

About the Youth Evangelical Alliance of the NCEASL

The YEA, an arm of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, is an interlink between young people and God's mission in our nation. We aim to connect the two; thereby, uniting and equipping youth to further God' mission in our land. We believe God's work in a nation is holistic: it touches and transforms individuals and structures through the gospel of Christ. The YEA exists to awake young people to this reality and fully engage them in God's mission in our land. To this end, we serve as a platform that unites and equips youth for effective Christian witness in the nation. To achieve our vision, we seek to equip young people in the area of holistic mission and leadership to impact the nation for Jesus.

Some of our other initiatives include PaanKade, an online platform that promotes reflection and action on some contemporary issues, X-change, an offline platform that seeks to equip youth to grapple with pressing issues in society and the Nation Church Project that brings together Christian youth leaders from different churches to mobilise prayer for the nation.

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From filters to freedom

Editorial

From the second wave of coronavirus infections to the passing of the 20th Amendment, much has happened in our nation since our last issue.

According to health experts, it is now that the most severe part of the crisis has dawned. Social transmission, after many months of containment, is a very real possibility. Every day, we have heard the news of hundreds of infections. The death count has been increasing by the day too. And at present, at the point of writing, we've been confined to our homes yet again.

On the political frontier, the 20th Amendment which was passed with overwhelming support and much fanfare was another hit to our democracy. At the end of it all, greater power has once again been concentrated with an individual. And, so, the passing of the 20th amendment proved to be yet another reminder of how desperately we need a complete transformation in our political culture.

In the current situation, how must the Church respond? The health crisis has meant that Churches cannot physically gather. However, the Church is more than four walls. And, perhaps, it is time to rethink Church too. In a context like ours, where the politics are so divisive, standing on the side of the truth and speaking truth to power, is a complicated matter. Nevertheless, according to Scripture, it is the prophetic role of the Church. As youth, we too should ask ourselves, do we critically think about the issues of our nation from a faith perspective or somehow suspend and disconnect our faith when it comes to such issues? At the same time, how much do we care for our nation? If ever there was a time to pray for our land and our people, it is now. As Christian youth, let's think critically, act boldly and pray unceasingly.



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Consider Jesus's model of leadership. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus definitively stated, "...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28). How does this compare to the actions of our leaders? Does the 20th Amendment promote this model of servant leadership?

do justice love mercy.

As Christians we have been called to do justice and love mercy. We are expected to uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. What then should be our position if it is our leaders themselves who are the oppressors? What should be our response when our leaders make plans to consolidate power and further marginalise the weak and the vulnerable?

The Bible is full of examples of individuals who were compelled by righteousness to act on behalf of others in the face of great opposition. Even after he was ordered to be silent, Jeremiah continued to warn that Jerusalem was doomed unless its leaders repented (Jeremiah 22). Following their encounter with the authorities for violating an order against witnessing in public, Peter and John did not pray for protection, but rather for boldness (Acts 4:29). And Jesus put His life on the line when He charged the Pharisees with hypocrisy and rebuked them for burdening others with cumbersome loads (Matthew 23).

By sacrificing His son for the sake of the guilty, God declared us righteous when we did not deserve it. Therefore, the only reasonable response is to seek justice and righteousness for others. This is a radical way of life that is neither easy nor convenient, but it compels us to act. It is imperative that we as the Church take this role to heart. The Church is not a voting block; she is a prophet in the desert—existing in the margins of society, in the world but not of it. And ready when necessary to speak truth to power.

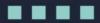
Editor's note:

Since the writing of the article, following a Supreme Court verdict, the 20th amendment to the Constitution was passed with two thirds majority in parliament and came into force on 29th October 2020.

