it, if not all of it, will hit very close to home. Finally, I publish this letter so you can pray for the writer and for others who have a profound desire to enter into God's rest as they prepare their hearts for eternity.*

If I'm honest with myself, though I know the Lord's taking care of me day after day in some very personal and merciful ways, I still see Him as somewhat uninvolved, distant. I often don't really believe He's leading. I see Him more as a responder, not an initiator. The Word sometimes seems simply like words, not specific, concrete, or personal. More like adages, platitudes (without substance), sort of far off and distant. And the Lord fulfills them in some sort of vague way. Yet I enjoy reading it and am often encouraged by it.

I'd like to think of Him as being more personally involved, but that's not my emotional picture of Him. I'd like to hope He's that way, but I don't really believe it. Of course the idea of Him being personal is also scary for me. So, I say I'd like to know Him more personally, but I'm also afraid of that.

Oswald Chambers said once in his early days of struggle (probably before he started writing any books), "Either Christianity's a fraud, or else I've got hold of the wrong end of the stick." Well, I don't think Christianity's a fraud, but I definitely don't have hold of the right end of the stick! If I even have the right stick . . .

Mackintosh, in referencing Romans 7 & 8, said that many think Rom. 7 is what God has in mind for the normal Christian life, when Romans 8 is what He really wants for us. That's where He wants to take us. Then he said something that stuck to my ribs: "However, it's better to be truly in Romans 7 than to be falsely in Romans 8." I thought, that explains my life.

I've often thought, if what I'm experiencing is the abundant life, then I don't think it's worth advertising . . . It helps me just to embrace what he said. Better to be truly in Rom. 7 than falsely in Rom. 8. Don't confuse the two. If Rom 7 is where you are, just be there. Don't try to be where you're not.

That's where I am, where I've always been. I live like an O.T. saint under the Old Covenant. There's very little difference between the way I live my daily life, and an O. T. believer endeavoring to live a holy life. I don't know what living my grace means. Functionally, in my daily life, I live under the ministry of condemnation, not the ministry of righteousness (I Cor. 3).

The Beatles had an old song called "Nowhere Man." *He's a real nowhere man, sitting in his nowhere land, making all his nowhere plans for nobody . . .* I used to run from that song every time I heard it because it hit too close to home and I didn't want it to be me. So I did what I could within my power to not be one, or to stop being one, or at least not appear as the one I really felt myself to be . . .

Well, the gig's up. Not that everybody else didn't already know. But that's what I am. I've failed at making anything out of my life (in the Kingdom or the world), or succeeding at anything, etc. Except for brief interludes, I've been directionless, passionless, scared, without capacity and just doing what I can to stay out of trouble, avoid guilt and shame, and try to stay under the radar and not be discovered for what I am—a "nowhere man." Vapid, like a hologram, having the appearance of substance, but there's really nothing there.

I used to run from that song, but now there's something relieving about simply

embracing it. I'm not saying that I have. Just let someone attack me and I will rush to defend myself. But there's a certain relief to the idea of accepting it. That's what I am. I've tried not to be, but without success. I've tried to hide it, but I keep being exposed. It would be nice if I didn't try to prove myself anymore. But I may redouble my efforts tomorrow and try harder in the weeks ahead.

Right now, I don't feel the desire to do anything particularly "spiritual," or pursue growing in Christ (which I've been trying to do for about 30 years) or try to accomplish anything, etc. I don't feel any urgency about the Kingdom, to do anything. It feels like a certain kind of "giving up," but I'm not sure if it's the good kind or the bad kind. Am I giving up to some degree on fleshly striving, or am I giving up on God and His promises?

Forget trying to get anywhere or do anything. Just talk with God, whether He feels close or far away. Things may change or they may not.

I project onto God (and others) the feelings I have for myself [contempt], then assume that they think about me the same way I do. Self-hatred is just another of my flesh's attempts to justify myself. Self-hatred is another form of self-righteousness. "Well, I may be bad, but at least I hate myself for it. And there's some virtue in that."

To love myself would leave me defenseless. One of my main methods of justifying myself/accepting myself is self-contempt. If I give up on that, I'm vulnerable. I would have one less thing left on which to build self-virtue. "OK, I'm a mess, and haven't changed for 30+ years, but at least I despise myself for it." (It feels like I'm agreeing with God.)

If I give up on that, and just be bad, without self-remedy, then I'd have nothing left to stand on. No self-protection, defenseless. Then my only hope would be if, per chance, God would forgive me/love me/accept me.

Giving up self-hatred feels scary. It's not my only weapon of self-righteousness, but it's a major one (especially since I can't seem to otherwise perform or "chin the bar" in life). Instead of attempting to rescue myself with that, my only hope would then have to be that God might rescue me.

For years, I've been trying to grow in Christ, know Him, walk in His life, His love, the power of the Holy Spirit, overcome bondages, etc. Not really because I want to know Him. I'm just trying to stay out of trouble. If when He comes back, I'm still a spiritual pigmy with puny fruit, I will have wasted His grace . . . I feel like I've made a run at this thing multiple times, but without success. And now, as I get older, the possibility looms larger that things may never change.

The other day, someone reminded me of the verse about when Jesus' disciples came back from their ministry and they were all excited that the demons were subject to them. Essentially, Jesus said, that's great, but don't rejoice/put your weight on the fact that the demons are subject to you, rather, simply rejoice in the fact that your names are written in the Book of Life. That was a pleasant thought.

Things may never change in this lifetime. I may stay the same "nowhere man" that I am now and never get one digit further. I may never live in Romans 8. But, 1) My name is written in the Book of Life, and 2) Today I have relative sanity and don't feel the torment that I felt months ago. I thank God for that. If that's all there is, that's plenty. And I will thank the Lord for His merciful rescue of me and His daily tender keeping of me—way beyond what I know.

Some would say that taking that attitude is simply settling for less than all that's mine in Christ—giving up on the good fight, throwing in the towel, just giving in to passivity and defeat.

Maybe it is.

Others would say that it's the right perspective. I don't know which it is. It's either flesh or Spirit, right or wrong. I don't know which. All I know is that it feels better to take that track for now. So maybe I'll try it for a while and we'll see what happens.

Again, how can I thank you both for your love and infinite patience with me this past year? No matter how many times you may have had "rage attacks" privately after you got off the phone with me or I stole another chunk of your day, you were always gracious toward me. You have been a hug from Jesus Himself.

I love you both.

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