

An Interview with Pastor Jeff Lampl by author and writer Sarah Riddle



Jeff Lampl is the pastor of New London Presbyterian Church and the Christian Life Center in New London, Pennsylvania, where he has been leading and teaching since 1987, helping people to understand the truth of Christ's love. He and his wife, Kathy, have five children and four grandchildren. His favorite ice cream is Cherry Garcia, about which he says, "It's got cherry, and it's got chocolate chips in it. It's just, it's just the best."

*Sarah:* Please share a little about yourself.

*Jeff:* I went to college, became a German major and became a German teacher for 16 years. During that time I got married, was married five years, and my wife left me. So I guess this is becoming my testimony also. At that point I was not a believer. I hadn't been to church in 20 years. Well, actually, I shouldn't say that. When I got married, my wife wouldn't marry me unless I was a Christian, so she took me to a campus outreach, and it was like, excuse the language, slam, bam, thank you, ma'am, you're a Christian. I went through the 20 minutes; I said yes. Then I came out and we tried to do the church thing, but I hated it, so I quit. So that was not good for our marriage. Then she quit, and I became atheistic, and anyway, she left.

At that point, I was so devastated, my thought was either Christ is real or there's nothing to life. I was by myself. To get rid of the pain, I went to a seminar I saw. It was called the Prophecy Seminar, and I thought I'd just get my mind off the pain. I didn't know it was Christian or anything. It was a Seventh Day Adventist evangelistic thing, and he talked about Christ, and I committed my life to Christ there. The only thing I remember is that it felt irrevocable, you know, it was nothing else. Then I found my way into a singles group. It happened to be in a Presbyterian church, and that's why I'm Presbyterian. It's that simple. I went there basically every Wednesday night for eight years, and that's where I met Kathy, my wife. We were friends for a couple of years. I became the leader of the group and quit teaching, went to seminary. We got married in '86, graduated from seminary in '87, came here [New London Presbyterian Church] and have been here ever since.

*Sarah:* If somebody asked you, "Why should I be a Christian? What does it matter? There are all these different beliefs in the world, what does it matter? Can't I just pick one?" Is that [question] too hard?

*Jeff:* It's not hard at all. I mean, it's very hard, but it's a great question. The Christian claim is that Jesus is God having come to earth to redeem it. The Christian claim is that God created the world, made it good, it went bad, but God hasn't quit on it. He's never given up on it. Never quit, never will quit. He is redeeming it right now at every point ever since Abraham. That old question, "Will God ever dwell on earth among men?" has been answered, and the answer is He was, and He will once again.

Now that world view, I would say to those who are searching and aren't sure what to do with it, I would ask them to first understand that world view, understand what Christianity says. Then put that over and against other world views, like The Lion King, sort of the circle of life, around and around. That's the eastern perspective. Then there's the perspective of Islam, top down, authoritarian. There's no relationship; there's no Father. It's not a kind of a love thing, in it's a theocracy. Christianity always works from the edges in, the bottom up, and Jesus is Lord of the universe right now. I don't know; I'm probably talking too much, but He's Lord of the universe right now, and He's recreating it, and I would just try to understand the Christian world view, put it over against the others and see which one is the most powerful.

Then study all of history, and see what Christianity has done for the world. It's something that most people don't know. I started to ramble a little bit. I don't even know if I answered your question.

*Sarah:* Yes, you did. You make some very good points. I think it's a question that people need to hear kind of a little bit more detailed explanation of, because it's so pervasive. The people I run into say, "Oh, yeah, I believe this. I'm a Mormon...I'm a..." Fill in the blank with your "brand."

*Jeff:* The only way I know to answer that is to look at the claims of Jesus and study them. That's the place to start, because Islam's god, Hinduism's god, Buddhism's god, a whole lot of other eastern religions – they're all different gods. They are not the same god, and they do not take you to the same place. At least come to that conclusion. If you choose no god, you're also choosing another destination for your life. So you're making life-impacting decisions.

*Sarah:* Right. I heard one speaker put it this way. He described Christianity as the only religion, the only belief system, where you have forgiveness from sins right now at the point you accept it and you have eternal life right now.

*Jeff:* Absolutely. Christianity you can spell "d-o-n-e", done. Everything else is something you have to do to please somebody or something, even yourself. Everything else. Christianity, it's nothing you can do. It's all God. It's what God did for you.

*Sarah:* What are the biggest lessons you've learned about being a Christian?

*Jeff:* Okay, there's three. There's three big ones for me. Number one, there's nothing like the body of Christ. Nothing, nothing, nothing, and the church is the body of Christ. It's like the spokes of a wheel. All these different people are spokes, and there's God in the hub. When you've got all your group going that way, you get closer to God; you get closer to each other, and there's just something different. So for me personally and my family, my life, the body of Christ is the greatest thing in the world. It's different from the rotary. It's different from my tennis playing friends or whatever. There's just nothing like it. Even it's not the same as your biological family. So, I think that's the greatest thing.

