

Follow Me

The true, radical call of Jesus

Follow Me

the true, radical call of Jesus



PHILIP CANARSKY

This work would not have been possible without the untiring efforts of four very talented people:

- Jacqueline Galo-Canarsky (Content and copy edits)
- Mary Gould (Content and copy edits)
- Brayner Ruíz (Cover design)
- Rachel Dermody (Cover design)

Copyright © 2011 www.IWantPeaceWithGod.com

This is a production of www.IWantPeaceWithGod.com.

All rights reserved

I feel that I am the last person who should be writing on the subject of following Jesus, because I fall so short in my own efforts to follow Him. All I can do is thank God for his grace; for having made me accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6).

Also, I am extremely thankful to my wife and sons, because they sacrificed greatly so that this book could come into existence.

Our desire and earnest prayer is that God would raise up a generation of Christ-followers who would give their lives to change the world with Jesus.

Philip Canarsky

October 2012

Luke 9.23-24

23 And he said to them all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

Contents

Introduction 11

A Radical Call

A Radical Idea 15

A Purpose That Matters 31

Why so Radical?

Motivated by His Glory 45

Motivated by Grace 59

How Should a Christ-Follower Live?

Radical Time 79

Radical Money 95

Radical Relationships 107

Connected to Jesus

Supernatural Power 123

Constant Communion 141

Epilogue: A Radical Challenge 151

Introduction

I was raised in the Christian culture: I grew up in a Christian family and I attended a Christian church. When I was 19, I went to Honduras as a Christian missionary to a small village, where I ministered mainly to Christian people.

I knew the Christian world, and I was very comfortable in that world. I knew the rules: how to behave, how to talk, what bad things to avoid. I felt a great deal of security in my relationship with God because I was part of the Christian subculture.

Everything started to change for me when my wife and I planted a church in the immigrant community in Lincoln, NE. Some of the people that came to be part of our congregation had spent some of their life in the same Christian subculture that I knew, but others who joined with us didn't know very much about this world. For the first time, I had to explain the Christian faith to people who didn't know this life, to people who were starting from scratch.

Every time I tried to explain the Christian life that I knew to someone who was just starting out, I felt as if something important was missing from my explanation. I eventually

Follow Me

came to realize that I had grown up with a huge blind spot in my definition of what it means to follow Christ.

I had been raised in a Christian world in which the definition of following Christ was to be saved, good, and normal. But when I read Jesus's teachings, I heard another call — a radical call.

I started to investigate Jesus's teachings, and then the teachings of the rest of the New Testament, all over again in order to see if this radical call of Jesus to his first followers was his universal call, or just the call for his most committed followers.

What I discovered was Jesus's radical call to all of his followers. Jesus never called his followers to live a good, normal life. Rather, his call to his followers was — and still is — a call to live a life radically devoted to his purposes.

In this book, I attempt to explain how we, today, can respond to Jesus's call and truly be his followers.

Part 1

A Radical Call

Jesus puts forth a radical call to his followers. It's radical because it requires a drastic change of life; it's radical because answering the call means losing one's life; it's radical because it means living a life that's completely different than one would otherwise live.

Luke 9.23-24

23 And he said to them all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

Chapter 1

A Radical Idea

Jesus asks his followers to live a radical life. Following Christ means living radically; this isn't Jesus's call to a select few, but rather to all who would follow Him. In order to understand this radical call, we need to start by asking a question:

What Does it Mean to Follow Jesus?

This is a question that we rarely ask. At least in my experience around churches, religions, and Christians, I can't think of one time that I heard this question asked. What does it mean to follow Jesus?

We take for granted that we know what it means to follow Him. If you're religious, one naturally assumes that following Christ means following your religious tradition; if you're not religious, I imagine you've seen or known religious people, and that by observing their lives, you could imagine what it

would mean for you to follow Jesus. So, we never think to ask what it really means to follow Jesus.

At some point, though, I started to think about this question, and I discovered that if you ask it as you read the Bible, it makes you see everything you read in a whole new light. The same texts, stories, sayings, and teachings you've heard before — or maybe even read several times — suddenly take on a totally different meaning.

Lost Meaning

The truth is that we've lost the meaning. We just don't know what it means to follow Jesus anymore. The biggest irony in this is that the very people who are Christ-followers, frequently forget what it means to follow Christ — and I include myself in this group. How ironic! We completely dedicate our lives to following Him, our eternity depends upon our identity as followers of Christ, and we even call others to follow Christ, but if we had to give a concise definition of what it means to do so, we wouldn't know what to say.

Try it. Can you say in one or two phrases what it means to follow Jesus? If you can, can you also give a biblical foundation for your explanation? If so, I congratulate you, because the reality is that the majority of those who follow Jesus have never thought about what it actually means to live life as his follower.

Saved, Well-Behaved, and Normal

The popular definition of what it means to follow Jesus is: being someone who's saved, well-behaved, and normal. Even though we don't consciously think that this is what it means to follow Jesus, it's what we, in fact, live out when we attempt to do so; being saved, well-behaved, and normal is our practical definition of how to follow Jesus.

Saved

Being saved is by far the biggest part of the popular definition of what it means to follow Jesus. It means having had a moment when you decided to follow Jesus and entered into a relationship with God. Obviously, you have to be saved if you're going to follow Jesus — salvation is the foundation of Jesus's message. The problem arises when “being saved” becomes the principal part of what it means to follow Jesus.

Well-Behaved

Besides being saved, the popular definition of following Jesus is to “be a well-behaved person.” It's being a person who goes to church; who doesn't have vices, like alcoholism or drug addiction; who doesn't say bad words, gossip, or lie; a nice person; someone who doesn't get angry; a person who has a good family. When we think of a follower of Christ, we think of a well-behaved person.

Of course you will be more like Jesus if you obey God in your personal life: you will sin less, and live better. The problem is that this description has come to be the totality of what it means to follow Jesus after salvation. Now we

expect God's children to merely be well-behaved people — nothing more.

Living as God's child does mean obeying God and avoiding sin, but at the same time it means much, much more.

Normal

Apart from being saved and well-behaved, the popular definition of following Jesus includes being normal: living a normal life, working a normal job, having a normal family, leading a normal schedule, doing normal hobbies — in other words living a balanced life, and doing the things other normal people do.

In a nutshell, we define following Jesus as being a saved, well-behaved, normal person: basically, a better version of the person we'd be if we didn't follow Him. In reality, we end up looking at life very similarly to most other people who don't follow Christ, and so we also end up living like them: our lives, careers, jobs, families, hobbies, and education aren't that different from everyone else's.

The True Call

Is being saved, well-behaved, and normal Jesus's true call to those who want to follow Him? What we rapidly discover as we read Jesus's actual words, is that his call never was to just be "saved, well-behaved, and normal." We've lost the essence of his original call.

A Radical Call

Jesus's call was a totally different call than the normal call of today's Christian culture. His true call was a call to a radical life: following Jesus never meant being normal. Rather, it has always meant living a life that's radically different from everyone else's.

We'll Listen to Jesus

In this book, I want to simply listen to Jesus's words, and let Him define what it means to follow Him. We'll let Jesus — instead of culture, tradition, churches, and our preferences — describe how his followers should live.

In this chapter, we'll look at several Scriptures in which Jesus repeatedly explains what it means to follow Him, and we'll see Him say the same thing in passage after passage. We will drown in his words. Maybe then, we'll be able to free ourselves from the idea that following Him means nothing more than being saved, well-behaved, and normal.

Forget Tradition

What we'll see might surprise you; I was shocked when I started to really look at these teachings for the first time, and I'm still surprised every time I read them again. In order to hear his true call, we'll need to forget a good deal of our religious tradition, open our minds, and come to the text with an attitude willing to hear what our Lord says.

Main Idea:

Truly Following Jesus Means Giving Your Life to Change the World with Him

What Jesus said repeatedly throughout his life was that following Him means giving your life to change the world with Him. This call has two parts: First, in order to follow Christ you must sacrifice your life; the second part of following Him is dedicating yourself to changing the world with Him.

Sacrificing Your Life

The main part of Jesus's call to potential followers is that following Him means losing their lives. It isn't possible to be his follower if you don't sacrifice your entire life.

Luke 14.25-27, 33

25 Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

33 So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

What Jesus is saying is that there is a high cost to following Him. This cost is for everyone. It is not possible to follow Him if you aren't willing to sacrifice everything that's important to you in your life.

World-Changers

Jesus doesn't call his followers to sacrifice their whole lives on a whim; his followers are to lose their lives in order to be able to do something much more important — something that they couldn't accomplish without sacrificing their lives. Jesus calls his followers to change the world with Him. Their purpose is much greater than merely being saved, well-behaved, and normal. The reason following Him means sacrificing your life, is that this is the only way to become a world-changer.

Just before his death, Jesus revealed this plan to his followers. He told them that they were going to do the same things that He had done during his life — and even greater things. Jesus was saying that following Him means being a world-changer with Him.

John 14.12

12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Jesus also said, in the same discussion, that being united with Him results in producing fruit: reproducing others who would follow Him, and bringing about changes in their lives and in the world.

John 15.5, 8

5 I am the vine; you're the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Follow Me

8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

You could say that being with Jesus automatically means being a world-changer with Jesus.

The Same Call

Instinctively, we think that there must be two calls that Jesus makes: one call to his special followers, and then the normal, or more common call. Those who respond to the “special call” are missionaries, pastors, teachers, church planters, and leaders. On the other hand, the “normal” call is for the rest of the Christians. But the reality is that, from the time Jesus called his first followers, his call to those who would want to follow Him has always been the same for everyone.

Luke 9.23-25

23 And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”

Jesus’s call to his followers is the same for everyone: leave your life to follow Him. In other words: sacrifice your life in order to change the world with Him.

God’s Purpose

The purpose of a Christ-follower is the same as the reason God sent Jesus to the world: to reconcile lost people with

Himself. The idea of following Jesus in this way originally started with a Father who so desired to rescue his creation, that He sent his beloved son into the world to save it.

John 3.16-17

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The radical purpose of someone who follows Jesus has its origin in the radical purpose of God the Father.

Jesus's Purpose

Seeing the purpose Jesus had during his life is the key to understand why He makes such a radical call to all of his followers. Here, Jesus describes his purpose:

Luke 19.10

10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Jesus is the Son of God, the King of the universe, the Creator of everything. He did something extremely radical: He left his throne, his position, and his power; and came to this world to be sacrificed for the sins of his creation. In spite of how inconceivable it is that God would do this, He did it so that we could come to be his sons and daughters.

Jesus Christ radically dedicated his life to one single purpose. Now, He asks all his followers to do the same, to sacrifice

their lives to continue the work of changing the world with Him.

The First Followers

When Jesus called his first followers, it was with this same radical call; they literally left their whole lives — their families, their work, and their friendships — in order to follow Jesus.

Mark 1.16-18

16 Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

They left their plans and their lives in order to change the world with Jesus.

All His Followers

Jesus didn't only call his first followers with this radical call. Just before ascending to heaven, He told these first followers that they should spend the rest of their lives converting other people to be his followers, too — followers who would in turn spend their lives making other followers. His intention was that all his followers would be called with the same radical call. Jesus started a chain of followers who would all spend their lives calling others to follow Him, who would call yet others to follow Him — and this would continue on and on.

Matthew 28.18-20

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

John 17.18

18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

John 20.21

21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Acts 1.8

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Without a doubt, Jesus's desire was that all of his followers would sacrifice their lives in order to help others follow Him.

This Includes Us

Today, the same chain of followers who lose their lives in order to make other followers, continues with us. The call of someone who is Christ's follower hasn't changed: Jesus

still asks that his followers sacrifice their lives in order to help others know and follow Him. In fact, Paul said that the reason that Jesus saves us by his grace is so that we would live our lives doing good works with Him.

Ephesians 2.10

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Following Jesus means giving up our lives in order to change the world with Him.

The Danger of Living an Empty Life

Actually, attempting to follow Jesus by being saved, well-behaved, and normal leads us to live an empty life. Aside from the fact that this isn't the life Jesus called his followers to, it's also a boring life. Simply being a better version of yourself, living a cleaner version of your life, and doing the same things you would normally do, leads to an insipid, weak life.

On the other hand, following Jesus and changing the world with Him is an inspirational call. It's the kind of call that you can accept or reject enthusiastically. Just being saved, well-behaved, and normal is a boring call, a call we would only accept in order to escape the fire of hell.

Leaving Bad Things Behind

When the definition of life as a follower of Jesus is being saved, well-behaved, and normal, the work of the Christian

becomes fighting against the bad things in his life. So then, of course we become well-behaved because we stop doing bad things. Our biggest mission in life is to quit our vices, reform our vocabulary, stop thinking bad thoughts, and avoid the bad habits we had before. When this is our principal mission, we start to measure our success as followers of Jesus by counting how many bad things we've stopped doing. So then, instead of having the mission of being a world-changer with Jesus, our biggest task is to stop doing a bunch of bad things. This sounds like an empty, tedious life.

Going to Church

When the definition of a follower of Jesus is being good, well-behaved, and normal, our principal activity is to attend: attend church, attend meetings, attend studies. The measure of our participation in the mission of Jesus is nothing more than a list of how many times we have attended our church's meetings and services. If attending is the primary activity of our Christian life, this is an empty life — no matter how good the meetings and services are.

Enjoying Life

When the definition of the life of a follower of Jesus is being saved, well-behaved, and normal, our purpose in this life is to enjoy it. We say that we love Jesus, but really what we love is our life. We go to church and sometimes read the Bible, but what we truly live for is our jobs and families, cars and houses, money and hobbies, sports and shopping.

Our purpose in this life is to enjoy it: we want to live this life to the fullest, as long as we don't go to hell afterward. So then, we come to Jesus so that we don't end up going to hell, and so that He helps us with our problems in this life. However, our purpose in this life is to enjoy the things of this life; the things that we think will really make us happy. So, we end up living empty lives, seeking temporary pleasures that can't truly satisfy us.

