

It seems to the youth that up till now he has been traveling on a flat, straight freeway—but one without exits. He looks directly ahead, traveling in a straight line. Everything is clean and simple. Point A to Point B. ■ Now, as he approaches the mile marker for early manhood, exits off the thoroughfare are beginning to appear.

Exits



Dark Imaginings

THE WORLD BEYOND HIS DOORSTEP is opening to him, and with that, alternatives. Philosophies in opposition to one another are now being discovered, entertained, sampled. The freedom to linger with darker imaginings has become an aphrodisiac, feeding a hunger for the fantastical, the strange—anything foreign to what has been familiar.

Throughout, his Savior remains real to him—but now Jesus has competitors.

From the youth's point of view, it seems that from the beginning Jesus has been leading him by the hand, taking him down a path illumined by the light of His grace. The roadbed has been flat, obvious, straight. But now, it seems to him, Jesus has let go of his hand, freeing him to sojourn off the path, to take a few of the exits that beckon so pleadingly.

Just as he is beginning to strain against the path set by his parents—a path in which, oddly enough, he has heretofore found comfort and security—the youth strains against what he perceives to be the myopic restrictions of a life in Christ.

His Jesus has become conventional, ordinary. Like someone whose favorite childhood uncle is now an embarrassment to him, the youth behaves as if he no longer wishes to be seen with Jesus. He keeps Him tucked away, out of sight, where no one might ask after His well-being.

And so, while he still has a Savior, he no longer acknowledges Him as Lord.

Knowing Him

Growing Pains

As with any relationship that expands beyond harmless pleasantries, the youth is discovering that Jesus' love for him, though constant, is not as simplistic as he had first thought. As he draws closer to adulthood, he begins to recognize the intricate subtleties in his parents. He now sees them not just as Mom and Dad, but as adults moving through the many layers of their own world. And as he becomes older, he understands that his relationship with his parents is undergoing a change.

Just so, with his gathering maturity comes the realization that Jesus is not the simplistic stick-figure of his childhood. The kindness and forgiving love expressed in the Sunday School flannel-graph stories are not untrue, but are just the beginnings of who his Savior truly is. He sees now that there is an undiscovered depth to Christ's personality, to His relationship with the Father, and to His relationship with him.

But the youth is not ready for this. Rebellion simmers in his heart. He is fast becoming a young man, and the tectonic upheavals within him are tearing asunder not just his own self-regard and his earthly relationships, but his relationship with Jesus.

Answers to his misgivings—when he has them—are no longer immediate or simple. More often than not his queries spawn only more questions followed closely by an even deeper confusion.

The youth knows that *he* is changing, but he wonders if Jesus is changing as well? Is Jesus changing their relationship?

Has Jesus changed His mind about him?

Off the Path

I look for a static, placid Jesus, but He is not to be found. The hippie, flower-child Jesus with which the world is enamored does not exist. The *real* Jesus has far more dimensions than the impotent love beads and granola puppet the world would have as savior.

"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Matthew 10:32-34

If Jesus is my steady companion, what is His response when I go my own way—when I leave the path He has set for me? What is His answer to my sin?

"Neither do I condemn you;
go and sin no more."



The woman had not just gone off the path of righteousness, but had been found out, and her sins publicly exposed.

Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act."

John 8:2-4 NKJV

By Jewish custom and law, this woman and her partner had sinned egregiously. In her time and place (so very different from my own), the punishment for her offense was clear and straightforward.

"If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death."

Leviticus 20:10

This was a highly charged, *political* moment. The point of this public confrontation was not the woman at all. She was but the bait in a sordid trap set to catch and accuse this inconvenient Teacher. The purpose of the extracurricular court session was not for the authorities to get the woman, but for them to get Jesus.

They said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him.

John 8:4-6a NKJV

One does not outwit the Son of God, and Jesus easily dispatched the troublemakers by making just one, rather annoying challenge.

When they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."

John 8:7 NKJV

The conspirators took their leave in disgrace, leaving Jesus alone with the woman.

When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord."

John 8:10-11a NKJV

Forgiveness

In my moments of sorrow over sin I have committed, when I have come before the Lord and fallen on my face to confess my transgressions against Him, it is not God's scorching wrath I feel coming down upon me from heaven. It is not holy anger, retribution or punishment.

It is the compassionate, forgiving love of Jesus.

And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

John 8:11b NKJV

The world's idea of a simpering, milquetoast Jesus would have Him say, "There, there. You didn't do anything so bad. You're a good girl at heart. Many others have done worse. You just go back home and forget all about those nasty men."

But the *real* Jesus knew not only about the sin in which she had been caught, but all the other still-private sins of her heart. And when I feel His warm, comforting arms around my shoulders, Jesus is not diminishing or dismissing the wrong I have done. He is acknowledging it—and forgiving it. He is picking me up off the floor and dusting me off.

He is turning me back in the right direction—from the side road I have been on, back to the straight highway of His path—and encouraging me to "Go, and sin no more."

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