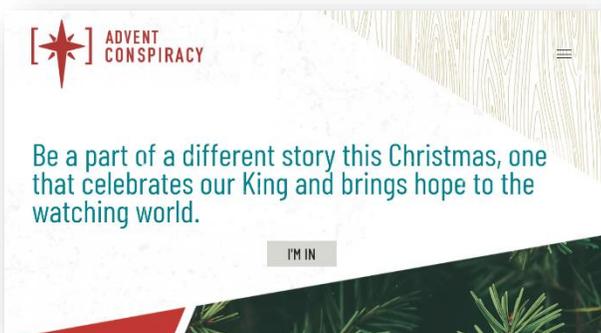


Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

December 4, 2018

Well, here we are in the first week of Advent, 2018. Welcome to the pre-Christmas whirlpool.

Some of you may have noticed in the previous sentence that I used the word "Christmas" instead of my usual "CHRISTmas." That was intentional. The "pre-Christmas whirlpool" doesn't apply to CHRISTmas.



In this year, as in every year, I invite you to join "the Advent Conspiracy" of those whose focus during December is centered on the Hope that we have in Jesus/Yeshua, God's Messiah and our Redeemer, and not on gift lists and blatant materialism.

I read an interesting article in last month's *Christianity Today* that suggested a novel framework for thinking about this year's "conspiracy." The article centered around the metaphor of "strengthening your core."¹

I'm no exercise expert (although I do recognize exercise two times out of three 😊), but I know that in this sense, "core" has to do with abdominal strength. As I understand it, most of our basic and essential movements such as bending, lifting, sitting, standing, walking, running, etc. depend on musculature related to our "core." The core supports and stabilizes the spine and directs power to our arms and legs. "Core training" focuses on strength, mobility, flexibility, and stability, and each of these plays a vital role in our overall health and ability to function.

Beyond general physical health, though, we humans have no way to communicate with God except through the cells of our bodies. While we have very little understanding of the mind-body-spirit connections and how they work, it seems clear to me that our physical bodies are the "antennae" through which we experience not just time and space, but the transcendent and the divine as well. We are wise to take good care of our "antennae."

At the same time, for those who follow Jesus/Yeshua, there is another "core" even more



¹ This column was inspired by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Core Exercises: How Focusing on Our Theological Center Helps Us Remember Who We Are," *Christianity Today*, November 2018, 46-50. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/november/theological-core-exercises-kevin-vanhoozer-discipleship.html>

central and crucial to our lives. It is this core of which Paul spoke when he wrote that “*I pray that [God] may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, **to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit**, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*” (Ephesians 3:16-17a). How might we strengthen that core?

In his essay, Vanhoozer suggests three avenues for spiritual “core development.” These avenues have to do with how we **think**, how we **behave**, and how we **relate** to others. Here’s how he puts it: “The best way to strengthen our core is to attend diligently to the convictions, choices, and relationships that define us, all of which involve attending and responding to the Word of God.” Let’s look at each of these briefly. . . .



Cognition & Belief. One cannot believe “just anything” and call oneself a “Christian” or a follower of Jesus/Yeshua. While the *Apostles’ Creed* and the *Nicene Creed* are important and ancient statements of essentials, some of the even more ancient New Testament statements of core convictions include John 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

Yet while the content of our belief is indeed important, *a personal relationship with God through Jesus in the power of the indwelling Spirit is more important.* Knowing about God is no substitute for knowing God (Matthew 7:23; James 2:19). One of the ways in which such “core strengthening” might be done this Advent is to dedicate significant time to reading God’s Word.

Volition & Behavior. Pastor Andrew and I had an extended discussion today pondering the importance of belief as reflected in personal behavior. Who we really are is reflected—and determined—far more by how we choose to live than by how we choose to believe.

C. S. Lewis put it well when he wrote that “**Every time you make a choice [all day long, every day] you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before.**” That includes the four weeks of Advent; and you’re probably familiar with these words from Edgar Guest:

I’d rather see a sermon
 than hear one any day;
I’d rather one should walk with me
 than merely tell the way.
The eye’s a better pupil and
 more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing,
 but example’s always clear;
And the best of all the preachers
 are the [ones] who live their
 creeds,
For to see good put in action
 is what everybody needs.

**Choose
well.**



Flexibility & Relationships. Finally, being in meaningful relationship is one of the most central ways in which we have been created “in the image” of God. One of the fundamental things we know about God as Father, Son, and Spirit (or Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer) is that joyful relationship is at the Very Center of what IS.

And in terms of human relationships, at least, being able to demonstrate the flexibility of “give and take” in relationship is one of the essentials to lasting relationship. Being in a meaningful relationship takes TIME, whether that relationship is with a friend, a spouse, or with God.

Baptist philosopher, Dallas Willard, whose writings challenge and enrich my life, liked to ask people, “Are you a *friend* of Jesus?” which is a question, not about doctrine, but about relationship (cp. James 2:23). What would it look like for you to take your friendship with God to a higher level during this Advent?

Dave



The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son,
our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Amen.

The earliest form of the creed is c. A.D. 140;
the present form is from c. A.D. 600.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified
under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge
the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped
and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic
and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

A.D. 325, 381