

Youth Culture Lesson
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Stranger

Atheist Comes out to Christian College Classmates

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

When Eric Fromm was looking for colleges, he was attracted to Northwest Christian University in Eugene, Oregon. The campus was nice, and the school offers a great communications program. One thing held him back. The college is Christian, while Eric's not.

Eric's an atheist, but after researching the college's religious requirements, he still felt that Northwest Christian was the best fit for him. So he enrolled and excelled, becoming the school's student body president as a senior. For years, few people knew his secret—until he revealed his secret on the college's student newspaper website.

“Every day I'm burdened by the fact that my peers might reject me because I'm different from them,” he wrote. I won't be rejected because of my race or social class, but simply because of the fact that I don't believe in God—because I'm an atheist.”

As it turns out, he had nothing to worry about. “The surprising thing for the both of us was that the school and the students were remarkably supportive,” says Brandon McGinnis, editor of the school's *Beacon Bolt*. Fromm says he's received more hugs than ever before.

No surprise there, the university's leadership says. “All of our students are on a journey,” says Jeannine Jones, director of university relations at Northwest Christian. “While the majority of our students profess a Christian faith, not all do. We as an institution meet students where they are and believe our God is big enough.”

Talk About It:

What do you think about Eric having gone to a Christian school? Do you think he should've gone to a more secular institution? Do you think he should've told the school about his lack of belief earlier?

Eric was really nervous about revealing his atheism to his friends and classmates. Can you understand why he was anxious? Do you think he had reason to be? Have you ever been in a situation where you were a little nervous to reveal you were a Christian? Have you ever worried that *you* might be rejected?

The fact that Eric was so warmly embraced and supported by his classmates perhaps reflects God's own sense of love and patience. Some would say that by being supportive, it makes Christianity look that much better—to Eric and to those who've heard his story.

However, some Christians might say that by showing such support for Eric as a person, they're not doing Eric's soul much good. What do you think?

America always has been a country filled with lots of religious diversity. How should Christians talk with people who don't share their beliefs? How should they share their own faith with others? Can you show Jesus' love without mentioning Jesus at all? Have you seen examples in your own life where people expressed Jesus' love particularly well?

What the Bible Says:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son” (John 3:16-18).

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).

Paul Asay has covered religion for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, Beliefnet.com, and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and wrote the Batman book, *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He lives in Colorado Springs with wife Wendy and his two children. Follow him on Twitter at @AsayPaul.