

Three simple rules for living the Christian lifestyle

By **JASON MICCOLO JOHNSON**

MOST WOULD argue that the instruction book for being a Christian is the Bible. Through prayers, parables, metaphors, songs, poetry, and direct edicts, we learn the holy story and the consequences of not following this magnificent how-to manual for Christian living.

Just as the Bible is more than simply another good book or all-time best-seller, the pews, pulpit, and choir loft of the interior church building represents more than just a sanctuary.

In today's turbulent times, both within our families and in our souls, it's "hard out here for a Christian." So we turn to the sanctuary of the church for relief.

We typically think of the church sanctuary as that gathering place for worship service, somewhere to praise God without shame or fear — because God and fear do not occupy the same space — and where all of our thoughts, talents and renderings are used to glorify and give thanks to the Creator.

From early childhood, I remember pastors and ministers commanding worshippers to respect the sanctity of the sanctuary and to govern themselves accordingly.

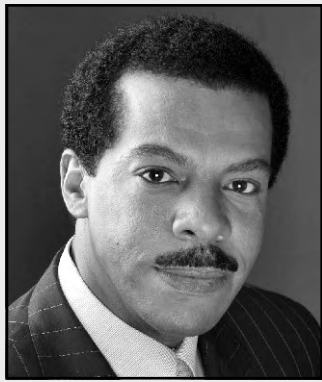
Sanctuary is defined as "a sacred place, a place that provides refuge, asylum, or immunity from arrest." It is also described as "a reserved place where animals and birds are protected from hunting."

Isn't it ironic that just as the animals, we Christians need a place where we can have refuge from life's daily "soul hunters: and immunity from religious persecution? But once we leave that sanctuary and go into the world, how hard is it to practice what has been preached?

In my photographic documentary, "Soul Sanctuary: Images of the African American Worship Experience," I visited Christians across this country in 20 states and 70 churches who answered that most perplexing of questions for a Christian, in a profound yet simple way.

First and foremost among the answers given was to simply "tell the truth." Telling the truth, will sometimes require diplomacy, and will keep one out of a whole lot of trouble.

Secondly, "live by example." In



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other words, become the kind of person that you always wanted to meet.

And thirdly, "walk by faith, but run when you have to." Having faith is great, but faith without work, and common sense, can prove fatal. There are times when after we've done all that is required of us, we must then do what is necessary.

The African-American church with its absorbing and overcoming legacy is one that embodies all of the above prescriptions for living a 24/7 Christian lifestyle that is in harmony with Sunday's teachings and Monday's realities. The black church has a track record of "walking by faith, but running when it had to."

From slavery to freedom, and from one Supreme Court decision to another, it has never swayed from "speaking truth to power" and "living by example" under some of the most oppressive conditions any people have ever been subjected to and for such a long period of time, the effects of which can still be seen like stained-glass windows in the distance.

Yet, it is this biblical text, written and translated into hundreds of languages worldwide, that offers all of us the best daily manual on how to coexist peaceably with our fellow humans, and with nature, if we would only follow it. Whether in the work place, or the church space, we do not have to compromise on fairness, truthfulness, and faithfulness. Even though it's "hard out here for a Christian," it's made easier with God. ★

Editor's note: Among the congregations featured in "Soul Sanctuary" is Philadelphia's own Sharon

Baptist Church. Also, on Thursday Jason Miccolo Johnson will sign copies of his book at Robin's Bookstore, 108 S. 13th St.

Each Saturday the Daily News offers men and women of faith the opportunity to share their words of life and comfort with our readers.

If you are a minister, a priest, a rabbi, or

the head of another religious organization and would like to submit a faith-based column, contact Lorenzo Biggs at 215-854-5816, or by e-mail at biggs1@phillynews.com.



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