

# *Dumb Things Smart Christians Do*

January 9, 2022

Today we were *planning* to begin a new series called *Made for More – becoming the person you were meant to be ...*

But, unfortunately, Rick (our lead pastor) is still in Covid jail. A couple of days ago, it looked like he would be released but it just didn't work out as he had hoped.

So, we're going to push *Made for More* off to next Sunday and, instead, reach back into the archives for a message he did a few years ago that I think will be of value to all of us.

Let's watch.

Today, we're going to talk about dumb things smart Christians do.

And I think the best way to begin is for me to unpack that title just a bit.

First of all, at the risk of overstating the obvious, this message is about people who believe in and follow Jesus: *Christians*.

If you're *not* a Christian – and I know that we always have folks among us or watching online who are not believers and we're glad you're with us ...

If you're not a Christian, what I'm going to talk about will help you understand more of what Christianity is supposed to be like and you might even be able to apply something to your life.

But, to do the kind of dumb things I'm going to talk about today, you have to be a Christian. So you're off the hook. Feel free to sit back and have a good laugh at our expense.

Second, when I say "smart Christians" I'm not talking about the IQ of someone who believes in Jesus. I'm not talking about their level of education or how much common sense they have or don't have.

By "smart Christians" I mean followers of Jesus ...

- Who have a decent and maybe even a deep understanding of the Christian faith.
- Who have a level of Bible knowledge that goes beyond the basics.
- Who've been involved in church for a while and maybe even been part of several churches over a long period of time.

Of course ... if there are "smart Christians" ... that must mean there are also Christians who are *not* smart.

But I don't mean that in a derogatory way because ...

- Some of us are still new to the faith.
- Or we haven't been in church for very long.
- Or we haven't read the Bible for ourselves.

So, when it comes to Christianity, we just don't know that much.

Now, if that's you – if you're not a "smart Christian," this message *is* for you. In fact I think it will be of great help to you because, by the time we're done, you're going to be a lot smarter.

And maybe that will help you *avoid* some of the dumb things the smart Christians do.

Third – and finally – when I say "dumb things" I'm not talking about making foolish financial investments or lending money to people who are not trustworthy or building your house in a flood plain or ... you get the idea.

You don't need to be a Christian to do those kinds of dumb things.

Instead, the kind of "dumb things" I'm talking about today are ...

- Things that Christians habitually do (or don't do) over time that keep us from experiencing the life God wants us to experience.
- Things that keep us from becoming the people God wants us to become.
- Things that sabotage our joy and peace in Christ.

And I hate seeing that happen. It breaks my heart when it does.

So I'm doing this message because, if you're a Christian who does dumb things, I want something better for you. God wants something better for you. And *you* want something better for you.

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Now, as I thought about trying to talk about out all the dumb things that I've seen smart Christians do (and all that I've done myself), I realized that would be a very long message. We would be here through lunch!

So, I narrowed the focus to the five most frequent and common mistakes I've seen (and done) through the years. And I'm going to give them to you in reverse order – sort of like a "Top 5" countdown.

Now, what's interesting to me about the things on this list is that they aren't huge or earthshattering. Instead, they fall into the category of what the Bible calls "the little foxes that ruin the vineyards."

That's a phrase from the Old Testament book, *The Song of Solomon*, which is a story about two lovers – King Solomon of Israel and his soon-to-be bride.

Near the beginning of the story, they're discussing their intense attraction to one another – and they're doing it in metaphorical terms because they're eventually going to get into areas that are best described as “adults only” – if you know what I mean – and the ancient Hebrews highly valued being discrete.

**Anyway ... at one point, the woman says ...**

*“Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, for our vineyard is in bloom.”*  
*Song 2:15 (NET)*

Without going into agricultural details about foxes and vineyards, what she's saying is “it's not the big things that are going to destroy our budding relationship. It's the little things that sneak in. It's the little things we don't notice until it's too late. So we need to pay attention to them and deal with them, lest they ruin a good and sweet thing.”

