COMPASS CHECK

Helping you point your spiritual compass toward God



BORN INTO THE Church

A DIFFERENT KIND OF CALLING

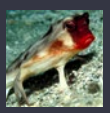
When Is God Going to Call Me?

The Amazing Sunflower Defies Darwinian Evolution

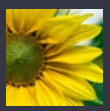
How Do You Get Recurring Sins Under Control?

"You've Goat to be Kidding Me!"
Strange Animals Designed by God

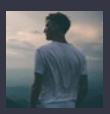
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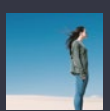
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COMPASS CHECK

Compass Check is a biblically based magazine for young people of the United Church of God, *an International Association* (UCG*IA*) aged 12-18. Our name, *Compass Check,* describes youth pointing their spiritual compass toward God.

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The goal of *Compass Check* is to inspire Church youth, ages 12-18, to respond to the gospel message.

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COMPASS CORNER

Dear Compass Checkers,

Not long ago I saw this vanity plate (or something akin to it since I only had a few seconds to see it while driving) on the back of an ultra-cool looking red Corvette. This 'vette had to be valued at around $70,000. I'm waiting at a stop light directly behind this all-American beast of a sports car, in my high-mileage and not-so-fancy SUV. Was I envious? No. But did I want to drive this sleek car? Of course!

The last time (and only time) I've ever driven a 'vette was when my brother-in-law offered me to drive his shiny red Corvette when I was around 16 (yes, just got my license). It was a lot of fun to drive, and the cool factor was off the charts! But I pulled out in front of a car, pushed too hard on the gas pedal, and almost ended up going off the road. My ego was shot, but I managed to get this American icon back to him without a scratch. Lesson learned: Fast cars and inexperienced drivers are not a good mix!

But let me come back to the vanity plate. This encounter got me thinking about what the vanity plate was referring to—"Living the Dream." It's a phrase we have all heard. It generally means the person is pretty happy about his or her life. A good friend and I tease one another about "living the dream," but neither of us drives a sleek sports car. He drives a family sedan and a well-worn SUV like mine. But we both are truly living the dream.

How about you? I hope you are. I want to share one key about how to live the dream.

You are writing your own "dream" story now—make sure it is a good one. Each of you has a story to tell and it is being written every day of your life. Yes, God has a "dream" for you. God and you together will write your story—if you seek Him in your life. Notice this in Jeremiah 29:11-13 (New International Version): "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to



Jeanette Rich

harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

I find this truth so inspiring. God will help all of us write our dream story. But this means making God number one in your life ("seek me with all your heart"). The key to enjoying your youth is by seeking God and living His way of life each day as found in Ecclesiastes 12:1 (NIV): "Remember your Creator *in the days of your youth.*"

I began to learn about God and the Church when I was in my mid-teens (about the time of my ride in the red 'vette above). I am so thankful God opened up my mind to Him when He did, otherwise I would have been a mess as a teen. I know me. I did not have the Bible knowledge about God's spiritual laws or the character to say no to things on my own. But God began to give me understanding when I read the Bible, plus the will to say "no" when I needed to and the desire to say "yes" to God. Was I perfect as a teen? Not at all. I made my share of mistakes, and had to learn the hard way at times, but God kept getting me back to the center of the road when I allowed Him to do the driving. How about you? Are you letting God do the driving in your life? Remember, God has a dream for you—and "plans to give you hope and a future." God is there for you if you respond to Him.

Today, after all these years, I can truly say I am "living the dream." This does not imply there have not been trials and stresses, but He has been there for me all the way down the road. God gets all the credit for this, but I had to move aside and let Him do the driving since My Father knows best, by far. Whether you drive a sleek 'vette or a well-worn and not-so-fancy SUV, you and I need to let our loving God do the driving by letting Him be in charge of our lives and following His laws, since He alone knows all of the details about living the dream. See you down the road!

Until next time, your camp friend,



Steve Nutzman

Steve Nutzman, editor, is a church pastor in Idaho, Oregon and Utah, and is the United Youth Camps national coordinator. compasscheck@ucg.org

Dear Readers



In college I took an entry-level economics class where I remember the professor explaining the concept of opportunity cost, a key idea in economics. Surprisingly, that lesson has stuck with me through the years.

As I learned, opportunity cost is essentially the potential benefits or options you give up when you choose a specific action. For example, after you graduate from high school, you have the choice to start working or go to college (in simplified terms). If you decide to go to college, the opportunity cost is the wages you could have earned working full time for the number of years you are in college.

Opportunity cost is important because we often don't think of everything we're giving up when we make decisions. It's easy to see what we will gain by choosing something we want, but not always easy to see the potential gains we're foregoing by making that choice. For me, it's easy to let time slip by while watching a show or reading a book, and not think until later whether that was the best use of my time, or even if that was really how I wanted to spend it.

Economist Dan Ariely puts it this way: "The problem is that thinking of opportunity costs is very tough. Every time you buy a cup of coffee, what are you giving up? It's unclear. In fact, a few years ago, we went to a Toyota dealership and asked, 'If you're going to buy this car today, what are you not going to be able to do?' And you know what? People had no answer. Why? Because they never thought about it. So we pushed, and pushed. Something has got to give. And the most common answer was, if I buy this Toyota, it can't be a Honda. People were substituting in the same product category, in the same time frame, instead of saying something like, I'm giving up two weeks of vacation over the next two years, or 700 lattes, and so on" (www.thinkforwardinitiative.com/stories/the-question-of-money).