Leading in a Post-Pandemic World



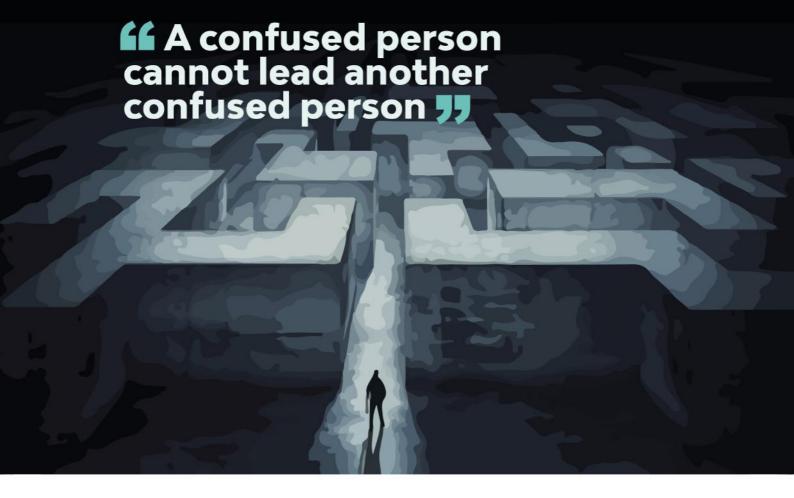
by David Rasiah



Have you ever watched Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)? The few episodes I watched had detectives investigating a crime scene, attempting to solve a crime and bring justice to the victim. 'Leading' in a post-pandemic world is perhaps somewhat like being a detective in an episode of CSI: surveying the scene and effects of the crime (COVID19?) on their world. I depict COVID19 as a crime because 'we do not wrestle against flesh and blood" and although there are practical earthly reasons for this pandemic, the deeper spiritual ones cannot be ignored.

Any crime has two parties - the perpetrator and the victim. We have alluded to the perpetrator in the previous paragraph and we will leave it at that as it is beyond the scope of this article. We will instead focus on the 'victims'.

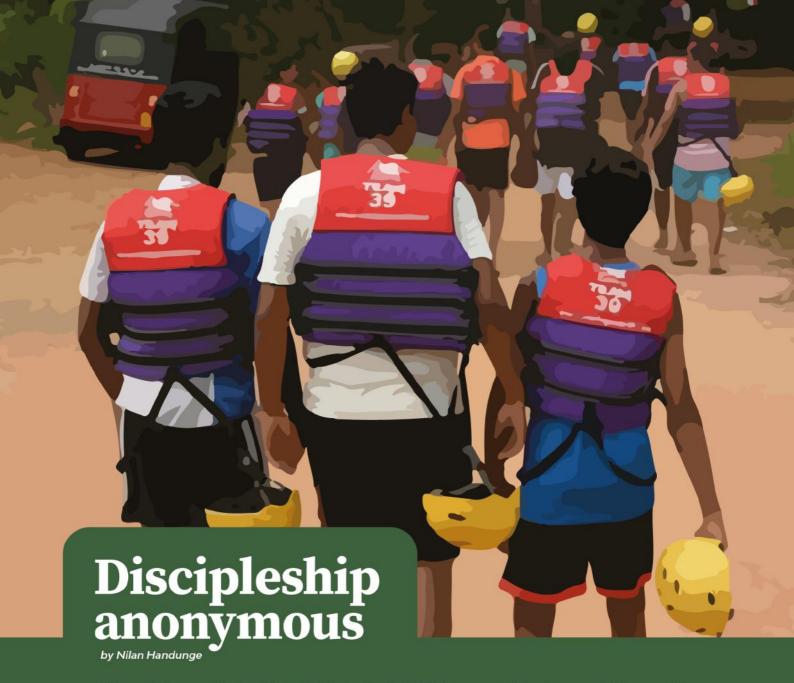
To lead in a post-pandemic world, a leader needs to have clarity about what God wants from them. A confused person cannot lead another confused person, and the COVID-19 pandemic will indeed produce a lot of confused people. This does not mean you and I must 'know-it-all', but rather, it is essential that we have clarity with regard to the basics of our faith: Christ, Salvation and Kingdom Life etc. From such a place, we will be able to lead others who during times such as these are confused and hurt about life and its purpose.



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a considerable number of people lost their jobs while many lost the ability to travel and do things they like. More seriously, some lost loved ones. As we all know some of these changes are life altering. Once the pandemic is over, people will need time to re-adjust and reintegrate back into a semblance of normal life and so they will be playing catch up in different areas. In such a context, a 'foolish' leader will over complicate things while a 'wise' leader will seek to simplify things for the people they lead. Choose, therefore, to add simplicity to your leadership arsenal.