And that's the way it is with my top five list of dumb things smart Christians do.

## **The Top Five**

Now, as we go through it, notice that we're not talking about *beliefs*. And there are a lot of dumb things smart Christians believe.

Things like ...

- “God wants us to be happy, so He will protect us from suffering and pain.”

That's a dumb thing to believe because not even God-in-the-flesh, Jesus of Nazareth, was protected from suffering and pain.

- Or “everything happens for a reason” (meaning “God must have wanted it to happen like this.”)

That's a dumb thing to believe because some things happen that God clearly doesn't want to happen.

- Or “Because of grace, it doesn't matter if I sin.”

That's a dumb thing to believe because even though Jesus forgives all of our sin past, present and future when we trust in Him (that's grace) ... *sin* – disobedience to God, rejection of God's ways – is still powerful. It's still destroying the world and still destroying the lives of everyone who says yes to it, even those who are Christians and saved by grace.

Anyway ... at some point we'll come back and look at these and other dumb things smart Christians *believe* but, today, we're going to focus on *the doing* of dumb things.

So, here we go ... the top five dumb things smart Christians do, beginning with number five which is ...

**#5. Pretending we're OK when we are not.**

For some reason, a lot of Christians have the idea that "church" and Christianity is for perfect people or, at least for people who have it together more than everyone else.

And that's ridiculous because the fundamental prerequisite for membership in the Body of Christ – the fundamental prerequisite for salvation in Christ – is admitting that you're *not* perfect and that you *don't* have it together because you're a sinner!

But somehow we forget that and we put on a face and put up a front that gives other Christians the impression ...

- That everything is fine, praise Jesus.
- That we have no doubts or struggles with our faith, praise Jesus.
- That we're OK with how our life is going even though it sucks, praise Jesus.
- That we're having victory after victory over temptation, praise Jesus.

Now, here's why this is so dumb – and I've seen this happen so often. It just breaks my heart.

- When we pretend with the very people who could walk through the valley with us ...
- When we never tell the truth about where we are and what we're struggling with ...
- When we never say, "I need help" ...

Guess what? We don't get help.

But we're *supposed* to get help from other Christians.

**The Apostle Paul writes:**

*Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.* *Galatians 6:2 (ESV)*

... which is to love one another as He has loved us.

**But no one can do that for you – no one can help you bear your burden when you pretend there is none!**

And it gets even worse.

What I've seen happen so often when Christ followers pretend they're OK is that they eventually start to feel isolated

and neglected. And the evil one starts telling them “no one cares for you. No one notices you. If anyone knew your struggles, they would reject you in a flash.”

And then they leave – either the church or the faith – hurt, angry and disillusioned that no one helped them with a problem no one knew anything about.

And that’s why for Christians to pretend we’re OK when we’re not is a dumb thing to do.

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Number four on the list of dumb things I’ve seen so many otherwise smart Christians do over the years is ...

**#4. Not giving to God’s work because money is tight.**

You knew there would be something about money on here, right?

I debated including it but I had to because I can’t count the number of people in 25 years of being a pastor who have said to me or to one of our other pastors or to our volunteer Good Sense financial counselors something like “Gosh, we really want to give to the church, we want to give to the Lord’s work, but we can’t because ...

- “We have so much debt”
- “We’re having trouble paying our bills”
- “We have to buy this or that for our kids”
- Or <whatever>.

And I’m not trying to minimize the stress of those kinds of situations. Jetta and I were there more than once in our younger years.

But to give nothing at all to God’s work – and, again I’m speaking to Christians; if you’re not a Christian this is definitely not for you ...

But to give nothing at all to God’s work in that situation is a dumb thing to do – or, not do.

And here’s why.

**You are robbing yourself of the opportunity to see God at work in your life ...**

... in an area where you desperately need Him to work – your finances.

What do you mean, Rick?

Let me first tell you what I *don’t* mean.

