



A Christian Life.....Connected

Jacksel

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A Christian Life.....Connected is Jacksel's varied collection of essays, featuring commentary on religion and history alongside its personal accounts.

The book's numerous topics include recipients of the Profile in Courage Award, death, the Bible, human dignity, and compassion. It also covers parts of Cambodian and US history, song lyrics from the English rock band Jethro Tull, and information about Jacksel's religious background. Lessons about courage, faith, love, and leadership are sometimes drawn from these topics.

Most topics, however, are not examined in depth. This extends to essays concerning heady topics, like materialism, the crucifixion of Jesus, confession in Catholicism, and the Pauline letters. And there's a haphazard quality to the book's progression that, sans context or background information, defies understanding: the book includes an Ian Anderson song, a personal story about an encounter with a homeless man, and a statement about the emotional delight of art and humor, but these are uneasy fits with the book's more serious subjects. And didactic declarations about the value of bravery in war, the need for tolerance in society, and how lust for power leads to negative leadership are delivered, but without refreshing their connected moral notions.

While the book is divided into topical sections, individual essays within these sections meander; they come without titles to explain their aims, and they jump from subject to subject. For example, one essay moves from a personal memory to discussing hunger to musing on Vincent van Gogh's self-mutilation without establishing connections between its stream-of-consciousness thoughts—or fleshing individual thoughts out:

Van Gogh cut off part of his ear as an expression of passionate disappointment with his life's relationships. Perhaps when we mutilate ourselves it is generally an expression of regret over painful loss.

Beginnings and endings of thoughts are muddled, and the essays' centers are lost in the process.

Elsewhere, historical images help to ground the book's thoughts in general culture, as with photographs of Civil War leaders or from Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon. Still, in the end, the book's personal stories are its most intimate and distinct: Jacksel discusses his son's birth, his father's work, and stories from his dating life in college. However, even these more tactile tales appear at random intervals, and without enough details to invite outside audiences in fully.

Though it is short, the religion-tinged essay collection *A Christian Life.....Connected* is wide-ranging, collecting personal musings on a variety of topics.

EDITH WAIRIMU (August 1, 2023)

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