My professor mentioned that there was an old economist (I don't remember the name) who believed we might someday all have opportunity cost meters around our necks or on our wrists, constantly measuring the cost of our choices. The meter could remind us how much we would be giving up, or how high the opportunity cost would be for each decision. This feels like it would be an overreach of our free will, perhaps, but I often wonder how my choices might change if that technology did exist. Would I be more mindful of how I spend my free time? Of how often I go out to eat? Of what time I go to bed?

Even if we aren't always able to perfectly calculate the opportunity cost of a specific decision, especially in the moment, I've found it a helpful concept to consider. It reminds me of Psalm 90:12: "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." *Barnes' Notes on the Bible* explains: "The prayer is, that God would instruct us to estimate our days aright: their number; the rapidity with which they pass away . . . the certainty that they must soon come to an end; their bearing on the future state of being . . . By taking a just account of life, that we may bring to it a heart truly wise, or act wisely in view of these facts. The prayer is, that God would enable us to form such an estimate of life, that we shall be truly wise; that we may be able to act 'as if' we saw the whole of life, or as we should do if we saw its end" (*Barnes' Notes on the Bible,* "Psalm 90:12," Biblehub.com).

With God's help, we can all better see the hidden opportunity costs in life and make decisions with clarity, pursuing those things which are truly valuable and making the most of what we've been given.

Your friend,



Kourtney Kovanis

Managing editor | kourtney.kovanis@gmail.com

"You've Goat to be Kidding Me!"

Strange Animals Designed by God

Have you ever seen an odd-looking animal and thought, "Why did God create that animal that way?" Why did He create ants and then a creature designed to eat them? What is the point of a gnat? Why is the platypus even a thing? True enough: God has formed some crazy animals. That's what I'm going to focus on: weird and funny (creatures) in God's creation.



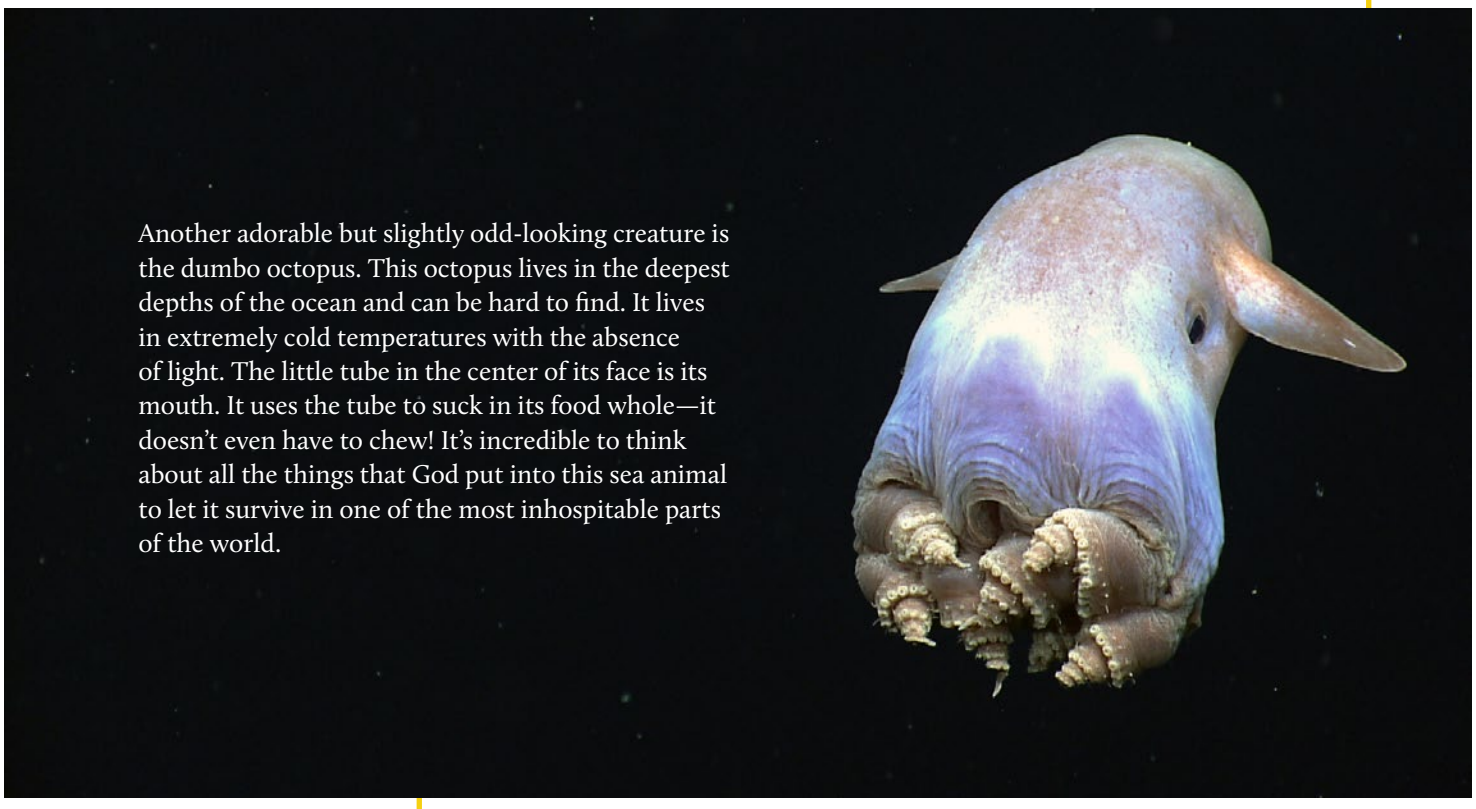
There's nothing cuter than a hamster or mouse, right? Well, have you ever heard of a jerboa? The jerboa is a desert rodent and looks like a little wind-up toy. Although it is only 2-3 inches (5-8 centimeters) long, it can leap over 10 feet in a single bound. It can freely roam its territory and escape from predators by running at up to 15 miles per hour. It looks like the leftover parts of various animals were put into one—and I'm grateful for it. This thing is adorable! God created this little rodent not with leftover parts but with the exact parts it needs to survive in its environment.