The Danger of Living an Empty Life

When the definition of life as a Christ-follower is being saved, well-behaved, and normal, it creates a condition that Jesus compared to an empty house.

Matthew 12.43-45

43 When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. 44 Then it says, "I will return to the house I left." When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. 45 Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.

Here, Jesus compares people to a house filled with bad things. Part of living life as his follower is removing everything that's evil from our life. However, Jesus says that there's a danger when we only empty the house (our life) of bad things: the danger is that the house now sits empty — by not filling the house with something else, it remains

vacant. And this is dangerous because the evil in this world looks for empty houses (i.e. people).

Jesus finishes by saying that when we only remove our wickedness and don't replace it with something good, the evil will return, and in one way or another, it will again fill the house with wickedness. In other words, the call to be a follower of Jesus must be greater than just being saved, well-behaved, and normal. It's more than leaving sins behind, going to church, and enjoying life: Jesus calls his followers to all this and to much, much more. His true call is this: leave your life and come change the world with me!

From Empty to Radical

In this book, we'll see how to escape the empty life; we'll look at how to lose our life; how to become world-changers; and how to live the true call of Jesus.

You Have to Decide: What Does it Mean to Follow?

This journey starts by deciding that you'll accept the idea that following Jesus means changing the world with Him, by deciding you won't continue to believe what our religious culture teaches — that being a Christian means just being saved, well-behaved, and normal —, and by deciding that you believe Jesus does, in fact, call his followers to lose their lives in order to change the world with Him. Do you believe that?

He'll Use You

When you accept this call, Jesus will not only be able to use you to do some good things, He actually promises that He will change the world through your life!

Chapter 2

A Purpose That Matters

Following Christ means giving your life to change the world with Him. This definition of following Jesus sounds radical and inspirational, but it leaves us with a small problem: we don't know what it actually means to do this.

Out of Reach

The ability to change the world sounds like something huge and out of our reach: maybe powerful or famous people can change the world, but not us. We tend to think that someone has to be very intelligent, exceptionally creative, or have a good deal of money to be able to change the world.

This just doesn't describe most of us. We're normal people and normal Christians. We know we should be well-behaved and that we should go to church. However, we don't really believe that we will change the world.

We Don't Do It

The reality is that the majority of Jesus's followers don't change the world; many live good lives and go to church, but most almost always live normal lives. Many of those who profess to following Christ will not take someone else into the eternity with them. They live their whole lives without ever opening the Bible and guiding someone through the decision to follow Christ. Very few invest even a year of their lives in regularly discipling another Christian. Even fewer do larger projects, like going to another country to teach about Jesus, organizing a study or community group in their home, or starting a new church.

What Does it Mean?

The main reason we don't expect to change the world is because we don't know what it means. We don't have a practical definition of changing the world with Jesus. So, we don't know how to start, what it would look like, or even what to do.

Since the definition of the lifestyle of a Christ-follower is being a person who sacrifices their life to change the world with Him, not knowing what changing the world with Jesus means, prevents us from truly living life as his follower.

So then, our question should be: what does it mean to change the world with Jesus?

Main Idea:

We Change the World with Jesus When We Change Other Peoples' Eternities

Changing the world means helping someone far from God find peace with God, guiding another person through the process of finding her way to God, demonstrating to others that there is a God who can — and wants to — save them from the vanity of life and the hopelessness of death.

When an ordinary person thinks about changing the world, the first things that (normally) come to mind are:

- Right injustices
- Helping the poor
- Passing better laws
- Protecting the weak

Of course, none of these activities is necessarily bad in itself — actually, they're all quite admirable. However, none of these in and of itself actually makes an eternal difference. For someone desiring to live her life in imitation of Christ, the definition of changing the world is changing other peoples' eternities.

From Children of Wrath...

In the Bible, God says that every person has the same basic problem, namely that everyone is a son or daughter of God's wrath. Because of this problem, changing others' eternities is the essence of changing the world. One place in the Bible that describes this problem is found in Ephesians. Here the apostle Paul, writing a letter to a group of people who had

already found peace with God, describes their condition before having decided to follow Christ. In this description, we see the spiritual state of every person who hasn't entered into peace with God.

Ephesians 2.1-3

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

As we look at the people around us, we naturally think that everyone is more or less the same. Some are a bit better or worse than others, but for the most part, everyone is very similar. God, however, says that the spiritual condition of any person who hasn't entered into a relationship with Him — through Jesus — is a son or daughter of his wrath, spiritually dead, following the devil's guiding, and dominated by the passions of his flesh. When God looks at everyone, He sees two different groups of people: those who are his sons and daughters, and those who are dead spiritually — those who one day will experience his wrath.

...to Children of God

The hope that God, Jesus, and the Gospel extend to everyone is that they can become children of God. Their destiny can change: Instead of experiencing the wrath of God, they can experience his love. Because of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross,

God is willing to adopt and receive people — who at this moment are far from Him — into his family.

Galatians 3.26-27

26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

This is the message of the Bible: We have all rebelled against God, but He sent his Son Jesus into this world as a man. Jesus lived a perfect life and died an innocent death; by his sacrifice, He paid the price of others' rebellion. Now, every person who decides to enter into Christ by faith, repentance, and baptism can receive forgiveness of sins and adoption into the family of God — instead of being a child of God's wrath, he becomes a child of God. This is the hope that God gives to everyone who is far from Him.

The Follower's Purpose

The purpose of anyone who is Jesus's follower is to share this message of peace with God with other people. God saves, but He has chosen to share his message of forgiveness and reconciliation with the world through his sons and daughters.

Romans 10.13-15

13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they

to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

God sends his children to speak about Him to everyone, with the hope that those people, too, would “call on the name of the Lord,” and have their eternity changed.

When we help change others’ eternal destinies, we change the world. Jesus calls his followers to devote their lives to this task of helping others come to know God. If we follow Jesus, the principal focus of our lives should be bringing other people to God, and by doing so, changing their eternities.

How Do We Help Change Someone’s Eternity?

Again, changing another person’s eternity sounds like an enormous task — it means changing where that person will spend all of eternity! We don’t even really understand the concept of eternity, so it sounds a bit presumptuous to think that we, by our actions and words, could literally help to change someone else’s eternal destiny. It doesn’t seem like something a “normal” Christian could do.

Can we really change someone else’s eternity? On one hand, no — only God can take someone who is an object of his wrath and make him his beloved, adopted child. However, on the other hand, yes — God changes people’s eternities through his sons and daughters. So yes, we can help Him change other people’s eternities.

A Purpose That Matters

If the definition of following Jesus is giving our life to change the world with Him, and if changing the world with Jesus is changing others' eternities, then we need to know how to do it. We need to be able to look in the Bible and find — in very practical terms — exactly how we can help God change other peoples' eternities.

A theme that runs throughout the entire New Testament is that changing someone's eternity has two parts:

- 1) bringing that person into a relationship with Jesus and
- 2) helping that person mature in their relationship with Jesus, so that they grow up to become more and more like Him.

This is what Jesus instructed his followers to do when He gave them the Great Commission:

Matthew 28.18-20

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

In other words, what Jesus means is: Bring all people into a relationship with Me, and help them continue to grow in that relationship. This is how we help God change other peoples' eternities.

Part 1: From Far to Near

The first part of changing another person's eternity is taking him from where he is — far from God — to the point where he decides to enter into a relationship with Christ. It's helping him get to the place where he wants to know how to enter into peace with God; explaining the decision to follow Christ to him, and helping him make that decision. This is what happened the first time that Jesus's first followers talked about Him to a large group of people:

Acts 2.37-41

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Peter told the story of Jesus, and they asked, "What should we do?" Peter then guided them through the process of making the decision of repenting (turning to God) and being baptized; he helped them make their own decision to follow Jesus, which is why three thousand people had their eternity completely changed that day.

In the same way, we are part of changing others' eternities when we help them come to the moment of making the decision to repent and be baptized, and thus start following Jesus.

Part 2: From Infant to Adult

The second part of changing others' eternities is helping them grow in their relationship with Christ. The Bible says that a new Christ-follower is like a baby: he's just starting his spiritual life. He doesn't know how to follow Jesus, or how to imitate Jesus. He still has many of his old habits and might not know how to read the Bible or pray. He's started a new life, but isn't prepared to live it out.

So, we also change the world when we help people who've made the initial decision to follow Jesus, to continue maturing — to imitate Jesus in their lives, to leave their old habits behind, to treat others the way Jesus did, to develop the character of Christ, and to spend time with Jesus and God the Father.

This was Jesus's example during his life, too. He didn't just call those outside to enter into a relationship with Him, He also spent a great deal of his time working with a group of three of his followers, with another group of 12 disciples, and with an even larger group of 72 followers. He changed their eternities by bringing them into a relationship with Himself, and by teaching them to live their entire lives as his followers.

In Ephesians, Paul says it's each follower's responsibility to help other Christ-followers grow in their faith.

Ephesians 4.11-16

11 and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Do you see the theme of growth? Leaders are supposed to equip everyone else to work with Jesus; and all Christians have the responsibility to work, mature, build up, and help other Christ-followers grow. When everyone works at this, the body of Christ, or the community of Christ-followers, experiences growth, spiritual formation, and increased maturity.

We change others' eternities when we help them grow in their relationship with Christ.

How Does This Look in Real Life?

Practically speaking, this radical lifestyle of giving your life to change others' eternities is not complicated. It's a lifestyle

A Purpose That Matters

of spending time with other people (both Christian and non-Christian), praying for them, talking about Jesus every chance you get, and helping the people in your life take their next step on their journey towards God.

One example of this in the Bible is a demon-possessed man that Jesus heals. After Jesus frees him from the demons that tormented him, he completely surrenders his life to following Jesus. In fact, he wants to leave his entire life and his family behind, and literally get into the boat and go with Jesus. However, Jesus tells him that the best way he can follow Him would be to actually stay in his city and live as his follower there. Jesus taught him how to be his follower in the midst of his normal life.

Luke 8.39

39 "Return to your home, and declare what God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole town what Jesus had done for him.

This Is How We Change the World

We follow Jesus by living our lives radically focused on helping others come to know God, follow Jesus, and mature as Christians. This is how we change their eternities. This is how we change the world.

Part 2

Why so Radical?

Why does God ask his children to live such radical lifestyles? Why does Jesus demand that his followers sacrifice their lives? Why does He ask for so much?

The radical call of Jesus seems to go against what we know about God. God can do anything He wants; why then does He ask or need his children to do so much? Also, we know that God gives to his children — we have received everything from Him, and it is by his grace that He saves us. This doesn't fit with the idea that we have to lose our lives to truly follow Jesus.

Let's look at why Jesus asks for such a high level of commitment from anyone desiring to follow Him.

Chapter 3

Motivated by His Glory

Why so Radical? Why is it so important for God's children to live radical lives? And why did Jesus emphasize this particular condition for following Him?

Does He Need Help?

One answer we might think of is: that God needs help. The thought is if He really is going to save humanity, then He needs our help to do it; we speak, we convince, and we persuade others. So then, it must be that we have to live lives completely devoted to Jesus's purpose to save others, because if we don't, they won't be saved.

Totally Sovereign

Reading only a small portion of the Bible, would make us abandon this idea that God needs our help. The God of the Bible is all-powerful: He can divide the waters of the Red Sea and let his people pass through the middle of the

sea on dry ground, feed 5,000 men and their families with nothing more than a small boy's lunch, change the world with Jesus's twelve followers, and transform a human heart that has been living in complete rebellion against Him. The reality is that God is completely sovereign — He needs no one's help. He made, sustains, and governs the universe.

Acts 17.24-25

24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

God doesn't need help doing what He wants to do in this world. In fact, all by Himself, He could convert the heart of every person, or condemn everyone to live their lives in rebellion against Him; He could make us love Him or hate Him. God is all-powerful.

God's Goal

In order to understand why God demands that his children live lives radically devoted to Him and his purpose of saving other people, we must look at God's greatest goal. The answer to the question: "why does Jesus say following Him means losing one's life and being radical?" is also the answer to the question of why God does everything He does.

To Receive Glory

The greatest goal God has is to receive glory — this is the reason God does everything. The Bible says time after time that God values and seeks his glory more than anything else, for example:

Isaiah 48.11

11 For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned My glory I will not give to another.

Isaiah 42.8

8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

These are just two passages, but they represent a theme that runs from the beginning to the end of the Bible — that God desires to receive glory from his creation.

What Is Glory?

In our world the word “glory” has a good deal of religious meaning, but very little practical meaning: we talk about giving glory to God or worshiping God; however, many times if we had to give a description of how to do this, the only thing that would come to mind would be singing worship songs at church.

In other words, we don't know what it actually means to give glory to God. So, saying the most important thing to God is receiving glory, sounds more like a religious idea than something practical; however really giving glory to God is

the most practical activity of the Christian life. Once we understand what it means, it's something that can flow out of every area of our lives.

Giving glory to God is making Him be seen as great, good, and powerful. Generally speaking, God is seen as being very small: He's a small part of our lives — we give Him time on Sundays, and talk to Him when we need something, but He's not at the center of our lives. Giving God glory is making Him be seen — by us as well as by those around us — as being as great, good, and powerful as He actually is.

The Purpose for Everything

God's ultimate purpose is to receive glory. Our world, our planet, our galaxy, and the entire universe all exist to give Him glory.

Romans 11.36

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Everything comes from God and is for God; his purpose in everything is to receive glory. The Bible gives many different reasons that motivate God to do everything He does: at times He acts out of love, other times out of a desire to take care of his people; sometimes He acts out of wrath, and sometimes it is to teach his children a lesson. However, if you look at all the stories in the Bible, what you find is that the reason behind all the other reasons — in other words the true reason God does everything — is to receive glory.

