

Simply Christian
14 October, 2012
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Course outline, book and other materials

[Simply Christian](#) by N. T. Wright
Also recommend [Simply Jesus](#).

Gathering, Prayer

Introduction

1. Part 1 explores the “echoes of a voice.” Think of it as an overture. We will cover part one today.
2. Part 2 covers the central Christian belief about God. (Weeks 2-4).
3. Part 3 describes what Wright believes it looks like in practice to follow Jesus, especially how his followers are to advance the God’s plan. (week 5-7).

Wright identifies 4 general categories that all humans share for which there is no biological reason (survival).

Justice

If you are around a group of children playing, what are inevitably going to hear at some time?

“That’s not fair.”

We say it as well. A sense of justice is part of being human—it is in our bones.

We can fix lots of things, but it doesn’t seem like we can fix injustice. It isn’t for lack of trying. We have lawmakers, police to enforce them, courts to judge, jails to punish, and lawyers to do whatever they do. (part of the problem maybe). In spite of that, justice seems to be elusive sometimes. We can all think of examples where justice both has been and has not been served.

And then, there is injustice that seems random. What was just about the tsunami in 2004 where 150k people died. Or the Joplin tornadoes? Or the fire in COS where some houses were destroyed and a neighbor’s house was not?

The most telling area about the issues with justice is in our lives. We believe in moral laws. We all try to live moral lives. And yet, we are not perfect, far from it. Even people who believe in justice as an absolute moral principle can't always act justly.

How do we explain this sense of justice in humans, this dream of a world put to rights? Three basic ways to explain.

1. It really is a dream. Life is not fair and we had just better get used to it. How many of you have told your kids that "life is not fair?" I have. Nietzsche and Machiavelli live in this world.
2. It is a dream of a different world, a world where we really belong. This is a world that is unrelated to this world, a dream of a future utopia. Bullies and bad people run this world, but we can't do much about it and besides, there is something better coming. Maybe Buddhists would fit in this category.
3. Maybe there is something really speaking to us, someone whispering in our ears that cares about this world and our present selves. Someone that made this world for a purpose which includes justice and a world free from evil.

Three religious traditions believe in the third option. Islam synthesizes Jewish and Christian stories and other ideas and creates a world which would be just and put to rights, if only the Koran were followed. Judaism believes that God created the world and imbedded in that world is a passion for justice because it was God's passion. And, Christianity believes that Jesus is the embodiment of that passion for justice.

Given the title of this book, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out it (and this class) are about the Christian tradition.

The objection comes up immediately from skeptics—if Christianity is about justice, then why, as the dominant culture in the west for centuries, have you done such a bad job of bringing justice to the world. Nazism, slavery, crusades, etc. You can make your own list. But, it is not a Christian belief that as followers of Jesus we get it right all the time. The prayer he taught us to pray says "forgive our sins". Jesus must have known we would be sinners. But if we are committed to Jesus and believe that justice was integral to what he was, then we have to be committed to justice as well. Remember the prayer again, "your kingdom come, on *earth* as in heaven."

And, before I drive you into the pits of despair, there are stories where Christians have made a huge difference in the world. William Wilberforce and his crusade to end the slave trade. Martin Luther King who was killed

because of his stand on treatment of blacks. Desmond Tutu and others in South Africa who drove a process that allowed reconciliation rather than retribution. The list goes on.

Spirituality

For 200 years or more in the Western world, skepticism has been the order of the day. Religion, if it was important at all, was packaged and set aside from life and had little connection to the real world. The world said we were captains of our own souls, whatever that might be. But no matter how hard the culture tries to minimize and even control spirituality, it still bubbles to the surface. And, in today's age, it is a veritable geyser. New age, Tarot Cards, crystals, horoscopes, spiritual Yoga, scientology, etc. <Question— have you run into people who seek a spiritual connection in unusual ways?>

There are offshoots of the Christian church that we would consider odd (The Toronto Blessing and the laughing church.

- The Holy Ghost Explosion:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSCuY7jyoTs>
- The Toronto Blessing:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCeVZ6e2T0E>
- Benny Hinn (about 1:30):
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sthm3vH6ixY>

If you don't think there is an awakening of spirituality going on, go to a book store and check out the section on this topic. A quick on Amazon reveals this:

Books > "spirituality"

Related Searches: [spiritual books](#).

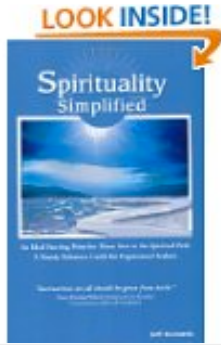
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Format

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#7 on the list:

7.



Spirituality Simplified by Jeff Maziarek (Nov 19, 2003)

★★★★☆ (32 customer reviews)

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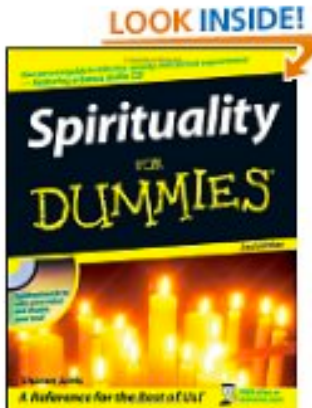
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9.



