



Kite-String

Christian

by Linda Fentress

All things have a beginning, and my addiction began in first grade. You would think this was too tender an age for this to happen, but happen it did.

You see, it was mid-way through the school year at Cedar Elementary. I shoved past Martin Kritchlow (whom I had a crush on) and hung my thick winter coat and gloves on my hook and put my lunch pail in my wooden cubby. We filed into the warmth of the classroom and immediately my little 6-year-old eyes were captured by something new...around the perimeter of the room hung beautiful kites of many vibrant colors.

I walked slowly towards the display, intrigued and mesmerized. I caught my breath in wonder when I realized that one of them had my name on it. I stood still pondering all of this...*What school gods had smiled on me that day? How was I to interpret this gift? What was the meaning of it all?*

Soon, the whole experience took on epic proportions. Mrs. McAllister, our first grade teacher, called us to our seats and explained the purpose of the kites. She told us that each kite had a long tail that would be filled with little bows for each book that we read.

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but I dismissed that idea immediately. Grownups liked to say those things, but of course that was not true. The end of the year would bring a tallying of the kite-strings and then glory would be bestowed, honor would be given and the ultimate question would be answered. Who was the best reader? Who was the smartest? Who was the brightest?

Here was my chance to make a name for myself! *Would my parents take note of my accomplishment? Would the other kids like me better? Would Mrs. McAllister beam proudly at me?*

With high-def precision I envisioned myself standing next to my kite-string, telling others how I did it, how I read all those books and how they too could excel at reading and life.

I decided right then and there to make that dream a reality.

I began furiously reading, chewing up book after book at a fever pitch. A few weeks passed and my string was getting fuller. A few more weeks...more books...more weeks...more books. Mrs. McAllister raised her eyebrow when I told her I had run out of space on my kite-string and needed another string. She dutifully lugged out the stepladder and climbed up to attach another string for my ever-growing achievements.

The end of the year came, and glory indeed was bestowed in the form of a "Best Reader Certificate."

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I'm afraid to say that was all it took. My fate was sealed. You see, I'm not addicted to wine, or hard liquor. I'm not addicted to substances like cocaine or marijuana. I'm addicted to something often more sinister and potentially destructive to a Christian than the

things listed above...I'm addicted to my own performance.

My Quest for "Best Christian" Award

My addiction has affected my quality of life. It has affected my relationships with my family and my marriage. Instead of being myself, I have become what I think others want me to be. It has robbed me of honesty with those around me and it has produced a loneliness that at times is very dark and deep. It has demanded that I live with some masks of competence and confidence super-glued in place, which are very difficult to pry loose.

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pain of rejection, but it is a pseudo-acceptance based on what others see me doing, not on who I really am. And although I don't want to admit this big one, it has deeply affected my relationship with God.

How often do I find myself striving to put just one more "bow" on my kite-string in the hopes that God will possibly like me better? Will I capture his attention with the progress I am making? Will he be pleased with my

new plan for Bible study, my new commitment to volunteer in the church nursery, or my financial sacrifice for the offering? Will he notice my effort, my dedication and my noble sacrifice?

I envision myself standing next to my spiritual kite-string—telling

others about how I did it and how they too, can attain the "best Christian" award.

The kite-string of performance is probably not really new to any of us. After all, we grow up taking tests, striving for grades, being picked (or not) for teams, writing college entrance essays and interviewing for jobs. As adults we undergo yearly performance reviews, we hope for promotions, we seek to make political connections, we write proposals that are evaluated and we are given raises (or not) based on production and performance.

To top it all off, we go to church and are often taught to be "good" people. We are told that in order to have favor with God and keep him

pleased, we must do more. We try hard to keep rules and regulations. We soon begin to dress, act and talk a certain way. We begin to believe, deep down in our core, that our value depends on what we do. I attended a church like this once, and it fed the notion that my relationship with God was dependent on my behavior.

It's Not Do—It's Done!

In so many ways, Jesus turned the value system of our society upside down and the issue of performance is no exception. Jesus introduced a radical new idea into our pattern of thinking, our ideals, and our values. Romans 5:8 (NLT) says: "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." That basically means the name on our kite was "Sinner" and our string was empty of any and all accomplishments. Yet God in his infinite love and tenderness gave us a future and a hope.



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...I know that taking off the “mask” of perfection and living in the grace of Christ has given my soul a freedom it never had before.

Our identity as children of God isn't about the things we should DO, it is about what Christ has already DONE. And that is a radical idea! It's so counter-intuitive in today's world, isn't it? It is for me. It's hard to wrap my mind around

ness is the door to recognizing the incredible love of our Savior. In our powerlessness, in our weakness, Jesus is made strong.

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I know that getting real with God is about the best thing that has happened to me in my life. I know that being honest with others about my joys, celebrations, disappointments, fears and emotions has brought me a joy of community that is deeply satisfying to my soul.

I know that recognizing and admitting my own dark side has given me a compassion and patience for the struggles of others. I know that recognizing my own limitations and being okay with them has allowed me to be ministered to by others in the body of Christ. And I know that taking

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the idea that Jesus isn't carefully examining my kite string to make sure I have all the important book titles listed there such as *Overcomers Unite*, *Heaven for Those Who Stay Positive*, or the ultimate best-seller, *7 Habits of Highly Favored Church Members*.

Instead, he invites us into a relationship with himself based solely on his sacrifice and love for us. He has taken our self-absorption and our stinginess, our anxieties and infidelities, our dark secrets and wandering hearts—and wrapped them up in his tender garment of sacrifice.

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ness is the door to recognizing the incredible love of our Savior. In our powerlessness, in our weakness, Jesus is made strong. We see the magnitude of the price he paid for us, and the tenderness with which he cares for us. We hear the voice of the shepherd calling to us, we see the gaze of the father for his prodigal child, and we hear the Rabbi's heartbeat of reconciliation—that he loves, accepts and cherishes us in our strengths and weaknesses alike. He has power enough for us. He has accomplishments enough for us. We can rest in his love.

Freedom From Performance Addiction

What does it mean to live free of the addiction of performance, particularly in the Christian life? I'm still trying to figure that out. A few things I know.

passion of a Savior who pursues us both tenderly and relentlessly and has already filled our kite-strings with his glory. □

Linda grew up on Vancouver Island, B.C., Canada. Finding her true love, John, in the U.S. she stayed and became a U.S. citizen in 2001. She currently finds herself attending many sporting events for her two boys. She serves as Women's Ministry Director and as a member of the Pastoral Resources Team at Woodcrest Chapel in Columbia, MO. Linda has a passion for helping people experience the incredible, transforming grace of God.