Motivated by His Glory

For example, the book of Exodus tells the story of how God's people were in captivity in Egypt under a cruel king, Pharaoh. But God freed his people from this slavery, brought them out of Egypt, and destroyed their enemies. You can find many biblical reasons for why God did all of this: loving his chosen people, being incensed by the Egyptians' unjust treatment of them, fulfilling his promises to Abraham, and punishing Pharaoh for his rebellion. All of these are good reasons that actually did motivate God to do what He did, but the reason behind all of these reasons was to receive glory.

Exodus 14.4

4 "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." And they did so.

Clearly, the reason God does everything is in order to receive glory. He does whatever He does so we will see Him as being as great, powerful, and good as He really is. Let's look at some examples of the great things that God has done, and we will see that the reason He did them was to receive glory:

Creation

Creation (of the universe, of our world, and even of us) is one of the greatest works of God. So, what is the purpose of creation? It is that everything that God created would give Him glory — and this includes every living being.

Psalms 150.6

6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Even created things that don't breathe or talk were created with the sole purpose of giving glory to their Creator — of making the greatness, goodness, and power of God be seen.

Psalms 19.1-4

1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. 2 Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. 4 Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun[.]

So all creation exists for the purpose of giving glory to God. He created everything so that we would see Him through his creation.

People

The high point of God's creation is people; we are made in his image. Everything else that is created reflects his greatness, but we reflect who He is. We're more than just a body: we have a soul; we're eternal creatures. In spite of this difference between us and the rest of creation, God made us with the same purpose as everything else: that we would give Him glory.

Isaiah 43.6-7

6 I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, 7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

The main reason that you and I exist is to give glory to God.

The Cross and Salvation

If the high point of creation is mankind, then the greatest work of God in history is the redemption of humanity. The Bible uses the word “gospel” (or good news) to explain how God redeems his people: this gospel starts with the idea that we have all rebelled against God, and so an eternity of punishment awaits us. In spite of this, God sent his Son to this world to live a perfect life, die an undeserved death, and rise from the dead — conquering Satan, sin, and death. Those who believe in Him and decide to follow Him receive the promise of one day rising from their graves, because Jesus rose from his grave; the certain hope of complete forgiveness of their sins, because in his death Jesus absorbed the wrath of God in their place; and a life that is made pleasing to God through the perfect life that Jesus lived.

So, why did God do all of this? Why did He save people that had rejected Him? Why did He sacrifice the life of his Son in order to pay the price for the punishment of humanity’s rebellion? An obvious reason is found in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son....” God saves us because He loves us. While this is absolutely true, there is an even more profound reason for his salvation than his love for us: it is receiving glory.

Ephesians 1.5-7

5 [H]e predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

The real reason God saves us is so that He receives glory; so that we would see what He has done and then say: “Look how God saved that person; He is good!” And, “Did you see how God transformed her life? God is powerful!” or, “Can you believe that God changed my heart? God is great!”

So then, the reason God does everything in this world is to receive glory: to be seen by us — as well as all the other spiritual beings — for how great, powerful, and good He really is.

What About My Life?

When we look at God’s overarching purpose of receiving glory in everything and through everything, we’re left with a question: “What does it mean for me to live my life for the glory of God?” In other words: “How can I give Him the maximum possible glory through my life?” In the answer to this question, two things come together: God’s desire for his glory, and the radical life Jesus demands of his followers.

Main Idea:

God is Greatly Glorified When His Children Live Lives Radically Devoted to His Purposes

The reason God asks his children to live lives radically devoted to Him and to his mission of saving others is because as they live this way, God is greatly glorified. Of course, when we live this radical life, we'll help others know God, be more holy and generous, and become better people. However, the reason behind these other reasons, the great reason why God demands this radical life, is because a life that's devoted to Him in this way results in his receiving much glory.

Jesus

No one can deny that when Jesus lived as a man in this world, He lived a life radically devoted to his Father's purposes. What's more, Jesus accomplished a great deal for his Father during his life: He died to pay the price of the sins of the whole world; He started a movement of followers that's grown over time and become the dominant world religion; and his followers have literally changed the world! Jesus prayed shortly before his death, and in this prayer He said to God that the result of all of the work He had done was that God would receive glory.

John 17.4

4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

Jesus's radical life gave much glory to God — this was the great purpose of his life.

And Us

Just before saying this, Jesus told his followers that if they were truly his followers, their lives would be filled with much fruit (the products of their good works), in effect saying that the result of their radical lives would also be that God would receive much glory.

John 15.8

8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

So then, when we work with Jesus and sacrifice ourselves like He did, the fruit of our work will be that other people see God for being as great, good, and powerful as He is, or in other words, our radical lives will result in God's being greatly glorified.

How Does He Receive Glory?

How does God receive glory through our radical lives? How is it that our good deeds, work, and sacrifice show God as great, powerful, and good to others? God receives glory in many ways when his children live radical lives. Here are three of the biggest ways:

As Most Important

We all have things in our lives that are important to us. Some of these things are:

Motivated by His Glory

- Family
- Work
- Money
- Sports
- Hobbies
- Appearance
- Reputation
- Cars
- Pleasure
- Vices
- Sex
- Buying things
- etc.

We all have something that's more important than anything else: for some it's family, for others it's sports, and for still others it's work. We know what's most important to us because it's what comes first in our hearts and thoughts; it's where we spend our time and where we spend our money; it's what we talk and dream about. However Jesus demands that the most important thing in his followers' lives be his mission to reconcile people to God. As we can see, He asks us as his followers to be radically devoted to the purpose of changing other people's eternal destinies.

Matthew 6.33

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

When Jesus's purpose is most important in your life, it will be what you most desire to see happen — you'll think about

it, dream about it, and spend all the time you can trying to make it happen; it will be what you talk about most. It will become more important to you than all the other important things in your life. When Jesus's mission truly is most important to you, your Father, God, will receive great glory, because you'll be saying with your life that everything else others value — family, work, money, pleasure, sports, etc — is not most important to you. If you, in your life, most value what your Father values, others will see that God is more valuable to you than all of the things that are so important to them.

Sacrifice

A radical life with Jesus requires a lot of sacrifice, because Jesus's followers always loose their lives — sometimes literally and other times little by little. They sacrifice their time to work with others, and spend their money generously to help grow Jesus's Kingdom. They don't take advantage of many of the comforts and pleasures of life, in order to be able to work with Jesus.

2 Timothy 2.3-4

3 Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

God receives much glory when we, as his children sacrifice our time, money, and comfort to help others come to know Him. With our lives we say God is important, and that helping others have peace with Him is worth more than all the time, money, and comfort we sacrifice. As we give

ourselves more and more radically to accomplishing his purposes, we make Him look more and more important, and He receives more and more glory.

Suffering

Suffering comes as part of a life radically given to Jesus. Sometimes it comes from others' mocking; other times it's due to friends who distance themselves; at times it's because the enemy attacks those who live radically for Jesus; and it can even be because the work itself is difficult. Inevitably, you're going to suffer if you live as Jesus's follower.

2 Timothy 3.12

12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Our willingness to suffer for a cause tells the whole world that this cause is important. The extreme value of knowing God and being like Jesus is displayed by our willingness to suffer in our lives in order to live as He lived.

Maximum Glory

The reason God asks his children to live radical lives is because that allows Him to receive the maximum glory through his children's lives. So, as we strive to live radical lives as Jesus's followers, it's extremely important to do it for the correct reason: We don't help God because He needs our help to do his work in the world — as if He weren't all powerful; the reason we live radical lives is because living this way gives great glory to our Father. When God's sons

Follow Me

and daughters live lives that are radically devoted to his purpose of saving humanity and redeeming his creation, others see God as supremely great, powerful, and good; He receives much glory.

Chapter 4

Motivated by Grace

What should our motivation be for living the radical lifestyle to which Jesus calls his followers? Why would we abandon the comfortable lifestyle of being saved, good, and normal Christians; and instead radically dedicate ourselves to working with Jesus to change the world?

What we discover upon asking this is that we normally serve God for the wrong reasons, which more or less ruins our service to Him. Let's look at what normally motivates Jesus' followers to serve God, and then let's look at a completely different reason for following Jesus — one that He gives his followers.

Our Motives

Obligation, pride, and manipulation. These are what normally motivate us to work with God: They're the motivation behind many different acts of service and charity, prayers,

evangelism, and sacrifice. These motives have produced new churches, excellent preachers, and dedicated servants. And all these motives have something in common: they're all based on paying God back, making a deal with God, or giving Him something in exchange for what He's done or will do for us. We serve God out of these motives by nature. Trying to make deals with God is a human instinct — it's who we are.

Obligation

The motive of serving God out of obligation comes from realizing how much we owe God: As we become more and more aware of everything God has done for us, it's impossible not to feel a great debt to God — He's the one who saved us from sin and from eternal punishment! He also transforms us from the inside out; He helps us in our sickness; He gives us hope in our problems. What life has taught us is that we owe everything to God, that we're unable to do anything of true value alone, and that we literally depend on God for everything. So when we hear Jesus's call to serve Him, work with Him, and live a life radically devoted to his purposes, it's completely natural to feel obligated to obey and sacrifice our lives for Him; we begin to do the right things, but it's because we have to — it's out of obligation.

Pride

Often our service to God is motivated by our own pride: We sacrifice because doing so makes us feel better about ourselves. The reason it makes us feel better is that our hard work and sacrifice for God fuels our pride. We work and serve God motivated by pride for two different reasons:

The first is that our pride tells us we can't receive something for nothing. In other words, if God is giving us life, saving us, forgiving us, and adopting us into his family, the least we can do is to serve Him. On one hand, this idea is very true: God does expect our service; on the other hand, however, this can easily stem from our own pride. For the same reason we don't allow someone else to pay our bills, buy gas for our car, or take care of our family for us, neither are we willing to only receive from God. Serving and sacrificing for Him become the way we try to repay Him.

The second reason we work with God out of pride has to do with what others think of us: When others see us doing good things — in the Kingdom, in church, or with other people — they tend to think well of us; so our true motivation to serve God is what others think. The compliments, admiration, and honor we receive become a drug for our pride. So, as we serve God more and more, it's really to receive more and more admiration from others.

Manipulation

Manipulation can be one of the subtlest motivations for serving God. We never think that we're serving God in order to do this, but frequently our actual motivation is to manipulate Him. We want to receive certain things from God: we need his help at our job, want Him to heal us when we're sick, desire more material blessings — like money, things, or whatever. We look to God and hope to receive these from Him. There's something within our hearts that feels like if we work with God and are devoted to his purposes in this world — if we sacrifice for Jesus and for his Kingdom — then God will owe us. He'll be in our debt

and will almost be forced to help us when we need Him. By thinking our service and sacrifice to God puts Him in our debt, we basically believe we can manipulate Him and thereby get what we want. When this is the case, even though we think we are serving God with our works, we're actually serving ourselves.

Right Actions, Wrong Reasons

Obligation, pride, and manipulation are bad reasons to obey God, because they come from our selfishness and desire to serve ourselves. Ironically, these bad motivations often produce the correct actions in our lives. So we could ask: "What's the problem? If we end up doing what we ought to do, why are our motives so important? Isn't what we do more important than why we do it? In other words, don't our motives only matter to the extent that they influence our actions?"

God's answer in his word is a resounding "No!". Our motives are extremely important. Even more important than what we do, is why we do it. Jesus used very strong language as He talked about the religious people of his day who would do the right things for the wrong reasons.

Matthew 23.5-7

5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, 6 and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues 7 and greetings in the market places and being called rabbi by others.

So obeying God for the wrong reasons, even to the point of living a very radical life, doesn't please God.

Good Works Ruined

By serving God out of obligation, pride, or manipulation, we ruin our good works. Again, it's not just what we do that's important, why we do it is also extremely important. In fact, God says He'll judge our motives. Just think about the Sovereign God evaluating why you do everything — that's a scary thought!

Proverbs 16.2

2 All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord.

We can actually do good things, live a radical life, and serve Jesus with energy and enthusiasm, but not please God. It's possible to serve God in such a way that our service ends up counting against us, rather than for us. Our works can repulse God, instead of pleasing Him.

Debt-like

When we work for God out of obligation or pride, we treat God as if we have to repay a debt to Him. Owing money to someone makes us feel obligated, so we pay that person back because that's what we have to do. If our debt is large, we get depressed and feel overwhelmed by the stress. That's the same way our perceived debt to God can make us feel.

Serving God with wrong motives is a sign that we feel indebted to God. Though it's true that God has given us

more than we even know, He's not out collecting payment from his children. We don't owe a debt to God — at least not in the sense that we're responsible for repaying everything He's given us.

Forced

Feeling like we have to repay God produces a type of service to Him that's very demanding, and at the same time very forced. It makes us serve God because we have to. We work and do good things for others because we feel obligated to do so. We end up working hard, but it's forced. Our service doesn't grow out of a heart that joyfully desires to work with our Father and Savior; instead it comes from a weighed-down heart that knows it can never repay its debt to God. Yet every day we try to do just that.

Miserable

Eventually, our bad motives make us miserable: we may serve God, but we don't experience what David described when he spoke of serving the Lord with joy:

Psalms 100.2

2 Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

Instead of working out of joy, we work out of obligation, carrying around a huge burden of guilt because we haven't done enough; meanwhile we look disdainfully at those who do less than us. Instead of changing the world with God's love, we end up embittering our lives and keeping others from God.

The Alternative

There's another motive for serving God that is described in his Word, and it's the only motivation that is pleasing to Him. The only way to not ruin our service through bad motives is to serve God with this motivation.