The saiga antelope is a very strange-looking animal. It has an especially unusual nose that looks like something only the writers of *Star Wars* could conjure up. God, however, is the perfect Creator. That big long nose that looks like it could be the hose from a vacuum cleaner is actually quite helpful to the saiga antelope because it is flexible and inflatable. This helps it to breathe clean air in the dusty summers of the desert and warm air during the cold winters. Even though this nose might be quite unbecoming and a little strange-looking, God had a plan and His way is perfect: "As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him. For who is God, except the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?" (2 Samuel 22:31-32). Everything He creates is for a perfect and indisputable reason!

Getty Images—Top: Yerbolat Shadrakhov; Right: VictorTyakht.

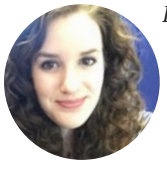
Another adorable but slightly odd-looking creature is the dumbo octopus. This octopus lives in the deepest depths of the ocean and can be hard to find. It lives in extremely cold temperatures with the absence of light. The little tube in the center of its face is its mouth. It uses the tube to suck in its food whole—it doesn't even have to chew! It's incredible to think about all the things that God put into this sea animal to let it survive in one of the most inhospitable parts of the world.





How about a fish that walks? The red-lipped batfish looks exactly how you might expect it to look. It looks like it's ready to make its debut on the red carpet! This fish is really bad at swimming. It uses its modified pectoral fins to literally *walk* on the bottom of the ocean! Scientists say that this is due to evolution, but we know better. A simple answer to the question of *why* God created it is in Genesis 1:20. "Then God said, 'Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures . . . '" Think of how boring it would be if God created just one kind of fish. God made all animals with variety for us to enjoy and gave the animals what they needed to survive.

God created everything for a purpose. He isn't the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). It's incredible to see all His creatures—no matter how strange-looking they are—and realize that they all are here for a specific reason. If God puts that much thought into animals, just think about how much more He cares about us. Notice this: "For You formed my inward parts; you covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well" (Psalm 139:13-14). God cares about His animals, but we are more precious to Him because we are to be in His family: "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:7). God's amazing creatures are just one more way to see God's loving care for all of us. **CC**



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Top: NOAA. Bottom: Jupiter Images/ Getty Images.



THE AMAZING SUNFLOWER DEFIES DARWINIAN EVOLUTION

Few things in life have impressed me more than watching a field of beautiful, bright sunflowers pointing toward the sun. It seems as if they are obediently following a silent command to look up in unison.

Perhaps you've never asked yourself how they do it, but it truly borders on the miraculous. In fact, this humble plant poses a tremendous challenge to what Charles Darwin claimed the process of evolution could do.

Darwin stated that "if it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down. But I can find out no such case" (*The Origin of Species*, Mentor Edition, 1958, p. 171).

Although he couldn't find an example, we can see one in the features of the sunflower. The sunflower has characteristics that do not appear to have evolved in a gradual, step-by-step fashion. Let's look at three examples.

Fibonacci spirals optimally pack the seeds

First, let's look at how sunflower seeds are organized. They are a product of the reproductive organs of the sunflower, called disk florets.

Inside the flower head, the seeds are arranged in a beautiful spiral. Incredibly, they form an elaborate pattern based on a mathematical formula that uses Fibonacci numbers. Fibonacci numbers were formulated in 1202 by the great Italian mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci. In the pattern, each number is added to the previous one, and the sum equals the next number. A string of Fibonacci numbers look something like this: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, etc. In a sunflower head, this means each seed is positioned at what scientists call "the golden angle," the angle where the largest number of seeds fit into the smallest amount of space.

As the Biomimicry Institute mentions: "Patterning seeds in spirals of Fibonacci numbers allows for the maximum number of seeds on a seed head, packed uniformly, with no crowding at the center and no 'bald patches' at the edges. The Fibonacci sequence works well for the sunflower because of one key characteristic—growth. On a sunflower seed head, the individual seeds grow while the center of the head continues to add new seeds, pushing those at the periphery outwards. Following the Fibonacci sequence ensures growth on the same terms indefinitely. That is to say, as a seed head grows, seeds will always be packed uniformly, and with maximum compactness" ("Helianthus Sunflower," *Encyclopedia of Life*, 2012).

We need to ask Darwinian evolutionists a question: How did the sunflower come up with the Fibonacci mathematical formula for packing its seeds in the most efficient way? What gradual, step-by-step process led to this? As expected, no process has yet been proposed by evolutionists to explain this elaborate design.

So according to evolution, did the sunflower become



what amounts to a skillful mathematician to organize its seeds in the most efficient way? How would this be possible through evolution's two mechanisms—mutation and natural selection?

Alternatively, doesn't it make more sense that the sunflower was carefully designed by a Great Mathematician who originated this precise mathematical formula as part of the flower's blueprint? Notice in Psalm 19:1: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork."

The sunflower's amazing movements

One of the most astounding abilities of the sunflower is the way it can follow the sun across the sky for most of its life. This is called heliotropism, or the tracking of the sun's path by a plant.