*What I don't mean is "if you give, God promises to make you financially rich."*

In comparison to most of the rest of the world, if you live in the USA – even if you're at the bottom of the economic ladder – you're already rich. So that's not what I mean.

What I *do* mean is that when you give to God's work, He will work in your life so that you have what you need so that you *can* give.

**Paul puts it like this:**

*God is able to bless you abundantly, so that [you will get rich like the televangelists promise; NOT] ...*

*God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8 (NIV)*

*You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 2 Corinthians 9:11 (NIV)*

What Paul is saying is that when you decide in your heart to give, God loves that and He will supply what you need so you can give. That's supernatural. That's miraculous. That's divine intervention.

That's why I've told countless numbers of people over the years, "Look, just give \$5 or \$10 a week every week as an act of faith, as a way of saying, 'Lord, I'm trusting what you say. I need to see you do something in this area.'"

Now, let me tell you something I've noticed.

Most Christians – not all but most ... most Christians whose finances are tight could do that because they're still buying \$5 coffee several times a week. They're still playing the lottery. They're still paying for Showtime or NFL Network or an unlimited data plan.

Question: If you're not doing well financially, why would you spend money on those things and not give to God?

No offense but that's a dumb thing to do. You're robbing yourself of seeing God at work in an area of your life where you need Him to work.

Now, it just so happens that if you want to give automatically on a regular basis here at NHCC, you can do that through the giving tab on our app and on our website.

If you've never given regularly before, you can even sign up for the 90-day giving challenge and we'll give you your money back if you haven't sensed God working in your life in this way.

And if you suspect that I'm telling you this just so I can raise more money for NHCC and that bothers you, then you should give somewhere else. Seriously. God loves a cheerful giver and so do we.

So, don't give here but give *somewhere* and *regularly* – just not to some televangelist who promises God will make you financially rich because of it.

Ok that's number four on my list.

Number three on the list of dumb things I've seen a lot of smart Christians do is, for lack of a better phrase ...

### **#3. Filling our mind with garbage (and believing it has no effect).**

We talked about this at length back at the beginning of the year in a series called *State of Mind* which is available in audio, video and text form in the media section of our app and website.

So I won't go into a lot of detail here other than to say that the overall point was that what we allow into our minds on a regular basis literally shapes our lives beginning with the biology of the brain itself. That's an amazing scientific discovery of the past 20 years or so called *neuroplasticity*.

Of course, that same principle was expressed in the Bible over 4,000 years ago.

#### **Solomon wrote ...**

*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)*

And I know that verse doesn't say "guard your mind" but, whenever the biblical writers talk about the "heart" they're not talking about the physical organ pumping in your chest and mine.

Instead, they're talking about the subconscious, the very core of our being.

"Be careful of what you allow to become established there," Solomon is saying, "because that is going to affect everything else about you."

Or, as I learned many years ago when I got my computer science degree ...

#### **Garbage in, garbage out.**

Over the years, I've seen so many otherwise smart Christians fail to take this seriously when it comes to what they watch and what they listen to for entertainment. I mean, there's so much out there and a lot of it is produced at such a high level of excellence.

It's interesting! It's exciting! It's entertaining! Everybody is watching it and listening to it!

But it's dumb to think it has no effect on you. It's dumb to think it has no effect to regularly watch and listen to things filled with foul language, violence and promiscuous sex.

And guys – Christian or not – if you think that hearing women repeatedly referred to as bitches and whores doesn't affect you, you're deceived. And if you *are* a Christian, you need to delete that garbage from your playlists as soon as

this service is over.

And ladies if you hang out with someone who regularly ingests that stuff, do I need to say that's a dumb thing to do?

And, sadly, that goes for much of what passes for "news" these days. Why would you fill your mind with partisan rhetoric – liberal or conservative – about people you will never meet and issues you have no way of correctly analyzing because you're not there and you don't know all of the factors?

