

How to Live in a Post-Christian Society

by Rev. Bill Haley
Executive Director, Coracle



www.inthecoracle.org

@inthecoracle



In May 2014, I had the opportunity to preach on this question, and I did something I'd never done before and haven't done since. I wrote the sermon first as a long essay, writing it as completely as possible so I could get it all out on the page, and unsurprisingly it turned out being twice as long as the time allotted to preach it. So I went back through and cut it in half to preach, while the complete essay is what I preferred to offer. You can listen to the original sermon [here](#).

So here we are, in the middle of November 2020. Quite a bit has changed since that time, and yet in some larger cultural developments relating to religious life in America little has changed at all, except to accelerate in the direction things have been heading for the past couple of decades. A Pew Research Center poll from October 2019 leads with this headline, [“In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace”](#). Research conducted in November 2019 by the American Enterprise Institute drilled down into [“The decline of religion in American family life”](#) and has similar findings.

Who occupies the White House for four or eight years seems to do little to impact the larger trend of America moving further away from a dominant, cultural Christian worldview and ethic. I wrote this in 2014, could have written the same thing in 2018, and in 2022 could write the same thing with little change. So I offer it now as part of [Coracle's](#) initiative on [“Christian Discipleship and the 2020 Election”](#). Just because the election is over doesn't mean we stop thinking Christianly about our response of living as Christians now.

For us as Christians, whoever is inaugurated in January 2021 won't impact at all how we are called to live now and in the years to come. I offer some of those ways in the following essay.

By way of introduction and summary: How to live in a post-Christian society? The shortest, truest, quickest answer comes in two words: **Like Christ!** That answer will go a long way. But there's more to say of course. How do we as Christians live in this culture now and in the years to come? **Christians must have a common goal, play great offense and defense at the same time, and play as a team.** I conclude with what our emotional posture has to be along the way, and it's a fun one!

How To Live In a Post-Christian Society

I grew up in Chicago in the 1990s, when the Chicago Bulls were magnificent. This basketball team won six NBA titles in eight years, two three-peats. Under their Hall of Fame coach Phil Jackson, they were among the greatest teams in the history of the sport. Together, they accomplished what their great Michael Jordan couldn't by himself. They were a team. So it was Jordan, and Scottie Pippen, Dennis Rodman, Steve Kerr, Horace Grant, Toni Kukoc, John Paxson, Bill Cartwright, and others who created in the 90s what would become known and remembered as "The Bulls Dynasty", and 'unstoppa-bull.' They were.

Here's why— at least three reasons:

- 1) They had a common goal, that tall, gold-plated NBA trophy.
- 2) They played great offense *and* great defense at the same time.
- 3) They played as a team.

I find this image helpful as a metaphor as we consider "How to live in a Post-Christian Society." In answering that question, I want to offer these thoughts to three groups: to us as individual Christians, to local churches, and even to the Church in America in this moment.

How to live in a post-Christian society? Well, I suppose the shortest, truest, quickest answer comes in two words: **Like Christ!** That answer will go a long way. But there's more to say of course. How do we as Christians live in this culture now and in the years to come? **Christians must have a common goal, play great offense and defense at the same time, and play as a team.** I'll conclude with what our emotional posture has to be along the way.

So, what is the court we are playing on?

Call it what you will— post-Christian, pluralist, pagan— it’s obvious that American society has undergone profound cultural changes in the past 40-50 years, which have increased with dizzying speed, especially in the last decade. Even those who are elated with our society’s direction are surprised at how fast it’s happened, and those with a commitment to more traditional moral values and conservative religious teachings and traditions find themselves having to adjust to a new cultural landscape that is still rapidly moving off of what might be considered basic Christian foundations. **Post-Christian?** Maybe not when you look at the statistics of people who call themselves Christian. But increasingly when you look at the lifestyles and core beliefs of many Americans, it’s probably a good term to help us realistically assess the challenges to the Christian faith and Christian life.