How can the sunflower do this? Amazingly, it has an organic hydraulic system that changes the pressure of the water in the neck of the stem, called the pulvinus, according to the angle of sunlight. So during the day, the stem of the sunflower uses its motor cells to elongate the side away from the sun, tilting leaves and immature flowers toward the sun, and ending up facing west at sunset.

During nighttime, the other side of the stem then expands, pushing the leaves and flowers back to the east where they will be facing the sun at dawn. Since leaves and immature flowers are green and actively carrying out photosynthesis, heliotropism provides them with 10-15 percent more sunlight than if they were in one fixed position. When the sunflower gets too heavy and its seeds mature, it settles in one position facing east.

Again, how could such an elaborate hydraulic system using motor cells gradually have evolved? If the water pressure was not just right at the neck of the stem, or if the rotating mechanism was not properly adjusted in the motor cells, the plant would not gain any benefit from it. Yet all of these mechanisms had to be fully assembled for them to work properly. No gradual process would get it done.

Mobile light sensors

For the sunflower to rotate toward the sun as it does, it needs sensitive light sensors that not only determine which direction the sun is moving across the sky, but also the time of day and the season. In fact, the light sensors are so sophisticated that they can distinguish between the solar rays and shadows, thus sending the right signals to the plant for it to turn correctly.

These light sensors in the plant organs can also determine how long the day is, how much light is available, and the direction from which the light shines. Included in the complex system is a molecular clock that automatically adjusts to the sun's path and keeps track of the time of day and season. This is why sunflowers don't get confused when moving during the day or night.

Furthermore, the sunflower is also able to sense the quality of light and adjust its productivity accordingly. For instance, in low light conditions, it can produce more photosynthetic pigments, whereas if the light is very bright and the levels of harmful ultraviolet light increase, it can produce more protective pigments to act as a sunscreen.

Do you believe all these features could have simply evolved on their own or rather that they came about by an all-wise and all-powerful Designer?

The sunflower was designed to benefit mankind

The cheerful sunflower has more to smile about. Beyond its intricate seed head and ability to follow the sun, it has other marvelous features that benefit humans.

The sunflower, one of the most economically important plants for mankind, can provide:

- Edible seeds
- Healthy oil for cooking
- Animal feed
- Paper
- Latex
- Environmental purification

Sunflower seeds are able to extract toxic ingredients from soils, such as lead, arsenic and uranium. In the Chernobyl nuclear plant explosion, sunflowers were used to remove caesium-137 and strontium-90 from a nearby pond, and a similar campaign was mounted in response to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in Japan.

So let's give thanks and glory to God, who with great intelligence and love, made the amazingly complex and productive sunflower! "For Your mercy is great above the heavens, and Your truth reaches to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and Your glory above all the earth" (Psalm 108:4-5). **CC**



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When Is God Going to Call Me?



Sitting in church at the age of 16, the minister was speaking as he always did, but all I could think was, "When is this going to be over? I'm hungry." Whatever the minister was saying went in one ear and out the other. It always did.

My parents and everyone else talked about God's calling. Perhaps in the future my eyes would suddenly be opened and I would find the minister's words and the Bible absolutely fascinating. Impossible, I thought. But at the same time, I was worried. What's wrong with me? Would God ever "call" me? Or would I keep going to church week after week, not really hearing, just enduring.

I grew resentful. Those older gentlemen stood up there and talked about the same stuff they always talked about. They came from a different generation. Maybe they had this massive revelation where they realized the Sabbath was really on Saturday, but I didn't. I had always known.

Flash forward to when I was 17 at summer camp. My dorm was sitting with an older minister and his wife. I was bold enough to raise my hand. "The sermons are boring," I challenged. "It's the same thing week after week. How are we supposed to be called or find any interest in God's Word?" "Well," the minister replied thoughtfully, "This is true. We are older and don't identify with the youth as much as we wish we did. But," he said looking directly at me, "it's not just the minister's responsibility to be a good teacher. You have to want to learn. You have to also seek it out." And then he quoted this verse that I had heard 100 times before: "Seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9).

It was at that moment I realized I hadn't even tried. I had just expected God and the ministers to do all the work. If only they were more interesting. If only church were set up differently. But that's not how God works. Why should He give you His greatest gift if you don't even want it?

And so my answer to the question "When is God going to call me?" is: Many people won't have a "moment." You may not metaphorically be hit by lightning and have some massive revelation. You have to seek it out. You have the very words of the God of the universe on your desk right now, unlike most everyone else in human history. Are you going to actually seek out God and see what He has to say?

First, you need to ask Him for His help.

James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." But *how* do you draw near to God? Pray, and tell God that you want to be called, and ask Him to open up your heart.

Let's continue reading after the "seek and you will find" scripture quoted earlier. "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened . . . how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:10, 13). Jesus Christ's own words show us that if you open up your heart by yielding to God, then He will hear you and answer.

Second, after you have asked for God's help, you must then read His Word.

Actually read the Bible for yourself. A relationship with God is a two-way street. You communicate to Him through prayer, and He answers and responds through His Scriptures. But you have to read them. Maybe you have tried to read them before and failed. But if you ask for God's help it will be as though a blindfold has fallen off your eyes.

Again, you have to ask.

So in answer to the question "When is God going to call me?" first, ask yourself: "When are you going to seek out God?" **CC**



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BORN INTO THE Church

A DIFFERENT KIND OF CALLING

Are there times when you hear the ministry or your parents express excitement and passion about the Church that you really don't feel?

Do you wish for the type of calling that your parents had, one that is direct, unexpected and dynamic? Have you ever been told by the older people in your church area that you are taking for granted the opportunity of being born into the Church?

