

# Christian, Atheist Display Complicated Friendship in New Documentary

A new documentary film titled *My Week in Atheism* is about a friendship caught between the two opposing worldviews of atheism and Christianity.

The movie remains neutral, enabling the viewer to watch as director John Christy, a devout Christian filmmaker and student of religion, joins David Smalley, an atheist activist and radio host, as they travel together to secular conventions, university campuses and a live talk show.

*My Week in Atheism* follows many theological and philosophical conversations relevant to modern culture as the two struggle to maintain a close friendship while protecting their worldviews and activism.

In addition to exchanges with Smalley, Christy has exploratory discussions with other prominent atheists along the way, including David Silverman, J.T. Eberhard, David Fitzgerald, Matt Dillahunty, Aron Ra and Dr. Anthony Pinn.

“The way the world is today, people too often view others with different beliefs as their enemies,” Christy says. “But David and I have developed a deep friendship—even though we talk and argue about religious differences all the time.”

“As I’ve gotten to know David more, I appreciate his challenge to my faith,” Christy continues. “Rather than digging in my heels to defend myself, I’ve tried to take an honest, intellectual look at what motivates atheism and why I believe what I believe.”

Smalley, who serves as co-producer on the film, agrees.

“John is an amazing guy. He’s a great friend, and he’s a critical thinker. I look at him in awe, because he asks the same questions I did and sees many of the same problems I found, yet he still believes. That challenges me to re-examine my position, and I’m certainly open to doing that,” Smalley says.

Even though they have many differences, both men are open to dialogue, and this inevitably leads to discovery.

“My goal with this film is to encourage viewers to examine the foundation of their beliefs, whether Christian, atheist, or undecided,” Christy says. “Being pushed to explain my Christian faith has led me to a deeper understanding of the Bible and its applicability to everyday life situations.”

When asked what he hopes to accomplish with this film, Smalley says, “I want people to know that atheists aren’t necessarily anti-Christian. We’re not angry. We’re not hateful. We can talk with our loved ones who have a differing worldview or interpretation and explain ourselves assertively without dividing families or friendships.

“These discussions need to happen, and this film will start many.”

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## **The Story Behind ‘God’s Not Dead’ Movie**

*God’s Not Dead* is the story of a young man defending his faith. He’s put on the spot and needs to make a choice to either stand up or back down. That’s the main storyline, but it’s also about how others are impacted by a person’s

knowledge of God and Jesus and what their relationship is in that situation.

The film really touches people's hearts because many have been in that situation or maybe they've never asked themselves the questions it raises. It provides the most important question to be asked: Is there a God?

### **Why We Decided to Make *God's Not Dead***

We were looking at a movie to reach out and spur conversation with people about the existence of God and actually got the idea initially from surveying a group of pastors. We asked them, "What kind of content should we produce?" They came back with many good answers, but one of the consistent responses I saw is that many of the pastors said there's a lot of people who don't know why they believe what they believe. The second point with that was a lot of Christians feel very uncomfortable sharing their faith. That was the main thrust for making the movie.

The inspiration behind the setting of the movie dates back a few years ago. I was in a meeting at Pinnacle Forum, and Alan Sears from Alliance Defending Freedom was speaking. He was speaking about a young girl who was asked to do some things that went against her faith and got in trouble for not doing them.

That story put my jaw on the floor and made me think about how many students go to college as Christians and how few stay a Christian after they finish their four years. It was that story that inspired me to set the movie on a college campus.

### **The Inspiration Behind the Stories in the Movie**

We wanted to look at the movie from several different angles and appeal to more age groups than college and career, which is where I got the idea for all these different storylines crashing together. It was a love-hate relationship with our

writers, because they loved the idea, but it's a very difficult thing making all the storylines tie in together. The original idea was to cover different storylines to help people see how the presence or lack of presence of God impacted each of the different character's lives in the movie.

### **Why You Need to See *God's Not Dead***

I believe Christians should go see this movie because it will strengthen their faith and help them question situations about how they stood up for or backed down from their faith. It will also encourage them to share their faith more.