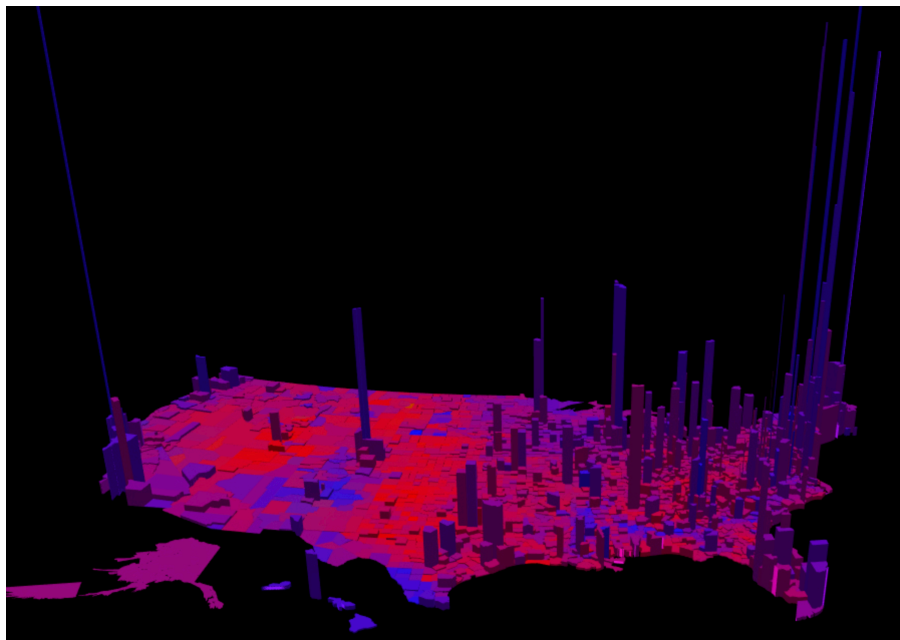
In 2013, the [Barna Research Group](#) evaluated the lifestyles of a randomly selected group of 43,000 Americans, and “*discovered that each generation is more post-Christian than the one that came before it. Only 28% of seniors are considered post-Christian, as compared to 35% of Boomers, 40% of so-called Generation X, and 48% of Millennials. Barna’s director noted that this type of research could serve as a glimpse into the ‘spiritual, moral and social future’ of the United States.*”

In the past couple of years, there’s been much press about the rise of the “None’s.” The Pew Research Center published [their findings](#) in late 2012 that “*the number of Americans who do not identify with any religion continues to grow at a rapid pace. One-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults under 30 – are religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling. In the last five years alone, the unaffiliated have increased from just over 15% to just under 20% of all U.S. adults.*” As these trends increase, America will increasingly be post-Christian.

A less loaded adjective to describe our society would be that it is increasingly a **Pluralist** society. From the dictionary, ‘pluralism’ simply means “*a situation in which people of different social classes, religions, races, etc., are together in a society but continue to have their different traditions and interests.*” Civil pluralism has been one of the great hallmarks and accomplishments of the United States— many different sorts of people living side-by-side in a common society— and this of course has and will increase as decades roll by. And this is not a bad thing; it’s part of what makes America great! *E Pluribus Unum*. “Out of Many, One.”

One thing we are not, at least in the ancient and technical use of the word, is a **Pagan** society. The word Pagan in English comes from the word “Paganus” in Latin, which translates as “rural” or “country-dweller”, with overtones of being uneducated and unenlightened. America is definitely not increasingly rural, rather, it is increasingly urban, and this has a fascinating effect on politics and worldview, easily seen in national elections.

Found in [this article](#) from *The Atlantic Magazine* and other places, one graph alone represents to me a certain sort of writing on the wall with regards to whether or not America will continue to head in a conservative or liberal direction.



It's been called "Red State, Blue Cities" and represents the voting record for the 2012 presidential election. You see that the number of Democratic voters are highly centralized in major urban centers, "blue cities," with vast swaths of rural America voting Republican, giving the appearance of "red states."

Like the rest of the world, America is [increasingly urban](#), more people are living in cities and continue to come to cities to live, making metropolitan areas larger. This trend shows no change. [Urbanization is the way the world goes](#); it's the way our country has gone, is going, and will go. This is not bad news, and it does mean that over time our population will likely continue to trend more liberal, not because of ideology but rather simple sociology. It's been noted, I think rightly, that it's not people who make cities liberal; rather, cities make people more liberal.