To lead effectively in a post-pandemic world, you need to first lead effectively in the present pandemic world. During this pandemic, how have you treated your followers? Have you messaged/called them? Met their needs? If you have significantly failed in these areas, you lack integrity. Integrity is not only avoiding what is wrong but also doing what is right.

Practice CSI (Have Clarity, lead with Simplicity and Integrity) and you will lead effectively not only during but also after the pandemic.



When I first committed my life to Christ at a Youth for Christ camp, I did not know what I was getting into. At most I was aware of two things. I was given a clean slate from my sins (that felt amazing), and I had decided to 'give God a chance' to be a part of my life. In retrospect I doubt I knew what I was getting into the day I 'found God'.

Thankfully though I had a leader who became a strangely welcome part of my life. We would meet up regularly where we could talk or play some sport and converse about life while he would advise me. He would consistently ask me questions along the lines of how my relationship with God was, if I studied the Bible that week, how I practiced what I learnt, and if I spent time worshipping God.

To me he was a pseudo counsellor / life coach / holy guy. Things were fine, until he asked me to lead other Christians in the same way. To disciple them. The morning after that request (and my immediate rejection of it), I read the following verse: You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit-fruit that will last John 15:16. My first question was whether God or my discipler had set me up. Turns out it was God! The two things I understood from this verse was that I did not choose God, rather, he chose me. And he did not choose me just to have a relationship with Him, but to 'bear fruit'. In other words, I was not saved to behave, but saved to save.

'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also (John 15:20). A few days later the thought struck me if I would be taken seriously by those I disciple. Thankfully, I came across this Bible verse, and apart from the obvious encouragement, it also humbled me. I am not greater than Jesus. If he can disciple me, then he can disciple through me.

It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble (Luke 17:2).

Before long, I was in a situation where I had to correct my 'disciple' on an issue I struggled with as well - coarse joking (Ephesians 5:4). It felt hypocritical and I tried to justify ignoring it, reasoning out that it was not important and simply harmless fun. However, the truth was that I did not want to change myself. Luke 17:2 challenged me in two ways; teach what is right even if you are wrong, and work with others to do right. Even though you are a leader you are walking the road of righteousness together with other believers.

But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you (John 16:7).

Sometimes in the process of being a discipler, we tend to take the place of God in a person's life.

Hear me out. We may always be present for them, offer advice, guidance and comfort as need be. Though this is good, in the process if we are not directing them to God and praying for them, we are building a kingdom for ourselves and propping our egos. This verse shows how Jesus 'made space' for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of His disciples by moving out at the right time. I am not suggesting one simply drops his disciples but rather transition them. Jesus went before His disciples making way for them and showing them 'His pattern'. He then passed the baton to the Holy Spirit and stepped aside for Him to finish the race, helping them discover 'their pattern'. Likewise, as we begin discipling we suggest that our disciples would follow us as we follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). But as they grow we should keep pointing them to God and let Him disciple them. They will do even greater things than us (and maybe even Jesus: John 14:12).

You know your work as a discipler is nearing completion when your disciples are discipling others, and you consider them a friend (John 15:15). But you know your work is done, when you stand before the One your soul loves, and hear Him say to you and your disciples 'welcome, good and faithful ones.' (Matthew 25:21)



An Instrument for Reconciliation by Jashan Jegasothy

Sri Lanka has been through many struggles: The war we all experienced, ethnic violence, communal conflict, and more recently a tragic extremist attack that took away the lives of hundreds. Reconciliation is a crucial aspect in helping communities progress past the grievance. But through all the mechanisms employed to work alongside these issues, there is one key area that has barely been tapped into.

Music has been a core part of my life ever since I can remember. From being baptised at a local Methodist Church at birth, till now, music has followed every year of my life for the past 23 years and because of that, I've been able to witness the role music has played in our local Christian community thus far.

