

# Jeanie Miley: Sugar Daddy or Redeemer?

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## CYBER COLUMN: Sugar Daddy or Redeemer?

**By Jeanie Miley**

Driving down one of the major streets in my city, I nearly swerved over into the other lane when I saw the billboard on a church building.

“God is not your sugar daddy,” the sign proclaimed, and I laughed aloud.

“No kidding!” I thought, making a mental note to relay that wise quip to friends who struggle with me about how best to communicate and live the gospel challenge.

Jeanie Miley
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There’s nothing in the biblical revelation that seduces anyone into thinking that God might fulfill the road of sugar daddy or cosmic bellhop.

I go back and read about Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness, and I am comforted and strengthened over and over again by the knowledge that even Jesus, God Incarnate, struggled mightily with what kind of Messiah he would be.

Sometimes, I am astonished all over again by the vulnerability and

transparency of Jesus. Even after all these years of studying and teaching the gospel narratives, I get goosebumps when I really think about the fact that the Son of God revealed his struggles in the wilderness and in Gethsemane to his close friends. What kind of God is that?

It is staggering to me to know that Jesus could have wielded all kinds of power over others but chose, instead, to be self-limiting and take the path of integrity and love. It never ceases to amaze me that Jesus could have drawn even bigger crowds by making the focus of his ministry the meeting of peoples' immediate physical needs but chose to save them and set them free.

I study the life of Jesus—the events and encounters, the teachings and the miracles—to seek and to find the light I need to take the next step in my own life, and sometimes, when I'm wrestling with a decision of my own, I remember the standard Jesus set for us when he stood up to the temptations of instant gratification, the quick buzz and worldly control and power, and chose to be the kind of messiah who would heal and liberate human beings, transforming and empowering them.

It seems pretty clear to me that the body of Christ on earth, the church, has to take trips to the wilderness now and then, as well, to wrestle with what kind of church it is going to be. Like Jesus in the wilderness, the church and churches face the same kinds of temptations in shaping the ministries and activities of the contemporary church in a contemporary culture.

Our minds have been trained for sound bites, and we have learned to have short attention spans. We crave to be entertained with sensory stimulation, and when it is thrilling, we want more of it next time. We are a culture with many addictions, and, according to people who observe cultural trends, narcissism and self-absorption are growing by leaps and bounds.

And so it is that we who love and serve and plan the programs of the

church must continue to ask ourselves if we are addressing the problems of our culture and helping people become whole and mature, or if we are, in fact, colluding with the culture to keep people immature.

We who love the church must keep on going into the wilderness and putting our programs to the tests that Jesus faced and make the hard decisions to be about the work of Christ, as the body of Christ.

You can't have it both ways. The One we worship can't be a sugar daddy if he's going to be Redeemer.

*Jeanie Miley is an author and columnist and a retreat and workshop leader. She is married to Martus Miley, pastor of River Oaks Baptist Church in Houston, and they have three adult daughters. Got feedback? Write her at [Writer2530@aol.com](mailto:Writer2530@aol.com).*