

"Life without a purpose is a languid, drifting thing; every day we ought to review our purpose, saying to ourselves, 'This day let me make a sound beginning.'"

—Thomas à Kempis

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At the Center of Everything

"Things fall apart. The center cannot hold," wrote W.B. Yeats in his famous, "The [Second Coming](#)," a short poem about the declining morality of the twentieth century. Using apocalyptic imagery and foreboding language, Yeats weaves a frayed tapestry of modern life, beginning with the relative stability taken for granted just before World War I to the fragmented identity of Western culture after it.

But even Yeats could not predict how relevant his poem would be to our contemporary culture. With the advent of relativism-based social philosophies, compounded with the universally disruptive catastrophe of 9-11, the first decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed further fragmentation, loss of center, and loss of meaning. These major shifts in cultural values, now reaching fruition, increase pressures on the church—and especially its young adults—to maintain a stable, dedicated [faith](#). We are quickly becoming singled out because we hold fast to our faith, because we have not given up [God](#) as our center.

To understand this "center," consider how we look at a painting.

Traditionally, and most obviously in religious art, there is a single, central image. For example, in Sebastien Bourdon's painting, *Moses and the Brazen Serpent*, the leader of the Israelites occupies the work's central position. Our eyes are immediately drawn to him; we quickly recognize that the painting is about him. The painting's other elements—the Israelites, the brazen serpent, and the landscape—direct our eyes back to the center, Moses. The entire painting, then, is seen in relation to Moses, who gives the rest of the painting meaning.

Metaphorically, relativism—which asserts that everything is equally central—has cut out the heart of the painting, Moses, and pasted him onto a new, blank canvas alongside other figures of great art, making the painting a collage. No order or any meaningful relationships exist between the figures; they merely share the same space. As a result, a viewer becomes lost in a maze of confusion, unable to determine the meaning of the patchwork painting. Whereas the original painting derived its significance from its center, Moses, the collage has no center, as it is a grab-bag of images lacking any central idea or meaning. The painting mimics our chaotic culture today, which places God on an equal plane with Allah, Brahma, Buddha, or any other deity from any culture, resulting in mass confusion over who or even what the true God is.

Though our culture swells with pride over how "tolerant" and "open-minded" it has become, this practice of de-centering is nothing new. In fact, it is as a fundamental [sin](#) of mankind, originating in Adam and Eve's decision to displace God with their own authority in the Garden. In the 1970s, Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher, attempted to validate Adam and Eve's sin through theory, creating a philosophical framework in which de-centering is not only advocated but asserted as the only option for "intelligent" thinkers. His destructive ideas seeped first into the English, Philosophy, and Theology departments of universities, eventually becoming one of several foundational ideas underpinning nearly all of "higher learning" today.

These ideas constitute what many call postmodernism, a vague concept many are still trying to define. Despite our inability to explain postmodernism, its consequences are clear and inescapable. These ideas are

anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-truth. Derrida's foundational assertion is that truth, if such a thing exists, could not be known, and even if it could be known, could not be uttered. This lays the foundation for multiculturalism, the concept that a nation is strengthened by its diversity rather than unity of culture.

Thus, as postmodernism cuts Moses from the center of the painting and places him in a collage, in America relativism devalues such founding documents as the Constitution, giving equal relevance to other texts, such as works by Confucius, Buddha, or Mohammed. Obama's current disregard for the Constitution is an example of such relativistic postmodern politics.

This phenomenon may have started in the academy, where professors in argyle sweaters and corduroy blazers bickered using pretentious jargon, but it has become a facet of our culture, especially in adolescent culture. High school and college students have become "tolerant" of any belief system so long as no one system ever assumes a central or sovereign position.

Young people are encouraged to "find themselves," to take spiritual journeys on which they pick up beliefs like souvenirs until their mental mantle is covered with more knick-knacks than a small-town thrift store. As a result, they become dabblers in many beliefs but adherents to none. After finding themselves, college students may feel connected to humanity on a universal, moral, and possibly even spiritual level, but they are, in actuality, lost, intoxicated by illusion, and stumbling in darkness, possessing no center and alienated from God.

Being inundated with calls to action to "create" or to "find" oneself, young adults in the church today must remember their unique position in God's eyes. Christ's prayer to the Father powerfully expresses just how special we all are to God, from the youngest to the oldest of the called (John 17). Unlike so many who experience intense anxieties and fears about "being someone who matters," we have been blessed by God with the invaluable gift of significance—not that we ourselves are special, but that God has chosen to make us special. If we accept His calling, we accept a role and a purpose with Him at the center. If we accept, we must acknowledge His foundational position, not only in our individual lives, but in all of life ([Colossians 1:16-17](#)). Through and within [Jesus Christ](#), our lives are given meaning.

For this incomparable gift, we must duly respond. Like the elements in the painting that both derive their significance from the central theme and direct the viewer's eyes to the center, our actions must express godly character, always pointing to Him ([Philippians 3:12-16](#)). Without this center, like the war-torn and fractured nations of the twentieth century that Yeats describes in his sorrowful poem, our lives will fall apart, slowly disintegrating into a combination of meaningless, unrelated, and futile events. Paul describes the person who lives without God as his center as possessing "futility of mind," being "darkened in understanding" and "alienated from the life of God" ([Ephesians 4:17-19](#)).

We must never neglect the purpose to which God has called us, forget the security we possess in Christ, nor appraise our lives as less than they are. God has offered Himself as our center, to provide us with a life full of meaning, [joy](#), and [peace](#), so that we may glorify Him. Because of this opportunity, we no longer have to navigate this evil age in search of some obscure notion of meaning. God has blessed us with the simple but overwhelming gift of knowing who we are and why we are here: to know that He is God and we are His people ([Exodus 6:7](#)).

- Staff

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Teaching of Jesus and Prophecy](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

God's called-out ones are so different from 'mainstream Christianity' that we have been branded as a crazy cult out of touch with the truth. Actually, members of God's Church are entirely in touch with the truth, assured that prophecies in God's Word are more certain than eye witness accounts, and that prophecy cannot be privately interpreted; the testimony of Jesus (the Good News of the Coming Kingdom of God) is the spirit (the governing ideas conveyed in Christ's words) of prophecy. In other words, the teaching of Jesus is the Key to Revelation, the keystone (or baseline of grace and

truth) balancing or buttressing the Law and the Prophets. The Olivet Prophecy (the testimony of Jesus) in Matthew 24 unlocks the meaning of the seals in Revelation and furthermore, the key (when coupled with Luke 24) to understanding the abomination that makes desolate. Jesus is the Revelator of all truth, holding the key to all understanding.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Prepare for Next Year's Feast!](#)

by Staff

The Feast of Tabernacles has passed for another year, and our hopefully positive experiences are fresh on our minds. We need to begin getting ready for the next festival *now*, providing a few areas of preparation we may well want to consider so we can call next year's Feast "the best ever."

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