The music at church has always been one of my favourite parts of the service. I recall when I was 6 years old, my parents used to wake me up bright and early on Sunday morning to attend the Tamil service at 7 am. I dreaded this. Sundays meant the weekend, and it was such a crime to wake up at such an hour. Looking back, however, I am grateful for the consistency in attending these services because it introduced me to a local worship style I will always appreciate. I used to wonder how the congregants have so much energy at such an early hour. The people would sing with everything they had, and it showed. The energy was vibrant. I saw this same vibrant energy in Sinhala services/prayer meetings. The music flowed through the people and gave them life. You could feel the power in the room.

The English congregation services I later began to attend exposed me to rich hymns, from composers such as John Wesley, which were eloquently written and intertwined with deep theology.

Through attending different services and worshiping God, I began to notice a distinction: the music from the Tamil and Sinhala congregations had more original pieces that were unique to the local context.

This was seen quite clearly in the lyrics and instruments used to the overall message and style of the song. It naturally resonated with the people because these are our first languages and the connection to the words is more. But the fact remained, there was more original music in Tamil and Sinhala than in English.



Original music for worship created by Sri Lankans was visibly missing at the English worship segment. While enriching as the words were, the English songs and hymns utilised in worship were for the most part, borrowed from the West and other parts of the world, save for a few local songs and hymns written by missionaries who arrived in Sri Lanka and others who wrote much later on. To add to this the local songs that were written in English by Sri Lankans are rarely sung in Churches today.

This difference is becoming more prominent as the bridge between the two distinct styles increases. 'Local' verses the 'adapted from abroad'. This is not to say that there is an overflow of original songs in Tamil and Sinhala. More could certainly be done. To clarify, there is absolutely nothing wrong about singing songs from the West and other countries. Songs that bring worship to God should not be bound by such limits. There are countless such songs which are true to theology and have powerful scriptural meaning.



The essence, however, is the lack of original songs of worship that cater to a country's specific realities. This is the power and potential music has in Sri Lanka that hasn't been utilised. This is the voice we have to raise the issues we struggle with and bring them before God as a community of believers. And this is something that can be encouraged to believers from all communities. The war we experienced, the ethnic violence, tragic extremist attacks are issues specific to Sri Lankans and provide an opportunity to write songs that strengthen communities struggling to cope. We must ask ourselves, what are the emotions and deep desires that we experience from all this pain that we can direct to God?

Songs that stress the congregational need of reconciling with one another in a nation recovering from the effects of war are a way to bring meaning to struggles we sometimes don't know how to talk about. Sri Lanka lacks this original Christian worship culture that stays true to the struggles we have been through. While songs from other countries can to a certain degree be adapted to our issues, there are opportunities to do more. It's not for a lack of talent either, as Sri Lanka has a plethora of talented Christian Musicians who are capable of composing original music. Sri Lanka has quite some ways to go in rebuilding communities torn down by the war, bridging the gap between two communities that lived through trying times.

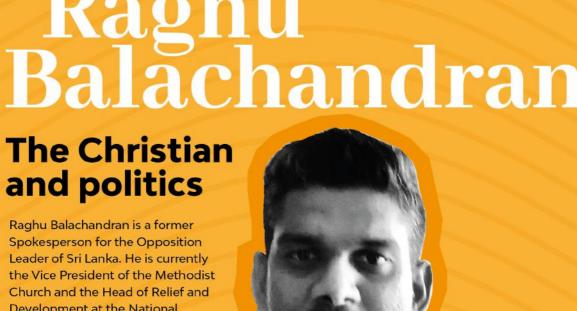
When we face moments where words fail, music has the ability to speak.

This could be an avenue that fills these gaps that communities are longing for. Churches ought to encourage those in their congregations who can compose and write music to create songs for local worshippers about the issues we face as a nation.

As Ephesians 5:19 puts it, to "speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord." It's time we stop ignoring what we have been through, stop acting blind to what we are capable of and let music challenge the struggles we face.

Let us make music that worships God; music that will be sung for generations by Sri Lankans to come.





Development at the National Chrisitan Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka. Raghu has a passion for politics and is keen to encourage Christian youth to get involved in the political sphere to bring about change in the nation.



