

Forcing Change



Exploring Worldviews

Last November, I had the opportunity of teaching a college-level modular course on Secular Trends at Millar College of the Bible, a school located in south-west Saskatchewan. During the class we explored a range of topics; from the history of humanist enlightenment to pagan concepts found in Deep Ecology to the transhumanism movement, and much more.

In this edition of *Forcing Change* two student essays are being presented, both stemming from jointly done, on-the-street surveys, as spurred by the Secular Trends module. It is my hope that these two reports will challenge and encourage you to interact within your cultural setting - to be ambassadors of Jesus Christ, speakers of truth-in-love.

Note: Some editing has been done to enhance the flow of the essays for use as articles in *Forcing Change*.



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Carl Teichrib, Editor

WHAT THEY SAY ON THE STREETS

By Gerrit Klumpenhower.

“Whatever works for you, that is true for you,” was the motto of a girl I met one cold night in downtown Calgary, Alberta.

In front of a punk bar on Stephen Avenue, we began discussing things like the meaning of life and what happens after you die. This was the perfect time for a young female to proudly state her individual views. She was about 5’6”, long brown hair, cute smile and a gentle demeanour; a real human being with real human experiences and problems. I found that despite both of us having an obviously human exterior, our beliefs could not have clashed more. The basis and reason behind her entire faith was to “believe what you want and whatever you feel is right is what is right for you.”

As I’m an evangelical Christian, one could imagine what was going through my head in light of that statement.

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The World Today:

What People Believe

By Fletcher Roberts

A survey was performed in an attempt to determine the general worldview of people in and around Swift Current, Saskatchewan. In surveying a few people, it was determined that the worldview of the interviewees were as follows: Postmodernist, Secular Humanist, “progressive Christian,” and Christian.

There were many similarities between the worldviews, and also differences. The idea of oneness - that God, Man and Nature are fundamentally one - was evident in going over the answers of the interviewees, and it affirmed many of the ideas put forward in the Secular Trends class time.

The Bible definitely has to be taken into account when considering these findings, helping us to understand how God sees the world; it definitely speaks on the state of today's society.

Finally, the experience of going into the streets and talking to people about worldviews are an important part of this report.

The first names and/or titles of those surveyed are as follows: Angela, Jacinda, Lauren, Lady in UCC, and Johnny.

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Your membership keeps the research going!

Your membership helps fund the research and expenses incurred in producing each issue of *Forcing Change*. *Thank you!*

On the Streets continued.

With over half a billion people (and almost as many belief systems), North America is nothing less than a smorgasbord of faiths. Most of the major groups have been infiltrated and dissected, leaving very few religions yet to have their own wiki page. Here in North America we have several cities with the highest ethnic and religious diversity in the world. Intimidating to the young Christian man? A little. It has also been exciting in a way, being able to walk down a busy street and catch wind of a copious range of beliefs.

After a while, one could begin to grow fairly upset with society's ideals drifting away from those that God has brought forth. Many of the people subscribing to these beliefs are extremely hard to talk to unless you understand what they believe. In order to address these ideas, they must first be studied. What better place to get information about the people and their beliefs than from the people themselves? Regretfully, it would take far too long to discuss all the information gathered; here are the most common findings.

There is Something Missing

A few friends and I took to the streets to survey and assess what we would be dealing with in terms of worldviews and religious beliefs. In all honesty, I expected more people with well-articulated ideas to conflict with mine. I also contacted a few people that I have encountered over the years around North America, and looked into old emails from friends all over the world; each representative offering a different angle.

If there was one thing that was agreed on by most, it would be the importance of family and friends, as these relationships were listed in the top five by those surveyed. To the question, "what are some things you value most?" - family was easily one of the most common answers.

Our first interview was with an individual named Jacinda, she listed her highest values as, "family first off... a home, you know, the basics."

I was quite happy with these findings at first. In fact, most of our conversations started quite positively with encouraging results, until I noticed something while looking over all our conversations: God was not even hinted at in the hierarchy of values, let alone mentioned. In only one conversation was God spoken about without us bringing Him up directly.

Fill the Void

There is a serious problem faced by those who do not have God placed amongst their values; this life becomes absolutely meaningless.

