

# Who do you say that I am?

By Zach Cowles

My whole life, I've been a pastor's kid. Being a pastor's kid comes with a lot of perks. For instance, there was this catwalk up above the sanctuary where nobody was allowed to go. But when you're the pastor's kid, nobody is going to tell you that you can't go up there. So I got to get a view of the sanctuary that only the janitor got to see. I was living large.

As I grew up, I went to church. A lot. I was in church every Wednesday, every Sunday, and then when we started doing the Friday night services, I was there too. I went to church a whole lot. And I learned all the rules at a young age. I learned that good christians don't drink, smoke, or have sex, so I didn't do any of that. And I thought I was a good christian.

Now, I looked up to my dad. I still do. He's one of the greatest people I've ever met. I saw the way that he followed Jesus. I saw the way that he loved God and served the community. I saw the way that he treated my mom with such tender care and respect, and the way that he loved me and my brother, even when we were being boneheads. I saw the way that he stood up for what he believed in, but never made people feel like they were worthless if they disagreed. I saw the way that he had followed Jesus for so long, that he began to look like Jesus. I saw that my dad had forged this relationship with our creator that was unshakeable. This relationship with God had transformed my dad and his heart into a reflection of Jesus. Not a perfect reflection, mind you. But when you look at my dad, you see the heart of God.

I based my faith on that. I based my faith on what my dad said about God. I based my faith on the encounter with Jesus that has shaped my dad into the man he is today.

So I found myself with this supreme understanding the rules, coupled with the faith of my father. This combo turned me into one religious, self righteous douche bag.

I had seen the way that my dad followed Jesus with his life, and I wanted it for my life. I knew all the rules I was supposed to follow, and did my best to follow those rules. But what I learned was that all the rule following, and all of the pointing towards my dad's faith in the world didn't bring me any closer to our creator. It didn't make me any more loving of a person, it didn't bring any meaning to my life. This life I was living left me broken and empty. I had it all together on the outside, but when you took a look in my heart, it was a cold and desolate place.

Then I came to a point where I realized something. I didn't have any faith. All I had was my finger to point to all the rules I had followed. I pointed at the people that were getting drunk every weekend. I pointed at the people that weren't following the rules like me. I pointed at my dad who has a beautiful faith. But it wasn't my own faith.

This reminds me of a story in the book of Mark. Jesus is in the middle of his public ministry. He had just finished feeding thousands of people. He and Peter had already walked on water. He'd delivered his revolutionary Sermon on the Mount. Word is spreading about Jesus. People are talking. He's a big deal.

**Mark 8:27-30 says:**

**“Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way, he asked them, ‘Who do people say I am?’**

**They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’**

**‘But what about you?’ Jesus asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’**

**‘Peter answered, ‘You are the messiah.’**

**Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.”**

Who do you say I am? This question rang in my head like a gong. My understanding of Jesus was the guy that gave me these rules to follow. The guy my dad talks about at church. But he didn't mean anything for me.

I had to ask myself this question. I had to get to the point where I couldn't ride on the coat tails of my dad's faith. I had to decide for myself if I was all in on this Jesus guy. I had to make my faith my own. Something that I shared with Jesus. Something that I had to work out.

Sure, Jesus is a great teacher. Sure, my dad has a beautiful faith. But what I've learned is that a life following Jesus is so much more than following rules. It's about living in community with our creator. It's about a transformation that takes place in our hearts that changes us. It shapes us to be more like Jesus. To love people better, to show kindness and display peace. To live a life where we look at everybody and see God's creation, and treat them like it. It's something we have to choose for ourselves. And we have the opportunity to live a life in the love of God, or we can choose our own way. He loves us enough to give us that opportunity.

The most important question anybody could ever be asked: Who do YOU say that Jesus is?