From a nonbeliever's standpoint or for somebody that's questioning, I think it's a great movie because they can view it through Josh's eyes and learn some things about apologetics that they may have not known. It will also bring up some questions that might inspire them to find a bigger answer.

It's the biggest question of all time, and so it's very important for them to consider it. People are so busy in their day-to-day lives that they don't always take time to consider what truly is going to happen and what they truly believe.

What this movie does is stop everything and put you on center stage. It makes you ask yourself, What do I believe? Is there or isn't there a God?

*Russell Wolfe is CEO and managing partner of Pure Flix Entertainment.*

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## **VIDEO: How the Church Is**

# **Responding to America's 'Fatherless Crisis'**

Watch a report on America's "fatherless crisis"—and how Christians are bringing hope and healing to families.

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## **Michael Brown: How the Church Must Respond to the Gay Agenda**

Watch Michael Brown highlight recent cultural victories for the gay agenda and explain how the church must respond.

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## **Why Do You Think They Call It Dope, Dope?**

It's heartbreaking to watch talented, brilliant Hollywood stars self-destruct or head down the road to perdition in light of Philip Seymour Hoffman's recent death from drug overdose.

Many of the young, once-professing-to-be-Christian entertainers, such as Miley Cyrus, Lindsay Lohan (whose mother told me she was a Christian when I interviewed her when Lindsay was a young child), Justin Bieber, and Dakota Fanning (who came to the Movieguide Awards several times professing her faith), have given up their faith and values for dope.

Of course, society no longer seems to care, in spite of the fact that scientists and investigators have shown that there's a strong connection between all sorts of drugs, and not only self-destruction but hurting others, including mass murders. David Kupelian's book, *The Marketing of Evil*, has a detailed chapter on the connection between drug use and mass murder. In Ancient Greece, the word for *drugs* was the same word for *sorcery/witchcraft*.

Watching the public antics of some of these celebrities makes one wonder whether the Greek didn't have a word for it. I grew up in the entertainment industry, and after my mother died when I was a young teenager, I dove headlong into the culture of drugs and licentious behavior. The stories are legion of taking piles of drugs, from marijuana to LSD to THC to cocaine, and dividing it to see how much we could take.

My wife doubted the stories until she went to my Dartmouth 40th reunion and one person after another came up to talk about the big drug punch I had made at our fraternity for more than 120 people, some of whom never fully recovered. The promise of drugs was always the same. Perhaps you'd reach nirvana, find out the meaning of life, overcome your limitations, get rid of your cares and so forth.

Eventually, a small crowd of us sat on top of the Dartmouth gymnasium, ripped out of our minds on several drugs, and talked about how the promise of drugs was merely a mirage that didn't deliver what they promised. I never had a bad trip in the way many other people reported, but there were moments where I blacked out and voices from real people, such as the

Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, who cautioned me, "Why do you think they call it dope, dope?"

We have lost that cautionary voice. We think we can live without limits and that excess is freedom. Actually, excess is bondage. Gluttony leads to obesity. Anger leads to pain. Dope leads to oblivion. At one point, someone gave me a Bible, and Jesus rescued me. When He did, I woke up and the promise became reality. Life made sense. God turned my problems into blessings, soon giving me a beautiful wife and four wonderful children.

Thus, there is real freedom that can be found only in Jesus Christ, who came to set us free. That is a message we have to help these celebrities know. Celebrities like Philip Seymour Hoffman, Heath Ledger and countless others endear themselves to many people. They are role models whether they want to be or not. Their self-esteem and egotism has grown to tremendous proportions.

None of that satisfies. It's a mirage. If you turn away from the mirage toward the light, you'll find all that you're seeking, including the fact that, as one Harvard friend who was redeemed from the darkness said, "God gives you back your mind."

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## **Extra Weight May Add to Elderly Fall Risk**

For Australians over age 65 included in a new study, being obese raised the risk of experiencing a fall by 31 percent.

"Falls are one of the most common causes of injury for older

individuals and as the world population ages, the number of fall-related injuries are projected to increase rapidly," said lead author Rebecca Mitchell.

"Likewise, rates of overweight and obesity among older individuals are also increasing," added Mitchell, a researcher with Neuroscience Research Australia at the University of New South Wales.