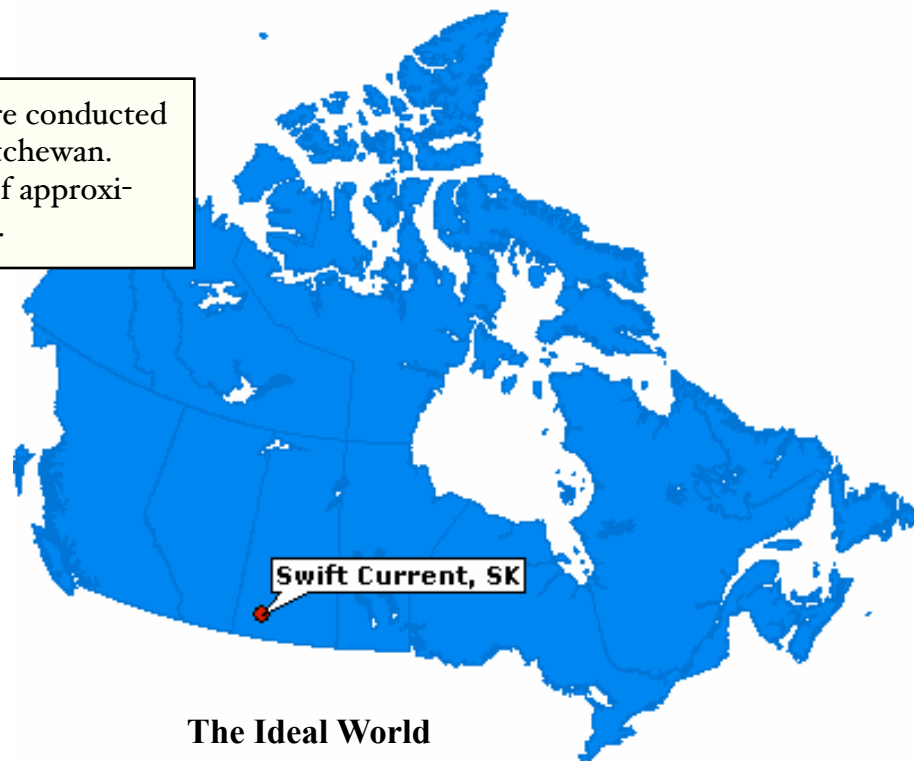
The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* states that the chief end of man is, "to glorify God, and enjoy him forever."¹ It calls to mind that we have a glorious purpose in life that reaches beyond humanity, pointing to a hope and pleasure far greater than anything this life can give. All the individuals in this study who revealed distaste for the idea of God had their own ways of coping when confronted with the meaning of life.

“The meaning of life is to discover our purpose,”² was the reply of one health store employee. Though there seems to be no consensus on the meaning of life, many people agreed that each person needs to find who they are. When you think about it, “finding yourself”³ really just means looking for your place in the world - looking for your purpose. The proposal that the meaning of life is “self-actualization” can be simplified to a circular pattern; the meaning of life is to find the meaning of your life.

The only people we encountered who did not find themselves on this merry-go-round of “the purpose of life is the purpose of life” was a MacDonald’s employee and a church goer. The church attender said that the purpose of life was to get to heaven. The food franchise worker, on the other hand, admitted that he did not know what the meaning of life was: “I don’t know... and that is why it is awesome.”⁵ He proceeded to explain that everyday your purpose can change, so there is no need to rely on the idea of a meta-narrative or ultimate purpose, for we can be happy without one.

Although the following may sound really nice for the comfortable western world - “it is beautiful that it (life) is purposeless”⁶ - this perspective disintegrates if you bring it to those who need purpose as a reason to carry on. For many people, purpose (or hope of discovering purpose) is the only thing that keeps them going, and the desire to have purpose make them happy.

Most of the surveys were conducted in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. Swift Current is a city of approximately 15,000 residents.



The Ideal World

If I was given a dollar for every time I heard, “Why can’t we all just get along?”⁷ in our interviews, I would have had free coffee every day. Many people agreed that the ideal world includes a humanity that is completely at peace, and most people threw in something about people working with the environment in order to create the paragon humanity. The belief in the ideal society

was similar in all we surveyed, until thoughts began to differ on the way that humanity would achieve this ideal.

Interviewees who were 40 years old and older seemed to think that humanity would not be able to reach its historical climax. “It will not be man made,”⁸ was the conclusion of Angela, the one interviewee that believed there was a God.

