

# Stuff Christians Like: An interview with Jon Acuff

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Jon Acuff is the author of the satirical blog [Stuff Christians Like](#) and [a book](#) by the same title published by Zondervan. In about two years, Acuff has taken a start-up blog from obscurity to more than 1.5 million readers, including many who interact loyally with his site every week.

Brad Russell recently sat down with Acuff to learn more about Stuff Christians Like and the guy behind the stuff.

**Tell us about Stuff Christians Like.**

Jon Acuff is the author of the satirical blog Stuff Christians Like and a book by the same title published by Zondervan.

Well, it's really an exploration of the entire culture of faith from a Christian perspective. So, it's everything from how to raise your hand in church when you worship to silly things we do on the road, like driving like we're not Christians. I wish there was a bumper sticker that said, "I'm sorry I cut you off, but I'm a Christian that drives like an agnostic." People have this idea that "I don't have to have faith when I'm in the car." We'll have it when we get to church, but on the way there, we might need to run somebody off the road. My grandmother actually took her ichthus off her car because she didn't want to make a bad name for God.

**One of the things I see in your work is ambivalence about pop culture. You'll talk a lot about Lil Wayne and Prince, and then you talk about the church being obsessed with being relevant and post-modern. What's the challenge of the church to navigate that tension, to speak the language of the culture but not worship the culture?**

I think it's a fine line. I think there has been a time when we went from being irrelevant to being obsessed. There's a pendulum. I think now maybe we are swinging back toward the middle. But somebody asked me, "Do you ever think we'll be as cool as the world?" And I said, "I hope not."

We're not held to that standard. It's not a popularity contest. It's not a coolness contest. For me, I use pop-culture references because it's a common language. When you, in the midst of a big "Jon and Kate" celebrity blow-up, mention them, everyone knows what you're talking about, so it gives you a chance to use a shared language to jump off of. For me, that's why I use pop culture. There's stuff I don't really care about and think it's silly, but I know I'll connect with a larger group of people if I can reflect that but not be obsessed with it, because ultimately, I don't write a gossip column. I'm not writing TMZ for Christians.

**You grew up as the son of a church planter in the Boston area. How did that whole experience shape your humor and observations about the church?**

It definitely did. Massachusetts at that time was very focused on Catholicism, so with my dad being a Southern Baptist minister, it was difficult getting a foothold. So, I watched him creatively approach people, creatively approach community, and that shaped how I looked at faith. It wasn't cookie-cutter. He didn't have an easy job, so I saw him apply

creativity and honesty, and these are things that are important to me now. So, I definitely think it shaped me.

**If there were three values that you would say guide your work, what would that constellation of values look like? What's underneath there?**

Well, I guess, honesty is one. Kindness. Mockery just tries to wound. Satire is not mockery. I hate it when people confuse the two. Satire is just humor with a purpose. So, I guess kindness, honesty and maybe accessibility. I don't want ivory tower ideas, and I don't want complicated ideas.

**For you, where is the line between satire, sarcasm and maybe cynicism?**

For me, the difference between satire and mockery is, "Is there a victim?" I ask, "If I write this, does somebody get hurt?" And the other distinction is that satire addresses issues where mockery addresses individuals. If I can stay away from making it personal, all the better. It's so much better to me to get people to talk about an issue. Who cares about one particular celebrity? If I can talk about divorce, for instance, then people can relate to that and engage with it.

**One of the things people praise about your work is that underneath the humor is a profound caring for people that comes through, a great deal of grace and compassion. Do you see the church missing the boat sometimes?**

I think we do sometimes. I mean, I write about Christian hate mail. That

doesn't even make sense. We should be the most loving people. We should be the ones who have the most grace, because we have been forgiven the most. So, it's weird that we'll give grace to everyone that's named ourselves, and then won't give grace to other people, so yeah, I think that's just weird.

**One of my favorite pieces is on “how to break up with your small group.” How do you do that?**

Well for me, there have been times when you have a small group, and it just doesn't fit. It's just not right. It doesn't mean they're jerks or not good Christians. And so for me, I came up with some things to do, like you just make gross desserts so they'll leave. You just tell horrible stories about bathroom issues you're having. Or you make a run for the border and just find another group and start going to that group as you start “small grouping around” and get a reputation. Or, you can just be honest. That's always a possibility.

**Any crises in the church that you think we need to urgently address?**

I'm always concerned about “deep v-neck syndrome.” We've got plunging necklines for our men that are disturbing. And iPads. We have people reading sermon notes from iPads for a sermon about homelessness. That doesn't make sense.

**Tell us a little bit about your process. You appear to have this enormous work ethic with over 750,000 words written in two years. How do you do what you do?**

The big part is collecting, capturing the ideas. So many people have ideas, but they don't ever capture them, and they disappear. I initially capture an idea and write it down on my iPhone. And then sometime later I'll go back and look at—whether it's a good idea. Does it fit the site? Does it make sense? Has it been done before?

Then I'll write a draft, and then wait a week, because you need a week from your work to get objective about it. If I post it that day, I'm too close to it. I won't see some of the errors in it. So, I wait a week, and then I'll edit it and post it.

I usually try to stay about three weeks ahead of my site, so I have three weeks written and posted at any given time. That gives me the chance to have a bigger look, so I can say: "Wow, I have two marriage posts in the same week. Let me move that and split it up." Because if you are a single reader, that's kind of frustrating.

### **So what's next for Jon Acuff?**

Figure out the next book. Working on that, spending more time on the site. Being a dad, being a husband, being an employee. We'll see.