

The Next (or Next Next) Generation of Crossings Theologians

Colleagues,

Today's guest theologian, Marty Lessmann, age 25, has a distinction that I can't imagine how anyone would be able to match. For 90% of Marty's entire life he's been "Crossings-connected." Who can top that? Not me, and I'm occasionally labelled "co-founder." Marty's Crossings-connection started when he was two and one-half years old!

Here's how. Twenty-two and one-half years ago (90% of Marty's current age) Crossings quarterly newsletters, posted snail-mail, were our only vehicle for connecting the Crossings Community. The first one came out the year Marty was born. In those days the office was the spare room in the Schroeder house. Newsletters—eventually going to 4000-plus receivers—were stuffed at the dining room table. So four times a year—now and then five or six times a year—a bunch of local Crossings folks gathered around our dining room table—extended as far as it would go—to stuff newsletters into mailing envelopes. All this in those days before cyberspace was discovered. The first ones were done on a typewriter, of course, and formatted with scissors and paste.

Cathy Lessmann, current major domo for all Crossings activities (yes, newsletters are now stuffed at HER dining room table), was herself "just" a new Crossings student, but one turned on. So she was regularly on hand for envelope stuffing at our place in those days. And what to do with her youngest child? Bring him along. So I taught Marty the arcane art of stuffing envelopes and we bonded. Marty was so small in those days that Marie

remembers he would simply walk under the table to get to the other side instead of going around.

I just asked Marie to call him and get some updated info. Here's what he told her: "I teach math at Parkway Central High School in the St. Louis area. I coach girls' golf and boys' baseball. I lead the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, about 40 kids every other week. We have a dinner and then a Bible study, but beforehand I look over the FCA study guide and then change the questions to make them more law/gospel. FCS as an organization doesn't get it. It's law, law, law. I love Crossings. And I'm free! I hear so many kids saying they have to do this, they have to do that, because God says they have to. I tell them: no, you don't. In Christ we're free! No more *have to.*"

"I am a product of law/Gospel theology. A graduate of Colorado State University, I decided to go against my major (business) and go into the business of changing the hearts of young people. Why? I coached baseball, led a ministry, and worked at a christian youth camp throughout college. Eventually I had to ask myself what made my heart come alive, and that was being with youth; as a result I went into education . . . math being the easiest route for my certification. Now I teach high school students life and Gospel; math is my modus operandi. I'm an old man as well, as labeled by my peers, for I sing in a church choir and play in a bridge group."

When I stumbled on to Marty's letter to mega-church pastor Jim, I asked his permission to pass it on to you. He said yes. Here's Marty.

Peace and joy!
Ed Schroeder.

Background:

Pastor Jim leads Flatirons Community Church out in Colorado; a non-denominational church of 9,000 weekend attendees. [Google the name to see what an operation it is.] I've got siblings out there, and when I visit them, I sometimes stop in at Flatirons. Recently Jim started a four-week sermon series about faith. His first sermon, entitled, "House of Cards" spoke about our faith in terms of what we put it in. He did an excellent job defining the external problem, that is suggesting faith is whatever we put belief in, and perhaps our faith is in the wrong place. Right into D2 he went, defining the internal problem as our faith being in the wrong place; our hearts cannot live on what we desire to put our faith into i.e., money, job, family, etc. Though he brushed on P4, he completely disregarded D3, the complete recognition of the problem with my unfaith and necessity for Christ. From D2 to P5 we went; "Just change your faith, trust the Cross, and you'll be alright..." and I agree, but it just doesn't work like that, for my unfaith, my disconnection with God the Judge, God the Mercy Manager, must be addressed. Whatever happened to "From 3 to 4 and not before?" [Ed here. Marty's citing the old Bertram mantra: Don't jump to step four in the Crossings sequence (Christ the Rescuer) until you have exposed the God-problem (step three) that only Christ can solve.]

So I decided to write a little note to Pastor Jim suggesting we talk about what is so great about our faith:

Pastor Jim-Grace and Peace to you this fine afternoon....in St. Louis.

The power of the internet is amazing; I got to hear your sermon this afternoon and I'm 846 miles away from Flatirons. Thank you for taking the daunting task to speak about faith.

As you mentioned numerous times throughout your sermon, our faith is what we put our trust in. Our intelligence? Our humor? Our Job? Good Looks? As Christians we are the biggest culprits of placing our faith in the wrong place, for of all people we should know the best but yet fail in the end.

At one point you mentioned "If I put my faith in any other thing (other than the cross, that Great Exchange, God's son for my life, God's mercy for my iniquity) it is a house of cards and it will collapse." I agree, but find great trouble in that very message. For in the end even though I know my faith reconciles me, my unfaith scares me, I KNOW my faith will fail me. I KNOW I do not get it; I KNOW I need a savior. I personally cannot change my heart.

In the end we must ask ourselves, "Self, what is so great about faith?" And if we are honest, I think you and I will both conclude that what is so great about our faith is NOT the fact that we have it, but *what is so great about our faith is the one who it is in.*

Jim, I'm an outsider in your church, heck I live in St. Louis and have only been blessed to worship with you all a couple times. I'm concerned, however, that your sermon on faith left me feeling worse about myself. My life is a deck of cards, for as much as I want to trust the message, I still trust my intelligence, humor, etc. I find no Good News in my faith for as Christ reminds us, it is the size of a mustard seed. The Good News is trumped by the Bad News, that is, I know I don't always live with enough faith....complete faith.

But there my brother, is where Christ changes everything. What is so great about my mustard seed faith? The very fact that it is in Christ is all he needs. He takes what little faith I have and runs with it. For in the end, I know I am going to trust

the house of cards. I don't want to, but it's my sin. Christ says, "Marty, I'm going to take your little faith, and make you well." To me that is the good news. I am made well, whole...ly (if you would) because of the one my little faith is in; not under my own doing.

I hear that same message in your sermons and I wanted to share what I think is so great about faith. Below I have included a link to an article written by Dr. Robert Bertram entitled, "What is So Great About Faith?" I believe you will find it invaluable to your series as you tackle the idea of faith. The contents have set me free in the Good News concerning faith, I hope you find the same.

<https://crossings.org/archive/bob/faithful-1974.shtml>

*Thank you for your time,
Marty*

P.S. There are a slew of articles on the crossings.org website about faith....many written by the same guy.