Dan Apartian, a deacon in Illinois, gives a sermon about the differences between first- and second-generation Christians. He describes how God calls people in different ways, depending on their age when introduced to the truth and whether they grew up with believing parents. The key is that there isn't a better or worse way to be called. This message has struck a chord with many listeners across different age groups. We're glad he gave *Compass Check* his notes, so we could share some of the concepts from his message. This article focuses on the unique ways God calls believers from different generations in the Church, why those differences are important, and what we as second-generation Christians can do with this information.

What is the difference?

First-generation Christians are those called as adults, usually without other primary relatives. "Adult" here means all those old enough to decide their spiritual path by themselves, so sometimes this group includes teens and young adults. First-generation Christians are the first people called in their families.

In the Bible, Paul is an example of a first-generation Christian. Acts 9 tells the story of what God's calling looked like in Paul's life:

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:1-6).

Paul's conversion was unexpected, dramatic and direct. Most first-generation Christians have a story they can (and often like to) tell about their calling.

Second-generation Christians, on the other hand, initially come in contact with the truth as children through their believing parents or relatives. (The term second-generation Christian will be used to also describe third- and fourth-generation Christians.) Currently, the majority of the Church is second-generation Christians. Mr. Apartian is a second-generation Christian, and so am I.

Timothy from the Bible is a second-generation Christian. In 2 Timothy 1, Paul writes to Timothy: "I thank God . . . when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (verses 3 and 5). For Timothy, God's calling was in his youth; it was expected and indirect. Christians like Timothy usually don't have a "road to Damascus" story to tell.

Second-generation Christians are born to a birthright by being born into the Church. First Corinthians 7:14 says: "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy." And in Acts 2, Peter explains that God promises His Spirit to those He calls

What does it mean to be called?

The Greek word *kletos,* translated "called," can also be translated "invited." A calling by God is His offer, His invitation, to repent and enter into a relationship with Him. For more information, check out this Bible study lesson: "Who Is God Calling?" (Bible Study Course, Lesson 7, *What is God's Calling?,* "Who is God Calling?").

and their children: "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call'" (38-39).

Second-generation Christians also have access to God's mind and the gift of a special calling. But it's often wildly different than the calling our parents received.



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Why is this difference important?

First- and second-generation Christians have the same spiritual objectives but see life very differently. Understanding the generational differences within the Church allows us to understand each other and develop more unity, along with enabling us to meet each other's needs. 1 Corinthians 1:10 says, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

It's important for both generations to realize there are two different ways of entering and coming into God's Church. One is not more official than the other. And they each have their own challenges and pitfalls.

The process of conversion for first-generation Christians usually begins with God revealing or making available a teaching which challenges their current lifestyle. It involves learning information about God that to them is provoking and even threatening. Their abrupt exposure to the new teaching usually compels them to scour and study the Bible about it deeply and thoroughly. When they are convinced of its validity, they are led to find a Church that upholds that truth. Eventually they realize the spiritual obedience taught in church provides a more important goal than the life they had been living. They then come out of and turn from a world they now see as evil. Their calling is first an academic or mental process of studying information. This develops into an emotional zeal for the truth, which then convicts and convinces them that practical application of this truth is necessary and good.

Compare this to second-generation Christians. We are born into the Church and often sheltered from what is outside of it. We start attending church because we have to go with our parents. We remember sleeping on a blanket, playing with toys and getting scolded for talking. Sometimes church felt like the longest two hours in history! We are trained to live God's truth and obey long before we ever validate it as the right thing to do. We learn practical application before it's a personal conviction. In contrast to our first-generation Christian parents, the world seems at times to us like a place full of untapped adventures. We realize there are problems there, but sometimes, frankly, we see similar problems in the Church.

For second-generation Christians, it's easier to take God's calling and His truth for granted. We were brought up knowing it, so none of it comes as a shock to us. Because we applied the truth first, and were often praised for doing so, it's likely we skipped personally proving all or parts of it. This leaves us feeling shocked and unprepared when our beliefs are challenged. It's more common for us to feel defensive and embarrassed when asked about the Church and our beliefs if we haven't personally proven to ourselves the truth we've been taught.

It's important to clarify that there's a difference between recognizing and proving God's truth. Second-generation Christians tend to recognize God's truth very easily. I identified with Mr. Apartian when he remembered that as a teen, many ministers' messages sounded the same. Sometimes we feel like we can finish the speaker's sentences. We've heard similar sermons and sermonettes since we were kids. Our problem is not in recognizing, but in realizing, proving and knowing. That's why we're uncomfortable when asked pointed questions to defend our spiritual beliefs. At these times we need more than buzz words to fill in a sentence. When friends ask us to defend our being different and our spiritual intentions, we're asked to dig inside the core of our beliefs and personally know why we do what we do. That requires proving it (Romans 12:2).

Until we as second-generation Christians come to know why we do what we've done all our lives—and make the emotional connection to want to do it—we'll never be totally comfortable being in God's Church. It was a fight for our parents to enter the Church. For us

second-generation Christians, we usually don't have to fight to get into the Church; we were born into it. Our fight is to stay in it! And without proving what we believe, we'll lose the fight to complacency.

Knowing this, what should we do?

With this viewpoint about the differences of God's calling between generations, it might be interesting to reread a familiar story: the parable of the prodigal son. Every person's calling is unique, and in this story both brothers are second-generation Christians. However, the disillusionment often felt by second-generation Christians is similar to the older son's words in Luke 15:29-30:

"'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.' And the Father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.'"

