



# THE CHICAGO CONNECTION

Connecting Chicago disciples with each other, the Midwest and the world

www.chicagochurch.org

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## Did God Really Say? *Living as Disciples in the "Real World"*

In the movie, *The Matrix*, the main character (Neo) is confronted with the truth that the world he thinks he lives in is fake—and that most of mankind is actually plugged into a machine to be used as an energy source for a world overtaken by a computer. Upon that realization, Neo is given the choice to take a red or blue pill. By taking the blue pill, he goes back to his fake existence, thinking that life is okay. But in reality, he is still unconscious and connected to a computer. By taking the red pill, he wakes up and faces reality—that the world he really lives in is destroyed by war and ruled by machines. This fake world created by the computer is the Matrix.

### The Matrix

The world we live in is much like a matrix. The devil has created a world that is a fabrication of reality—it is not the truth. Many of our neighbors, friends and extended families believe that all is well with their souls and that their spiritual futures are secure. After all, isn't God the all-loving God who embraces everybody and would never raise a hand of wrath toward the people He loves? This is the matrix! And many people around us have taken the blue pill. Most people don't really want to know the truth. But it is our mission to help them see the truth. And the challenge for the Chicago Church of Christ is resisting the temptation to swallow the blue pill. The devil's greatest victory will be won when disciples take the blue pill and ignore the truth around them.

Yes, it's easy to pretend that the horrors of a fallen world don't exist. And taking the blue pill means less conflict! But we must remember the words of the Apostle Paul in **2 Corinthians 11:3-4**: *But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or*

*a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.* Like Eve, our minds are fertile ground for deception. By adding a little emotion, the devil can convince us of almost anything. The mistake being made by the Corinthians was that they were beginning to embrace a different Jesus than the one Paul had taught them. And the temptation to do the exact same thing is there for us as well in the Chicago Church.

### The Deception

*And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. (2 Corinthians 11:14-15)* Satan's main tool of seduction is still deceptive Christianity and false doctrines. As a church, the strength of our doctrinal convictions used to be very strong. Yet, through the years and through the recent turmoil our church has experienced, it seems that many are trying to widen the narrow road that Jesus described. The line between

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lost and saved has somehow been blurred. And we are in danger of drifting from the truth of God's Word in regard to the plan of salvation. The radical drop of souls being saved is evident—we are losing urgency. And why be urgent if so few are lost? What happened?

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1)* From the beginning, Satan's work was to tempt humans to question the authority of God's spoken and written word. And throughout biblical history, mankind has regularly succumbed to the devil's ploy. This seed of distrust has helped to produce a world that doubts the seriousness of God and questions His authority. And I believe it's an issue that is plaguing our church. We are tempted to take the blue pill and ignore reality. We, too, wonder, "Did God really say...?" To answer that all-important question, let's examine a few

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## Member Article: The Struggles That Transform Us

*The following article was written by Aaron Breford of the Southland Ministry Center. Aaron and his wife, Julie, oversee the family group that meets in Northwest Indiana.*

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)*

This passage of scripture has been an inspiration to me for the past 20 years since becoming a disciple of Jesus. It is incredible to consider that the Lord is working constantly in my life through His Spirit to transform me into His likeness. As I reflect back upon the amazing relationships, experiences and victories I've had over the past several years, it is very easy to see the hand of God working to transform me. However, if I'm really honest with myself, as I reflect over the past 20 years, it has been the struggles that have transformed me more than anything else.

While there have been many challenges over the years—ranging from stepping out of the full-time ministry to the death of my father—nothing has impacted my life more than the unique and exciting challenge of raising a son with special needs. My son, Max, has autism, a neurological disorder that disrupts his ability to communicate. While Max, who is now seven years old, is incredibly intelligent and an amazing little boy, he is basically non-verbal and he struggles with emotional outbursts. My wife bears scars up and down both of her arms where Max has scratched her in an effort to regain his self-control.

In addition, it is not uncommon for autistic children to wander off suddenly. Because of this, we keep our house locked up, even from the inside. We have special locks on the doors that require a key to come in or go out. Yet the one area of vulnerability is the garage. Max had always been afraid to go into the garage—until four weeks ago when we learned the hard way that his fears had abated. Max left the house through the garage and wandered off. After a desperate search and a call to the police, he was found (thank God!) playing three blocks away near a busy street. As I reflect upon what could have happened, my heart nearly stops. In this article, I would like to share a

valuable lesson I have learned about God from my relationship with Max?