Main Idea:

God's Grace Motivates Us to Live Radically

God's grace is the only good motivation for living a radical life. Jesus doesn't ask his followers to live a radical life based on legalism and obligation; his grace and favor for us should be the reason we serve Him radically. When we realize how much God has given us, his grace starts to motivate us: We're motivated to give ourselves completely to Him — not to repay Him, but rather out of gratitude for what we have received. The difference might seem small, but it changes everything! Seeing and truly feeling the greatness of God's grace destroys our bad motives (indebtedness, obligation, and attempting to manipulate God).

2 Corinthians 5.14-15

14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

What is Grace?

Grace is a religious word we use without even realizing what it means; it's an enormous concept that is difficult to fully understand. To better understand what grace is, let's look at what it is in theory, and then see what grace looks like in practical terms:

Undeserved Favor

Grace is God's favor towards us; but not just his favor, it is his undeserved favor. In other words, grace is when God gives us something we haven't earned.

When God decides to save a sinner who doesn't deserve to be saved — and no one deserves this — it's by his grace.

When God blesses a sinful person — and we're all sinners — it's by his grace.

When God allows someone who has rebelled against Him to continue breathing air in his world — and we've all rebelled against Him — it's by his grace.

So, grace is God's favor toward us: undeserved favor — favor we can't earn, favor we can't ever repay.

Not by Works

The theme of this book is that following Jesus means working radically with Him, which makes it very important to strongly clarify that God DOESN'T love us because we work with Him. Living a more radical life doesn't make God approve of us more. Working so others are saved doesn't make us more deserving of our forgiveness in Christ. God

won't love us more if we sacrifice more. If we are saved and forgiven, and enjoy the love and approval of God, it's not because of our works, but because of his grace toward us.

2 Timothy 1.9

9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

We've Received from God

The first step in living a radical life is understanding God's grace. Seeing the grace He's given us, makes us live a life utterly surrendered to his purposes. In order to follow Jesus the way He wants us to, we have to start by realizing how great the love is that He's given us. We begin to understand and appreciate the grace of God when we see all we've received from Him; when we begin to feel the reality of what John describes:

John 1.16

16 And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

Since we could undoubtedly fill more than just one book with all the descriptions of how God shows us his favor and grace, we won't describe everything the Bible says about God's grace here. However, if grace truly is to be our motivation for living this radical life, it would be helpful to look at some of the largest demonstrations of God's grace to his children.

Salvation and Forgiveness

We rebel against God — this is called sin — but God saves us and forgives us. We receive this salvation completely by his grace, we can't earn it and we can never repay it. If you're saved, it is by God's grace.

Ephesians 2.4-9

4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

It is by his grace that God saves and forgives people who do not deserve to be saved.

Adoption

God does more than save and forgive: when He saves us, He also adopts us into his family as his sons and daughters.

1 John 3.1

1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. {...}

By his grace, good will, and love, He takes rebellious, depraved, and corrupt people and places them into his family.

He calls them “sons” and “daughters.” It’s inconceivable that the Almighty God would take his rebellious creation to be part of his family, and yet that is exactly what He does! It’s by his grace and love that we can be his children.

Transformation

Another great work God does in his sons and daughters is continuously transforming their inner being. He improves us, changes us, and makes us more like Jesus.

Philippians 1.6

6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

If you’ve changed, it’s because God changed you. If your desires and habits are different, it’s because God gave you new ones. If you’ve left behind sins that previously enslaved you, it’s because God delivered you. God transforms his sons and daughters, and this transformation is a constant demonstration of his grace.

What does Grace Produce?

Truly having received God’s grace produces something in us: the grace we receive flows out of us, and it produces good works in us. This is one of the most surprising messages of the Bible, because grace is something that’s received. The idea that receiving from God can produce a complete surrender to God is counter-intuitive — it doesn’t make sense, but that’s exactly how it works. Receiving God’s grace

changes who we are and what we do; receiving radical grace produces a radical life.

1 Corinthians 15.10

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

So, receiving God's grace produces good works in us. Works are the fruit of God's grace: grace is the root, and a radical life is the fruit of that root. So, God's grace is the only real reason for a radical life.

Moving Us

God's grace towards us is literally a force moving us to act, it compels us to surrender our lives to God — this is what leads us to live a radical life.

Romans 12.1

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

If we see how much compassion we have received from God, the only logical reaction is to give Him all that we are. God's grace moves us to serve Him.

Working Through Us

God's grace isn't just something that we receive. God wants this grace to flow to others as well. In this way, God can

change the world around us. So then, when we receive God's grace, his design is that his grace would pass like a river, through us to others.

2 Corinthians 9.8

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need you will abound in every good work.

God gives us so much, and out of what we receive from Him, we give to others. His grace flows through us to those around us. For this reason, God asks his sons and daughters to live radical lives, so that through them He might bless many more.

Freeing Us

Finally, the greatest work God's grace accomplishes in us is freeing us from the need to obey God out of obligation. Nothing is more miserable than feeling forced to serve Him. His grace frees us from this misery, because since we've received so much from God, we can give generously to others. We even give our very life to God, not because we have to, but because God has given us so much. So we are freed to serve from the heart.

Jesus instructed his disciples how to do his work: Instead of pushing and filling them with a sense of obligation, He reminded them of how much they had been given.

Matthew 10.8

8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

When we realize we've received so much from God, we can feel a great freedom to be able to give our lives to Him and to others, and to sacrifice ourselves unconditionally. Just as we've received all of God's grace; we give from that same grace.

Radical Because of Grace

We began this section with a question: Why does God call us to live a radical life? We saw that the purpose of everything, including this radical life, is the glory of God. We live radical lives so that God will receive glory. Now, we've seen the second reason Jesus calls us to live radical lives: because we have received radical grace from our Father, God. The only appropriate response from our heart to a Father who is so generous and so good to his children, is a life entirely devoted to Him and to his purposes.

Part 3

How Should a Christ-Follower Live?

So far, we've seen a lot of theory, like how: following Christ means living a life completely devoted to his Kingdom and purposes; being Jesus's follower means being a world-changer with Him; our goal in changing the world with Jesus is the glory of God; and our motivation for living so radically is the grace which we receive from God.

These are all true. They are inspirational ideas; ideas that change what we see when we read the Bible and hear Jesus's words. However, we're left with a huge question: what does it look like to incorporate these ideas into our daily life?

Practically Speaking

Theory's fine, but only when we connect it to real life. All the good ideas in the world won't help us if we don't know what they look like in practical terms. For these ideas to transform

us; we must learn how to apply them to our lives — and this is the task of the next chapters. In the pages to come, I will give practical expression to the ideas and theories we have seen so far. My goal is to answer the question: practically speaking, what should the radical life of a Christ-follower look like?

Key Areas

We'll specifically look at what this radical life looks like in three key areas of our lives: our time, our money, and our relationships. Since everything we do is connected to these three areas, essentially our whole life is made up of these three factors. So to radically follow Jesus, we need to know what that means for our time, money, and relationships.

The Foundation

We must lay a foundation before looking at the biblical principles of using our time, money, and relationships to be world-changers. This foundation has two parts: complete surrender and the 'crazy filter'. Both are philosophies that come from the Word of God, and together form a radical attitude in us when we think about our money, time, and relationships.

Complete Surrender

Following Jesus requires a total commitment. However, when we start to apply the principles of Jesus's radical call to everyday life, the temptation is to ask: how much do we have to give?; how much of our money do we have to give to Jesus's Kingdom?; or, how much of our time do we have

How Should a Christ-Follower Live?

to use to work for Jesus's purposes? The answer in God's Word is: "Everything!" In the Bible, Jesus repeatedly says that following Him means giving all we are and everything we have to accomplish his purposes in this world.

In the next few chapters, we'll see example after example of the total dedication Jesus asks of his followers. But before we begin, I want you to know that the total surrender that we are going to look at is not an exaggeration of what Jesus — throughout his entire life — called his followers to give. Paul, the apostle, describes this surrender saying we should give all that we are to God.

Romans 12.1

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

Once again, living a life utterly surrendered to Jesus's purposes means giving everything we are, and everything we have, to his kingdom and to his cause.

The "Crazy Filter"

In the up-coming chapters, we'll learn to look at every area of our lives through a radical filter; we'll look at our lives through this filter by asking the following question about every part of life: "If I didn't serve the risen Christ, would my life and how I live make sense?" Another way of asking the question is: "Does my life make sense to those who don't live to follow Christ?"

Paul describes this idea in his letter to the Christians in Corinth, saying that Jesus’s followers live so radically, that if they had no hope of eternal life with Jesus, their life here on earth would seem crazy:

1 Corinthians 15.19

19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

So, we’re faced with the reality that, if our life “seems to make sense” in human terms, then we aren’t really living the life of a radical follower of Jesus; and if the way we use our time and money seems to make sense to our non-Christian friends, then we aren’t living as world-changers.

As we’ll see in the pages that follow, Jesus teaches his followers to live a life so radical that the only explanation is the eternal hope his Father gives them. This is the “crazy filter” — and we’ll learn to look at our lives through this filter.

Warning!

What we’re going to hear in Jesus’s practical instructions to his followers is very radical. Most of those who profess to follow Jesus don’t live this way — it’s hard to live like this.

In the religious world, it’s easy to ignore these teachings of Jesus and just be a “good Christian”; it’s easy to think all this is for the “super-Christians” — like ministers, pastors, and missionaries. In fact, we’re constantly tempted to say: “This is all optional; it surely isn’t required to live this radical of a life in order to follow Jesus, is it?”

How Should a Christ-Follower Live?

Going forward, remember that we'll be looking at Jesus's instructions to his followers. These are not optional. It's not his call to "super-Christians"; it's his call to all who want to truly follow Him.

We have to remember that Jesus always allows people to reject Him, but never allows them to partially follow Him. Let's be careful that as we read his call to his followers, we either accept it or reject it, because the truth is that we can't just be "good Christians" and be true followers of Jesus at the same time — Christ's followers must accept his radical call.

Chapter 5

Radical Time

Following Jesus means dedicating our time to his purposes; we can't change the world by simply attending services on Sundays. A follower — or disciple — is a person who dedicates his or her life to follow a master or lord by imitating his actions. This means that truly following Jesus is about living a life that completely imitates his life. And that means giving of our time — all of our time. Christ-followers dedicate their lives to imitating Jesus by devoting their time to help others come to know God.

It's Hard

It isn't easy to really follow Jesus, especially when it comes to our time. The modern religious culture has made us think that the time God wants from us is an hour or two on Sundays, and maybe a small group study during the week. It's extremely difficult to change that mentality and start thinking about following Jesus with all our time, because

that goes against what we have grown to expect “church” and religion to be — something that fits comfortably in our lives.

Never Enough Time

The major barrier blocking us from following Jesus with all our time, is that we simply don't have time. Our lives are full; we barely have time to sleep because there's always something else to do. We have work, family, shopping, tasks, responsibilities, and social obligations. The weekend comes, and we haven't done half of what we needed to do. We have so many commitments and responsibilities, we often feel like we're barely keeping our head above water. We don't have enough time to radically follow Jesus; actually, we need more time for ourselves!

If following Jesus means we have to give Him more time, then we probably feel like we just can't do it. Even before reading this chapter, we know what our answer is going to be: We don't have time to change the world. We can make time to go to church, but we can't do much more than that. In spite of this, that is exactly what Jesus asks of his followers: more than that.

The Dilemma

As we try to follow Christ, we face a dilemma: on one hand, we see good things we could do with Jesus:

- studying with a friend who's seeking God
- taking more responsibility in the church
- helping a poor family who lives close by
- leading a community group

Radical Time

- spending time with friends from work or school who are far from God
- and many more

We feel inside that following Jesus really does mean that we do these tasks and make the most of these opportunities. On the other hand though, we're aware of all the demands in our lives. We have:

- work to do
- tasks to complete
- bills to pay
- household chores
- family commitments
- and the list goes on

Of course, all these demands are urgent, and there are consequences for not meeting them.

Now, unfortunately, in this conflict between following Jesus and meeting life's demands, the urgent always wins. By necessity, we focus on life's urgent tasks. We do plan to follow Jesus with our time — just later on, once we have more time. But if we're truly going to be Jesus's followers and change the world with Him, we must grasp this important principle:

Main Idea:

Truly Following Jesus Means Following Him with All of Our Time

Being a follower of Jesus means following Him all the time. The definition of a disciple, or follower, is someone who lives their entire life in imitation of their master. So, if we really follow Jesus, all of our time will be used for Him; if He's our Lord, his purpose will be our purpose; and if we live in imitation of Him, we'll spend our life doing what He did. There won't be a division between "our time" and "Kingdom-time," because if we're part of Jesus's Kingdom, all our time must be given to that Kingdom.

It's What Jesus Did

We started this book looking at the modern thought that following Jesus means going to church for a couple of hours on Sundays. The curious thing about that idea, is that Jesus never modeled this kind of low commitment at any point in his life; He was so dedicated to the purposes of his Father, that He even said working with God was his sustenance.

John 4.34

34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

So, the first reason that following Christ means following Him with all of our time, is that Jesus devoted all of his time to doing the work of his Father.

It's What the First Disciples Did

Jesus's early followers knew his expectation was that they follow Him with their entire lives. He made this clear to them from the first moment He told them to leave their nets and follow Him, until the moment He gave them the Great Commission just before He left the world.

When Jesus called them to be his disciples, they began living their lives imitating Him: walking with Him, living with Him, eating with Him, working with Him, and listening to Him. Their whole life was dedicated to following Him. And after Jesus's resurrection, right before He ascended into heaven, He gave these first followers the Great Commission, in which He told them that as they went and lived their lives, they were to continue working with Him; they were to keep changing the world by helping the people around them come to know him and have peace with God. In this commission, He was asking them to continue following Him with their whole lives and with all of their time, even after He left.

Matthew 28.18-20

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

So, another reason following Christ means following Him with all of our time, is that this is precisely what He asked of his first followers.

He Asks It of Everyone

Perhaps the biggest reason that following Jesus means giving Him all our time, is that it's the level of commitment He asks of all his followers.