What is your view of politics as a Christian?

Politics is like any other calling or ministry. There is great potential to demonstrate and witness to Christ in politics. Politics is part of our daily life because every decision that has been made in the political realm has a direct impact on people. Therefore politics cannot in any way be kept out of our Christian life.

There is a general sentiment among Christians that politics is something we should stay away from. As someone very involved with the Church, how did you get an interest in politics?

The negative perception of politics prevails due to a lack of understanding. People often think politics means people getting elected to parliament or something related to it. In reality, the political structure has different layers which provide a great platform for individuals to serve people and uplift their standards of living. If someone could understand how much potential it creates for individuals to serve; those of us who truly want to serve people would join politics.

My interest towards politics did not start on a positive note. Through various struggles that I experienced in my life, I realized that a Christian presence is very much needed in the highest decision making bodies in this country. If not, it will be extremely difficult to ensure that justice and accountability are being upheld. We keep blaming the system and the way things are being done, but if we are to change the system for the betterment of everyone we need to step up to the challenge and be involved in the system to bring about that change. I wanted to be part of the system to understand the politics in this country and make my contribution in whatever way I can to bring the change which I desire or want to see happening.

As someone involved with politics, what would you say are some of the most pressing political problems in Sri Lanka that the Church should take notice of?

I cannot pick specific things for the church to take note of. Because in my view the church must engage in every aspect of politics! In other words in every aspect of human life. Because the church is all about caring for people individually, I do not think the church should be getting involved only in very specific matters. If anything affects people, the church must be there to make its contribution. The church is there to serve people, and politics is one such platform to serve and show Christian values while doing so. This gives an opportunity for even non-believers to see that there is something different in you, and they may want to know what it is.

As Paul wrote we must seize every opportunity to present the gospel, and being engaged in politics gives us ample opportunities to do that both in word and deed. If we take some of the issues that are pressing in today's world such as the cost of living, poverty, violence against children, Human rights violations, suppression of the freedom of speech; all these should concern the church and us as Christians. The church must start to think what if Jesus was here? How would he have responded to this situation? If the Church could find answers for these questions and then implement those answers, we will see the church being instrumental for positive change in every part of this nation.

Politics is a difficult field. Are there any figures in your life who inspired you to think about politics?

Indeed it is a difficult field and in my personal view, it may demand more sacrifice than being a Priest. I was inspired by the story of William Wilberforce and how he fought to abolish slavery and changed the system. Though it was a long struggle he never quit. He continued his fight and finally, his dream came true. Perhaps when his dream came true he was not active in politics, but the seed he planted in his time bore fruit. Also, his story helped me to understand the importance of being rooted in our faith to bring change to society regardless of which period you are in and who is opposing you.



What is your view of the Church's response to politics in Sri Lanka?

As I mentioned earlier, the Church is very selective when it's come to political engagement, which is not a sign of a prophetic church. When the church decides to be selective it loses its fundamental calling of being the salt and light in the world. Instead, they isolate themselves from matters that are critical to the community. Therefore the church must play an active role in keeping those who are in authority accountable. When the church raises its voice on matters that are only relevant to the Christian community or just for the particular community they are in, it loses its position as the representative of God.



The political situation in Sri Lanka has often not been the most encouraging. What would you say to young Christians who are disinterested in politics?

We as Christians are called to be the agents of change, which means we are called to be involved in any corrupted system and yet to be true to our faith and calling and bring the change to a system if we see injustice or corruption in it.

Especially for young people the thought I'd like to provoke is, what do you want your legacy to be? How do you want to leave your mark in this world? If you see injustice happening in the system, we should not simply criticize it from afar, but rather we must put ourselves in the places where decisions are made. This is where political involvement comes in, this is where you can leave your mark.

This does not only include representative politics where you contest for elections but also just stepping out of your comfort zones to engage in political conversation, to educate yourself and encourage those around you to take an active interest in politics. People often accuse young people of being more interested in their own lives and happenings rather than taking responsibility to change the world around them. It's up to you to fit into that narrative or challenge it by rising above.