What really surprised me was the percentage of people who believed mankind would only reach a nonpareil state through trials of Revelation-scale proportions. A recent conversation with my friend Michael from San Francisco paralleled this catastrophic notion. In talking about the formation of an ideal society, my conversation with Michael ended with his elaboration that humanity has reached a holding pattern, coming as far as it can on its own. However, the ideal society will emerge and humanity will arise after a course of “...revelation sh**”: natural disasters, the enslavement of our society, resistance groups, hoping for enhanced powers.”⁹

In the end, Michael believes the human race “will work alongside technology to create an abundance in resources.” He is not the only one who feels scarcity of resources is what is stopping us, and that separation between religions is keeping us from the ideal humanity.

Where Do these Ideas Come From?

Michael’s philosophy is apparently a personal interpretation of several concepts: People love to think that they have reasoned their beliefs by themselves. Western society, in turn, advances the message that what is true is based on your personal exploration and interpretation - that you, with your own knowledge and personal enlightenment, can be the director of your own purpose and fulfillment.

The Bible tells us that there is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9), so we know that every train of thought has a single origin. As much as Michael wants to think that he came up with his ideas on his own, many of his beliefs are consistent with Zen Buddhism, and other positions of his are a mash-up of several different philosophies and religions.

Probably the Strangest Believe System I Have Encountered

We had a more difficult time with our survey at the The United Church in Swift Current. People in the church seemed to be free to believe anything they want, and their beliefs emanated from no definite article. A woman, whom we interviewed from the church, had a belief system that played out in a way that does not make much sense at all.

She was a regular church goer and seemed to think that attending church made her better in some way. She commented that she “did not start going to church soon enough.”¹⁰

The confusion arose when we began to ask her what she thought the ideal world would look like, and how that would happen. Her response was that everybody needs to get along and the discussion of religion is what causes disunity. She lectured us for about ten minutes on how we need to be decent to our fellow man, and that everyone believes the same things anyway so we shouldn’t preach our beliefs. The conversation was over when we asked about her thoughts on

God. Instead of a thought-out response, we were scolded for asking her to talk about religion, and she refused to say another word to us.

What Now?

How does society function when anyone can believe whatever he or she wants?

In talking to just a few people on the street, our research was sent in every direction. There are hardly enough moments in a lifetime to track where the ideas held by fellow citizens, friends and acquaintances come from, and where they go. And being a witness for Christ is difficult in an age when so many divergent ideas and conflicting thoughts can be encountered, and because I can't seem to understand how these people think, it's especially hard. Listening to the recordings of our survey broke my heart. These are real people who are happily lost, sauntering down a one way path to eternal death, and all we did was listen to their plans on how to get there.*

I know that many of these people are searching for purpose and fulfillment that only Christ can give, but there is a refusal to listen to the exclusive claim of Christianity.

People are much more willing to start a friendship when you are willing to listen to who they are, and what they believe. It is clear that friendship might be one of the only ways to reach the people we encountered. The truth that the Holy Spirit is powerful, and that He can work through any situation or circumstance, is valid. And we too have a role in touching the lives of others; to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12:31), and to go into the world and make disciples (Matt 28:19).

With so many belief systems in North America, it will be our responsibility to study and understand these beliefs, so that as a church we can be educated and prepared to relate to our neighbours, just as Paul did in Acts 17:23. *FC*

* In conducting a social survey it is imperative that the researchers do not inject their personal beliefs, as this will skew results. However, after the survey is complete, there may be opportunities to talk more intimately with those being questioned.

Endnotes:

¹ CRTA, "Westminster Shorter Catechism," accessed November 15 2014, http://www.reformed.org/documents/wsc/index.html?_top=http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC.html.

² Lauren, Interview on Worldviews. (health food store, Swift Current SK, November 5, 2014)

³ Jacinda, Interview on Worlrdviews. (Small store, Swift Current SK, November 5, 2014)

⁴ Johnny, Interview on Worldviews. (Macdonalds, Swift Current SK, November 6, 2014)

⁵ Osho, "Life is Purposeless," GitHub Gist, August 31, 2012, accessed November 15, 2014. <https://gist.github.com/rsms/3564654>

⁶ All, Interview of Worldviews. (Swift Current, November 5-6, 2014)

⁷ Angela, Interveiw of Worldviews, (Warehouse, Swift Current, November 5, 2014)

⁸ Michael, (no subject), personal email, November 11, 2014.

⁹ United Church Woman, Interview of Wordlviews. (United Church, Swift Current, November 5, 2014)

The World Today continued.