Many second-generation Christians have similar feelings to the older son who felt resentment toward those God dramatically works with, whom God seems to "kill the fatted calf" for. In contrast, second-generation Christians may feel like they have been serving Him all along without fanfare. The issue is that our callings differ greatly. A first-generation calling might sound exciting, but a second-generation calling is equal in God's eyes and should not be undervalued. Growing up in the Church can offer a certain amount of protection and keep us from making some big mistakes. It doesn't always work out that way, but when it does we should appreciate the blessing. You may not even recognize the long track record of how God's truth has changed your life. Second-generation Christians reap the rewards of following His way from infancy, so it's hard to see and appreciate how things could have been otherwise.

Ecclesiastes 11:9 reminds us that it's good to have fun, to strive for success, to live a full life, but with all of it we remain accountable: "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment."

Don't feel guilty because you're different or don't have a dramatic story to share. There's no way as babies we could prove God's truth before we applied it. But *do* prove your beliefs now; make them yours. Remember that your convictions aren't complete until you know why you do what you do and personally choose to do them. Doing God's way doesn't bring success until we combine it with conviction. 1 Thessalonians 1:5 says, "Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (English Standard Version).

We can only tap into the full power of the Holy Spirit through baptism. Second-generation Christians have been counting the costs of living God's way all our lives through our actions. We have been conditioned in the responsibility of following His laws. But there comes a time when we each must deal with the core of our nature. Counting the costs of baptism is still a factor, but the question of baptism for us is more about accepting the cost of our calling and admitting our personal need for God and Christ's sacrifice. Part of proving your beliefs is realizing the importance of God's invitation and accepting it.

Finally, don't be afraid to broach open and honest discussions of real world situations with others in the Church. It's okay to challenge and talk through hard realities. Ask first-generation Christians to share experiences when they were tempted or faced difficulties doing God's way. We can learn from each other.

When friends ask us to defend our being different and our spiritual intentions, we're asked to personally know why we do what we do. That requires proving it.

I hope this article gives a little insight into the differences between two ways God calls people into His family. There isn't a better or worse way in the calling of God's people—God's calling to eternal life in His Kingdom is always unique and extraordinary! As first- and second-generation Christians, we all have a very special birthright. If we respect and work together to complement our unique differences, we can bridge the gap between our Christian generations and collectively attain the great prize of becoming first fruits. **CC**

If you're interested in hearing Mr. Apartian's full sermon, search for "The Difference Between First and Second Generation Christians" at ucg.org.

If you want to know more about your calling, we recommend the article "My Parents Are Christian, but How Do I Know if God Is Calling Me?" also at ucg.org.



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Everyone probably has had at least one person say to them sometime in life, "Watch your attitude!" or "She's in an attitude!" Usually this is referring to a bad, moody or snotty attitude. So what type of attitude should we be looking to have?

There is a section of Scripture that talks about attitude or a state of mind, sometimes called the Beatitudes. "Beatitudes" means the state of supreme blessings or perfect happiness. It describes a quality of character and lifestyle that we strive for. It's an attitude that we should be emulating now, but we will have the ultimate fulfillment in the Kingdom. In a spiritual sense, to be blessed means to be happy or joyful or in a state of spiritual wellbeing and prosperity. How can we live the way of life that will lead to blessings and happiness? Let's learn about what it means to be truly blessed.

The poor in spirit

Jesus's first beatitude in His sermon is "blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). Jesus meant that he who shows an attitude of humility, contentment, submission and gratitude will also trust and hope in God to rule in his life.

This is the opposite of much in society today. Pride, arrogance and superiority are promoted in today's media. On the contrary, the person with a poor-in-spirit attitude behaves differently. The poor in spirit realizes that because of sin, his very life and eternal existence are in God's hands. Without God's mercy, he has no future. He must yield himself to God and have a humble attitude.

Those who mourn

The second beatitude is "blessed are those who mourn" (Matthew 5:4). A person who mourns is sad because she will not see a deceased loved one again in this life. Jesus wants us to have this type of attitude towards the way we live our lives. We are sad or mourning when we fail to live up to God's expectations. We mourn because we have broken His laws and disobeyed Him.

God wants us to have the attitude that we are in constant need of forgiveness through His Son's sacrifice upon repentance. We will find comfort when we acknowledge our shortcomings before God.

The meek

"Blessed are the meek" is the third beatitude (Matthew 5:5). A meek person is one who has a gentle and quiet spirit, but who can show strength when needed. Some call it strength under control. Trusting in God, he submits himself to Him, and waits patiently for Him to work things out in his life. He is eager to be instructed or admonished, and willingly submits to the will of God.

The reward of the meek person is to inherit the earth. That is where God's Kingdom will be. We should all strive to be in God's Kingdom. Developing meekness by learning now to be humble and gentle to others and willingly being submissive and obedient to the Lord is a good attitude to start increasing.

Those who hunger and thirst

Fourth is "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6). Someone with this attitude



pursues God and the knowledge of His way as a hungry person pursues food. She wants to live a life that is pleasing to God; a life that follows His commands. We need to physically eat several times a day. Spiritually, we need to be eating of God's Word continually throughout the day to be satisfied and full.

The merciful

When we are seeking God's righteousness and living His way of life, we will be merciful. That is the next beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). A merciful person forgives those who have hurt him, performs various acts of kindness and has an intense desire to spread the gospel.

How can you show mercy? Mercy is shown by not being overly critical, not holding grudges, helping those in need and being a good example of God's way of life. Showing others that you are cheerful, tender-hearted and compassionate spreads the gospel by showing that God's way of life is good and rewarding. Each time you show mercy towards someone, more mercy will be shown to you.

