

Finding your real faith

By Tabitha Wells

Faith is a funny thing. Despite being rooted in your own personal thoughts and feelings, it can be deeply affected by people's actions, lack of actions, and words. These things can rock everything you believe, bringing your world down around you like a glass ceiling shattering in a million pieces.

Though faith ultimately should be planted firmly in an omnipresent, gracious, steadfast God, it can be difficult to learn to separate him from the people who follow him. As human beings incapable of completely understanding God, we see him represented by the people who claim to do things in his name. People who use his name as an excuse to do bad, to hurt others, or to absolve themselves from helping those who are struggling or hurting.

I've questioned my place within Christianity more times than I would like to admit. I've also been hurt by people within Christianity more times than I would like to admit. Some of the cruelest people I've met are ones who seek out God every Sunday, raising their hands in worship, and acting as if God is their all and all.

There have been times when this behaviour has made me wonder whether it is worth it ? whether it is worth following God, pursuing the Bible, and being actively involved in a church setting.

And while I have certainly seen some incredibly loving people in the church and witnessed them pour out that love, support, and mercy on others, it has been rare for me to experience it myself.

We're not supposed to rest our faith on people, but sometimes, it becomes hard not to.

As the transgressions pile up, the hurt and feelings of abandonment begin to cave in on top of you, it can become difficult to view any of it as worth it. Even worse, it can be difficult to find and connect with the good things that are happening. The rose-coloured glasses aren't just off, they're smashed into tiny splinters jabbing into you so hard you can't see any of the positive anymore.

The last four years have been the most traumatic in my faith. I've been disappointed by people who claimed to be living for God over and over again. It felt like the more I tried to set my feelings aside and dive into church and into the churchy world, the more disappointments were thrown at me.

But, these last four years have also been the best for my faith. Being hurt and feeling like there was no real place for me challenged me to find my own footing. If my faith was wrapped up in whether I was connected and part of a Christian community, was it really an active, living faith?

Perhaps one of the biggest things I have come to finally understand is imperfect people make imperfect Christians who have imperfect faiths and make imperfect churches. Despite so many believing they have it all figured out, that they believe they know what they are saying and doing is 100% right, the truth is none of us do.

If I'm being perfectly honest with myself, there was a time I believed exactly as many Christians I know do, and believed I was 100% right in believing that. My struggles and my experiences in the world have taught me otherwise ? they've taught me a lot of what I believed was wrong and often hurtful to others.

The past year and a bit, the biggest step in my journey has been learning to have grace; grace for those who hurt me, grace for those who believe differently, and grace for those who can't accept that I believe differently. It's not easy ? it's probably been the hardest part of my faith journey ? but it's a work in progress.

It's allowed me to take the focus off other people, and how they live out their faith, and figure out what my faith means for me. It's meant I've had to completely deconstruct everything I've believed down to the roots and rebuild.

This isn't something I'm facing alone; one need only look to any of the dozens of faith-based publications to see the reports of Millennials, Xennials, and Gen Xers struggling to figure out what they believe and where their place is.

Unlike other generations, I think our biggest challenge is that for many of us, we are not content to just believe something because we are told to believe it. While we like and even want to see traditions and reverence for our history, we also want to understand it. We want to know we are living how we're living and believing what we are believing because it's what WE believe, not because it was our parents' beliefs.

For many, that might mean faith ends where their questioning begins. For others of us, it means beginning to see things in a new light. In that new light, it means figuring out a way to throw out all the bad, to use those experiences to push us forward to fight for better, all the while finally being able to see the good that was always there all along.

I know many of you who read my columns aren't Christians ? to some of you, some of whom I've had some wonderful in-depth conversations with, the idea of Christianity and God is childlike and silly. This week, I apologize, because for this piece my target audience is people like me. It's for those who are struggling to find their place in a faith that now almost seems foreign, but don't

want to let it all go.

Every walk has a season. It goes through highs and it goes through lows. It goes through still waters and deep, dark, desolate valleys. You may be at a crossroads, but that crossroads is a good thing. Don't be afraid to plow straight forward, through that field, and dig through all the gunk, the mud, the weeds, and the tall grass ? to tear it all down and figure out which way is right for you.

Ask questions. Study different thoughts. Seek truth. Find your way to a place where you feel peace in your beliefs. It is there you will find your real faith, whatever that may look like.