

## Lost Because We Kneel Before Too Many Gods

- **Bryan Patterson** -

*Simply accept the fact that you are accepted -- Paul Tillich*

ONE of the most popular bars in the Chinese city of Nanjing has only a sofa, a few tables, and many boxes of tissues. This is the city's first cry bar, where customers can sit and weep for about \$6 per hour,

The owner, Luo Jun, said he opened the bar when clients of his last club said they found life so desperate, so morally and spiritually confusing that they often wanted to cry, but didn't know when or where it would be appropriate to do so.

The cry bar is perhaps bringing temporary relief to the afflicted, but it won't solve the problems of a spiritually confused age.

Some things about human nature are universal. When good things happen, we are in heaven; when bad things happen, we are in hell. The fragmentary nature of our experience shatters us into fragments. One minute the world is full of light, then suddenly it is full of dark. No wonder we want to cry.

Martin Luther King said there was so much frustration in the world because we have relied on gods rather than God. We have genuflected before the god of science, only to find that it has given us the atomic bomb, producing fears and anxieties that science can never mitigate.

We have worshipped the god of pleasure, only to discover that thrills play out and sensations are short lived.

We have bowed before the god of money, only to learn that there are such things as love and friendship that money cannot buy, and that in a world of recessions, stock market crashes and bad business investments, money is a rather uncertain deity.

We need help but, for most, spirituality has an otherworldly ring to it, calling to mind eccentric monks who forsake the world, take vows of poverty and isolate themselves in monasteries.

"What about the rest of us?" asked the late American writer Mike Yaconelli.

"What about those of us who live in the city, have a wife or husband, three children, two cats and a washing machine that has stopped working? What about those of us

who are single, work 60 to 70 hours a week, have parents who wonder why we're not married, and have friends who make much more money than we do?

"What about those of us who are divorced, still trying to heal from the scars of rejection, trying to cope with the single-parenting of children who don't understand why this has happened to them?"

"Is there spirituality for the rest of us who are not secluded in a monastery, who don't have it all together and probably never will?"

Mike Yaconelli, who wrote about the ordinary man's search for God in his book *Messy Spirituality*, said he had been "trying to follow Christ most of my life, and the best I can do is a stumbling, bumbling, clumsy kind of following".

But he concluded that spirituality, as most of us understand it, was not spirituality at all. It was a lot simpler than we thought.

It came from understanding that the grace of God was dangerous, lavish, excessive, outrageous and scandalous.

"God's grace is ridiculously inclusive," said Yaconelli. "Apparently, God doesn't care who He loves. He is not very careful about the people He calls His friends."

I recently asked a pastor friend from Sri Lanka, who has presided over amazing healing meetings across the world, why such miracle happenings seem more common in poorer nations.

"I think one reason is that the poor and less educated do not intellectualise their faith," he said. "They merely accept that they are loved by God and expect the best from Him. They do not talk about what they do not have, but rather what they do have. And because of that, they are open to accept when the normal order of things falls away and a truly miraculous event occurs."

French scientist and mystic Teilhard de Chardin said our lives would change when we realised we were not human beings having a spiritual experience, but spiritual beings having a human experience.

And if we'd only just stop for a minute, we could hear the God of the universe whisper: "I love you."

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