The pure in heart

The person who is merciful is headed toward the next beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8). She acts and lives her life in the way that God desires her to live. Her good, positive and pure actions are backed up by good, positive and pure inner thoughts and motives.

Purity of heart is internalizing God's way of life and expressing that in your thoughts and actions. When godly virtues become part of your inner thinking, and are expressed in outward actions, you are living and acting like God and Jesus Christ.

The peacemakers

As we begin to put on God's attitude, we begin to have a new perspective or viewpoint that reflects God's nature of peace: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9). A peacemaker shows attitudes of cooperation, will not be easily offended and will want to help keep situations calm. He will want to do this in his family, in school, in work and in church. He will not be found backbiting, gossiping, slandering or ridiculing, because these actions do not promote peace.

The persecuted

As we continue to put on the beatitudes, we begin to look more like a child of God, and less like a child of the world. Those in the world may not like this, which can bring on persecution. But the next beatitude says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matthew 5:10). Christians have been hated, pursued and have suffered for no other reason than that they are living righteous lives. She who knows God suffers willingly because she knows her future is the Kingdom of God, which is so much more valuable than anything on this earth.

Persecution can go beyond hatred to outright harassment, being picked on, oppressed, poorly treated and lied about. In these situations, follow the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ lived perfectly, although He was persecuted. When they reviled Him, He did not speak back. He let God judge those people (1 Peter 2:23).

Rejoice and be glad

Jesus finishes His sermon by saying, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:12). He who develops this beatitude determines to have the Kingdom of God as his ultimate goal. He constantly keeps this in the forefront of his mind. Nothing that he suffers in this world, or is deprived of in this life, can compare to the reward, the blessings and the happiness that he will receive when Christ returns.

Jesus focuses us on the future. Always look to God to guide your life. God knows what is best. If you follow His instruction book—the Bible—you can live a blessed life. The beatitudes help us be happy, be content, be merciful, and most of all, be in God's Kingdom. **CC**



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How Do You Get Recurring Sins Under Control?

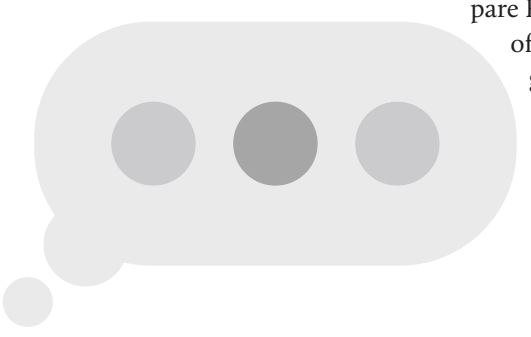


It's late, you're the only one awake in your house, and you're alone in your room . . .

Your stomach is in knots and it's hard to breathe—you sent that last text a few hours ago but haven't heard back yet. Did I say too much and scare him off? you ask yourself. Your phone lights up, and your heart skips a beat. He wants you to send a picture of yourself. At first you're shocked he'd ask that, but he's not letting up. "Please, you're so beautiful. Let me see . . . " You know deep down that this isn't right, and that nothing good will come of late-night, private messages back and forth with the guy you like. But you can't stop thinking about him, and he makes you feel special. So you try to play along without sending anything inappropriate, but the longer you text the more you warm up to the idea . . .

Fill in the blanks. Guys, you may have never personally asked a girl to send you photos of herself, but have you ever looked for photos or videos of other women online? Ladies, you may have never been personally asked to reveal yourself, but have you ever changed your personality for a guy you liked or done something else you knew was wrong because a guy made you feel special?

I use this story as a stand-in for any number of things you might come to recognize are problems in your life—maybe you have a tendency toward rage, jealousy, gossiping, greed or disrespect. "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24; compare Romans 6:4-7). But of course the struggle continues each and every day, as those desires keep haunting you. Just like the story I described, each of those things has a lead-up to the actual moment of sin. To be Christian means to recognize that lead-up and take action early in the process. It is to make Jesus' way of life *your* way of life: "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Ephesians 5:1-2, New International Version). And in so doing, it is to reap the rich rewards of a more abundant life (John 16:33; 1 John 5:4; John 10:10).



Mitchell Moss

Consider this my hard-earned list of first steps to take in the struggle against sin. I, like anyone else, have overcome some sins with a high hand—but with that growth comes recognition of *other* sins in need of their own day of reckoning. Start your own sin-crushing endeavor here.

1—Pay close attention to what your heart is feeling so you know when you are being tempted

It seems like an obvious point to make, but how many times have you found yourself wondering "How could I let myself get here?" That usually happens because you weren't paying attention in the lead-up to the sin. It's critical to remain aware of your feelings at all times, because sin almost always starts in your heart (Jeremiah 17:9)—even before any thoughts can form, or your conscience can alert you to the temptation.

We get ourselves in these situations where our noblest intentions don't stand a chance. But too often we aren't paying attention to the small decisions we make along the way that have gotten us there. Most sins aren't one big leap into the fire—they are the result of incremental decisions made when you weren't even paying attention.

What is the sin in your life that tugs on

you so gently that you choose to ignore the signs until it's too late? These things start in your heart—and you need to learn to identify what your heart is feeling so you can choose to *not follow it* into sin. Reflect deeply and honestly, asking yourself questions like: What were you feeling during, immediately before and immediately after the sin? What were you feeling the entire day leading up to the sin? Write these things down.

2—Pay attention to the circumstances when you're most tempted

A lot of sins are unthinkable when you're around other people, but when you're alone, they beckon you almost ceaselessly. Others are the kind that take place no matter where you are or the time of day. Some only take place when you're around certain people.

