

# RELIGION REDEFINED

## I'm looking for my missing piece Keeping the Faith

By Ronnie McBryer

Sheldon "Shel" Silverstein had one of the more extraordinary literary, music, and art careers you will ever read about, though many people will not recognize his name or his face. He was the eccentric combination of Chicago-born Jewish kid who became a country music legend, a composer, a cartoonist, the author of children's books, and a columnist for Playboy magazine. Quite the resume.

His two most famous works are on opposite ends of the creative spectrum. One is a country music song made famous by Johnny Cash for which Silverstein won a Grammy in 1970, a song entitled "A Boy Named Sue." The other work is a children's picture book he published in the 1960s titled "The Giving Tree." Check it out at your local library.

But my favorite work of his is a little children's book named "The Missing Piece." In "The Missing Piece" this rolling circle, that Silverstein has hand-drawn beautifully sloppy, has a huge missing wedge out of itself. It is rolling along through life looking for his missing piece.

All along the broken, sloppy circle sings a little jingle. It goes: "Oh, I'm lookin' for my missin' piece; I'm lookin' for my missin' piece; Hi-dee-ho, here I go, lookin' for my missin' piece."

And since the circle has this missing pie-piece, he can't roll very fast. He travels painfully slow. But his pace allows him to enjoy the scenery around him, to talk to the butterflies, and to look for that piece that will complete him. After many miles, he finally he finds it; a triangle piece along the road and it fits him perfectly.

Now the circle is made whole and he zips along the road at speeds he could only imagine before. But after a while of

rolling through life at breakneck speed, the circle realizes that he can't do the things he used to do.

He can't enjoy the scenery. He doesn't move slow enough to sing like he used to. He has no time to enjoy the company of the butterflies. It all moves too fast. So he removes that once missing piece, lays it aside, and goes back to the life he had, a life that was slower, a life where his weaknesses were obvious, but it was the life he lived best.

All of us have these huge gaping holes in our lives. Sometimes they are obvious, and sometimes we hide them well. They may be physical ailments, emotional suffering, our past mistakes, or great failures. We have these missing pieces that force us to shuffle along the road getting no where fast.

But when we are torn to pieces by our mistakes, our loss of people or possessions, or our brokenness, bitterness, failures and weaknesses, it is then God comes to us with his grace. He may not fill in the missing piece, but he will give us himself. In fact, the only receptacle for the grace of God is human emptiness.

When we are weak, he is strong. When we decrease, it is he who increases. When we feel like our life is one huge, colossal malfunction, that is the cry to heaven for God's grace to pierce our darkness and somehow to give us life. Divine grace is what shows up in the face and space of human disgrace and shame.

We must embrace; we must own; we must take hold of our brokenness and the holes in our hearts, and our own crippledness – and not wear these as

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shameful  
scarlet letters, but  
cling to them as the very  
places in our life that God will  
enter and reveal himself. So let us  
boast about our weaknesses, that the  
power of God can go to work in those  
very places.

Meister Eckhart, that old Medieval German theologian, said the only spiritual discipline is emptiness. Claim those empty, broken places. Don't try to fill them in so no one sees or knows the real you. Those are the doorways and the windows for God's grace to shine through, so let it. Let it shine through.

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