The second thing is the resurrection of Jesus is everything, everything, everything. "I make all things new." That's to me everything. That in Jesus Christ, He takes every regret, every failure,

everything of the past, every moment, everything that's evil, the worst of everything, at every moment He's redeeming it and reclaiming it and using it for the new creation. That's why Paul says that nothing you do is ever wasted. That's the greatest thing in the world.

The third thing I thought, is for Christians, I think we need to learn how to rejoice. So often we praise God for answered prayer, and that always worries me a little bit. This will sound heretical; I'm not even sure that that's the right thing to praise God for. I mean, of course, to be thankful, but so often when we do that, then we're mad or feel like God's gone or something when things don't go right. I think the way to rejoice is to rejoice that God's God.

*Sarah:* Any other big lessons?

*Jeff:* Those are the biggest lessons I would put at the top. As far as what God is showing me right now, I've noticed with myself, I seem to agonize a little bit less about things. You know, lots of times I sit, and I try to work things out and think things through, and it's very intense. I can be very intense, and I seem to be a little bit less like that these days. What that does go hand in hand with is this realization that Jesus is competently running the world. I can actually rest in that a little bit. I'm not an outward worrier, but inwardly I do. Anyway, so I seem to be more at peace, even around things because of which I used to be less at peace.

*Sarah:* Do you have any advice that you want to pass along to someone who is a brand new believer?

*Jeff:* I would say the very first thing to do is to find a church, well, church shop, but find a church where you're comfortable, and commit yourself to it. Recognize that you're not committing yourself to the church, but you're committing yourself to be part of the body of Christ. We have to somehow be actually connected to each other, and I would say, go to that church; commit to it. Sunday you go to church, and then commit yourself to a small group to study the Bible together. The way to read the Bible generally is with others, not just alone. Find out what it means to be part of the body of Christ, and the only way to do that is to make a commitment to show up all the time.

When you find your place, and don't quit until you find your place, no matter how hard it is, keep showing up. If you find people that are hard to get along with, fine. That's how God grows you up. That's what the body of Christ is, you find out that you differ with people, but you find out that you can differ differently. Until you get to that point where you can stay committed beyond differences and hardships, you still haven't found out what it means of be part of the body of Christ.

Then, through that, you find out you'll have these amazing experiences where you'll be able to say after some event or some connection, "It doesn't get any better than this." I think too many people church shop and jump around and do all that, and then you get critical. You know, well this is better than that. Skip all that. There's no one place that's more worthy of you than another.

So that's the first one, the body of Christ. Well, actually, that's the second one. The first one is to make your commitment to Jesus Christ irrevocable. Regardless of how badly things go for you in

your life, even if the worst comes and all you ever see is the worst, never revoke your commitment to Jesus Christ, because there's nowhere else to go. Where else are you gonna go?

See, following Christ is a truth claim. You know, if you've decided it's true, it's true. I mean, regardless of what happens to you. What happens to you doesn't change truth. Truth is truth. So that's where you stick to that. I want to stay away from 'if you do that, then you'll be blessed'. That's the wrong way to think about it. However, it's also true that when you get there, and you really come to the conclusion: "God, if I have nothing else, but I have You, I have enough," then, you're in a position to be blessed. Until then, you're always looking for a blessing, and that blessing will never match what you hope for. Does that make sense?

*Sarah:* Yeah.

*Jeff:* It's almost like, "I'm in it for you, God. I don't care what You give me."

*Sarah:* Right, and I think when you fully commit, you find your contentment in God.

*Jeff:* Yeah. I think that's the only solid ground.

*Sarah:* Anything else for a new believer?

*Jeff:* Well, yeah, there are a bunch of things. One of them is: find what you're really good at and you're gifted at, what God's gifted you for, and then do it. Use it. Use it for God, and that's when Christianity's fun. You've gotta have fun, and Christianity should be fun. I'm a teacher, and I never have more fun than when I'm teaching. Find your gift and serve, and do it with others. We're never supposed to do it alone. We weren't built that way.

*Sarah:* Okay. Thank you so much. Do you have a favorite verse?

*Jeff:* I have a bunch, but right now it is Revelation 21:5 "I make all things new." When I first became a Christian, I just came across Romans 4:17, and it's the same thing, but I love this verse: God brings life to the dead and calls into being that which does not currently exist.

*Sarah:* You're right. You have to stop and soak that in. It's a very good truth. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

*Jeff:* Oh, there is one other little thing. There's a great missionary. I think he was a missionary to India, I think, for like 30 years. His name was Leslie Newbigin. He was once asked, "Well, are you like, optimistic or pessimistic?", and he said, "I am not an optimist, nor am I a pessimist. Jesus Christ is raised from the dead." That's beautiful. Never forgotten that. I think that's the right way to look at life.