At the end of step 1, you took note of and wrote down your *internal* circumstances—in step 2, write down as many details as you can about the *external* circumstances. Answer questions like: What time of day is it? Where are you? Who are you with, or are you alone? Are you hungry? Tired? In a good or bad mood? How long has it been since your last temptation? Have you been watching or listening to something in particular? Get really specific.

Evaluate these lists together. You can start to identify patterns of behavior from the feelings, people, places, times and other factors that are conducive to this sin. Armed with this info, you can be actively aware of these circumstances as they're happening in real time. You can choose to stop yourself and heed that voice in your head before you go too far next time.

3—Share the most revealing and intimate struggles you have with someone you trust

It's easy to rationalize things for yourself, and as you continue to struggle with your private sin over time, you can even become numb to its seriousness. You rationalize things that you previously would never have even imagined yourself doing.

Tell someone you deeply trust about your struggle (James 5:16). They can help cut through the mist of subjectivity. If you tell them the internal and external circumstances you've identified, they can help you look out for them. If they're with you and see those patterns of behavior, they can take action to intervene. If they're not with you, you have to reach out to them so they can take whatever



indirect action is available to intervene. The key is immediacy, with the goal being them holding you accountable for your actions.

When confiding in someone, make sure it's someone you trust to keep your struggle private. But also, it must be someone who loves and cares for you enough to *stop you from continuing in the sin.* False compassion is helping you rationalize it, letting you off the hook, or seeing it happen in real time but failing to take bold steps to put a stop to things (Proverbs 24:11-12). Make it clear to whomever you confide in that you expect them not to take your excuses, but to punch you in the gut (metaphorically, of course). Think of it this way: If they asked you to help them overcome *their* sin, how guilty would you feel if you didn't do what it took to stop it from happening again?

These steps are only a beginning on the path toward complete repentance. As with anything, the hard work you put in makes your life far more satisfying than you could have imagined when you were waffling around in indecision. And there comes a point you realize that you cannot do it alone. You must learn to yield to God, which allows Him to mold, shape and grow you. What that looks like will be the subject of the second article of this series, in the next issue. "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6, English Standard Version).

Fighting this good fight of overcoming may be difficult, and there will be hardships. But coming through on the other side *always* results in a deeper, longer-lasting and more sincere grounding in the grace and peace of God our Father and of our Lord Jesus Christ. **CC**



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MarioGuti/Getty Images



God Was There

When I was in middle school I never really had any luck making friends. No one seemed to like me, and I couldn't figure out why. I wasn't weird; I didn't wear strange clothes or talk differently from everyone else. For some reason, I just didn't fit in. I was insecure, and I kept thinking, Everyone is looking at me, just blend in. All of this discouraged me a lot. To make matters worse, there were barely any kids at our church. The few kids that did come to church didn't come all the time. So I was alone. Until one day, when I met a girl at a church party. That day changed my life. It turned out that she had three other siblings and they all came to our church. I just hadn't known because they rarely came. After meeting the girl and becoming friends, she and her siblings started coming to church all the time. Slowly, all of us became very close friends, and I felt like I had a place; I wasn't alone anymore. I finally fit in, and fitting in was the best feeling.

About five years later, our little church in Buffalo, New York, grew smaller as my best friends picked up and moved to Alaska without warning. In my head, Alaska was on the other side of the world—the farthest place from Buffalo. I still didn't have many friends at school, and there were no other kids at church. This broke me. Before this, I didn't care about my social life at school. It didn't matter because I always had my friends at church to look forward to every week. After they moved, I pulled away from my family. I felt like no one understood and no one cared. I was alone again. I pushed away all of my problems and let my loneliness consume me. I was going down a horrible path. I let my grades slip away. I was numb from anger, bitterness and disappointment. And I started to pull away from God when the same questions kept rolling around in the back of my mind, questions I couldn't answer: Why would God do this to me? Why would He take away the only friends I had for no reason? Why me?

Looking back on this time I can say with complete certainty that God always has a reason, even if we can't see it. Sometimes we get caught up in the glory of one moment that we forget there's something bigger. The summer after my friends moved, I had the opportunity to go to summer camp. I normally couldn't go, because camp is the same time as my final exams at school, and I couldn't miss those. But Pentecost was later that year, and that pushed camp back as well. I am confident in saying that Camp Cotubic is what helped me. I am incredibly grateful for that experience. At camp I gained confidence and happiness that I never had before. It was what saved me from walking too far down the wrong path. I finally felt like I belonged somewhere and fit in again. When my friends moved to Alaska, I couldn't see why God would allow them to leave. But now, it makes sense. If He wouldn't have, I would have stayed shy. I would have only talked to my friends at church and not talked to anyone at school. After my friends moved I started making more friends because I became more outgoing and friendly. I was interested in connecting and talking with people, and I wasn't hidden away being shy anymore.

My friends from Alaska visited this past summer, and I was able to share the Feast with them in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina. I am finishing up my sophomore year in high school and now have many friends. I drew closer to God, and I have a more positive outlook on everything. There is one scripture that my mom pointed out to me that really opened my eyes. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). This scripture really moved me. God always has a reason. All we have to do is pray, have faith in Him and have courage that He will guide our lives. I am closer to God because of this. Every time I have a trial, I walk with God, pray and trust that He is always there for me when I need Him. I am happy now, I have a place, and I fit in. This is all thanks to our great, glorious and loving God. If you are ever going through a rough time, don't make the mistake that I did and pull away. Draw close to God and He will help you, because even on your darkest days, God is there. **CC**



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