Mitchell and her colleagues wanted to determine whether overweight and obesity added to the risk of falling among older adults, as well as the risk of being injured in a fall.

The researchers used information from the New South Wales Prevention Baseline Survey, a large Australian population study started in 2009.

A total of 5,681 people 65 years of age and older were asked about their history of falling, their perception of their own risk of falling, their general health status, medication use and activity levels.

Participants who had fallen one or more times in the previous 12 months as a result of accidentally losing their balance, tripping or slipping were also asked how many of those falls resulted in injury and how many required medical attention or led to hospital admission.

According to the results published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 23 percent of healthy-weight respondents had fallen once during the previous 12 months and 34 percent had fallen more than once.

About 30 percent of obese respondents fell once and another 45 percent fell more than once, making the overall fall risk 31 percent higher in the obese group.

The obese participants who fell didn't have any higher risk of fall-related injuries compared to healthy-weight people who

fell, but they were more likely to have other health conditions—such as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure—and to report being in moderate or extreme discomfort.

Those who were obese and fell were also more likely to be taking four or more prescription medications.

“It is difficult to know for certain why the risk of falling increases for obese individuals, but it is likely to be as a result of reduced peripheral sensation, general physical weakness and instability when standing or walking,” Mitchell said.

There are a number of common risk factors that can increase any older person’s risk of falling, she added.

“These can include individual factors such as: poor health, instability when standing or walking, some health conditions, such as poor vision or dementia, lack of physical activity, use of multiple medications that can affect balance, and a poor diet,” Mitchell said.

Risks can also be in an older person’s environment, including “uneven or slippery floors, unsecured floor coverings, such as rugs, inappropriate footwear or eyewear, or inadequate lighting,” she said.

“As to why fall-related injuries do not increase for obese individuals this is likely to be as a result of adipose tissue (fat) protecting bone,” Mitchell said.

Compared to the healthy-weight group, the obese participants in the study were more likely to be sedentary for eight or more hours a day, to walk less, to have problems walking and to believe that nothing could be done to prevent falls.

Mitchell and her colleagues point out that obesity is associated with a higher risk of certain chronic illnesses,

but also that chronic conditions such as lung disease and arthritis can limit activity, leading to weight gain.

To reduce the risk of falls among obese older people, tailored activity programs, such as strength and balance training, as well as home safety assessments and eyesight checks could all be of benefit, they write.

“Everybody knows how falls can be life-changers for older people, from breaking a hip to hitting your head, so if we can prevent them that’s always better and there’s a lot that can be done,” Dr. Sharon Brangman told Reuters Health.

Brangman, who is Chief of Geriatrics at SUNY Upstate University Hospital in Syracuse, New York, and a past president of the American Geriatric Society (AGS), was not involved in the new study.

“We know that when people fall, the biggest problem afterwards is a fear of falling because then they move less or when they walk they hold themselves really rigid and tight which actually increases the risk for falling,” Brangman said.

The American Geriatric Society published fall prevention guidelines for physicians in 2012, she noted. Though they are intended for doctors, some of the suggestions may help families assess the risk in their homes.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about one of every three Americans over age 65 suffers a fall, and every year 2 million of those falls result in emergency room visits.

The AGS guidelines were intended to encourage healthcare providers to ask about falls, according to Brangman, “because a lot of times it’s not asked and patients don’t volunteer it because they don’t want anyone to know. They’re so afraid that will mean they need to be placed in long-term care or something.”

Brangman said that sometimes patients who are overweight might need a little extra support to realize that their situation isn't hopeless and that there are things they can do, such as starting an exercise program.

Strengthening the quadriceps muscle group at the front of the thighs is especially recommended.

"Exercise programs that are tailored to the individual can make a difference, and it's really never too late to start doing something," Brangman said. "Balance and strengthening exercises, especially exercises that strengthen the quads, are very important in preventing falls in the future."