Whichever term you choose to describe America— Post-Christian, Pluralistic, or Pagan— **the fact that we've been undergoing massive societal change with remarkable rapidity seems undeniable, with little indication that it's slowing down.** And with this change, for better or for worse, Christianity that is orthodox in its belief and historically consistent in its morality is increasingly a minority position and is currently an increasingly unpopular notion for the general public, especially among the younger generations.

The Invitation

Now, this essay is no hand-wringing Jeremiad or lament. It's just observation. **The glad invitation is that we get to be Christians in this age!** Sure there are challenges, but friends, it's all opportunity. With joy we shout with C.S. Lewis, "*Further up and Further in!*" Let us live with joy deeper inward, further outward, and higher upward!

I've said it before and will say it again: there's some really good news here! These are the early days for Christians in America. For the first generation in our

history, **we can read the New Testament as if it was written for a culture like ours**— where Christians are in a minority in their culture and live more on the margins of common society. We can read the New Testament letters as if they were written actually to us, and of course they are. We can understand what it's actually saying and live the way God is actually calling us to live. Paul and the others who wrote the New Testament were writing to a people who were a minority in their pre-Christian culture, in fact more of a minority than we'll ever be. Christianity was not a dominant cultural narrative in their time, as it has been for a long time in America.

So how do we as Christians live in this culture now and in the years to come? Let's remember the Chicago Bulls. They had a common goal, a great offense and defense, and were on the same team. Thus for us...

Our Common Goal

Our common goal as individual Christians, local communities, and the universal church is not complex, nor is it single-layered. It is a great invitation, and there's nothing negative or reactive about it. Our common goal for us is good news!

For those who believe in Jesus, individually and corporately, our first job is to give Jesus our whole lives for our whole lives, to deepen and mature and grow in our own discipleship and life with Jesus. Nothing lasting or strong happens without this. The first goal of our Christian life is a real relationship with Jesus that is ongoing and increasing in its intimacy.

And then our goal is to bear witness to Jesus however we can and as often as we can, through our words and through our actions.

And then we are to grow the Kingdom of God in the power of Jesus for the good of the world, now and as a pointer to the Kingdom that will come in fullness when Jesus Christ comes back.

Putting these together, our common goal as Christians alone and together is **to give our whole lives to Jesus, bear witness to Jesus, and grow the Kingdom of God in the power of Jesus.** In short, our common goal is to glorify God, that is to say, to manifest his character through our lives and give him our praise.

Why? Because the God revealed to us in the Bible and through Jesus is real— he’s true, he’s great, he’s good, he’s powerful, he’s Love! This is in no way impacted by a culture which can’t see it, or a culture that makes it hard for us to see that too. Our common goal is to glorify God and his Son Jesus in the power of the Spirit. When we do this well, we win, and God is responsible both for the cultural outcome and for our reward.

What does Christianity playing a good offense and a good defense look like today?

Playing offense is when you’re trying to move the ball down the court, when you’re trying to make progress. Defense is when you’re trying to protect something that’s valuable, when you’re trying not to lose ground. The best teams play great offense and great defense at the same time (this is critical), in the same game. It’s time for Christians both to circle the wagons and to get aggressive in outreach.

Before going through the following things we need to do,¹ highlighting some a bit more than others, we need to affirm that Christians don’t do these things primarily for cultural impact. Rather, **these things are simply what Christians do, for no other reason than God tells us to do them in Scripture and that we are compelled to do them because of the glorious truth of Jesus Christ.** This is how we should respond in any culture, whether we find ourselves in a majority, or as in these days, a “prophetic minority.” None of these suggestions are particularly odd Scripturally, and none of them, rightly understood, are particularly onerous.

¹ It’s also helpful perhaps to consider Jeremiah 29, the whole chapter, as a background to this essay. See also [Q’s Instructions for Exile](#)

Because of the great goodness and glory of God, because of who he is and what he's done for us in Christ, **we get to do these things!** They're all invitations, all the time! What a great life God has called us to!

Offense

The church playing good **offense** in a pluralistic society would include these things, and I'm sure you can add some too. These are hallmarks of a good Christian offense.