2 Corinthians 5.14-15

14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

If we're really following the Christ who died and rose for us, our life belongs to Him, and his desire is for us to live our entire lives in his service.

How to Live this Way

Because we have so many things to do each day, it doesn't seem to make sense that we have to devote all our time to following Jesus; it just seems impossible. We can't see how we could possibly live like that. But if this is really what Jesus asks of his followers, then we need to discover the answers to these questions: "How do we live this way?" and "What does it mean today to follow Jesus with all of our time?"

As Ambassadors

Being a disciple of Jesus every minute of the day starts by realizing that the essence of being his follower is that it is something we are, not something we do. We tend to define following Christ by what we do:

- going to church
- giving up vices
- trying not to sin
- reading the Bible
- having studies
- working in the church
- (...).

In fact, being a disciple is about taking on a new identity that changes who we are, not just what we do.

In this passage, the apostle Paul describes what it means to be a follower of Christ:

2 Corinthians 5.20

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Did you see it? We're ambassadors for Christ, and God speaks through us. Through our lives and our words, He's constantly trying to attract those around us to a relationship with Himself. This means that Christ's followers are assigned the task of representing their Lord — everywhere and all the time: at work, in our family, and with our friends; we always are to represent Jesus. That's why we can follow Him

with all our time: Because following Jesus isn't just adding more religious activities to a full schedule; rather being his disciple means representing Him to everyone around us at all times. Sometimes we represent Christ by the way we live, and other times we represent Him by talking about Him to others.

It All Counts

We have to break out of the mindset that separates the “spiritual” from the “worldly”, because for a Christ-follower everything is spiritual. If Jesus's followers always represent Him to everybody around them, then it all counts: there are no longer “religious activities” and “normal activities”. If we are following Jesus, everything we do is a “spiritual activity”, because we should always be showing God's grace and love to the world. The way we work, the way we talk to our spouse and children, the kind of friend we are, even the way we treat the cashier at the store — it should all teach something about God to everyone who sees us. The purpose of all our actions should be to enter into deeper friendships with the people in our lives, and thereby guide them into a closer relationship with God.

Practically-Speaking

Now, as good as the idea of being Jesus's ambassador sounds, practically-speaking, how does someone represent Him? What does the life of one of Jesus's followers look like? And how do we live as his ambassadors every moment of our lives? Working with the people around you and having a

Kingdom project are the two main elements of living like this.

Working with People

Being a Christ-follower changes how you look at the people around you, because you start to feel a burden for the souls of those who aren't yet following Christ; and a desire to see them enter a relationship with God grows inside you. At the same time you start to feel a responsibility to help people in your life who have already decided to follow Jesus; to help them grow in their new life with God.

Remember the Great Commission Jesus gave his followers before going back to heaven? His assignment to them was that they should work with people; help those who aren't yet following Him to learn to do so; bring them to the point of deciding to make Him their Lord; and help them grow in their relationship with Him.

Matthew 28.18-20

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Practically speaking, every follower fulfills this mission by focusing on the people God has placed in his life, seeking to work with everyone — friends, relatives, spouse and children, coworkers, classmates, and other people he sees on

Follow Me

a regular basis. He doesn't become a salesman, or someone who goes around pressuring people to follow Christ, rather he treats them as Jesus treated the people around Him. Jesus was interested in those around Him and sought to enter their world. He took advantage of the opportunities He had to talk about God, and tried to connect every person around Him to the Father.

In the same way, we can also be true friends to the people in our lives. This happens when, instead of just trying to go through our day, we take time to enter into conversations and friendships with the people around us. We aren't their friends just to "convert them"; they are real, genuine friendships.

Then through these friendships, conversations naturally take place that become doors that are opportunities to speak about God. We don't force awkward conversations about spiritual things, but we do go through the doors that open naturally. Then, when we have the chance, we talk about Jesus and the need for peace with God; we look for opportunities to study the Bible or share a study that explains how to have peace with God: We shouldn't be pushy, but we are always looking for the moment when the Holy Spirit gives us the opportunity to offer to share a study or talk about Jesus.

See, a large part of working with the people around us is just being their friend, waiting for the Holy Spirit to open a door in the conversation to talk about Jesus or to offer to study the Bible together, and making the most of the opportunity when the time comes. If that sounds like a lot of waiting around, a huge part of this strategy is that as we wait for opportunities to talk about Jesus to our family,

friends, and acquaintances, we are always praying for them. It's not just passively waiting, but actively, daily pleading with God for specific people in your life, that He would soften their hearts and give us an opportunity to talk with them. We struggle and labor in prayer for them.

In other words, following Christ and being his ambassador means seeing ourselves as missionaries to the people in our families, at our jobs, in our schools, and on our sports teams. While we live life, we form friendships with others, pray for them, and look for the opportunity to lead them to know and follow Jesus.

Working on Projects

Another part of living as Jesus's ambassador is having a project; a project is a regular job you do in the Kingdom. Paul says we've all received gifts — or abilities — from God, and He expects us to use these skills regularly within his community — the church.

Romans 12.4-8, 11

4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Follow Me

11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Every son and daughter of God has been given gifts, or abilities, from their Lord; and so we are to be diligent in using our gifts. Having a project or responsibility in the Kingdom gives us a place to regularly use our gifts for the good of the whole body of Christ. When we don't have a project, the amount we serve goes way down: we use our gifts less, and work less with Jesus. But having a project keeps us active in Jesus's work, even in times of discouragement when we would honestly rather not do any work at all.

Your project can be anything you regularly do for the Kingdom. Some examples of projects include:

- Leading a group that meets in your home: This could be a missional group, community group, cell group, discipleship group, or study group.
- Working with the band or worship team in your church.
- Planting a new church.
- Being part of the team that supports a new church.
- Working in or leading an area of work or ministry in your church.

Of course, this isn't a complete list of all the jobs that could be Kingdom-projects; these are just some examples. The project(s) you take on will depend on your skills, the leadership and focus of your church, as well as the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Having a project in Jesus's Kingdom doesn't mean you shouldn't also be a missionary to the people around you, though. Likewise, being a missionary to those who are around you doesn't mean you shouldn't have a formal project in the Kingdom either. In this life, the best way to be an ambassador for Christ is to have a specific project, and also be a missionary to anyone God puts in your life.

The First Priority

With all this talk of being a missionary with Jesus in our normal life, we could come to believe that working with Jesus throughout our whole life does not mean making that big of a change in our schedule. However, this just isn't true: if we live life normally, but with the focus of helping people around us come to know God, we'll encounter more and more opportunities to function as missionaries — chances to enter into a spiritual conversation, counsel someone experiencing a problem, offer a study, help someone with our time or money, or spend more time with a non-Christian friend. When these occasions arise, we feel the tension between the big priorities of our lives and the knowledge that God is giving us an opportunity to work with Him. Jesus said something that can help us decide what to do in these moments:

Mateo 6.33

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Following Jesus with our time means making our first priority that of helping others know God; living a life so

devoted to the purposes of our Lord that we give the highest priority in our lives to the tasks He gives us. So when God opens a door and someone wants to study, talk, be guided, or needs help, then that's what we do first. Working with Jesus has to be our first priority.

Accept the Task

When being Jesus's missionary is our first priority, our initial reaction once the opportunity to work with Him arises is always to accept the assignment, rather than thinking first about our life, our schedule, or our commitments. Following Jesus with our time means saying "yes" to the tasks He gives us. (Sure, there'll be times when we let an opportunity pass by — when it's not the right time, or someone else ought to do that particular task; however, these moments happen much less frequently than one might think.) Almost always, when an opportunity presents itself, we should take it.

It Will Consume Your Life

If accepting the tasks Jesus gives you is your highest priority, you'll see that little by little his work will begin to consume your life. You'll always be prepared and willing to study with people; you'll spend much of your time with people who don't know Christ, and you'll spend more and more time involved in your church's projects. By following Jesus in every part of our lives, we end up living a totally different life than we would if we weren't following Him. Working with Him will be what we do most; it will become the center of our lives.

It Won't Make Sense

If we follow Jesus like this, our lives won't make much sense to others. They'll look at our lives, and won't understand why we live the way we do. It will seem odd to them that we don't focus more on our desires, our lives, or our money.

1 Corinthians 15.19

19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

For those who's purpose isn't helping others come to know the risen Christ and find peace with God, a life dedicated to such a purpose doesn't make sense.

Make the Most of Life

The irony is that even though a Christ-follower's life doesn't make sense to others, it is the best way to get the most out of life. Seen from the viewpoint of this world, it would appear to be a huge waste of time, but looking at it from an eternal perspective, it's the best use of our short lives — living all of life radically devoted to changing the world with Jesus is the only way to not waste our lives. In fact, it's spending our lives dedicated to any other purpose that would be wasting them.

Short Life

Life is actually very short: We don't have that much time on this planet. When we do reach the end of our life, only two things will matter: whether we have peace with God, and whether we've helped others enter into peace with God.

After this life, in eternity, our relationship with God and having helped others have a relationship with God, will be the only things that will have value.

There's a saying that expresses this reality and helps me to keep that eternal perspective in mind. The saying is:

"Life is short, it soon shall pass, only what's done for Christ will last." – John Piper (Don't Waste Your Life)

The Most Important Thing

That's why the very best use of our time is to bring the message of peace with God to the people around us. Working with Jesus isn't just another job, another thing we can do in life, rather it's the only thing in life we do that will last for eternity.

Eternal Consequences

Yes, truly following Jesus will consume our entire life; yes, working with Jesus is something we will have to do every moment of our lives; and yes, Jesus will give us assignments that will seem inconvenient. But there's a reason it makes sense to accept Jesus's call to follow Him with our whole life: when you radically devote your time to Jesus's priorities, God changes the world; through you, He brings his peace and forgiveness to people around you. By working with Jesus, you'll see people who are important to you make the decision to enter into a relationship with God.

The way we use our time has eternal consequences. So, we should use it to help others find eternal peace with God.

Chapter 6

Radical Money

Following Christ means following Him with everything we are — and all that we are includes our money. The way we spend our money shows what's really important to us. Also, with our money, we can have a huge impact in the world and greatly grow Jesus's Kingdom.

A Tough Subject

The problem is that it's really hard to talk about money. Nothing makes us as uncomfortable as when other people talk about our money; and it's even worse if they talk about our money in a religious context. We suspect right away that they want us to give them money; we assume that if they talk to us about it, it's because they want our money. So when someone talks about this forbidden subject, we close ourselves off, change the subject, and avoid that person. In short, we try to not talk about this topic at all.

We definitely don't like to talk about money!

Jesus and Money

If we're going to follow Christ, though, we have to talk about money. We have no choice, because Jesus Himself talked about money a lot. It was one of the dominant themes in his teaching. So, if we really are going to live lives that are radically devoted to his purposes, we can't escape the topic of money.

Jesus said some very radical things about money; and a review of all his teaching about money shows that He expected his true followers to be radically generous. Let's look at what Jesus said about his followers and radical generosity.

A Requirement for Following

Giving up everything and being radically generous is one of the requirements Jesus laid out for his followers. He didn't teach that his followers couldn't have possessions, but what He did teach was that in order for someone to follow Him, that person must renounce his rights to everything he owns, and give all he has to Jesus and to his Kingdom. In order to follow Jesus, you have to be radically generous.

There are several examples that show that as far as Jesus is concerned, being radically generous is a requirement for following Him. Let's look at two examples. The first is a story, the second a teaching.

Luke 18.18-23

18 A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. 20

Radical Money

You know the commandments: ‘don’t commit adultery, don’t murder, don’t steal, don’t give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’” 21 “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said. 22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you’ll have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” 23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth.

In a nutshell, Jesus is saying that if we don’t let go of everything that we have in our hands, we can’t take hold of God. He said the same thing very directly throughout his teaching:

Luke 14.25-27, 33

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 “If anyone comes to me and doesn’t hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who doesn’t carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Clearly, one of the requirements of following Jesus is to give up everything we have in this life.

A Result of Following

If surrendering everything to Jesus is one of the requirements for following Him, then radical generosity is one of the results of walking with Him. Jesus said — and his early

followers demonstrated — that being radically generous is something we become when we truly follow Him.

Luke tells the story of Zacchaeus, a tax collector, who lived his life far from God. But after encountering Jesus, Zacchaeus decided to turn from his old way of life, and then he described the generosity he would show in the future. Jesus said that this was a sign that Zacchaeus had truly decided to follow Him.

Luke 19.8-9

8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” 9 Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.”

For Jesus, being radically generous is a sign of conversion — a result of truly following Jesus is that we become extremely generous.

What Will We Do?

So, what will we do with Jesus’s teachings of radical generosity? They’re hard and we don’t really like them; we’d rather pass over them to his “nicer” teachings about loving others and receiving blessings from God. It’s not fun to listen to what Jesus says about money, mainly because we don’t live out the radical generosity He taught and showed during his life. Sometimes we are generous, but we’re hardly ever radically generous.

“Not for Me”

One option we have as we read Jesus’s words about money is saying, “This doesn’t apply to me.” We read what Jesus tells the rich man in Luke 18 and say: “Jesus said that to him, not to me; I don’t necessarily have to sell everything I have to follow Jesus.”

On one hand, that’s true: what Jesus said to a particular person was intended for that person, not necessarily for everybody. However, what we’re ignoring when we think this way is that there’s a principle behind what Jesus said to that person. The specific application was for this individual, but the principle is true for everyone.

Here, the principle is: “If you’re going to follow me, then you’ve got to give up everything you have; you have to sacrifice it all for my Kingdom.” Selling everything and giving to the poor was the specific application of this principle for that particular man. While the specific application might be different for others, but the principle does apply to everyone who wants to follow Jesus.