As I consider my son, I think about this great passage in Romans: *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father."* (Romans 8:15) God is my Father. God is the perfect Father. And as I meditate on this concept, it occurs to me that *I am the special needs child*. I have a communication disorder. I struggle to communicate with God. I struggle for intimacy with Him. And when I consider my participation in the crucifixion of Jesus, I realize that, just as Max has scarred my wife's arms, I have scarred the arms of Jesus by my sin. Over the past 20 years, I also have wandered off numerous times—not quitting on God, just wandering a few blocks away, oblivious to the dangers around me.

I am a sinful man and certainly an imperfect father. Yet I do not begrudge Max. I don't harbor ill will against him. I don't love him any less than I love my daughter, Madison, because he has autism. When he can't talk, we have learned to follow **Proverbs 31:8**: *Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.* When he scars our arms, we hug him and reassure him. When he wanders off, we go after him. He is my son.

How much more will God bridge the gap in our communication problems with Him? Ultimately, Jesus showed us the answer at the cross. When we scar His arms, He hugs us and says, "Father, forgive them." When we wander off, he comes after us. As we struggle through life as "special needs" children of God, He doesn't give up on us and say "better luck next time." No! He meets us where we are and fills our lives with victories and challenges, all of which are designed to transform us into His likeness.

As I reflect upon the power of God to transform me and my family though one of the greatest challenges we have faced to date, it builds my faith to realize that God is working though the trials in my life, as well as the trials in the church, to transform all of us into His likeness.

### Do You Remember When...

**1997** With many of the original members in attendance, the Chicago Church of Christ celebrates its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary with an exciting worship service at the UIC Pavilion.

**1997** The gospel continues to be spread throughout the Chicagoland area. For the first time in its 15-year history, the Chicago Church of Christ reaches a membership of more than 3,000 disciples.

## Reviews and Previews

### 2007 Women's Retreat

Over 650 women attended our seventh annual women's retreat entitled, *The Heart of a Woman*. Worship, praise and inspiring music and dance filled the weekend with a focus to "guard our hearts." One highlight included a "Wellspring of Life Spa" scene with women from the Bible brought to life on the stage. Also, Kelda Townsell impacted all attendees as our main speaker. Following her were 26 different lessons, each taught on a women of the Bible. Four women from the Ukraine Church were our special guests, and on Sunday they led us in communion. They truly moved our hearts as they shared their hearts for God. This was a weekend that truly glorified God as we built up His kingdom! Recordings of many of the classes can be found on our website, [www.chicagochurch.org](http://www.chicagochurch.org).

### Family Devotional Rescheduled

Last month we were forced to cancel the **Congregational Family Devotional** when the facility lost power. This exciting family event has now been rescheduled for Saturday, October 13<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m. The entire family is invited to join in a morning of songs, skits and Bible stories designed to strengthen our children. The devotional will take place at Bryan Middle School, 111 W. Butterfield Road in Elmhurst.

### 2007 Mid-American Campus Retreat

*καιω: "To Light or to Burn"*

Fire is a theme resonating throughout the Scriptures. Within wrath, sacrifice, purity and passion, we find the concept of fire. In nature, fire spreads, grows and consumes. Its effects are awesome. Fire is both destructive and regenerative. Yet, beginning a fire from scratch can be difficult. Fire-building techniques require a lot of energy and a lot of friction, yet even this doesn't create actual fire; it creates an ember or spark.

Much energy has been exhausted in bringing our campus ministries to their present condition. There has also been a great deal of friction and many obstacles in the process. Today we have a spark, and it is with that ember we hope to build a great fire. It is up to us to protect this spark and help it catch fire. It will be these concepts that will be discussed during the upcoming **Mid-American Campus Retreat** on October 19-21 in DeKalb. It is an honor to welcome Marty Fuqua back to DeKalb where he was once the campus minister at NIU. He will be speaking to a group of 200-250 students from 10 different states! The event will take place within the Holmes Student Center at Northern Illinois University. For more information, please visit [midamericancampusretreat.eventbrite.com](http://midamericancampusretreat.eventbrite.com).

### True Bereans

*Southland Ministry Center*

There's a couple I know who recently brought **Acts 2:36-38** to life for me—that moment in the first century when many lost souls were cut to the heart by the gospel message and humbly asked Peter and the other apostles, "What shall we do?" *Joe and Shannon Gruzanski* are that couple. They not only are inspiring, but their lives have been transformed by God.

Shannon is a very talented woman who plays guitar and has been singing and performing since she was a very young child. By the time she was thirteen, she was singing with a band and performing at various venues. She writes and sings all of her own music. Although she has a deep passion for music, she had a series of unfortunate events in her life that left her feeling very empty. She began her search for true happiness one day as she was browsing on My Space and reached out to an old friend named Darren Shey. (She used to sing in a band with Darren when she was only 16 years old.) Shannon discovered that he was a Christian and a member of the Chicago Church of Christ, so she called him to inquire about his church. He shared with her how God had transformed his life and he invited her to

midweek that evening. At that time, she was in the process of a divorce and was separated from her husband, all of which left her emotionally distraught. She also had to deal with custody issues in regard to their seven-year-old son, Michael. So Shannon came to midweek that very evening and accepted an invitation to study the Bible.