A common theme was found in comparing and contrasting the findings of the survey. The main thing that everyone who took part in the survey agreed on was the idea of humanity working together to bring peace to the world, hoping for the ideal society. Each had an idea of what a modern day utopia would look like, and sadly and not surprisingly, these hopes had nothing to do with God.

Every person surveyed seemed to put a high value on the following idea: “Can't we all just get along?” This thinking stems from the hippie movement of the 60's, and it is still on the minds of many today. Even in Angela (the Christian's) response to the question of what an ideal society would look like today, God wasn't a part of that utopia. It is almost as if they knew that some form of divine being or “God” exists, but don't think He would impact humanity. However, when asked about where humanity might be headed in the next 50 years, Angela did say that she believes God will bring about some sort of calamity that will bring many people back to God.

Each interviewee seemed to agree that if “religion” was swept under the rug, humanity would be able to find peace. Even Angela seemed willing to just cover up her faith in order to make those around her happy, which was really heartbreaking. Most agreed that the human race would ultimately need some sort of global catastrophe in order for everyone to unite peaceably. They also shared generally the same values; Family, friends, and health were important to all. Furthermore, those surveyed held to a notable middle-class perspective - as long as needs are met, you can find happiness for yourself.

Some stark differences emerged. For example, cultural differences can be seen between Johnny - a young Korean man who read the Bible but was discouraged by it - and the rest of the survey group. Johnny's point of difference was on the topic of a perfect society, focussing on the idea of “respect” - which may reflect his cultural values - and presenting a longing for a human society in which respect is highly regarded. He didn't think that mankind is at rock bottom yet.

Every person interviewed recognized that mankind has a problem, but Lauren seemed extra negative when it came to people in general. She seemed to hold the idea that if people didn't exist, the world would be much better. Her belief that nature and animals should be seen as equal with mankind ultimately degrades humans, placing us on the same level as that which God gave dominion over.

Jacinda, a post-modernist clothing store owner, was in disagreement with Lauren. She thought that as long as people are doing what they feel is right, then they are in the right. Jacinda was the only one who said people should openly embrace religion, but her view was that of making your own religion out of what works for you. Such a position seeks to remove any God-authority beyond humanity, ultimately putting themselves in the bondage of being both a self-Master and self-Savior, without realizing the freedom that comes from acknowledging the true God.

Considering the Bible

A testament to how a large part of society thinks is reflected in Romans 1:28-29.

“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice...” (Romans 1:28-29a).

As one commentary explains; “God does not usually stop us from making choices against His will. He allows us to declare our supposed independence from Him, even though He knows that in time we will become slaves to our own rebellious choices – we will lose our freedom not to sin.” [*Life Application Bible Commentary: Romans*, p.37].

In his New Testament commentary, Warren Wiersbe says this:

“When man began to feel the tragic consequences of his sins, you would think that he would repent and seek God, but just the opposite was true. Because he was abandoned by God, he could only become worse. Man did not even want to retain God in his knowledge! So, ‘God gave them over’ this time to a ‘depraved mind’ (Rom. 1:28 NASB), which means a mind cannot form right judgments. They now abandoned themselves to sin. Paul names twenty-four specific sins, all of which are with us today.”

People know about God, and don’t have any legitimate excuse to reject Him, yet they still seem to take the more widely used path. This road leads further and further away from the true God, and accepts that one day humanity can become their own God. Dr. Peter Jones touched on this in his book, *One or Two*:

“In his letter as a whole, Paul insists that sin infects everyone, whether Jew or Greek (Rom 2:1-17; 3:9). ‘They’ refers to humanity as a whole and takes us back to our first parents and their disobedience. This will become clearer when we discuss the nature of the Lie. If Paul is referring to Adam and Eve (and thus to all humanity), then we all accept and repeat this lie. According to Paul, it is second nature for us all to accept the Lie and refuse the Truth.”

This is not to say that all of society today is as blatantly sinful as described in Romans 1. However, the heart is revealing, as Jesus reminds us in the Sermon on the Mount.

- “Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matthew 5:22).
- “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28).

So how should a born-again Christian respond to the depravity of the world? Is there anything that the Christian community can do to restore the human mind?

The answer, ultimately, is in the negative. Evangelists do not have the power to cause the renewal of the mind that is so desperately needed for people today - that is the domain of Jesus Christ working in the heart of individuals - but that doesn't mean Christians should just sit back and watch as society tears itself apart. Christians, instead, are commanded in Matthew 28:19, 20 and Acts 1:8 to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). At the end of the day it is God who does the work in a person to renew their heart and mind, and to set them on a path of restoration and sanctification, but Christians are the instrument God uses to "plant a seed."

