

Supposedly one of the things to make a half-decent pastor is to teach them some Greek and Hebrew to have some better understanding on the whole Bible thing. Supposedly, then, the half-decent pastor is meant to use such learning on a consistent basis to make it all worthwhile, after the fact. Well, let's just say that half-decency left me a while ago. Nevertheless, it all starts with learning the respective alphabets: the *aleph* to *tav* in Hebrew, and the *alpha* to *omega* in Greek. Now, we don't exactly limit the insider seminary-learning to potential pastors. After all, anyone can walk into a sanctuary and see a letter that looks rather suspiciously similar to the English "A" and this other horseshoe-like symbol, and already know what the book of Revelation is talking about: this God being the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.

And then, if any such persons decide to go to college, they may very well come up on this street overflowing with these massive Greek letters. After a few houses they'll have the entire Greek alphabet figured out without ever stepping onto a seminary campus: they'll see random combinations of deltas and sigmas and taus and kappas and gammas and plenty, plenty more.

Of course, there's meant to be much, much more to what lies inside those buildings than the three Greek-letter arrangement on the front-side of the house. Granted, not all things that happen in fraternities and sororities are, exactly, quality PR advertisements for potential students not just thinking about joining that organization, but whether to come to that campus at all. Nevertheless, many are going along quite strong on university streets across this country, because they fill a void in late teen's/early twenty's lives, many of whom are leaving home for the first time. Some are entering this brand-new place, knowing absolutely no one at all. They have this need for new trustworthy friendships, people they can cling to face-to-face with whatever issues they may struggle with for the first time in the big-kid world, to create a sense of their own home, for even the slightest semblance of care and respect.

I will be the first to admit that I never looked into such places. I hardly ever walked down the streets dominated by the massive Greek letters. Instead, my own fraternity of sorts, if you could call it that, became the choir on campus: a wide variety of majors, vocal expertise, areas of the country we grew up in, all part of this group that filled some kind of void at that point in our life. Some of us grew up in the church, being part of choirs with

Wednesday evening rehearsals trying to, somewhat, smoothly blend in a hodgepodge of voices, attempting to proclaim some form of the Gospel Promise. Other students wanted to make it big on the stage: this served another way to enhance their talent. Others didn't talk about their reasonings too much, but it must have been something: they tried out, they showed up for rehearsals twice a week for a couple hours each time, and they would give up their entire spring break to go sing in churches in a different region of the country.

And what we did to conclude each of those concerts, our own attempt at the Gospel-proclamation in song, in these sanctuaries filled with reminders of God being the beginning and the end not just of our respective life, but the life of the entire world; at the end, we left our respective positions up-front and we walked around the entire outside of all the pews, surrounding all these people with the reassurance of the benediction song: the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord be gracious to you, the Lord give you peace.

I always wondered if it ever felt awkward for the people sitting in the pews, because this wasn't some distant carved-in stone saying that God was your alpha and omega. This wasn't being spoken or sung from some distant

altar or pulpit. This was right up in your grill, in your not-so-personal-space-anymore that God is not scared at all to approach with the same tenacious love that shattered open a stone that attempted to separate us from any hope of a positive ending for our eternity.

Because, the truth is, God is not just the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. God is everything in between too, everything in between for our life as well, filled with plenty of voids and up-and-down friendships and groups of people, who shaped us for a lifetime. After all, as God has not only stood up right beside us, but has infiltrated our very hearts from the beginning, God knows we are not just some combination of letters forming our name or some random assortment of numbers and symbols depicting finances or church attendance. God knows about everything in between. And not only does God know, God loves us from the beginning to the end, everything in between. Today, the Great News remains true: the stone of death could not dare separate us from that Jesus Christ bursting out of the tomb and into our very hearts, from the beginning to the end and, most certainly, everything in between. And for that Greatest News of all, we give thanks to God indeed! Amen.