Spirituality For Dummies by Sharon Janis (

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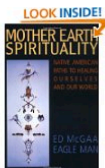
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Excerpt - Front Cover: "... Spirituality for DUMMIES :

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NUMBER 19

19.



Mother Earth Spirituality: Native American Paths to Healing Ourselves and Our World (Religion and Spirituality) by Ed McGaa and Marie N. Buchfink (May 10, 1990)

★★★★☆ (32 customer reviews)

Formats

Paperback

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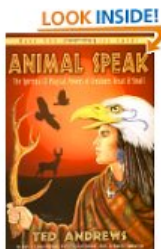
Kindle Edition

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Number 63

63.



Animal-Speak: The Spiritual & Magical Powers of Creatures Great & Small by Ted Andrews

★★★★☆ (166 customer reviews)

Formats

Paperback

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\$9.44

Excerpt - Front Matter: "... destroyed the mysticism and spirituality surrounding it. It has burst ..." [See a random page](#)

This hunger for spirituality is an echo of a voice, signpost if you will pointing to us a different world. This is probably a Western world centric view. Other cultures still revere traditions that look quaint or even stupid to us. The whole idea of giving food to a Buddha or ancestor worship is strange to us.

Freud would say that spirituality is result of psychological forces. There are lots of other explanations which we don't have time to explore.

But, the Christian explanation is quite simple. If there anything like the Christian story is true, then we should expect this interest. If we are created in the image of God, a God that love people and wants them to know and respond to that love.

Relationship

In spite of the statistics about marriage, people still get married. There is something calling people to commit to relationship with other humans. Human relationships are another signpost pointing into a mist telling there is road leading to a place that we want to go. We are clearly made for each other. Yet, making relationships work, not to mention flourish, is remarkably difficult. Even highly introverted people do not choose a completely solitary life. And people that do choose one know it is odd. People that are forced into solitary confinement for long periods can literally go mad. "It seems that we humans were designed to find our purpose and meaning not simply in ourselves and our own inner lives, but in one another and in the shared meanings and purposes of a family, a street, a workplace, a community, a town, a nation."

Not only do individual relationships break down, larger groups break down as well. Communities, churches, even countries. From the small scale to the large scale, we feel we are made to live together (remember Rodney King saying, "Can we all get along." Yet, we find it is so hard.

You can't talk about relationships without talking about sex. Like it or not, there is gender identity in our relationships. I relate differently to a woman than I do to a man (and vice versa). Despite that we know this, we are incredibly confused about the whole topic. Trying to pretend that everyone is essentially genderless is a distortion of reality. Sizing up ever person of the opposite sex as a potential sexual partner is also a gross distortion of reality.

Christians believe that God intended us to be in relationship and therefore be fully human.

Beauty

<show slides and listen to music>

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder for sure. But, we all have some idea of what beauty is. Beauty is a matter of time. A beautiful woman in the 1600s

would not be an eye turner today. Beauty is fleeting. Even if we appreciate the beauty of old age, that beauty is a faded version of the youthful beauty.

It has been said that beauty is truth and truth is beauty. But, if that is true, then truth must also be in the eye of the beholder. Most of us believe that there is absolute truth. I'm not sure any of us agree that there is absolute beauty.

We have to understand that beauty does not give us direct access to God or to a transcendent realm of any kind. Beauty clearly comes with context. For example, if you had no knowledge of tigers and you saw one taking a nap, you might be tempted to go up and cuddle with it or even worship it. "Few examples of idolatry would be so swiftly self-refuting."

There are explanations of why we find things beautiful. Some say it is just the way we evolved. Others say it has to do with unconscious sexual feelings. Philosophers (especially Plato) speak of a representation of the natural world where there is a "form" of an object that embodies the beauty of the object. Any natural object is a shadow or dim representation of that form.

As Christians, we believe that God created the earth and the beauty we see is a reflection of him and his glorious creation. And when beauty is diminished, we don't go the Platonic view, but assert that the present world is not the final world, but one that is need of repair. And we believe that God will come back to do that repair. This is the clear message of Isaiah, chapter 11.

⁶The wolf will romp with the lamb,
the leopard sleep with the kid.

Calf and lion will eat from the same trough,
and a little child will tend them.

⁷Cow and bear will graze the same pasture,
their calves and cubs grow up together,
and the lion eat straw like the ox.

⁸The nursing child will crawl over rattlesnake dens,
the toddler stick his hand down the hole of a serpent.

⁹Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill
on my holy mountain.

The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive,
a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide."

The beauty in the present world is a signpost to a larger beauty, a deeper truth.

Conclusion

This whole discussion of echoes opens all kind of deep questions. What is truth? How do we know? What do we mean by know? This is indicative that we are complex beings that live in a complex world. If there is a God who created the world, why would we expect him to be simple and easy to understand. In fact, we should expect such a being to at least as complex as us.

“We honor and celebrate our complexity and our simplicity by continually doing five things. We tell stories. We act our rituals. We create beauty. We work in community. We think our beliefs.”

Four echoes of voice seem audible to all humans: justice, spirituality, relationships, and beauty. There is something more than just a complex set of atoms following natural laws that combine in ways to make the world. Those echoes tell us there must be. Where does it come from? Next week we start talking about how Christians answer that question.

End in prayer.