Paul gives us a first hallmark in 1 Corinthians 9. Remember that the Christians he was writing to were more of a minority in their culture than we'll ever be in ours.

1. We must **share the good news of Jesus Christ**: Paul was passionate about this. These verses answer the questions "With whom?" and "How?" and "Why?"

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

(1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

With whom did Paul want to share the gospel? Everybody and anybody, those who were like him and those who were different than him. Jew, Gentile, the weak, it didn't matter, Paul wanted them to know the good news about Jesus— that he was God come in flesh, that he died so that our sins could be forgiven, was raised on the third day by the power of God, and is coming back to claim the whole world, and we can have eternal life in him. The encouragement to us in this is that everybody and anybody is for us an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus, whether or not they are like us or agree with us.

How did Paul share the gospel? Verse 19— by servanthood. This is very important because it's all about our posture, attitude, and tone. Paul evangelized by being a servant, putting himself under those he was hoping to tell about Jesus. This sounds a lot like Jesus himself of course. For Paul evangelism was not primarily done through

persuasion (though he did a lot of that), or his own powerful presence, or through force or argumentation or coercion. Rather, by putting himself under those to whom he was speaking, he communicated the gospel of the one who came as a Servant. So we can take from this that our posture in evangelism— including with those who disagree with us and are not like us— is the posture of a servant, and servants are humble. Servants serve.

Why did Paul do this? Verse 23— for the sake of the gospel itself, and that Paul might have many more brothers and sisters to share in the goodness of God with. He did it not only for their sake, but for his own sake, and for Jesus’ sake.

2. We must offer **acts of love and service to those around us**: When people know that you care about them, they’re so much more willing to hear what you have to say.² However, the point of loving people well and serving them well is not to gain a hearing, but rather because this is simply what Christians do and what Jesus calls us to.
3. We must **love each other**: Jesus promises us, straight from his own lips in John 13.35, “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” Christians holding together and loving each other well speaks loudly.
4. We must **offer radical care for the poor and work for justice**: This is one of the main ways the early church went from a pre-Christian minority in its own day to a dominant cultural force.³ They didn’t care for the poor for this purpose... that’s just the teaching of Jesus and the Bible. Every individual personal matters infinitely to God because he loves them and wants the best for them. And that’s why we love those who are impoverished, on the margins, and subject to injustice. Because we love people. And, in the early

² Jack Kemp: “People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.”

³ World Vision Magazine, “[Serve the Poor, Grow the Church](#)”; and Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity*

church, profound cultural impact was the effect, but it was secondary to simple love.

5. We need to **do good works**: Again, straight from Jesus, who said this in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5.16, “*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*”

6. We must **stand firm in our Christian faith and morals**:⁴ In a culture that celebrates things that lead to brokenness and death, what Christianity offers is healing and life. Christianity offers a profoundly compelling alternative to those trapped and wounded by our culture of death. So we must stand firm in what historical Christianity is and always has been, a rock to cling to in tumultuous seas. In the words of Stanley Hauerwas, the church is to be “a colony of life in the culture of death.” In a culture like ours, this on its own is outreach.

7. We must **live lives of luminosity**: We ought to always display an inner radiance that is the result of Jesus living inside of us by his Spirit, such that when people are around us, they feel somehow that they are in the presence of God. This is what Paul speaks of when he talks about us being “the aroma of Christ.”⁵

⁴ 1 Corinthians 16.13: “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”

⁵ 2 Corinthians 2.15-16 “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?”; see also: John 15.1-9, and the concept of Theosis...

8. We must **be people of deep prayer** and petition: And while we pray for various people, problems, and situations we read about in the news, it's also right and good to pray for revival in our country, for the sake of her people and God's glory.

9. We must **know the whole Gospel and communicate it**:⁶ God's good news includes individual salvation and still is so much more than individuals being forgiven so that we might have eternal life. The Gospel in its four chapter fullness—Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation—is a profoundly compelling and attractive vision when deeply understood and well-communicated. We communicate the whole Gospel through both words and deeds.⁷

10. We must **work for the common good**⁸ **with our vocations**⁹ **for human flourishing**:¹⁰ What we do with our work, paid and unpaid, is a profoundly important part of God's plan for his Shalom to fill the world, for the flourishing of individuals and societies.