Genesis 1:27 - "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Reading this verse in today's context seems a little dated. We live in a world where if you google search "how many genders are there?", some will say 72, others will say 52, and the general idea is, gender meaning 'man' and 'woman' is simply an old fashioned idea.

The Bible is quite clear about sex and gender, the idea of creating them "male and female". Separate, distinct from each other, meant for each other and **made in His image.** But of course, we live in a fallen world, and the world is not perfect as God intended it to be.

You could look at the dictionary definition of gender: it would say "either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female."

And that's in a sense true, the term is used quite broadly. To capture how the world views it today, as opposed to the "natural" view in the Bible; it is a self-identification. A feeling or belief one has, that in a man's body they are, indeed, a female (Trans-gender). Or perhaps identify as female today, and sometime later as a male (Gender Fluid). Or you identify as neither, and so on.

The general idea in the world today is that gender exists on a sort of spectrum, and it is just a social construct. Gender itself is something people learn, apparently not something they are born with.

Dr.John Money was an American psychologist who believed in gender neutrality, that what is male and female are socially constructed and taught. He got the opportunity to test this theory when a young boy of about 6 months. Bruce Reimer at the time, was brought to the John Hopkins hospital. Bruce was one of two twins and was brought to the hospital following a botched surgery to his **penis** which damaged it beyond repair. Dr Money along with the team at John Hopkins Children's hospital convinced the parents to perform a gender reassignment surgery to this boy, and that he would be better off if raised as a girl. This, of course, gave him a perfect situation to test his theory, as one twin would be raised as a boy, and the other as a girl (With a surgically constructed **vagina**), in the exact same environment and sharing the same genes [1]

The result, unfortunately, was not unexpected. As my opening line stated,

"Male and female He created them".

Separate, and distinct. Young Bruce was raised as Brenda Reimer, and by the age of 13 started having severe mental challenges. As time went on, regardless of whatever social upbringing he had or the reassignment surgery he did, or the hormones he took (which even induced the development of breasts), he could not accept this identity as the truth, he could not live as a girl. His gender, determined by his sex, was male.

The New York Times best-selling biography written by John Colapinto. "As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl (2000)", in which he described how—contrary to Money's reports(which claim he lived happily as a young girl) —when living as Brenda, Reimer did not identify as a girl. He was ostracized and bullied by peers (who dubbed him "cavewoman"), and neither frilly dresses nor female hormones made him feel female.

Gender is something you are born with, determined by your sex, and the expression of gender is due to the hormones a child is exposed to in Utero, according to the scientific evidence [2]. These are the facts about gender, led by scientific research and objective reasoning. How does this affect all those living while not conforming to a gender or the gender their sex is supposed to be associated with?

I believe we approach anyone who identifies with this, or a situation like this the same way we should to any situation, with love. With the understanding that there is such a thing called "gender dysphoria - the feeling of discomfort or distress that might occur in people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth or sex-related physical characteristics." And this is a condition people suffer from greatly. This group of people with a terrifyingly high suicide rate, and to love them is not to stigmatize or "other" them further than what society is already doing. Our call as Christians here is to know the truth, of course, and let the Bible dictate to us what that is, not the world. But also follow the dictates of the Bible in loving and accepting each other, and providing a community for all those who have been marginalized or discriminated against.

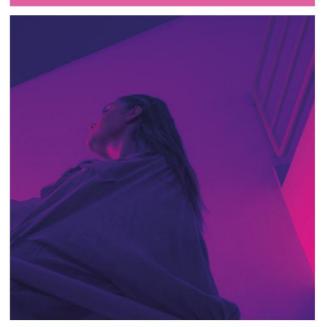
All people are created in the image of God, and so they are all, intrinsically of equal value. Let us then treat each other as such, regardless of who we identify as.

From Filters To Freedom

by Jerome Rasiah

As you scroll through your day, does it feel like everyone else has it all together? Someone always has a better job, is better looking, or has the happiest relationship. Do you find it hard to be your true self in a "filtered" world?