There was such an eagerness in her heart to learn about God. Every week she would share with us how much she was learning through her reading, and she would bring a list of questions to gain deeper understanding of the Scriptures. Through her studies, her heart began to melt

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**Conversion  
Corner**

### Welcome New Baptisms!

#### Central

- Nikki Boiselle

#### Chicago

- Zimmerman & Amelia Flowers
- Catherine Pabato

#### Metro

- Penny Stone

#### North

- Manuel Chavez

## Did God Really Say? (Cont.)

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events from biblical history and discover the consequences of doubting the serious nature of God's commandments:

*Adam and Eve:* They disobeyed clear direction and were exiled from Eden after taking the forbidden fruit. **(Genesis 3:1-24)**

*Nadab and Abihu:* They were put to death when they offered unauthorized fire. **(Leviticus 10:1-3)**

*Achan:* He and his family were put to death when he stole a few "devoted" things. **(Joshua 7:1-26)**

*King Saul:* He was replaced as king and killed in battle when he refused to follow God's specific commands. **(1 Samuel 13:1-14, 15:1-23)**

*Uzzah:* He was put to death when he improperly touched the Ark of the Covenant. **(2 Samuel 6:1-7)**

Yes, God really did say what He said, and He really did mean what He said! So why are we facing this challenge today? Here are some possible reasons:

- *Post Modern Culture*—it's a culture that rejects absolute truth.
- *Lack of Discipling*—without biblical guidance, our emotions take control.
- *Death*—as we get older, we find it difficult to face the truth about those who pass away and are outside of the Lord's saving grace.
- *A Holy Huddle*—by not studying the Bible with the lost, we lose conviction about the truth.

But the truth is still very clear—a soul is saved when they

come to Christ in faith, repent of their sins, make a decision to live a radical life for Christ and are then baptized for the forgiveness of sins. There is no other way to be saved recorded in the Scriptures. We cannot allow our spiritual vision to be blurred by religious institutions that produce great music, offer exciting Sunday services or display religious sincerity.

### Taking the Red Pill

By taking the red pill, Neo woke up to a dark and painful world. But it was the true world. So what is the red pill for us today?

- **2 Timothy 4:3-4:** There are a great number of false teachers in our world today.
- **Matthew 7:13-14:** The road is still narrow and only a few are saved.
- **Matthew 7:22-23:** Many who profess Jesus as Lord will be shut out from the gates of heaven.
- **Luke 13:22-27:** Many will try to enter, but will be rejected.

While taking the red pill reveals unpleasant truths, this is where true victory can be realized! Let's open our eyes to the fallen world around us. Let's let God make the call on who is lost and who is saved, and let it be done according to His Word. And let each of us be urgent once more as we realize that only Christ can give clarity and vision in a world clouded by the devil's matrix.

Mike Kwasniewski

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## Conversion Corner (Cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

and she was constantly convicted about the way she was living her life. Shannon began immediately changing her entire lifestyle. She also had a burning desire to seek and save the lost, which led her to invite her husband to church. Despite what Shannon was going through in her marriage, she still loved her husband and would share with him everything she was learning. Little did she know that her husband, Joe, was also desperately searching for understanding from God. He came out to his first church service and was moved to tears by the message. He, too, accepted an invitation to study the Bible. Joe was so inspired by all that was happening in a short period of time that he wrote an article and submitted it to the Moody Bible Institute on how God was transforming their individual lives and their marriage. He also shared their story on a live radio interview.

Over the next few weeks, they acted as true Bereans. **(Acts 17:10-12)** They diligently searched the Scriptures for

wisdom and direction for their lives. They received Christian marriage counseling, restored their marriage, and before many witnesses, were both baptized on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007 in my back yard. Shannon even wrote a song and performed it for her baptism, giving thanks and praise to God. They wasted no time in asking how they could use their gifts to serve God and the church in Chicago. Joe is a professional DJ, and he immediately volunteered to help in the sound ministry. Shannon has dedicated her heart to writing and singing Christian music to give God all the glory. She recently performed at the famous Chicago Street Lounge in Joliet. She touched many hearts there as she performed a few of the songs she had written while studying the Bible. Joe and Shannon now have a beautiful marriage and a deep relationship with God. They are truly an inspiration to all who meet them!

Tina Konieczki