This also means we should **make common cause**¹¹ **for the common good and human flourishing**. Christians don't have a corner on working for the things on God's heart. Working with others to address God's concerns will not only see good work get done, but it will also bring us into meaningful contact with those who have yet to believe in Christ.

⁶ See Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*; and also the works of NT Wright and Tim Keller

⁷ Sojourners, "[To the Dying Church: Use Your Words](#)"

⁸ See the works of Andy Crouch, including *Culture-Making* and "[What's So Great about the Common Good?](#)"

⁹ See Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*; Ben Witherington, *Work*; and others on the topic of Vocation

¹⁰ See Bill Haley, "[On Work and Human Flourishing](#)"

¹¹ See Peter Kreeft, *Ecumenical Jihad*

11. Churches must **offer a strong parish life of welcome and worship**. Nicky Gumbel [recently said](#), and I think he's right, *"People will come to church for many reasons, but they will stay for only one - friendship."* I've heard more than one person come to church not as Christians, but the worship and community they experienced led them to become Christians.

Defense

While we're playing good offense, at the same time we must play great **defense**. A danger we face is to emphasize one at the expense of the other. While we're reaching out, we also must dig in deeply. We must, individually and corporately, protect what is valuable to us and valuable to a flourishing society and people, and steward well the inheritance of faith and what God has revealed to us in the Bible and through Christ.

These are hallmarks of a good defense for the Church.

1. It's both good offense and good defense to have a **rich corporate worship and a strong parish life**. This helps sustain us, week by week. The author of [Hebrews in 10.25](#) tells us not to neglect meeting together and encouraging each other, all the more as time goes by. Showing up in church on Sunday matters, even if it takes different forms!
2. We must continually **deepen our personal discipleship**: The church is only going to be as strong as its members.
3. We must conscientiously **cultivate the spiritual and character formation of our children**: The inheritance of faith is one of the greatest gifts we can give to our kids, and statistics show that most people come to their faith at a young age. So that command of God to his people Israel in Deuteronomy 6.4-7 is as relevant to us as them,

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

4. We must continue to form **counter-cultural communities, both as alternatives to the prevailing culture of death and also as agents of the preservation of Christian teaching and morals.**¹² For many years I’ve been struck and formed by the insights of Alasdair MacIntyre at the end of his book, [*After Virtue*](#). He’s reflecting on general parallels between ancient Rome and contemporary America. He published the book in 1981 and I imagine would say the same thing now, even more so...

“A crucial turning point in that earlier history occurred when men and women of good will turned aside from the task of shoring up the Roman imperium and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that imperium. What they set themselves to achieve instead... was the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness. If my account of our moral condition is correct, we ought also to conclude that for some time now we too have reached that turning point... This time, however, the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time.”

¹² The Clapham Sect, along with William Wilberforce, of 18th and 19th century England remains a strong and enduring example of this. See [“Wilberforce and His Circle of Friends”](#) and other resources.

5. We must know, really know, that **our deepest identity is in God and our primary citizenship is in heaven**: Paul says in Philippians 3.20 that “*our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*” When we call to mind this constant New Testament theme, we are much more able to weather the diminishment of the earthly countries we are citizens of and deeply love. When we recall that our primary identity is in Christ and home is in heaven, our hope, and the locus of our stability, is in the right place, and we are solid. What we have now and inherit doesn’t shake.
6. We must be **willing to endure loss and suffering, even gladly**: Jesus in [Mark 10.30](#)– and then the whole New Testament– promises Christian suffering and persecution and doesn’t just tell us not to be surprised by it, but even– like in [1 Peter 1.3-9](#)– to rejoice in it! To expect suffering and loss for the sake of Christ and not be surprised by it, prepares us to be able to gladly endure it and persevere.
7. We must **fight against dehumanization and the destruction of life**:¹³ The forms this takes in our current society are legion. Christians must be those who fight for the dignity of every human life from conception to natural death... and at every stage in between, for all people, and all individuals. Christians must not only be pro-life, but [consistently pro-life](#), concerned about the welfare of children after they’re born, and concerned about the whole life of adults, not just how they die.