I'm not saying put your head in the sand but seriously ...

I'd better move on before I get into more trouble.

Point is ... to think that what you watch and listen to doesn't affect your thoughts, attitudes, perspective and eventually your actions is foolish.

### **That's why Paul writes ...**

*Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.  
Philippians 4:8 (NIV)*

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So, we've seen three of the top five.

- Pretending we're OK when we are not.
- Not giving to God's work because money is tight.
- Filling our mind with garbage.

How are you doing so far? Are you ready for me to be done? Me, too.

But onward in our countdown to number two.

One of the most common dumb things smart Christians do ... and not just smart Christians but committed Christians, serious Christians, wanting-to-make-a-difference-for-Jesus Christians ... one of the dumbest things we do is ...

### **2. Living an out-of-balance spiritual life.**

Several weeks ago, we talked about what spiritual balance looks like for a Christian.

In the message *Engaged* (which was part of the "First Love" series) we looked at a simple model for knowing God, connecting with God, and interacting with God.



**Around here, we call it the SCM model ...**

- Where “S” stands for “solitude” ... which is spending time alone with God in prayer, scripture reading, and personal reflection.
- “C” stands for “community” ... which is connecting with other people who are also engaging with God (and who can bear your burdens and whose burdens you can bear)
- And “M” stands for “Ministry” ... which is serving in ways that advance God’s Kingdom in this world.

I won’t go into more detail on all of those – if you want to know more, the message is available at our website and through our app.

Now, I briefly mentioned in that message that most Christians who engage in these practices tend to balance them differently according to their personality type. For example, extroverts tend to spend less time in solitude and more time in community. Introverts do the opposite.

And that’s OK, but one thing we’ve noticed through the years is that ...

**If you completely ignore one of the elements (and most people do), you’re going to experience some unpleasant consequences in your life.**

That’s why this is number two on the list of dumb things smart Christians do.

Let me give you an example from my own life. I’ll just talk about me and *my* stupidity for a minute.

If I spend a lot of time in solitude (listening to God; letting God remind me of who He is and who I am) and I spend a lot of time doing ministry (i.e. doing my job here) ...

**... but I don’t have much community, I get arrogant and prideful.**

I start thinking “it’s all up to me. God has this mission for Rick McGinniss and I’m going to get out there and I’ve got to do it.”

Without community, I forget that it’s about people. I lose my compassion. I lose my sensitivity.

My life becomes a mess if I neglect community.

**Now, let’s say I have community going on and I’ve got ministry going on but I don’t have any time for solitude ...**

...when I don’t have regular time alone with God, eventually, what happens is I run out of the emotional capacity that it takes for me to deal with people.

I start getting short with people or I start getting jaded and fatalistic about the ministry: “nobody cares, nobody is going to give, nobody is going to serve.” Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen.

Without solitude, I don't have God reminding me that He is the source and not me.

And my life becomes a mess.

**Finally, if I have solitude and I have community but I'm not doing any ministry (like when I'm on vacation), then I quickly become self-centered.**

I don't think that it's all *up to* me – I think it's all *about* me.

I become this fat little pig who just takes it all in, "Jesus loves me. God loves me. All these people around me love me," but I'm of no use to God in this world.

Now, it may work the same way in your life or it might look different, but the principle is the same:

*You need to give attention and priority to all three of those habits because without all three, you're going to be unhappy, unconnected and unfruitful as Christian.*

... which is why we are constantly encouraging folks to be involved in a small group, to be in church services each week and to serve in a ministry of some kind, either here at NHCC or in another Kingdom-of-God venture. It's why I constantly badger you to make sure you're spending time with God alone.

Not only that, when people get out of balance like this, it's not too long before they begin to find all kinds of fault with their church. And the church becomes the lightning rod for all the spiritual problems in their life when, in fact, a lot of times, they've not taken responsibility for their own spiritual health.

Oh, baby get me off this stage.