Impossible to Ignore

When we’re honest with the text, it’s impossible to ignore what Jesus teaches about money — it’s so clear that for Jesus, following Him means being very generous. We can see this in the general instruction Jesus gives to all his followers at the end of the story of the rich young ruler in Luke 18.

Luke 18.27-30

28 And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." 29 And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there's no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who won't receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."

We can't ignore what Jesus says about money. He simply said too much about the generosity his followers should display, and about the attitude they should have towards money. A large part of his call to his followers, is the call to give Him all they have.

Why Does He Say That?

Another option besides ignoring what He taught by saying "That doesn't apply to me," is asking "Why does He say this?" Why does He say that part of following Him is being radically generous? We don't like it. It's not easy to live that way, yet that's what He says. He must have a reason for teaching this. What could that reason be?

Once we ask this question, we can see his teachings about money in a brand-new light; they begin to make sense, because Jesus not only says his followers must be extraordinarily generous, He also explained why.

Transformation

As Jesus speaks about money, He teaches his followers a secret: that when one of his followers is generous in this world, she's doing more than just giving her money away

Radical Money

to others; she converts her money into something eternal; she literally transforms her physical money into treasure in heaven.

Luke 18.22

22 When Jesús heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you’ll have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Luke 12.33

33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that won’t wear out, a treasure in heaven that won’t be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

1 Timothy 6.17-19

17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they’ll lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that’s truly life.

Did you see it? Over and over, the Bible tells us that if we give to others in this life, we accumulate wealth in Heaven; we transform our physical assets into something eternal.

Temporary Riches to Eternal Treasure

The basis of Jesus's teaching about money is that all our physical possessions are temporary—nothing we accumulate in this life will last. We seek after and accumulate things and money, and what are most real to us are the things we can touch and hold onto. Jesus knows the reality is that nothing in the world is permanent — it won't last forever. In fact, all we have can be lost in a second; and for everyone, death is the last time we'll possess physical things.

The key to making what we have permanent is to give it away: giving it to others, giving it to put food in the mouths of hungry children, giving it to help people in need, giving it to facilitate the work of Jesus's people, or giving it to plant churches.

On one hand, when we give our wealth to other people, we lose it: we no longer have whatever we gave away. When money leaves our hands here in this life, it feels like we've lost something. However, Jesus says something completely different happens: Our temporary riches, which we're going to lose anyway, are transformed into something permanent; we no longer have them here, but we have something much greater: treasure in heaven.

What are these eternal riches, or treasures in heaven? When Jesus teaches that his followers should accumulate eternal treasure by being generous while we are here, He's clearly talking about other people being saved and us receiving a reward from God. Gaining eternal treasure is having our money converted into people who have a relationship with God and into a reward from God for us.

Main Idea:

Our Generosity Helps Others Come to Know God

The goal of following Jesus and being radical is changing other peoples' eternal destination. Jesus teaches that his followers can transform their earthly riches into eternal treasure by using them to help others come to know God. We do this when we're generous — both with the work of the church, and also with the poor and needy around us.

Jesus once told a story to demonstrate this fact. In this story, there was a manager who had squandered his master's wealth. He realized his master was going to fire him, so before he was fired, he used the influence and money he still controlled to make friends who'd owe him favors and help him after he was fired. (You can read the whole story in Luke 16:1-15). At the end, Jesus compared the influence the manager had before he was to be fired, with the temporary resources we have in this life.

Luke 16.8-9

8 The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. 9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it's gone you'll be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

He said that we should use our temporary resources to make friends in Heaven. In other words, with our money, we can help others enter into a relationship with God.

People and Projects

In the same way as with our time, there are two ways in which we can use our money to help others come to know God: they have to do with people and projects. Practically speaking, we convert our money into eternal riches when we are generous with people and projects; when we help individuals, and when we collaborate together in order to accomplish the projects of our local church.

Projects with a Purpose

Giving money to our local church can feel like either a pointless obligation, or like the most important thing we could possibly do with our money. It all depends on the mission of our church. We feel purpose in helping when our church as a community uses the money that it raises to do projects that have a purpose. It is when, instead of pointless programs and merely maintenance expenses, every dollar spent is connected with Jesus's Great Commission — in other words, when our money goes directly to attracting, converting, and maturing followers of Christ.

Some of the projects that the members of a local church can do better together than each person individually are things like organizing the Sunday gathering, distributing Bibles, equipping members with the materials they need to do the work of ministry, planting new churches, training leaders, and sending missionaries to other countries. When the members of each local church put their money together, they can achieve great projects that fulfill the Great Commission and bring others into Jesus's Kingdom. This is one of the ways in which we transform our money into eternal riches.

Generous Friends

Another way to use our money to help others come to know God is to be a generous friend. In the previous story, Jesus teaches his followers to be generous friends; He says following Him means valuing the salvation of those around us more than the physical possessions we own. This makes his followers extremely generous with their money and possessions.

Being a generous friend means opening your home and sharing your food; it means sharing everything you have; it means being the one who always pays when you go to lunch or coffee with someone; it means helping others when they have problems; it means giving generously.

Not Manipulation

At first, this could sound like manipulating people with money, but Jesus isn't talking about buying or manipulating people; He's not talking about using our money to trick others into following Him. Rather, Jesus is thinking of being a true friend. He wants his followers to have genuine friendships with many people who far from God. These should be friendships that are so authentic, that they would continue even though these friends never decide to enter into a relationship with God, come to church, or study the Bible. At the same time, within that friendship there always is a purpose, because the goal of Jesus's followers in every friendship is to help their friend decide to enter a relationship with Him.

They'll Come to Know God

By being a true friend with the purpose of helping others enter into peace with God, you'll help other people come to follow Christ. This is partly because by being generous, you simply will have more friends — everyone likes to be with generous people. And by having more friends, you'll be able to help more people come to know God.

Also, your generosity in itself will help your friends come to know Christ, because as they see your generosity, they'll see a little bit of the generosity of your God. Then when you talk about the grace of God and his gift of eternal life, it'll be easier for them to believe in a generous God, because they've seen a living demonstration of this generosity in you.

Jesus said that the goal and the effect of his followers' generosity is that others would see — and come to know — his Father:

Matthew 5.16

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus calls his followers to be radically generous, and by their generosity, use their possessions to lead others into a relationship with God.

Chapter 7

Radical Relationships

Jesus's followers live to change the world with Him, and changing the world means changing the eternal destiny of others. With this as our priority, it changes the way we relate to other people. So then, following Christ radically changes our relationships.

We've seen that somebody who follows Jesus is radically generous with his money and sacrifices much of his time to work with Jesus, however money and time alone won't change others' eternities — only through relationships can our money and time be used to help others come to know God.

Do I Have to Be Weird?

In order to learn how to truly follow Jesus, we have to ask ourselves: "How should I treat the people in my life so that their eternal destiny is changed as a result of being my friend?"

It might seem that having relationships that change others' eternities is something for extroverts — but not as much for people who are more shy or introverted. We imagine that this is for the evangelists, for people who feel comfortable talking to strangers, or for people who can knock on doors and preach to anyone. But in fact, we all have relationships and friendships that occur naturally in the course of life — we have classmates, people we play sports with, friends from work, both close and distant relatives, childhood friends, and casual acquaintances. All of these are people whom we interact with as we live our lives, and whose eternities we can help change just by being their friend.

Christ's radical call to his followers isn't necessarily to knock on doors and evangelize in uncomfortable situations; Jesus Himself used relationships that developed naturally around Him to help bring people to God. So following Jesus in our relationships and friendships doesn't mean being weird, but rather having a different focus when we spend time with others.

Far from God

We have to think radically about our relationships with others, because most people around us are far from God and have never made the decision to enter into a relationship with Jesus. Think of the important people in your life. Isn't it true that many of them are far from God? Can you think of specific people — their names and faces — who are important to you, but whom you know aren't at peace with God?

In the Scriptures, God repeatedly says that since these people don't have a relationship with Him, they don't have the most important thing in life.

Ephesians 2.12

12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

On the Road to Eternity

Their problem is not only being far from God in this life; the situation is much more serious. Each day they live, they move a little closer to eternity: to God's judgment and to experiencing his terrible wrath.

Ephesians 2.1-3

1 As for you you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

See how severe God's judgment is against every person who isn't at peace with Him? Here Paul says that:

- They're spiritually dead.
- They follow Satan's leading.

Follow Me

- Their ultimate motivation is their own evil desires.
- They're objects of God's wrath.
- They're destined to be eternally punished.

A Heavy Burden

It's impossible to consider what God says about the people who are far from Him, without feeling pain and sadness. We start to think about the faces and names of our relatives and friends, and it hurts us immensely to think of the eternity of terrible punishment ahead of them.

Like Everybody Else

The irony is that the burden we feel for them usually doesn't affect how we act towards them, because generally speaking, Jesus's followers don't think about the eternities of the people in their lives. You could say that in our relationships we're not truly affected by the Gospel nor by what we know about God; we treat our relatives, co-workers, and friends pretty much like everyone else does.

Permanent

The truth is, we treat our friendships and relationships as if they were permanent, not thinking about life without them — they're part of our lives and our daily routines. We assume they're a permanent part of our lives. Think about your friends, relatives, and acquaintances: When was the last time you thought of the day that they would no longer be part of your life? Since we feel that our relationships are

permanent, we don't feel that much urgency to help the people in our lives enter into peace with God.

Aimless

What's more, we don't expect that by spending part of our life with them, we'll help them move closer to Jesus. We don't anticipate our acquaintances, relatives, or friends changing as a result of being part of our lives. (When was the last time you imagined how one of your friends would be transformed if they would just come to know Jesus?) Since we don't live with the expectation that we could actually bring them closer to God, we don't truly live with the purpose of helping them find peace with God.

False Illusions

These two ideas are illusions: We're gravely mistaken in our thinking about the people who are part of our lives. Our relationships aren't permanent, and we can help the people in our lives come to know God.

Deep down, we know our relationships aren't permanent — people who are part of our lives now quite possibly won't be in a year or two. Those who share their lives with us today, will tomorrow move, change jobs, or find new friends — not to mention the inevitable separation: death. For one reason or another, every relationship and friendship ends up being temporary.

Also people who spend time together always change each other; people in a group — whether of friends, co-workers, or relatives — begin to rub off on each other to the point that outsiders sometimes say, "They're all the same." Of course,

they're not exactly alike, but because they share their lives with one another, they all change. We change because of our friends, and they change because of us. Therefore, it's logical to think that we can bring our friends and family closer to God. It makes sense to believe that by sharing life with us, our friends could end up entering into a relationship with Jesus.

Think about how Jesus treated the people in his life: He knew the relationship He had with each person was temporary, and He obviously was convinced that by being with Him, those people could very well be transformed. Every time Jesus was with someone, his purpose was to help them come to know God; Jesus changed the world by forming relationships with people, because He took advantage of every friendship and every conversation to guide and to teach.

Main Idea:

A Relationship Is a Temporary Opportunity to Change Someone's Eternal Destiny

Our friendships are temporary and lead to changes, so every relationship a Christ-follower finds himself in is a temporary opportunity to change the eternal destiny of another person. This is a powerful idea! When we get a hold of this idea, we start to live radically within our relationships; this idea changes how we see our family, our work colleagues, school friends, siblings, and acquaintances.

Not an Accident

Thinking this way makes us realize God has put these people in our lives. It's no accident we live where we do, were born into our family, work where we do, play on the team we're on, sit next to the same people in class, or always go shopping with the same group of friends. God says all these details of life don't happen by accident, but rather are meant to help people search for Him.

Acts 17.26-27

26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

So every relationship and friendship we have is an opportunity for God to help someone move closer to Him.

You Can

Through this idea, we come to understand the great potential in our relationships. God has placed us with the people who share our lives, so that we can help them find peace with Him. This means, no matter how far our friends or relatives are from God, we can help change their eternity. The relationship we have with each of them is an opportunity to help them move from being objects of God's wrath to being his beloved sons and daughters.

Temporary

The only catch is that this opportunity to change our friends' and relatives' eternities is temporary; it won't last forever. As we've seen, every relationship ends or changes, so good friends and colleagues who are part of your life now, won't always be there. But today you have a chance to change their eternity. Later on, they'll move somewhere else, get another job, change schedules, or just move on in life.

Every relationship is an opportunity to change someone's eternity, but you only have this chance for a short while. It will pass, and once it does you won't be able to help these friends move any close to God.

Radical Relationships

This leads us to have radical relationships with all the people in our lives, and it changes how we see every person we come into contact with — from the barista at the coffee shop to our parents. It makes us feel an urgency to seize the opportunities we have with them, so they'll come to know God.

So, how do we take advantage of this opportunity? How do we live with the people God has placed in our lives in such a way that they come to know Him? We started this chapter by saying that we don't have to be weird to have an impact on the lives of the people around us; rather we fulfill Jesus's purpose for us in our relationships by having genuine friendships with an eternal purpose.

Genuine Friendships

Everything starts by having genuine friendships with anyone God puts in our lives. Every friendship is different, and we don't have to be best friends with every person we meet — however, we should be very friendly people. We should try to develop friendships with every person who crosses our path; because we don't know which of them we'll be able to help move closer to God. At the same time though, our friendships have to be genuine, because nothing alienates others from coming to faith in Jesus more than Christians who just want to “convert” them. When we become “salesmen for Jesus,” and manipulate or push those around us to make a decision for Christ, we just end up pushing them further away from a true relationship with Jesus. Instead of acting like salesmen, we should be the kind of friends who say, “Even if you never follow Jesus, we will be friends. I'm not your friend to sell you anything or convince you of something; I'm just your friend.”

So we enter into genuine friendships with everyone God puts in our lives. Paul describes this kind of friendship when he wrote to the church in Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 2.8

8 We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

In practical terms: we develop this kind of friendship with people by spending time together. A Christ-follower must spend a lot of time with non-Christians. We do this by

talking to, asking questions of, and demonstrating a genuine interest in the lives of the people around us.

