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A Word from Woody. . .

Trying to Process Apostasy

The featured speaker at my seminary commencement in 1989 said something that puzzled me. He told us graduates that our gift to him will be that, should he call us years from now and ask how we are doing, we would still be walking in the faith. My thought was, "That's weird. . . we made it *this far* in our preparation for ministry, so it seems unlikely that any of us would fall away, right?"

Unfortunately, wrong. My personal experience has painfully born out that many in ministry leadership can and do fall away from the biblical faith. A public reminder of this has occurred in the recent revelations of Joshua Harris and Marty Sampson.

Harris is widely known for writing the 1997 best-seller *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. The book is reported to have a strong emphasis on purity before marriage. He later married and became the Senior Pastor of the mega-church Covenant Life Church in Maryland. Tragically, last July Harris not only announced he and his wife are divorcing, but also that he has left Christianity.

Sampson has been an influential worship music writer. He has worked with Hillsong Worship as well as Hillsong United, Delirious, and Young & Free. He has recently announced he is on shaky ground with his faith and feels he is losing it. He has expressed many doubts about Christianity.

How are we to process Harris' apostasy and Sampson's being near it? At least four things come to mind.

First, we should not be shocked by such news. Jesus was betrayed by one of His very own disciples, Judas. Peter three times denied he knew Jesus. Barnabas and Paul were abandoned on their first missionary journey by John Mark (Acts 13:13). This upset Paul so much that he refused to take John Mark on his next missionary journey (Acts 15:37-39). In one of his letters Paul mentions Hymenaeus and Alexander, two men who "suffered shipwreck in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:19-20).

Second, we need to acknowledge the reality that living the Christian faith is *hard*. In fact, it's impossible. This situation leads the psalmist to ask, "How can young people keep their way pure?" (119:9a). God calls us to His moral standard of holiness which for us in our fallen state is impossible. Our thought lives are to be pure. Sex is only for a man and woman in marriage. Our forgiveness of those who hurt us—

and those who *really* hurt us— is to be pure. We are called to have thankful hearts in the midst of adversity and **abandon our favorite "go to" four-letter word(s)**. We are to tell the truth even if it works to our detriment, and seek the best for those who hate us. We are to share the faith consistently with a world that is often disinterested and defiant. Such standards are impossible for us to live, and demand the need of a savior. When we acknowledge that, that is when God can enter our lives. He took the penalty for our sins, and if we let Him, will begin a work of holiness within us, in our characters. Sometimes I think God is not so much interested with what we do when we sin (although, of course He is), but *what we do after we sin*. Do we humbly, sincerely repent? Can we laugh at ourselves for the silly people we really are and receive His unconditional love? Do we extend His grace and mercy to

others when they, like Harris and possibly Sampson, fall away and pray for them, because we know we too stand on feet of clay? When we struggle with doubt do we intentionally pursue answers? Thus, **when someone says the "sinner's prayer" or joins the church, we should never think, "Mission accomplished". Rather, "Mission begun", because that is when the meaningful work of maturity in discipleship begins, and that lasts a lifetime.**

Third, we need to tether ourselves to God's Word.

That is why the psalmist answers his question above on **how to keep a young person's way pure: "By guarding it according to your word" (119:9b)**. Jesus similarly says, **"Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me"** (John 15:4). **When we abide in Jesus we will naturally abide in His Body, the church.** It is to Him and His church that we go when we fail, when we question, when we hurt, when we feel our lives are jumbled up messes that seem unredeemable. His Word reminds us of His unbreakable love that pursues us all our days.

Finally, we need to remember that for those who fall away and struggle, there is hope for them to return to the faith. We recall Peter was the featured preacher on the first Pentecost (Acts 2). And in his final letter Paul writes, **"Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry"** (2 Timothy 4:11).

I hope Harris and Sampson, will process these four truths. And I hope you and I do as well.

Yours in Christ,



Woody

Youth Corner

Putt-putting, A gain!

We had a great time last month in Gulfport, Mississippi at Gulf Islands Waterpark! The weather held up long enough to get down the necessary slides, but heavy rain made its way sure enough, seemingly just over the waterpark!

This month we will go to City Park for City Putt Miniature Golf from 3:00-5:00 PM on Sunday, September 29th. More information will be forthcoming. Please invite friends to this fun event!



Church Family Night

Church Family Night will return on Wednesday, September 4th! Our speaker will be Steve Hebert who will share his experience with AA.