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6). The world is in dire need of Christians who fear God over man. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:37).

On the Ground

The experience of surveying people on the street reminded me as to the fallen state of humanity, and this experience stirred up a heart of compassion more deeply than ever before; hearing their stories, and considering their beliefs and worldviews, was an important reminder as to the necessity of proclaiming God's truth to a lost and hurting world. This survey stirred up a stronger desire to evangelize and share the Gospel with those who may not have heard it before, or with those who have heard and rejected it. Conducting such a survey is an excellent way to become more comfortable in talking with people. For myself, it was a very beneficial exercise.

In conclusion, the three main worldviews encountered were Postmodernist, Secular Humanist, and Christian. The various interviews affirmed what had been learned in the Secular Trends class, and it was obvious that the idea of oneness and humanity "working together in unity and peace" is highly valued in society.

May God stir up the hearts of His people today, that the body of Christ might work diligently in the time He has blessed us with, as we present the love and truth of Jesus Christ to a society desperately in need of His salvation.

Excerpts of Conversations in Swift Current, SK.

Angela:

Q: What are some things you hold very high in this life? (Values)

A: Family, friends, helping the community/others.

Q: What is the meaning of life?

A: Ultimately to get to heaven.

Q: How would you get there?

A: By believing in God.

Q: Who is God?

A: The Creator and the Finisher.

Q: Is He involved in your life?

A: Yes.

Q: Is there a right and a wrong?

A: Yes I believe so.

Q: Where do you find that?

A: In the Bible.

Q: Where do you get your views on life?

A: From the Bible and personal experience.

Q: What is your ideal society?

A: Where everybody would be equal. Where we would all have our basic needs met.

Q: Do you think that we can ever get there or obtain that?

A: Yes I think so.

Q:How?

A: I don't know. I just think it's gonna happen. It won't be man made. It's gonna be something that shakes us to the core.

Q: Have you noticed throughout your life changes in society?

A: Yeah, churches used to be a lot more full when I was young. People didn't used to believe that they could accomplish everything on their own. People today feel that they don't need a "God".

Q: Where do you think that society is headed?

A: I think there's gonna be catastrophes that will bring people close to God.

She didn't really focus on training her kids in the faith to keep peace at home.

Q: How has being married to someone who doesn't hold the same faith as you affected your faith?

A: It changes the way I decorated at home.

She just kind of kept her faith to herself. She talked about how not every church teaches the Bible. ie. UCC (United Church of Canada)

Jacinda: She seemed a lot more apt to talking about herself.

Q: What kind of things do you value? What is most important to you?

A: Family, a home, food. The basics as long as you have what you need.

Q: What is the meaning of life? What is the chief end of humanity?

A: Happiness. True happiness, finding your true self and finding your place in the universe. Learning how to be yourself in a crazy world. Being true to yourself to find happiness.

Q: What are some methods to reach that point of self-actualization?

A: For me, just being yourself. Yoga & meditation. More of a spiritual approach. Not through exactly one religion but maybe one thing from 10 different religions. Whatever works for you.

Q: What's your opinion on yoga?

A: Well, it's the one hour of the day that I just get to take for myself where I just focus on myself and focus on my breathing. For me it is spiritual and physical its really everything.

Q:Would you classify yourself as spiritual or religious?

A: I would classify myself as more spiritual than religious. Religions is something that you can combine to make whatever works for you.

Q: Where do you find your spirituality?

A: I found mine in books and videos mostly.

Q: What's your view on the Divine?

A: I think there's something else out there. I don't know where it is. I've lost quite a few people in my life so I find it that it gives me peace to believe that there is something after this life.

Q: Do you have a view of God?

A: I don't really. I'm not a really religious person because I have lost a lot of important people in my life so it makes you question why those people are taken from you. I guess I do believe that there is something out there.

Q: Would you say that there is any overarching authority to the values that you hold to?

A: I would say that it's just whatever you need to get you through to the next day or month or year. Whatever works for you to find what it is that you need to keep you going.

Q: What is your ideal view of humanity?

A: Peace, if we could all live in peace. No more war and fighting. The problem is mainly religion and that's kind of why I chose to stay away from it maybe and just take what I need to get through I guess.

Q: Do you think it's possible for humanity to ever attain peace?