An Eternal Purpose

It isn't enough just to have genuine friendships with people who are far from God; within these friendships, we need to always have an eternal purpose. The eternal purpose is the desire that the people in our lives come to know God. Our friendship doesn't depend on whether or not they make that decision — we'll be their friend even if they reject Christ; however our desire is for them come to know Jesus.

Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul described this type of purposeful, genuine friendship. I imagine that upon hearing these words, some of the Christians in Corinth thought about Paul's friendship with them. They now could see how this friendship resulted in their conversion to Christ.

1 Corinthians 9.19-23

19 Though I'm free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I'm not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I've become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Radical Relationships

In practical terms, having this purpose in our relationships means doing two things in every friendship we have:

- 1) **Pray:** When our purpose is helping our friends enter a relationship with God, we pray for them. There will be many times when they don't respond to the Gospel, or that we aren't even able to talk to them about the Gospel. However, we can always talk to God both about them and for them. We should pray daily for our relatives, friends, and acquaintances — that God would open their hearts and save them.
- 2) **Guide Them to Their Next Step:** Every person in our lives has a “next step” that will move them closer to God. We should seek the Spirit's guidance to know what their next step is, and always look for opportunities to help them take it. Each person's next step will depend on that person — the state of their relationship with God, and how open or closed they are to the Gospel. Sometimes, we'll need to help them work through figuring out a question they have about God; other times we'll need to study with them and explain how to have peace with God; still other times we'll need to invite them to a church service; and sometimes we'll need to talk with them about their doubts.

Having an eternal purpose in every relationship means always praying for our friends and relatives, and helping them take their next step towards God.

Eternally Changed

For the Christ-follower, every relationship we have with people is a temporary opportunity to change their eternity. This mentality leads us to live among the people of this world in such a way that their eternities do, in fact, change. By being in their lives for a time, by sharing our friendship with them, and by having an eternal purpose in this friendship, we do change the eternities of many of our friends and relatives.

Colossians 4.5

5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

Can you imagine the day when that co-worker asks you about your faith, and ends up going with you to worship with your church? Can you imagine when you're able to help that relative understand how to have peace with God, hear his words of repentance and be able to baptize him? This is exactly the kind of thing that happens when you live with the purpose of helping the people in your life come to know God — you help change their eternities!

Part 4

Connected to Jesus

So far, we've focused primarily on what Jesus's radical call requires of us. We've seen that it requires a lot; it's a high calling and hard to reach. Jesus gives us a very lofty goal: to change the world with Him by changing others' eternities.

If, as you read the description of the radical life Jesus asks of his followers, you've felt you could never live like that, you're absolutely right; we can't be radical on our own; we can't change anyone's eternity by ourselves. That's why Jesus never presented this call in terms of something his followers had to do alone. He didn't talk about just making a huge effort and working really hard; rather, He taught a lifestyle that his followers simply could not achieve by themselves.

The only way to live a radical life and truly change the world is to have a radical connection with God. When He taught, Jesus balanced the enormity of his call to his followers with the incredible power of being in a relationship with God,

Follow Me

because it's only through this relationship that we can have hope to achieve the huge goal of changing the world.

Paul described again and again this living connection between God and the Christ-follower; he stated that our work and our efforts are the result, or product, of this relationship:

Ephesians 3.20-21

20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Colossians 1.29

29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

1 Corinthians 15.10

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Paul worked hard, harder than the other apostles, but it wasn't his strength or power that accomplished the work; he was only able to change the world as a result of his relationship with God.

Yes, Jesus calls his followers to change the world, but He doesn't ask them to change it by themselves; He calls them

Connected to Jesus

to change the world with Him. Here we'll look at how He equips, prepares, and empowers us to change the eternities of the people around us.

Chapter 8

Supernatural Power

Jesus's call, as we've seen, isn't just to get saved, be a good person, attend church services, and live a normal life — his call is to follow Him. More specifically, his call is to change the world with Him. And He calls us to change the world by changing others' eternities. But there's a major obstacle in actually living out Jesus's call though — simply stated, we can't do it; Jesus asks something of us that we cannot accomplish.

We Can't Change the World

We actually can't change the world; we can't save anybody. So, when we hear Jesus's call, and then feel that being a world-changer is beyond us, we're absolutely right. Neither you nor I can do this. Sure, we have ideas of how we could do things that could change the world — we have dreams of helping certain people in our lives come to know God, and we see things we could do, like visiting or calling

somebody, asking someone to study the Bible, taking on more responsibility or leadership in the church, starting up a community group in our homes, preparing to plant a church, or moving to another country as a missionary. We're surrounded by opportunities to do more — opportunities to have an impact on the world, but those opportunities aren't the only things we see. The truth is that every time we see an opportunity to do more with Jesus, we also see why we aren't able to do so. We see what we can't do — and there's so much we can't do: It's hard to speak in front of others, lead a study, play music, write helpful studies or messages, start a church, or explain our faith to a friend.

Therefore, when Jesus presents us with an opportunity to do something with Him, we analyze it logically, looking at who we are and the abilities we do and don't have; and then more often than not, we see that we clearly can't do what Jesus asks, so we decide we have to say “no” to this opportunity.

We live logically: doing what we can do, and not trying to do what we can't do. And so we don't even try to do many of the tasks Jesus offers us: we don't ask our friend to study, don't start the small group in our home, don't take steps to plant a church, or don't accept the leadership we're offered.

So We Don't Change the World

And so we don't change the world. We live without really changing our world, and go through life seeing few people affected by our faith. We seldom have the privilege of leading a friend towards a relationship with God; we don't study with, baptize, or disciple others. We live a good life, but one without impact. Naturally there are exceptions, Christians

who leave their mark, who change others' eternities, but the majority of Christ-followers never experience this.

I don't mean to make us feel guilty or condemned. Remember the chapter about radical grace: God loves us because we're in Christ, not because of our good works. However, the reason we have to honestly look at how small an impact most Christians have, is because we live without experiencing the great purpose God has for his children. We go through life not enjoying the relationship with Christ that we only experience when we work with Him; we miss out on things like having the great privilege of baptizing a friend after studying with him, and seeing him start his new life as a child of God. When we don't fully follow Christ, our lives lose so much that God has for us.

The truth remains though: although we'd like to live such a life, we can't do many of the things Jesus asks of us. Honestly, his call to his followers seems unachievable.

Does He Ask the Impossible?

Could it be that when Jesus calls his followers to help Him change the world, He asks the impossible? He tells people who don't have the ability to effectively study with others, train them, be missionaries in their culture, or plant churches to go throughout the world, make other followers, and show them how to obey Him. We can't do it.

Jesus's call would be a cruel joke, if it weren't for the promise He also gives his followers: that He will equip his followers to do the job He asks of them. In other words, Jesus asks the impossible of his followers, and then gives them everything they need to accomplish what He's asked.

Main Idea:

God's Spirit Equips His Children to Be World-Changers

Jesus equips his followers to be able to fulfill the tasks He asks of them by giving them his Spirit. When God's child receives his Spirit, he's given the skills, time, and ability to help change others' eternities.

Strange and Mystical

Talking about the Holy Spirit can be a little weird, mainly because much of what we've seen others do in the name of the Holy Spirit can seem a bit out there. Many times, Christians attribute their strangest practices to the Holy Spirit. Various groups will shout, hit other people on the head, and fall to the floor, claiming that this is a manifestation of the Spirit. Other groups respond to craziness like this by avoiding the topic of the Spirit altogether.

So, much of the religious world is divided into two camps: those who do seemingly crazy things in the name of the Holy Spirit and those who virtually ignore the Spirit. Sadly, neither one is consistent with what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit. Time after time, the Bible says that what God's Spirit produces is meant to be helpful, not strange; everything He does has a purpose. For this reason, you'll never read in the Bible of the early Christians screaming, falling to the floor, or hitting each other on the head in the name of the Spirit. On the other hand, those who virtually ignore the Spirit also ignore the many scriptures that talk

about Him and the active role He plays in the Christian's life.

The Key

Properly understanding the Holy Spirit is the key to following Jesus; it's the key to having a living connection with Him that transforms us into world-changers; it's the key to having the ability to work with Jesus; and the key to having the confidence to decide to accept and start the work He gives us, work that's outside our capacity to accomplish.

Who is He?

To properly understand the Holy Spirit we must first answer the question "Who is He?" It's hard to have an accurate concept of the Holy Spirit precisely because his identity is that of a spirit. Perhaps we can better relate to God the Father and God the Son, because we understand the concept of fathers and sons: everyone has a father, and we're all sons and daughters. So, we can more easily understand the idea that God the Father is the best father in the universe, and God the Son is the only perfect child who has ever lived. But what do we do with God the Spirit? It's hard to understand what He's like.

He's God

From the very first verse of Genesis, the Bible reveals God as three Beings in one. This is the idea of the Holy Trinity: God is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. They're three distinct beings, but together they are God, and each one is a divine Being.

Genesis 1.1-2

*1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

1 John 5.6-8

6 This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it's the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

These two passages describe God the Father, God the Spirit, and God the Son as three individual Beings, who all together are God.

To put it simply, the Holy Spirit is God; He is the third member of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, He's as divine as God the Father or God the Son.

He's Very Real and Powerful

Since the Holy Spirit is God, He's extremely powerful. Although his identity can seem a little hazy and hard to grasp, his power is very real; the Holy Spirit is as real and as powerful as God the Father. When Jesus promised the coming of the Spirit to his followers, He told them He'd give them power from heaven — power only God could give.

Luke 24.49

49 I'm going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you've been clothed with power from on high."

The Holy Spirit's real, He's powerful, and He's God.

What's the Connection?

Exactly where is the Spirit? How does He relate to Jesus's followers? If his power is the key for us to be able to change the world with Christ, how do we get his power?

The Promise

Remember how Jesus began the Kingdom? He came to this world, became a man, and shared his life with his early followers. Before returning to Heaven, He instructed his followers to continue working with Him. Up until that point, they'd been working with Him through his power and presence; now, He said He was going away, but that his Spirit would take his place — He promised to send his Spirit to fill them with power.

Acts 1.4-9

4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." 6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He

said to them: "It isn't for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

Shortly after this, Jesus fulfilled his promise: He sent the Holy Spirit to his followers.

Acts 2.1-4

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

When Peter started to explain what was going on to the watching people, he used the words of the prophet Joel to explain that God had sent his Spirit to fill his children with power.

Acts 2.17-18

17 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

Supernatural Power

Now, it would be easy to say: “This was for the first followers of Christ, the apostles and early disciples”, however at the end of his speech, Peter said that the promise of Jesus’s Spirit would be for all who would decide to follow Jesus.

Acts 2.38-39

38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

If you’ve made the decision to believe in Jesus and have responded to Him through repentance and baptism, God says the promise of the Spirit is for you, as much as it was for Peter and the other disciples at the beginning. Jesus promises his Spirit will remain with his followers and give them his power, so that they can transform their world and bring salvation to those around them.

Inside Each Follower

So, where exactly is the Holy Spirit? How can a Christ-follower be connected to Him? Jesus said that after He sent his Spirit, the Spirit would be inside each of his followers — in other words, if you’re connected to Jesus, you have his Spirit within you.

John 7.37-39

37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the

Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit hadn’t been given, since Jesus hadn’t yet been glorified.

John 14.16-17

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world can’t accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Every son and daughter of God has the Spirit of God inside their soul.

What Does the Holy Spirit Do?

What does the Holy Spirit do in the Christ-follower? The New Testament describes all of his work in us. We won’t look at everything He does here; for the sake of brevity, we’ll only look at what He does that’s specifically related to equipping us to change the world.

Empowers

The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus’s followers with the power to do the difficult tasks He asks of us, even when it seems like we don’t have enough time or energy to accomplish them. Looking at the life of Christ is the best way to see an example of the power the Holy Spirit gives to Jesus’s disciples. How do you think Jesus was able to do everything

Supernatural Power

He did during his life? If your first instinct is to answer that it was because He's God, you're partially correct; however, don't forget that when Jesus came to earth as a man, He set aside many of the rights, privileges, and powers He had as part of the Godhead (see Philippians 2:6-8 and Hebrews 2). Luke's gospel shows that the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus throughout his ministry. Much, if not all, of what Jesus did during His lifetime was by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3.21-22

*21 When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened
22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I'm well pleased."*

At the start of his ministry, he received the Spirit, and Luke then repeatedly credits the Holy Spirit's power as he describes what Jesus did:

Luke 4.1-2

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

Luke 4.14-15

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

Luke 4.18-19

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he’s anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Jesus lived his life through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Then, when He instructed his followers to wait and not start their ministry until they had received power from the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8), his promise was that the Spirit would empower them, just as He had empowered Jesus.

Guides

Jesus promised that the same Spirit that would empower his followers would also guide them. Although Jesus was not going to be with them in person, the Holy Spirit would be their guide so they’d have all the knowledge they would need.

John 14.26

26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I’ve said to you.

What’s more, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would guide them in a personal way: He would be a connection between Jesus’s followers, and the mind and will of God.

Supernatural Power

John 16.13-15

13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He won't speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

Jesus promised that the Spirit would guide them in practical ways; He would even tell them what to say in the moments when they'd need to talk about Jesus:

Luke 12.11-12

11 When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.

The Holy Spirit guides God's sons and daughters, letting them know what to do, what to say, how to say it, when to speak, when not to speak, whom to talk to, and whom to pray for.

Gives Skills

Often the Spirit's guidance moves us to do things we aren't able to do; however, the same Spirit of God who is within each Christ-follower, gives us the skills to complete the tasks He assigns each of us. So, we can say "Yes" every time He gives us something to do, even if we know that we aren't able to do this with our own ability. The Spirit equips everyone who decides to follow Jesus.

1 Corinthians 12.1, 4-11

1 Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I don't want you to be ignorant.

