

What If Jesus Doesn't Come Back This Year?

Think about it. God wants us to live our lives with a long-range view of the future.

I'm not a controversial kind of gal. Controversy's not my shtick nor is it a factor, for me, in what New York Times best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell calls "stickiness." In fact, I look forward to controversy about as much as I look forward to catching the Ebola virus or bird flu.

Why the aversion to debate? I find that although a small segment of the population tends to come alive at the smell of political, cultural or social disagreement, the vast majority of people I know are turned off or prematurely shut down at the whiff of conflicting ideas.

It's one thing to have an opinion. It's another thing to inflict it on someone else in the form of verbal haranguing.

That's why I always feel a little edgy when I'm cornered by someone who just has to know my opinion on a topic such as women in ministry, homosexuality and the church, or religious involvement in politics. It's at these moments that the idea of crawling under the table or running to the ladies room is most appealing. "Waiter, check, please!"

I used to think that people liked to ask me tough, controversial questions because I am a writer and speaker. Now I realize it's for a much less profound reason: I have a pulse. That little heartbeat qualifies me to weigh in on some pretty heavy issues.

One question that caught me a little off-guard recently—with no table or restroom in sight—was whether we are living in the end times. It's a simple question, but what surprised me most

about it was not the question itself but rather who was asking it.

The person wasn't someone who had stayed up too late watching Jack Van Impe on TBN. Rather, he was a young, hip 20-something. I could tell from the sincerity in his eyes that he really wanted to know. And perhaps he was tapping into a question we all quietly ask ourselves from time to time.

Are we living in the end times?

I recognized something about the question. After you interview enough people you discover a simple but profound journalistic truth: If you ask the wrong question, then you'll get the wrong answer. So I gently prompted the 20-something to reword the question.

I think you mean, "What if we are living in the end times?"

Without an exit sign in sight, I continued, "And that begs the question, What if we're not?"

"What do you mean?" he pressed.

"Well, I think when we look around, it's hard to deny that on many different levels—politically, socially, economically and religiously—things on the world's clock are slowly winding down. I think we all have a sense, a quiet wonderment, of, Could this be it? That means every day of knowing and following Jesus is all the more important.

"But what if we're not living in the end times?" I went on. "What if it's our children's generation or our children's children's generation? Or a generation 100 or even 1,000 years from now?

"Then what are we doing to raise them up? What are we doing to reach out, impart and breathe life into their souls as vibrant carriers of the faith?

“Whether or not we are living in the end times, we need to live with one arm reaching forward and one reaching back,” I concluded. “We need to be learning and gleaning everything we can from the generation that has gone before us and at the same time imparting as much as we possibly can into those who will follow.

“In other words, regardless of what age we’re in, we’re still the plan. We’re still the ones called and created to take the wildest good news to the ends of the earth and beyond. We’re still the ones designed to transform our world, to embroider a God-infused design on the fabric of our culture and to raise up those who carry not just the message but the life of the message to the next generation.”

I paused.

“Are you in?” I asked.

“Yeah,” he replied.

“Me, too.”

And in that brief moment I realized that the presence of conflicting ideas—that which pushes us forward and presses us back—isn’t so bad after all. Maybe there is something that can be learned from controversial issues. Maybe the next time one of those topics comes up, I won’t be so quick to run away.

So, how do you feel about women in ministry?

Margaret Feinberg, , is the author of more than a dozen books, including *God Whispers*, *twentysomething* and *What the Heck Should I Do With My Life?* She hopes you’ll continue the discussion online at .