A: Yeah I think it is possible. I don't know what it would take exactly but probably tragedy of some kind. Something that would affect the entire world that would for us to all come together. People are stubborn... they are very strong-minded when it comes to their religions.

Lauren:

Q: What kind of things are important to you?

A: Health. I don't know what else is important. We're all very greedy, we don't know it but that's the truth. We don't know it because of the country we live in.

Q: So what kinds of things do you hold very high in your life?

A: Well, health, happiness, good honest friends and family. Keeping family as a family. Food, good quality food and water.

Q: How would you find happiness in your life?

A: Not working? A combination of the things that I value. Helping others, so many of us focus on making everyone else happy and don't worry about making ourselves happy. To me, happiness isn't being able to buy things it's enjoying life as it is.

Q: What is the meaning of life?

A: To find the meaning of life. I don't know what mine is. Maybe we're to make a better world, I just don't see that happening.

Q: Is a better world attainable?

A: I don't think so. We would have to get rid of too many people.

Q: Is that in population or individuals?

A: Individuals, the other countries where were over trying to manage.

Q: What would be your idea of an ideal society?

A: Bubbles...

Q: Care to elaborate?

A: Bubbles always make people happy. Peace I guess, where we don't have worries and stress.

Q: Do you have any views on spirituality or religion?

A: Nope.

Q: Would you consider yourself a scientific individual?

A: I don't know what I'd be.

Q: Do you have any view on God or a god?

A: It's not that I don't believe, but if we have one God, there's lots of em out there 'cause there can't be only one, every society thinks they have one.

Q: Where do you see society in 50 years?

A: I don't think we'll ever be able to get any better.

Q: What do you think of the whole green movement?

A: I'm a fan of it as long as it's done through the right means. We have a long ways to go. I don't think we can save the world.

Q: What do you believe about right and wrong? Is there a right and wrong?

A: I guess in some cases yeah, but we're also trained to think there is. We all have morals.

Q: Is there a source to morals?

A: I guess we get shaped by society and parents. Even though we think we have morals we all just do what we want.

Q: What do you think human relationship with nature should be?

A: We think we own the world, that animals are second. If we weren't here in the way they would be fine.

Q: So what is your opinion on that?

A: I think that we should be equal.

Lady in UCC:

Q: What things are most important to you in life?

A: My family, being kind to other people, not criticizing other people or other sects. I hear about that a lot here. Just trying to be a half decent human being.

Q: What is the meaning of life? Why are we here?

A: Well, I can't put it into words.

Q: What is your ideal society?

A: If we all got along. People have been fighting over religion all through history. It's not fair to another person to push your religion of others. Each person has their beliefs.

Q: Do you think that all religions could work together in peace?

A: No I think it's unachievable. That would be great though.

Q: Why not?

A: Well, its the leaders in some of the religions.

Let's all just be a good person keep your faith to yourself

Johnny:

Q: What are your values?

A: Music, family, and relationships. If somebody gives you friendship its very important to be grateful to them.

Q: Who inspires you?

A: My old music teacher. He was 27 when he died but he really showed me a lot.

Q: What was the biggest way he impacted you?

A: He taught me a different way to see life. He taught me how to be myself and not just blend in with everyone else.

Q: what is the meaning of life?

A: I don't know. That's why its awesome everything is new every day.

Q: What do you think an ideal society looks like?

A: Respect. We need to learn how to respect and love people. Everyone should just be nice.

Q: Do you think that is attainable?

A: Yes. We would have to learn to respect who people are.

Q: What does social justice mean to you?

A: Equality, Everyone should work together.

Q: What do you think of right and wrong?

A: In religion that we get our morals from what people teach you. What is right is what you feel is good.

Q: Is there an authority over what's right and whats wrong?

A: It's kind of whatever you feel is right.

Q: Do you believe in a divine?

A: No I don't. I've read the Bible but i get so lost in all the ideas floating around. I just take what I want from each different idea.

Q: what are some ways that you experience spirituality?

A: When you feel good about what you do or can do. For me its writing.

Q: What do you think happens when you die?

A: I have no idea and that's what makes life interesting.

Q: What gives you hope in life?

A: I think people, how people love and how they give you peace. The noble things you see every day.

Q: Are there multiple ways to get to heaven?

A: I think there is only one way. If there's only one heaven then it only makes sense that there's only one way to get there. If you read carefully the Bible says that nobody can really get there.

Q: what do you think our relationship to nature is?

A: I think it's important to take care of what we have because it's so awesome. We are responsible to take care of it.