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## Break Free From the Diet Trap

We too often are influenced—actually, controlled—by the diet schemes of today. Unfortunately, it creates a long-term cycle of defeat and potential health risk. We do not have to live this way, though. Here are four key tips to break free from the diet trap:

- 1. Activate your metabolism.** It's not the calories you take in but the calories you burn that count. Our new millennium lifestyles have slowed our metabolic rate down to a snail's pace, resulting in fat being stored rather than burned for energy. This "cocooning" effect is the result of constant stress demands and not enough energy supply to meet the needs. Our body was created to slow itself down as a protective response so that our erratic, catch-and-catch-can eating patterns keeps our metabolism stuck in low gear, storing away every meal we do eat as if it's our last.

**2. Tell your slowed metabolism to take a hike!** Eating smart is only half the picture of an activated metabolism. Regular exercise is also a key to keep the body burning calories at a high rate. It allows the body to bust out of the “cocoon,” gearing up its calorie and fat-burning potential by fanning the metabolic fire.

**3. Watch fat, not calories.** Just cutting calories is too broad. What you most need to do is cut fat calories. As you’ve just read, it’s the kind of calories you eat more than the sheer number that has the most impact. Calories consumed as fat are converted into fat on the body more readily than the same number of calories consumed as protein or carbohydrates. In other words, 100 calories of butter (1 Tbsp.) are more likely to go to your hips than 100 calories of whole wheat bread (about two slices).

**4. Don’t set up any food as a forbidden fruit.** There are no good or bad foods, and there is no such thing as a legal or a cheat food. Food is simply food. It’s the power it lords over us that is the problem. Setting our focus on what we shouldn’t do and what we shouldn’t eat only sets us up for failure. Our eyes are so fixed on the negative behavior or food that it becomes an obsession and only a matter of time before we fall headfirst into it. We must learn to let food be food and to let God be our God.

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# Hollywood: 2014 Is the 'Year of the Bible'

In a throwback to the golden age of cinema, Hollywood has declared 2014 the "Year of the Bible." From Ridley Scott's *Exodus*, starring Christian Bale as Moses, to Russell Crowe playing Noah, Hollywood is gambling on new innovations in technology and star power to revisit some of the most popular stories ever told.

"It's definitely a throwback to the 1950s and early '60s," Dr. Stephen J. Whitfield, an American studies professor at Brandeis University, told .

Starting with *The Robe* in 1953 and Charlton Heston's 1956 Passover-related epic *The Ten Commandments*, then continuing with Heston's other biblically themed films—1959's *Ben-Hur* and 1965's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*—the post-war era was packed with movies that appealed to the conservatism of the era.

"One of the reasons biblical epics were [so] popular in the 1950s and 1960s was because of the general atmosphere of piety of the era," Whitfield says.

Advances in technology also played a role, according to Whitfield.

"The second reason [for the popularity for bible-related films] was television, which was in black and white for most of this era," he says. "What movies could do is provide rich living color on a very big screen."

But in an age of increasing secularism, will the latest

biblical epics be able to capture the attention of a new generation of Americans?

One of the first biblically inspired films on the docket for 2014, scheduled for February release, is *Son of God*, by British-American producer Mark Burnett and his wife, Roma Downey. The devout Christian couple made headlines last year for their acclaimed History Channel miniseries *The Bible*, which drew polarized reactions over its literal interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Produced by 20th Century Fox, *Son of God* seeks to trace the life of Jesus of Nazareth while also telling the story with “the scope and scale of an action epic,” according to the film’s trailer.

Coming on the heels of this story about Jesus will be the March release of Jewish-American director Darren Aronofsky’s *Noah*, starring Russell Crowe as the biblical patriarch who saved mankind from the Great Flood. Joining Crowe are other Hollywood stars Jennifer Connelly, playing Noah’s wife Naameh; Emma Watson of *Harry Potter* fame, playing Noah’s adopted daughter Ila; and Sir Anthony Hopkins playing Methuselah, Noah’s grandfather.

Aronofsky has garnered criticism over his movie’s environmental slant and other creative licenses.

“Noah is a very short section of the Bible with a lot of gaps, so we definitely had to take some creative expression in it,” the film’s producer, Scott Franklin, told *Entertainment Weekly*. “But I think we stayed very true to the story and didn’t really deviate from the Bible, despite the six-armed angels.”

With a massive \$130 million budget, *Noah* will feature all the usual Hollywood computer-generated special effects and action scenes that moviegoers have become accustomed to over the past few decades.

