

Southern Adventist University
Knowledge Exchange

The Main Thing Devotional

Office of Ministry and Missions

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Life Under God

Anna Bennett

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“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.” Isaiah 29:13 & Matthew 15:8-9, NIV.

Life Under God

How do you relate to God? How have you been taught throughout your childhood to view Him? Is it possible you experience God in a kind of cause-and-effect way – living by the belief that if you are good enough, obey enough, and keep His commands then He will bless you, your family, our nation? If so, this isn't surprising as many individuals live from this posture of Life Under God. There's just one problem – this way of relating to God doesn't bring freedom or draw us into authentic and intimate connection with Him. In fact, it is a kind of empty religion that often weighs people down under guilt and fear. This is the kind of religion Jesus came to set us free from

“They [the religious leaders] tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders.” The Life Under God view puts its emphasis on appeasing God through behaviors—either in the form of rituals or morality. Formal religions, and those leading them, often create elaborate and arduous lists of requirements for their followers—the “heavy burdens” Jesus condemned. Trying to get everyone to follow the rules and live by divine expectations as oppressive Islamic regimes and Christian fundamentalists attempt today, is not what God intends for his people. It will not set us free from fear and evil.”^[1]

You may think Jesus is a softy, and while He is meek, He was a political force to be reckoned with. In direct opposition to this oppressive religion promoted by the Pharisees and other religious leaders, Jesus invited people: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”^[2] Even more, He called out the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who may have appeared righteous on the outside but “neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.”^[3]

Life Under God is not the kind of religion Jesus came to establish. Author Ellen White declares, “What is true religion? It is to love God with all the heart, and our neighbors as ourselves. This is the whole duty of man.”^[4]

As you make Jesus the main thing in your life this week, may you take a critical eye to the way you relate to God and experience the compassion He offers in loving relationship.

Reflection

1. What kind of 'heavy burdens' have you experienced in religious communities?
2. Have you ever identified hypocritical behaviors in your own life? How does Jesus' message set us free from this tendency?

News and Resources

- Join us this week for Vespers at 6:30pm or 8:30pm in the University Church with Chaplain Joseph Khabbaz.
- Find a meaningful sense of belonging by joining a student or faculty/staff LifeGroup today: [click here](#).
- If you are feeling anxious or have recently experienced loss or grief, call 423.236.2782 to talk to a counselor on campus! (This is a free service for Southern students.)
- **Talk** with Chaplain [Anna Bennett](#) or [Joseph Khabbaz](#) if you need someone to pray with or have a desire to grow spiritually.