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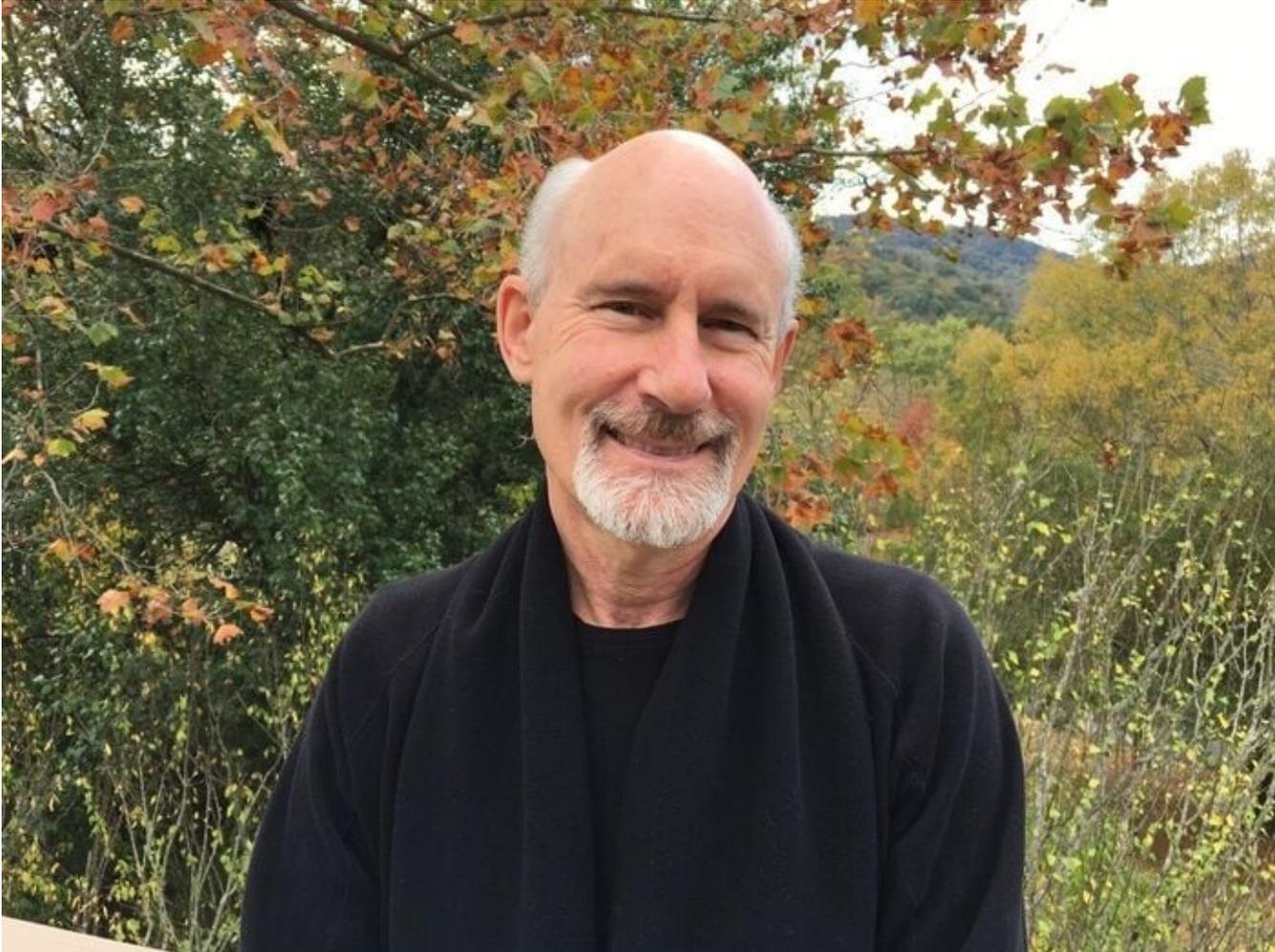
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## Half-baked Beliefs: Each Mind a Measuring Cup