¹³ See The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “[The Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching](#)”

8. We must **have and demonstrate strong marriages and vibrant celibacy**:¹⁴ In a culture of divorce and hook-ups, fidelity and purity will not only lead to our own happiness, but also shine like a beacon to those hurting themselves in the dark and give them a way out.
9. Finally, to protect what is valuable we must **remain clear on the Bible's teaching**. There's little worse, when a ship is sinking, than to hoard the lifeboats. How we do this, however, matters. That is to say, Tone Matters.

In 2014, I attended a wonderful annual conference simply called Q, which was led by its founder Gabe Lyons. He posed four excellent questions we as Christians can be asking in this our moment in this our society: *What is wrong? What is confused? What is good? and What is missing?* And Gabe provided excellent answers to the answers we find for those questions.

To those things that are wrong, Christians must stop and confront.

To those things that are confused, Christians must clarify and compel.

To those things that are good, Christians must celebrate and cultivate.

To those things that are missing, Christians must create and catalyze.

In short, we must play great offense and great defense, at the same time.

The Dream Team

And the great news is we're **on the same team** with other Christians, and we have a lot of great teammates. Who are they? They are those who have been filled with the Spirit of Jesus because of their faith in Jesus, the Son of God. They are those who believe in the incarnation of Christ, in his death and resurrection, and in his coming again. They are those who hold to the orthodox Christian faith, genuinely affirming its Creeds. They are those who believe that God's word in the

¹⁴ See Christopher West, [Theology of the Body for Beginners](#)

Bible is the highest authority, and authoritative. This is not divided along denominational lines, but is rather more about actual faith than any particular form or Christian tradition. Our team includes the Roman Catholics,¹⁵ and the Eastern Orthodox in its many forms, and our brother and sister Anglicans across the world. We are on the same team and what unites us is overwhelmingly greater than what divides us.

In the last 15 months or so I've been in Burma, Congo, and China, and in every case the orthodox Christians there— and I'm thinking specifically of Anglicans and Catholics— had a profound unity both relationally and missionally, for the simple reason that in those countries Christians are a persecuted minority, and their cultural challenges are huge and the stakes high. **Denominational division amongst Christians is not only a scandal but a luxury**, and we're losing that luxury in our day, thanks be to God! The forcing together of God's people in our day is one of the great blessings growing from the challenges we're facing in our broader culture.¹⁶

So how do we live in a Post-Christian society? How do we play on this court that we didn't choose but that God has given to us?

Christians have a common goal, a great need to play great offense and defense at the same time, and we get to play as a team.

On the far side of complexity is simplicity. Most simply, **in this day like any day, we're to live like Christ, really, and nothing less.**

¹⁵ See Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*; and [this Washington Post profile of their efforts 20-yrs later](#).

¹⁶ See First Things, "[The Uncertain Future of Protestantism](#)"

What Do We Feel?

Three emotions come to mind as we seek to be faithful Christians in post-Christian America, and the first is grief.

Grief: I love my country of America, and I'm grieved, deeply, by where it is and where it seems to be going. I don't think our nation's direction is leading to human flourishing either for individuals or for our society, and our capacity to be a blessing to the world has and is diminished. If I were an American first and a Christian second, I might be tempted to despair. As it is, I grieve.

I fear that, using the language of [Romans 1](#), somewhere in the past decades, God has given us over as a country to our lusts and greed and arrogance, and this in part explains the speed of the cultural shift we've observed in the last decade, a dark snow-ball effect. It is bitterly ironic and short-sighted that a large part of what has made this country great is becoming increasingly unwelcome in it. I grieve what feels to be the squander of several centuries of God's favor and God's blessing to America. I grieve those whose lives are and will be wrecked because they were sold a lie. This leads to our next emotion.

Compassion: We must have compassion on those who are being wounded and broken in a culture that increasingly confuses the ways of death with pathways to life. Maybe these folks are wounded by their own hand, or by the hand of another... it doesn't matter. The church has to be a place of grace and not judgment, clear in our invitation to healing through Christ, new life in Christ, and a better life with Christ, both now and forever. It's been said before, and I agree, that the image that best captures the vocation of the church in these and coming days is that of a field hospital.

