

# I LIKE YOUR INK

## Exploring the World of Tattoos and the People Who Wear Them

I was in the Vienna Coffee House, working on some of my tasks. This coffee house is the place where all kinds of people meet together for coffee, tea and assortment of treats. This is the place where people gather for caffeine and community—and the laughs are just a bonus.

I love this place. This is what makes living in our little section of East Tennessee special. And I long to know and befriend more of the people who share this space with me, and knowing the stories of their lives is a part of that, but how? It isn't like people today are saying "Here's my life. It's an open book. Read it."

But what if they are?

Over the next year I'm going on an adventure and I'd like to take you with me. I'm going to interview people who have tattoos.



### So why are you studying tattoos, Bill?

1. The number of people with tattoos is **numerically** significant. Many of us have several people in our life who have a tattoo, and research studies confirm our experience. Last month, a survey from the Pew Research Foundation found that 32% of Americans have at least one tattoo. So why should the Church care about these numbers?
2. Tattoos are **theologically** significant. Tattoos are embedded in the skin of people who are made in God's image. As John Calvin once observed, a greater knowledge of ourselves reveals a greater knowledge of our Creator. ***"But Bill, isn't getting a tattoo like drawing on the Mona Lisa? Why would they deface the image of God?"*** That is a fair question, which I will answer in upcoming issues.
3. Tattoos are **relationally** significant. God made us for relationship with one another and Him. The image of God seems to know this and is seeking connection in a broken world. Although this exploration is in its infancy, several interviewees have thanked me for letting them tell their stories. All of us want to be known. ***"Do tattoos achieve this desire in a secular world?"*** We'll see.

But back at the coffee house I met Tyler. He is one of those image bearers—but it was his tattoo that grabbed my attention. I think it was the shading that impressed me. If you’ve ever seen really good charcoal sketches you may know what I mean.

“Hey there, I hate to interrupt you, but I really like your ink,” I said. That’s how I’ve learned to get things started. Although I don’t have a tattoo, I have learned how to appreciate the work of artists. And without a doubt, this was the work of a tattoo artist, a master in his craft. I continued, “Is there a story behind that?” With that simple introduction, Tyler started to unpack his story and I listened.

How well do we listen? Often when people talk, I’m thinking about the right way to respond, but that isn’t listening. Listening is not easy, but it is one of the most practical ways in which we can love our neighbors. [Here’s](#) a video of the interview.

Here’s what listening to Tyler unearthed:

- Tyler is beginning to realize that he wants something more permanent than what he’s experienced. Tyler observed, “It’s almost like doing that ancestry.com thing, where you are able to understand why you are who you are.” Clearly there is an ancient longing.
- When asked “If you could ask God one question, what would it be?” Tyler responded, “Not a question, but simply ‘thank you.’ Thank you for making me the good young man that I am.”
- After I stopped recording, he mentioned that he appreciated the fact that I noticed his tattoo.

***“So what are your conclusions (at this point), Bill?”***

**First**, we should appreciate Tyler’s introspection. He has these longings because he’s made in God’s image. [Please pray for Tyler](#), that He would find all he seeks in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Second**, Tyler appreciated that I took the initiative to ask him the question. Like all of us, Tyler wants to be known.

**Finally**, if we are going to share the Gospel with people like Tyler, we can’t assume that he shares our presupposition about Scripture. He does not seem to think that he needs anything from God, and yet he also has a sense of disconnection. Instead of asserting that the Original Sin is the source of his disconnection, could I assure him that he isn’t alone in his feelings, and confirm that what he feels lines up with what the Bible teaches? Could I help him find his story in God’s story?



**It’s almost like doing that ancestry.com thing, where you are able to understand why you are who you are.**

**-TYLER**