And now it's time for number one the list; the dumb thing more smart Christians do more often than anything else, at least as I have observed and experienced over the past 25 years.

And it causes so many problems in the end ... grievous and painful problems to us and people around us.

Are you ready?

**1. Being nice instead of "speaking the truth in love."**

Now, there's nothing wrong with being nice as far as it goes. After all, it's much better to be a nice person than a not nice person.

In addition, Jesus and those who followed in his steps and taught his way of life said that ...

- Christians are to be kind and gentle.
- We're to bear with the failings and the struggles of those who are weak.

- We're to extend forgiveness and grace to others in the same way we ourselves have received it from God.
- As far as it depends on us, we're to live at peace with everyone.
- We're to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

But our kindness, gentleness, graciousness, forgiveness, and peacefulness towards others – especially other Christians (including pastors and leaders in the church) – all of those attitudes and actions are to be rooted in truth.

Around here we call that “relational integrity.” If you've been to the Intro to NHCC class you've heard us talk about it. Relational integrity means that what's transpiring between you and me is real.

It means if I act like you and me are OK, we really are OK.

It also means if we're *not* OK – if I have hurt you or offended you in some way, or I think you have done that to me – we don't settle for being nice. That's what everyone else does. Christians actually take steps to deal with the issue with truth and grace.

**Paul puts it like this:**

*Put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

“We're connected in Christ. We're brothers and sisters. So we don't lie to each other,” Paul is saying.

**And then he adds ...**

*In your anger do not sin. Ephesians 4:25-26 (NIV)*

Listen, people are going to do things to you that hurt you and offend you and you're going to get angry. But don't sin.

And of course we think of sin in our anger as being profane or abusive and it certainly is. But ...

- Lying about our anger is also sin.
- Being nice instead of speaking the truth of how we feel is also sin.
- Pretending we're OK with someone when we're not is sin.

And it's one of the dumbest things Christian do.

I have seen so many relationships destroyed. Marriages end, families split, businesses go under, people get mad and leaving churches because we choose to be nice when we're not feeling nice; because we choose to be nice instead of dealing with whatever issue there is between us.

And I think of all the things that bother God about this messed up world, this has to be at the top of the list because Jesus gave his life to make peace – real peace, not fake peace – between us and the Father.

Think about that. Jesus sacrificed his life so that there could be reconciliation instead of hostility that was caused by our sin. It hurt him. It was messy.

And we just want to settle for being nice.

And in the short term, a lot of times being nice does keep the peace. It minimizes the pain. But when we keep doing that with each other, over time that pain and anger builds up until one day it explodes. And the damage at that point, so many times, is irreversible.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Jesus said <Matt 18>

So, if you're a Christian, I plead with you and I beg you. Do not sin in your anger. Do not lie about what has hurt you. Have faith in what Jesus taught. Go, speak the truth in love, and see what God might do.

## Conclusion

Well, there you go: the top five things I've seen smart Christians (including myself) do over the years that sabotage what God is trying to accomplish in us.

- Pretending we're OK when we are not.
- Not giving to God's work because money is tight.
- Filling our mind with garbage.
- Living an out-of-balance spiritual life.
- Being nice instead of "speaking the truth in love."

And, again, my purpose in talking about these things isn't to browbeat anyone. I'm not trying to make you feel bad. I'm not saying you're dumb.

I'm just asking – are you doing some of these things and, if so, could that be why you're not experiencing the life God has for you?

That's a great question to end with.

Are you doing some of these dumb things and, if so, could that be why you're not experiencing the life God has for you?

If that's true, then as the band does this next song, I invite you to just admit that to God.

“God, I’m doing some dumb things these days because I don’t trust what you say. I’m afraid to step out in faith.”

- And I’m missing out.
- Your Kingdom and your church is missing out.
- The people around me who need me to be a light in the darkness are missing out.

And I want something better.”

And once you’ve admitted that to God, make the words of the song your prayer. “Lord, have your way in me.”

Here we go.