The third emotion we as Christians need and get to have in this moment is the strongest and brightest! It's **JOY! JOY!** Back in 2014, I took a spiritual

retreat, to pray about many things, and among them was to confess to God a low-grade but relatively constant state of discouragement when I thought of the state of the country and the state of the church. I told God, “I’m tired of being bummed out about all this.” And God has been giving me new eyes to see old truths in new ways and believe them again anew, and the result has been a new Joy. This has come from encountering again the brightness of the Gospel itself, and from simply being reminded about the reality in the second coming of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Lover, who will come.

In 2013, Pope Francis wrote a letter called simply, *[The Joy of the Gospel](#)*, and I found the first five pages about just that– the joy of the Gospel– to be convicting, inspiring, even thrilling, and heart-changing. It’s nothing new, but it was a powerful reminder. He writes, “*The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner-emptiness, and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew... The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ’s cross, constantly invites us to rejoice... our Christian joy drinks of his brimming heart.*” The good news of Jesus Christ sets all other news in a different perspective. Christians of all people ought to be the most joyful! This takes so many forms, but the deepest essence of our faith is joyful, optimistic, and expectant.

Speaking of expectant, I’ve been newly convicted that I’m not looking forward enough, or farther ahead enough, to the second coming of Jesus. Yes, Yes, Yes! Jesus is coming back and the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. Jesus has already won the battle!

Regardless of whatever else happens on this earth,
it's not the end of the story.

Regardless of whichever direction our culture goes or how far,
it's not the end of the story.

Regardless of whatever price I have to pay for Jesus and his Gospel,
it's not the end of the story.

The end of the story is that Jesus is coming back. He's already won, and he's got the world, and our country, well in hand for his purposes. And he'll make it right, whatever the "it" is. There is great joy when we touch again that deep truth; it is a central aspect of the hope of the Gospel. Jesus will return and claim the whole world and his own, as his own. With this great hope there is great joy! I heard a preacher say a few weeks ago, "Of all the people who don't need to freak out over the state of the world or culture... it's us!" And she was right, deeply right. So, I say to myself, looking at a shifting cultural landscape, *"No moping, Haley! Jesus is coming back! Now and til he does, get down to the business of living like him. And don't forget the breadth and glory of what he's done."* No moping Church! Jesus is coming back! Now and til he does, let's get down to the business of living like him. Let's never forget the breadth and glory of what he's done.

I started this essay with the story about those champion Chicago Bulls, who had a common goal, played great offense and great defense at the same time, and who played together as a team. Someone might say, "Well, they had Michael Jordan! I'm no Michael Jordan."

Their coach Phil Jackson remembers¹⁷ back to when Jordan first came on the team, and the other players on the team were so intimidated and dazzled by him that even during real games they often would actually stand back just to see what

¹⁷ Phil Jackson, [Sacred Hoops](#)

Jordan was going to do next. If he had the ball, they wouldn't call for the ball. They relied on him to win the game for them. And for seven years, they couldn't take a championship. Jackson's first task in his coaching was to convince the other players that they had a real part to play on the team, and to do it, and that without them, they weren't going to reach their goal.

Friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, fellow followers of Jesus... we each have our part to play in this moment in our society, this moment which God has given to us, not another. And we've all got to play our part... until we meet Jesus, one way or the other, and we will. And then we'll get to hear those words which are far more valuable than any NBA trophy or anything that rusts or fades, those words, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*" Amen.

Maranatha! Amen!



For Reflection and Discussion:

- 1) How do you understand this moment in American society relative to Christianity?
- 2) What do you think the common goal for the Church in America should be?
- 3) Which part of offense and defense are you most drawn to? Which do you find most challenging?
- 4) How can you cultivate Joy?

Rev. Bill Haley is Executive Director of [Coracle](#), a ministry that exists to inspire and enable people to be the presence of God in the brokenness of the world through Spiritual Formation *for* Kingdom Action.

Some of this happens at Corhaven, a retreat home in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia near Mt. Jackson; some of it happens in the Washington, D.C. metro area and throughout the mid-Atlantic; some of it happens around the country and around the world.

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