

the SCENE

Viewing the latest news through the lens of Scripture

Daniel Norris lives in a rundown van in a Wal-Mart parking lot in Florida. He shaves with an ax, cooks on a portable stove, and sleeps inside a sleeping bag. Store employees call him “The Van Man.” At first glance, you’d probably assume he’s a runaway teen, a homeless surfer, or some kind of vagrant hippie. But if you take the time to meet the man behind the van, you’ll find that the truth is even stranger.

Norris is a baseball player with a 92-mile-per-hour fastball. He is working toward a starting position with the Toronto Blue Jays and received a \$2 million bonus just for signing with the team. He has a deal with Nike and has his own fan club. And yet Norris prefers the solitude and simplicity of life in a ‘78 Volkswagen van. “I’m actually more comfortable being kind of poor,” he says.

Before reporting to spring training, he does his own parking lot workout—pull-ups and resistance exercises using abandoned shopping carts. He heats water in the back of his van to make coffee, and then bangs on the dashboard to get the engine to start. He’s named the van Shaggy, after the character from *Scooby Doo*. He fixes it with duct tape and never puts more than a quarter tank of gas in it.

He’s actually so uncomfortable with the idea of wealth that he hired financial advisors to keep his money in a separate account for him. They deposit \$800 a month in his bank account—about half as much as he would make with a minimum wage job. It’s barely enough to get by, even in a van. But it keeps things simple, and that’s the way Norris likes them. “To me, this is the way that makes sense,” he explains.

He has always lived by his own code, and he has no intention of changing that now. In the off-season he works 40 hours a week at a sporting goods store. He surfs, journals, and masters the art of photography. He vacations in Nicaragua—hiking the jungles, surfing the tides, and renting a motorcycle for \$2 a day. The solitude is a comfort to him, an inspiration of sorts. It’s where he feels at home. And it’s not much different with baseball.

“It can get quiet and lonely out there when you’re pitching, which drives some people crazy,” says Norris. “But that’s my favorite part.”

As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the above news story to read. After all teens have had the opportunity to read the article, discuss it in this way:

What do you think of Daniel Norris’ lifestyle?

What parts of his life would you enjoy? What parts would be hard for you?

If you were in his shoes, would you choose to spend so much time alone? Why or why not?

What’s the difference in *being* alone and *feeling* alone? When have you felt alone lately?

Being alone is one thing, but feeling alone is much harder. We all feel lonely at times. But in our loneliness, God has important things to teach us about ourselves and about Him. Let’s look at an example from the Bible and see what we can learn when we feel lonely.



MEETING GOD FACE-TO-FACE

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