If the answer is yes, then, I have to break it to you that you are like many of us who are struggling with the modern ways of social media. As we live in the 21st century and experience the power of social media, the importance of integrity and authenticity is questioned like never before. The desire to portray ourselves in a way that can be acceptable to society is an expectation that all of us face. Similarly, in such a context, we also find ourselves often pondering who and what can be trusted!



The more filters we add, the more we show the world what we want them to see.



This only makes the task of being authentic harder.

This matters in every single area of our lives and every relationship we have regardless of how we approach it. What starts off as a superficial covering in time leads into a condition. In fact, we now appear to be a part of a generation that filters everything! We don't even know how to open up or for that matter know who we truly are anymore! In an age where we look out for 'likes' and constantly ask people on how my picture looks, we need to ask the question whether we are "real" in life and in our dealings with others.

The Bible tells us that God delights in us when the truth is found in our inmost being (Psalm 51:6).



While these are great and give us much joy, peace and surely are pleasing before God, according to the Bible, we see that God's deepest desire for us is to be set free. We are told that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). Therefore, knowing Him and knowing what He has in store for us is what results in great FREEDOM; a freedom to be ourselves in a filtered world.

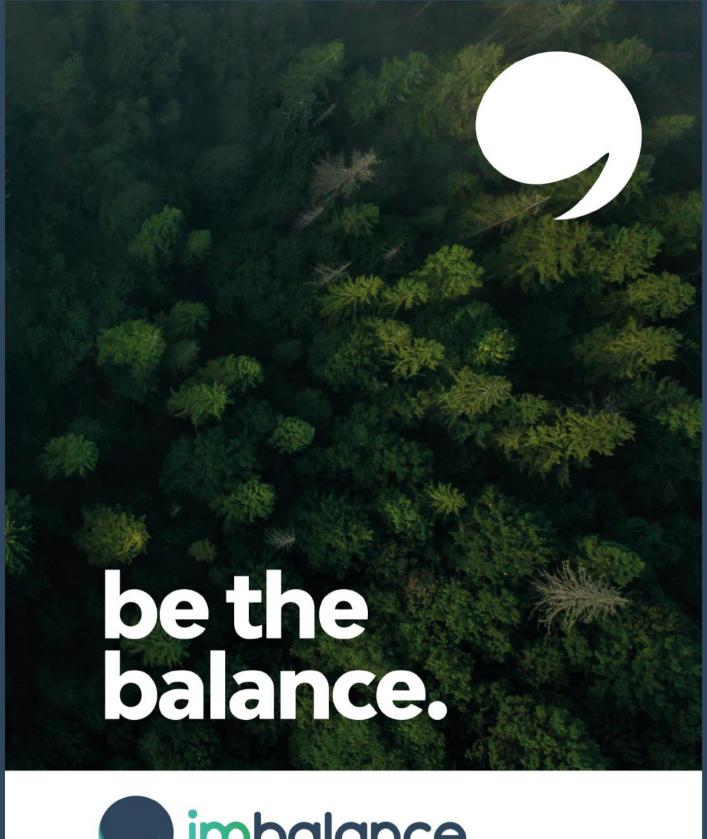
Yes, our inner being should align with our outer being. However, it seems like in God's eyes, what's more important is for our inner and outer beings to align with His being. Have you been able to share the deepest part of your life to somebody? Do you always seek affirmation from people and not

God? Are you scared that people wouldn't accept you if you revealed to them your true self? Are you different things to different people; so much so that you don't even know who you are anymore? In a world where we live "filtered" lives, what does it truly mean to have integrity? What does it mean to live a life of authenticity? These are difficult but important questions to ponder.

God also loves honesty (Psalm

see that we've been made to live in a manner where what's inside aligns with what's outside. If you think about it, rarely would anyone confess that they are happy with duplicity and dishonesty. In fact, if you are honest, you'd know where there is a disconnect between what's inside and what's revealed out, there is frustration, unhappiness and disturbance in our innermost being. Yet, according to Scripture, this is not solely the type of honesty, integrity or authenticity that God is after.

How sweet it is to be a Christian, where not perfection, but freedom and forgiveness are the heart of our life's pursuits!





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