By Chris Highland  
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With an older sister and a good friend who are experienced cooks and bakers, my attempts at creating edible dishes can be comical. In my defense, I've come up with a few things worth eating. Though I fail now and then, my walnut banana bread is actually quite tasty, and after destroying several batches of cookies and granola, I think I've finally found the right mixture. What has been both my downfall and my success has been a stubborn refusal to be "religious" about measuring. When it comes to salt, cinnamon and other light ingredients, I regularly turn to my favorite measurement: the palm of my hand. When it works, it works very well, since precision isn't always necessary. Yet, when it comes to measuring cups, if I get too liberal or conservative with amounts, the result can be messy—oven to trash.

Oddly enough, religion can get caught in the same trap, especially when the mind or heart becomes a kind of measuring cup. When a person becomes a unit of ingredients, judged by how much they are empty or full of something—like “spirit” or “spiritual energy”—strange things come out of the oven, so to speak. “How much God do you have?” is rather nonsensical, but it’s implied when others are testing and measuring the amount of God or godliness they see in us. My personal example may help cook this idea a bit—or a bite—more.

Baptized in the church, I read my Bible and prayed my prayers, but my “new birth” happened at home, guided by none other than Billy Graham. I became an active Evangelical, youth group leader, guitar-player for youth choir, Sunday morning service choir singer, Bible-study teacher and “witness of the Lord.” Then, a friend invited me to a meeting at an older woman’s home. There I was informed my baptism and born again experience weren’t enough—I needed to be “baptized in the Holy Spirit.” Accepting Jesus into my heart wasn’t enough. I needed to be “filled with the Spirit.” Being Protestant wasn’t sufficient; neither was Evangelical or even Pentecostal. Instructed in how to begin speaking in tongues—speaking a heavenly, angelic language—I was now a member of the Charismatic Christian club. A high level believer. One group in town was named “Full Gospel Fellowship.” I was no longer a half-full believer, but full of God, Spirit ... and myself.

Measuring believers by levels of spiritual ingredients leads to some bizarre beliefs and behaviors. The holy oven can get very hot if you don’t stay “on fire” for the Lord (you might be in danger of being transferred to the hottest oven of hell). In my case, by all measures, cups or palms, studying and teaching the Bible wasn’t good enough, neither was going to church, Bible study or praying. What I needed, and every true believer needed, was the direct experience of the Spirit—and proof of it. And the way to prove your holiness, your faithful devotion and sincere relationship to God, was by “signs and wonders.” Speaking in tongues, interpreting, prophesying, healing, and any other “miraculous” activity, was the proof in the pudding. You were baked in God’s oven; cooked by the Creator; one of His special confections.

Is life, or faith, somehow like a measuring cup? How do you find the right “mixture,” the correct “ingredients,” when it comes to beliefs? Sometimes we feel “filled” with goodness and gratefulness for life; at other times, life lacks salt, or sugar or seasoning that brings out the best flavors of living. Jesus taught people to be the salt of the earth, well-seasoned, adding savory flavor to the world. Some get a little too sweet; others get bitter; while others mess up the whole mix, leaving a bad taste or bad digestion.



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I suggest we keep an eye out for half-baked ideas. Watch for those beliefs that just don’t add up to a healthy recipe—viewpoints and opinions that are probably the oven-to-trash variety, inedible, maybe even toxic. How do we measure other people? By our own measuring cups? Does everyone need to mix the same ingredients, to bake the same things? Let’s hope not. Variety in foods makes life more interesting and flavorful. If the measurement of your personal cup or spoon is confined to living by the Bible as you interpret the book, I probably won’t get baked in your oven. Yet, if you are open to trying new tastes, risking a bite of a new recipe, we might be able to enjoy a meal, or dessert, together at the same table.

Sweet or salty, nutty or not, the experience of shared stirring can offer a good opportunity to create common delights for the nourishment of every eater and conscientious cook.