“Hollywood’s return to biblical stories can also be explained

by the huge advances in computer-generated graphics, similar to the role color played in the 1950s," Whitfield told .

"These massive special effects have already been demonstrated in revisiting science-fiction and comic book stories," he says. "Now they can put this into recreating the ancient world."

Another highly anticipated 2014 biblical epic is famed director Ridley Scott's *Exodus*, starring Christian Bale as Moses and *Breaking Bad* star Aaron Paul as his lieutenant, Joshua, which won't hit theaters until December. There have been few details leaked about the direction Scott will take movie.

Whitfield says that by focusing on major figures in the Bible and using Hollywood megastars, Hollywood is not gambling too much on these films, despite the many changes in America today.

"By producing movies focusing on major figures like Jesus, Noah or Moses, these are individuals that even the most ill-educated know of, compared to most other historical figures," he told .

Whitfield adds that the movies, by using biblical stories that take place in the Middle East, are also able to feature diverse casts and weave modern political themes into the stories.

"Because it is set in the Middle East, you can also have a multiracial and multiethnic cast that appeals to Hollywood's values," he says.

Also slated for release in late 2014 is *Mary, Mother of Christ*. The film, which bills itself as the "true prequel of [Mel Gibson's] *The Passion of the Christ*," stars 16-year-old Israeli actress Odeya Rush as Mary, Ben Kingsley as King Herod, and recently deceased Peter O'Toole as Simeon, a

prophet from the Gospel of Luke.

The trend of biblical epics on the big screen is likely to continue for several more years. A number of other biblical movies are also under consideration, including Will Smith directing a movie on Cain and his fratricide victim, Abel, and a film starring Brad Pitt as Pontius Pilate, the villainous Roman governor of Judea who sentenced Jesus to a painful death.

“Despite increasing secularism today, the Bible is still a very strong part of American culture,” Whitfield says. “There is more of a chance [for biblically inspired films] with recognition and widespread appeal, than [there is for] another movie about an American president or any other historical figures.”

*For the original article, visit .*

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## **Can We Build Bridges With People Whose Views We Oppose?**

A few years ago, I spoke at Harvard University with nine other speakers. We were surprised when the gay community opposed the very idea that a Christian group would be on campus.

They concluded that we would be like every Christian group they had experienced. They thought we would use our time to bash gays and their agenda. Our conference was on the theme of community transformation.

They met with the dean of the school and did all they could to shut down the conference. They spread lies about the speakers,

and I was personally targeted. They tried to tie me to some Uganda anti-gay legislation just because I been there and knew someone who had been caught up with the controversy. It was guilt by association.

The day came for the conference, and they had about 60 protestors in front of our event. Early in the process, our intercessors told us they believed we were not to fight the smear campaign but let the Lord protect us.

The conference went on as planned, and it was a good event. Not one word was ever spoken against the gay community. At the conclusion of the event, many of the organizers of the protests were in our refreshment area. A few of us invited them in to talk with us. We had a Harvard professor join us.

We let them tell us what was on their mind and why they so opposed us. We listened, and then I responded to the man who spread the lies about me by asking, "Are you aware that everything you spread about me on the Internet was a lie?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

I told him I was not involved with that Uganda legislation nor would I support it.

"Really?" he asked.

"Yes, I would never support such legislation," I said.

We talked about it, and he concluded he had wrongfully judged me. He offered to publish a retraction in the Harvard paper, to which I said, "That would be nice."

The Harvard professor turned to the protest organizers and said, "Gentlemen, I have just attended this conference, and there was nothing said about you. There was nothing said in the entire conference that we would not find acceptable on the campus of Harvard. You have wrongfully judged this group."

The meeting ended with us shaking hands. We did not agree on our respective worldviews or political views, but we did gain one thing from our sitting down together: We respected each other as human beings who had a right to hold personal views without being maligned and persecuted for them.

Bridge-building requires us to support the individual even though we cannot support their agenda. It requires listening and building relationship.

That appears to me to be how Jesus did it. That's good enough for me.