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

So, the Spirit enables us to do what Jesus asks of us. Our inability to do something isn't an obstacle or reason for not obeying — if Jesus wants us to do something, his Spirit will give us the ability to do so.

Gives Capacity

One of the biggest barriers that blocks us from accepting the tasks that Jesus gives us is a lack of time. We think we don't have time in our schedule to do what he asks us to do. "I don't have time," is our magical excuse — it automatically frees us from the responsibility of analyzing the opportunity and discerning if Jesus really is asking us to do something, because if we don't have time, it simply isn't an option.

Supernatural Power

However, the Spirit gives us the ability to do more than we are humanly able: We say: “I don’t have time”; Jesus says, “I’m God, I can stretch your time so that you can do what I ask.”

Which is why in the middle of the text where He promises the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus also promises that his followers will do the same things He did — and even more.

John 14.12

12 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I’m going to the Father.

Often we don’t have enough time, but when we accept the tasks that God gives us, the Holy Spirit gives us more capacity. He helps us so that we can do more than seems possible.

Living Full of the Spirit

Jesus calls us to change the world by changing other people’s eternities, but we can’t change the world — only God can change hearts. Yet the Holy Spirit is God, and Jesus promises that the Spirit dwells within each of his followers, giving guidance, power, skills, and time, so that we can change the world with Jesus.

When we see this great power, we have to ask: “How do I live life full of the Holy Spirit? How do I live a life that’s full of his power? And, how can I be guided constantly by Him in my life?” We ask these questions because as we see the promise of the Holy Spirit, we also encounter the

Follow Me

reality that we often don't live lives filled with his power or guidance. Think about it: are you really living every moment filled with the power of the Holy Spirit? Do you hear his voice when you read the Bible? Would you say you feel his active guidance as you pray, think, and plan? And do you start projects in the Kingdom that you don't have the talent, the time, or the skills to undertake?

Sadly, much of what we do in this life is by our own strength. Many times, it's hard to think of something we've accomplished that could only have been done by the power of the Spirit. So, what can we do so that the power of God's Spirit flows through us and transforms our world?

Follow His Guidance

Many times, the Spirit will guide us to do what we aren't able to do. The best way to live a life full of his power is to follow his guidance — by starting the projects He moves us to do, talking to the people He puts in front of us, studying with others every time we have the opportunity, helping others, and giving to the needy. When He gives us tasks, we almost always look at what we don't have — talent, time, words, or will — but by following his guidance and beginning the task, we encounter his divine power that supplies all our needs and provides us with everything we need to complete the work He gives us.

Romans 8.14

14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

To live a life filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, we begin by following his guidance, not by looking at what we can't do.

Ask For More

The Bible clearly teaches that all God's sons and daughters have his Spirit (Romans 8:9 and Acts 2:38-39); what's interesting then is the instruction Jesus gives in Luke 11:

Luke 11.13

13 If you then, though you're evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Jesus says that if his followers ask, God will give them more of his Spirit. So clearly, Jesus is instructing his followers to actually ask God to give them more of his Spirit. And this is consistent with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 14.1

1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

Here, Paul instructs them to seek after the gifts of the Spirit; so we should regularly ask God to give us more of his Spirit. If we follow his guidance and begin the projects and tasks He asks of us, we'll always be aware of what we lack and of our need for more of his power, gifting, and guidance. Jesus gives us permission to ask God to give us more of his Spirit; He also gives us the promise that when we ask this of God, He'll grant our request.

Filled with Power

When we follow the Holy Spirit's guidance, take every opportunity He puts in front of us, and ask God to give us more gifts, skills, and power through his Spirit, Jesus truly will empower us to change the world with Him. We'll live lives of "only God" — lives we could only live if God were truly inside us, lives that can only be explained by the living power of the Holy Spirit. He is our connection to the full force of the power of God, and through his power we can truly change the world!

Chapter 9

Constant Communion

The Bible says again and again that the definition of following Christ is being a world-changer with Him — dedicating our lives to helping others enter into peace with God. The question you probably have is: “so, how do we change the world?” Just as a trip across the country requires a map and a plan, living radical lives and changing the world also requires a plan.

What is the strategy that yields the results Jesus asks of us? Rather than creating a plan, a series of techniques, or a strategy to change the world with Jesus, we ought to simply adopt the strategy Jesus already gave his followers. Before He died, Jesus laid out his strategy for how his followers would change the world: His plan of action was for his followers to live their lives in constant communion with Him.

Main Idea:

Our Strategy for Changing the World Is to Always Be Connected to Jesus

Jesus shared this strategy with his followers the night He was betrayed. He had just celebrated his last Passover meal with his disciples; and they were walking along the road to the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus was going to pray and where He would be arrested. Jesus explained how the relationship between He and them — and between his followers and his Father — would work; and He explained the relationship between communion with Him, and results in their ministry.

John 15.1-7

1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 you're already clean because of the word I have spoken to you (...)

He compares God to a gardener and Himself to a vine. He says that his followers are like the branches connected to the vine. This idea of the branch being connected to the vine, representing our connection to Jesus, is the big idea of this teaching.

4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I

Constant Communion

in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (...)

There it is: Jesus's strategy for his followers' ministry. Producing fruit (that is, changing the world with Him) depends on being connected to Him — and what's more, He promises we'll bear much fruit, if we simply remain in a relationship with Him.

6 If anyone doesn't remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned (...)

His strategy isn't one of several; we don't have the option of trying to do Jesus's work without being connected to Him. In fact, when we try to follow Him without being connected to Him, we fail miserably.

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

Again, He repeats this strategy; I think He knew that our tendency would be to rely on techniques of how to have studies, evangelize, plant churches, develop leaders, and minister — while neglecting our relationship with Him. So, He emphasizes that our communion with Him is what really determines whether we'll change the world with Him or not.

Our Communion

So, our communion with our Lord is the key to being able to do his work here on earth. That's why we should start by analyzing how healthy our communion with Christ is.

Remember, we follow Jesus by living our lives in connection with Him. This means so much more than just going to church and being a good person. It means living life close to Him; being connected, like the vine and the branches are connected. So, what is the state of our relationship with Jesus?

Sadly, our communion is often not what it should be; and frequently, it's far from what it could be. Generally speaking, those who say they're Jesus's followers do not live in constant communion with Him. Instead of a close relationship with Him, we add a little bit of God to our lives — by going to church, and sometimes reading the Bible and praying, but we spend a good part of our Christian lives feeling alienated from God. We don't live in constant communion with Jesus, and so we feel alone, overwhelmed by life, and lacking the peace and happiness we could have by being in a relationship with Him.

How Do We Live in Communion with Jesus?

What does it mean to live in communion with Jesus? Being in communion with Jesus isn't just going to church and being good: Living in a relationship with our Savior means staying connected to Him by entering into a relationship with Him, always listening to his voice, talking to Him, obeying what He says, and seeking Him by fasting.

By Entering

Logically, in order to be in a relationship with Jesus, we have to enter into one. In the book of Acts, there is example after example of people entering into a relationship with Jesus. In each case, the person entered by making a decision: they believed in Jesus and the message of the Gospel, and out of this belief — or faith — they decided to follow Jesus by repenting and being baptized.

Acts 2.38

38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

So, to be in a relationship with Christ, you have to make the decision to follow Him; this decision is made by repenting and being baptized.

By Listening

Also, to live in communion with Jesus, it’s essential to listen to his voice — paying attention when He speaks. By definition, being in a relationship means being in communication, and Jesus Himself spoke of how important it would be for his followers to listen to Him:

John 15.7

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

This verse also shows the importance of listening to Jesus by reading the Bible, because Jesus talks to us through the

words of the Bible. Paul says the Bible is inspired by God and is the word of God.

2 Timothy 3.16-17

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We know Jesus talks to us when we read the Bible, because the Word of God isn't just any book — it's a living book. Because it's alive, as we read it the Spirit of God speaks to us through the words written by his inspiration.

Hebrews 4.12-13

12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

God speaks to us when we read the Bible. It's his living Word. Since we stay close to Jesus by listening to Him, we should read the Bible every day, throughout the day. And each time we read, Jesus speaks to us and our relationship with Him grows and becomes stronger.

By Talking

If one component of communication is listening, the other piece is speaking. In order to have a real relationship with Jesus, we have to converse with Him. And to actually converse with Him, we must hear his voice and talk to Him. Another word for talking to God is ‘prayer’. Unfortunately, religion has taught us that prayer is something we do in the morning, or at bedtime. We’ve learned that prayer is an act we perform, totally apart from the rest of our lives. But, Jesus taught something different; He told his followers that they should talk to God about every area of their lives:

Matthew 6.9-13

9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come your will be done, on earth as it’s in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Rather than being an isolated activity, He was saying that our prayers should be a constant conversation with our Father (Luke 11:5-13). And Paul taught the same thing — just more concisely — when he said:

1 Thessalonians 5.17

17 pray without ceasing,

Prayer should be an informal conversation with our Lord, Jesus, and with our Father, God. We should talk to God constantly; just like everyone always sends texts to their

friends, we should always be talking to Jesus. Sometimes we talk to Him out loud and other times we talk in our minds; sometimes we thank Him and sometimes we ask Him to do things; sometimes we ask for guidance and other times we express our deepest anguish. We should talk to Jesus like we'd talk to a good friend.

By Following His Guidance

Communicating with Him, by talking and listening to Him, is our main way of staying close to Jesus. However, we can still miss something that's very important in having true communion with Christ, namely following Him. We're not in communion with Jesus if we only listen to Him, but don't obey what He says.

As we spend time listening and talking to Jesus, He tells us specific things to do: changes to make in our lives, sins we should let go, money we should give away, work with other people we should be starting. The true test of our communion with Jesus is the way we respond when we hear his voice; Jesus said part of being in a relationship with Him is obeying Him.

John 15.9-10

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

We often don't obey when Jesus talks to us. Instead of obeying, we either:

Constant Communion

- avoid changing by focusing on another area of our lives.
- ignore Him by not thinking about the task He has given us.
- delay our obedience by procrastinating — saying “yes, but later”.
- make excuses to justify our disobedience.

Being in a relationship with Jesus requires that we obey his voice — of course, we never obey perfectly (which is why He constantly offers us grace and forgiveness); however, Jesus does expect his followers to focus their lives on listening to Him and obeying what He says. This is part of being in a relationship with the Son of God; when He speaks, his followers obey.

By Fasting

From the beginning, fasting has been a way to experience deeper communion with God. Fasting is simply not eating — it could be for one meal, a day, or a week, and during this time focusing on reading the Bible and praying. Jesus said that fasting would be a normal part of his followers’ spiritual practices.

Mark 2.19-20

19 And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

When we fast we enter into deeper communion with Christ, because fasting brings more intensity to our communication with God. Also, in fasting we experience more clarity and focus as we listen to Jesus.

More Communion?

As we conclude this chapter, we should ask ourselves: how can I live in deeper communion with Jesus?

- Have you decided to enter a relationship with Christ by believing in Him, repenting, and being baptized?
- Can you spend more time throughout each day listening and talking to Jesus?
- Is there something He's asked you to do that you haven't done yet?
- Do you regularly fast?

When we take the next step to be closer to Jesus, we enter into deeper communion with Him. His promise to us (that when we're in a relationship with Him, our lives will bear much fruit in his Kingdom) becomes real. In other words, when we live close to Jesus, we'll help many others come to know Him as well.

Epilogue: Radical Challenge

Saved, Good, and Normal?

Following Christ doesn't mean just being saved, good, and normal. Jesus gives a radical call for us to follow Him, and following Him means living life imitating Him — it means living with a purpose; loosing your life to accomplish his mission.

Before finishing this book, let's take a quick look back at what we've seen:

Called to Be a World-changer

Following Jesus means giving your life to change the world with Him. Truly changing the world, means changing the eternal destiny of others.

The reason we live radical lives should be to give glory to God, and it should be because of the grace we've received from Him, not an attempt to pay for our salvation.

Through his Holy Spirit and through constant communion with Him, God equips his children to change the world.

Practically Speaking

What does the radical life of a Christ-follower look like practically?

- Someone who's truly following Christ devotes radical time to Jesus's Kingdom.
- Someone who truly follows Christ is radically generous with their money.
- Someone who truly follows Christ sees every relationship he has as an opportunity to help the other person come to know Jesus better.

What's Your Next Step?

Having looked at Jesus's call, what do you need to change in your life to follow Jesus more fully? What is your next step?

Different for Everyone

If you've never made the decision to follow Jesus, your next step is to do so, by repenting and being baptized (Acts 2:38).

If you're living a comfortable Christian life, your next step is to change what you think following Jesus means: you do this by accepting the reality that following Christ means living a life radically surrendered to his purposes. You need to identify how to more fully devote every area of your life — your time, your money, and your relationships — to Christ. Listen to the Spirit as He guides you down the path of totally surrendering these areas of your life to Jesus.

If you're already trying to radically follow Christ, your next step is to raise your level of commitment and devotion. We

always need to ask ourselves how we can spend more time with Jesus, what else is the Spirit leading us to do, how can we give more time and money to building Jesus's Kingdom, and how we can help others take their next step closer to Jesus.

Taking the Next Step

Once you know your next step, God expects you to take it. Don't wait any longer to radically follow Christ with your whole life!

The Best Life

Living a life that is completely surrendered to Jesus's mission is the absolute best life anyone could live! By joining your life to Jesus, you become part of something much bigger than your own life could ever amount to: you're sacrificing your life to be part of the redemption and restoration of the world; you're working with Jesus; you're helping to build his eternal Kingdom, rather than living to build your own temporary kingdom; you're storing up treasures in heaven, by helping others come to know Jesus; you're helping people around you enter into peace with God and obtain salvation, which is in Christ.

Jesus calls you: He says, "Follow me." How will you respond?