The church will provide Popeye's red beans and rice as the main course for our meal from 6:00-7:00 PM and the speaker from 7:00-7:30 PM. Everyone is encouraged to bring a food item. The suggested donation is \$5 per person, no more than \$15 per family.

Have a Strong-willed Child?

Pastor Hingle will teach a parenting class beginning Tuesday, September 10th from 6:30-7:30 PM. This class **has eight meetings and is based on Dr. James Dobson's *The New Strong-willed Child: Surviving Birth Through Adolescence*** and the accompanying workbook. To register please contact the Church Office or register during Sunday morning worship.

Habitat ReStore Outreach

We have an opportunity to volunteer at the Habitat for Humanity ReStore in New Orleans (2900 Elysian Fields Ave.) on Saturday, September 28th from 8:00-12:00 Noon. This volunteer work is important, as the proceeds from the ReStore help fund the new homes being built for those in need. Please contact Pastor Woody for more information on this important outreach.



We Work and Play Together



Sermons for September

Pastor Hingle will continue his sermon series "The Good News for Life" on Sundays through September on the Gospel of John. On September 1st he will bring the message, "A Completely Unexpected Visitor" on John 6:16-21; on September 8th, "Which Bread Is Most Awesome?" on John 6:22-35; on September 15th, "God's Idea of Inclusivity" on John 6:36-45; September 22nd, "Three Reasons to Believe" on John 6:41-51; and September 29th, "A Passage that Troubles Every New Orleans Protestant" on John 6:52-59.

Welcome, New Member!

On Sunday, August 25th Beryl Lynn Jones became our newest Lake Vista UMC Family Member. Welcome, Beryl Lynn!



Storytime Corner



Prayer Focus

- ✚ Barbara Velasquez, health
- ✚ For The United Methodist Church to stay united under the final authority of Scripture and to follow the Book of Discipline
- ✚ Judith Martin, recovery from hip surgery
- ✚ Dee Fauchaux, recovery from fall

A Time for Guys' Fellowship!

A Time for Guys' Fellowship! Pastor Woody Hingle is leading a Men's Sunday School Class that meets in the Library at 9:45 AM, and we are currently studying the Gospel of Matthew. The men will have their supper gathering at New Orleans Hamburger and Seafood (817 Veterans Blvd.) on Tuesday, September 17th from 6:30

Church Clean-up Day

On Saturday, September 7th, we will meet from 10:00 AM-12:00 noon to clean up the church. Please come even if you can only stay an hour!

Addressing the Skeptic's

Our next meeting of the Skeptics class will be Friday, September 6th at 12:00 Noon in the Parlor. We will review atheist Duke University philosopher Walter Sinnott-Armstrong's book *Morality Without God?*, chapter 7, "What Do You Know?" All are invited!

New Worship Time!



On Sunday, June 23rd Lake Vista UMC experienced a shift in worship time from 10:30-11:30 AM to its new time of 10:45-11:45 AM. This time shift will continue at least through the month of September. The reason for this time shift is that Lakeshore

Church will be renting and using our sanctuary from 9:00-10:15 AM as they are in need of a larger worship space. They will also use three Sunday School classrooms during their worship time, and have an after-worship fellowship in our Fellowship Hall. Let's be sure this church knows how much we value their ministry for Jesus' Kingdom!

Prayer Walk Around the Neighborhood

This month's Prayer Walk is Friday, September 6th, 10:30-11:30 AM. Please join us for this important ministry.

Small Group Offerings

The SONrise Prayer and Communion service will meet on Wednesdays from 6:30-7:30 AM this month. The Wonderful Wednesday Bible studies will go over the previous Sunday's sermon meets at 7:00 PM, but will not meet on September 4th because of Church Family Night.

The S(tudy), P(ray), A(ct) Ladies' The SPA Ladies' will begin meeting at Debby Grimm's house early in September. Watch the bulletin for details.

Sunday School classes for women begin at 9:30 AM on Sunday mornings in the Fellowship Hall. Men's classes meet in the library at 9:45 AM. Youth meet in the Education Building, and children on the playground also at 9:45 AM. A nursery sitter is available for children during worship services.

Promotion Sunday Breakfast 9/8

Sunday, September 8 is the day we celebrate Promotion Sunday with a pancake Breakfast in the Fellowship Hall from 9:15-10:15 AM. Sunday School classes are cancelled on that day. A brief devotional will follow the breakfast. All are encouraged to attend!



A lighthouse for Christ in the heart of the lakefront.

Lake Vista

United Methodist Church

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