*Os Hillman is president of Marketplace Leaders and author of Change Agent and "TGIF: Today God Is First," a free email daily devotional.*

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## **Dealing With Dirt and Hurt: When to Call in the Cavalry**

Tough times happen. This world isn't a cozy comforter. It's more of a wet blanket that wants to wrap around you when you feel lost, defeated, rejected and discouraged.

The world provides liquid spirits, drugs, fantasy women and images to soothe, but these only drag us down a path of destruction.

The Bible warns us in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble" (NIV). So it should be no surprise when we feel like we've been sucker-punched in the gut with problems. Unfortunately, we are all damaged goods, bringing past dirt and hurt to our lives and relationships, which can snowball in

our minds and make matters worse.

How do we deal with the dirt and hurt?

Life offers a series of challenging events, like experiencing betrayal by a loved one, losing a job, financial woes or the death of a close friend or family member. These are the obvious ones we need to be prepared for, but what about the daily issues we struggle with?

- Anger outbursts
- Emotional avalanches
- Relationship confusion
- Communication gaffes
- Frustrating situations
- Compulsive behaviors
- Intense mental anguish

The first step is to have a relationship with Jesus. Knowing and following Him will be the foundation for dealing with dirt and hurt. Then add a supportive group of men you can talk with. Lean on God with honest prayer because He listens and loves you more than we can imagine.

There are times and situations in relationships when you need to call in the cavalry, raise the white flag, give in and ask for professional help. Counseling or therapy should be the norm, not rare. We all have baggage that can impact our decisions, emotions and behaviors. A good licensed counselor is like a good mechanic who pops open the hood to your life and does some rewiring.

Unfortunately, men self-protect. We don't want our problems aired out in front of others. We strive to protect our public image, but our image lies about what's really going on deeper down. Our pride and fear result in pretending there's nothing wrong. Too often, guys view getting counseling as a weakness, instead of being courageous.

Stop being resourceful and trying to apply a MacGyver fix. There's no duct tape for your character. The longer you stay with the self-protecting image, the less real help you'll get while your character defects get worse.

The humble choice to accelerate your growth is to forget about your image and get counseling from a professional who doesn't care about your image.

When should you get professional help? Here is the spectrum I use to guide men:

- **Scrape:** If you have an emotional flesh wound, start by searching our site for teaching and then apply what you learn.
- **Cut:** If you have a deeper issue, perhaps a recurring problem or habit, then use our site for guidance, but you may need to turn to other men who can listen and carry the burden with you.
- **Deep Cut:** This is a lingering problem, perhaps a fracture in the relationship and you're not sure it's repairable. When you have a deep cut, you would go to the emergency room, right? The same goes with a deep cut in your social, emotional and spiritual health. Time to get help immediately.
- **Big Bleeder:** This is serious trauma with lives on the line. Perhaps it's marital trouble, dealing with divorce or dangerous behaviors that are risking your livelihood. There's no time to waste. Find therapy fast.

There's a great example of this in the story about Naaman in 2 Kings 5. Naaman was at the apex of his career. He was a highly regarded commander and valiant soldier, and he had money. But he also had to hide his spots from leprosy. So he did what any rich commander would do: He ordered healing immediately and paid generously for it.

Elisha told him what to do. But Naaman's pride didn't want

healing by washing in the dirty Jordan River seven times. Naaman's servants slapped him with the humbling obvious, telling Naaman if he wanted to be healed, he would have to obey. Eventually Naaman did as he was told and received healing.

Here's what we learn from Naaman to deal with the dirt and hurt:

1. Ask for help.
2. Expose your hurt.
3. Put your pride on the shelf. Healing requires humility and faith (1 Pet. 5:6).
4. Be open to, and seek, the truth.
5. Do the work. Knowledge demands action; otherwise it's just like an unopened book sitting in your library.

The secret to change is doing something you don't want to do in order to get the result you need.

**Kenny Luck**, founder of Every Man Ministries and the men's pastor at Saddleback Church, provides biblically oriented teaching and leadership for men and pastors seeking relevant, timely material that battle cultural, worldly concepts threatening men and God's men. Follow Kenny and Every Man Ministries now on Facebook, Twitter (@everyMM) and YouTube.

*For the original article, visit .*