

Yes, but...

*The barriers that prevent us
from radically following Jesus,
and how to overcome them*

YES, BUT...

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Ephesians 6:10-12

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

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Preface

Originally, this book was going to be the last part of *Follow Me* — which is another book that I wrote. In *Follow Me*, I explain the radical call that Jesus makes to all of his followers, and at the end, I was going to give some of the excuses and reasons we give for not accepting his call. However, as we were editing *Follow Me*, it struck me that these last chapters revolved around their own theme, and as such deserved their own book. *Yes, But...* is this book.

It is my desire that this book would help us confront the different excuses and barriers that come between us and accepting Jesus's radical call, so that we would be able to follow our Savior in the way that He asks.

Philip Canarsky

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Introduction

The common definition of a Christian is someone who is saved, who is well-behaved, and who goes to church. In reality, Jesus's call was (and still is) to follow Him. Jesus calls everyone to be his follower — or disciple.⁽¹⁾

Jesus's True Call

Following Jesus means becoming more and more like Him: living as He lived, and doing what He did. Jesus lived his life with the great purpose of bringing the Kingdom of God to this world. So then, being Jesus's follower means dedicating one's life to changing the world with Him.⁽²⁾ Following Christ means devoting oneself to working with Jesus in his mission of bringing people into peace with God. Truly following Jesus means giving everything we are — our time, money, and effort — to becoming like Him and to working with Him.⁽³⁾

It's worth clarifying that following Jesus like this isn't a legalistic endeavor; it isn't a way of working to gain his favor

(1) *Mark 1:17*

(2) *Luke 9:23-25*

(3) *Matthew 28:18-20*

and forgiveness. Rather, this lifestyle is the only appropriate response to the grace of God;⁽⁴⁾ we love because He first loved us;⁽⁵⁾ He died so that his followers would live for Him.⁽⁶⁾ We give maximum glory to our Father with our lives when we devote ourselves to working with Jesus.⁽⁷⁾

The Barriers

At times we don't follow Jesus like He asks because we haven't heard his true call; we don't realize that being in a relationship with Jesus means much more than being saved, being good, and going to church services.

However, even when we truly hear Jesus's call, most of the time we don't end up following Him completely. Barriers arise, and we end up not giving our whole life to change the world with Christ. This is exactly what happened during Jesus's life as well.⁽⁸⁾

Breaking Down the Barriers

In this book, we will look at some of the most common barriers to following Jesus; we will look at the source of these barriers — where they come from; and we will look at how to break down these barriers. We will do this so that we can truly follow Jesus, and at the end of our journey, hear our Lord's words of approval:

(4) *Romans 12:1*

(5) *1 John 4:19*

(6) *2 Corinthians 5:14-15*

(7) *John 15:8*

(8) *Luke 9:57-62*

Introduction

Matthew 25:21

21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

Chapter 1

Diminished Capacity

Barriers always arise when Christ's Spirit guides one of His followers to move forward, to start a new work in his Kingdom, to take the risk of talking with a friend about Him, or to do anything new for Him. These barriers are obstacles that attempt to block us from working with Jesus and truly following Him.

More Than a Coincidence

There are some common barriers that everyone tends to experience in one moment or another, but we always think that our situation is special. We don't realize that the same explanation or excuse for not following Jesus's guidance that seems so valid to us, is the same barrier that many other Christians also feel. What's interesting is that one of these common barriers always appears every time we feel the Holy Spirit giving us a nudge to do something new.

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It isn't a coincidence that these barriers always appear when we hear the call to devote ourselves more to Jesus's mission.

The Real Reason

There is a reason why the same barriers always come up when the Holy Spirit attempts to move God's children to change the world with Jesus. It is that there is a powerful being who actively opposes God's sons and daughters when they try to live lives of purpose.

This being is Satan, and his primary purpose is to block God's work. He does this by trying to obstruct God working through his children. His goal is that God's children merely live well-behaved, normal, and impotent lives.

Main Idea: Satan Wants to Diminish Your Capacity to Change the World

Satan's story is interesting. The Bible tells parts of it in passages such as Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:11-19.

The short version of the story is as follows: Satan was once an archangel. His name was Lucifer. The Bible says he was extremely beautiful and powerful. However, he became filled with pride, and rebelled against God. There was a great battle in heaven between God and his angels, and Satan and the angels that took his side. At the end of the battle, God vanquished Satan to earth.

Now this being battles against God. He actively opposes all that God wants to do, both in this world and in the entire universe.

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Revelation 12

17 Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

Our Enemy

When we become children of God, God's enemy also sees us as his enemies. The Bible teaches that a war is happening around us in this world all the time. There are two sides in this war: God, his angels, and his sons and daughters are positioned on one side, and on the other side is Satan, his angels, and his demons.

Ephesians 6:10-12

*10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.
11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

During this life, Satan is our enemy. Not only is he opposed to God, but he also opposes all that God's sons and daughters try to do with their Father.

His Purpose

The desire of our enemy is to diminish the impact that we have in this world. It is to discourage, distract, and tempt us so that we don't focus on following Jesus's call. It is to make us become good people who live normal, comfortable

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lives, instead of people who live radical lives and change the eternal destiny of others.

After describing the spiritual battle that surrounds God's children, Paul instructs us to pray. He reveals our enemy's purpose in what he asks us to pray for. He says that we must fight against our enemy by asking God to work, and that his work would continue to go forward, through us. By asking us to pray for this, he reveals that the purpose of our enemy is that God's work wouldn't advance.

Ephesians 6:18-20

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

God is working in this world so that mankind would be reconciled with Him. Satan wants to stop God's work. That's why his purpose is to diminish the impact of God's children in this world.

He Steals

Every day that we exist as merely good and normal Christians, Satan is moving us away from fulfilling God's purpose. When we don't live radical lives completely surrendered to Jesus and when we don't invest our lives in helping others come to know God, we lose so much. We miss out on the extraordinary life that God has for us. We

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miss out on the opportunity to guide others into a living relationship with God. We end up experiencing what Jesus said when he described Satan as a thief who comes to steal.

John 10:10

10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Satan wants to take from us the great joy of living with the same purpose that our Father has. He is a thief. Instead of changing the world with Jesus, he wants us to settle for living comfortable, normal lives. The thief turns us into good, normal, and spiritually impotent people.

His Strategies

The enemy uses a variety of strategies to reduce our ability to change the world. God warns us that we should know what the strategies that our enemy uses against us are.

2 Corinthians 2:11

11 so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

When we know what Satan's strategies are, we can resist him and fight against him. We can follow Jesus, change the world with Him, and not be distracted or diverted by the enemy.

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The Barriers

Throughout the rest of this book, we will look at some of the most common strategies the enemy uses to diminish our capacity to change the world; we will look at the most common barriers he puts in our way when we hear Jesus's call; and we will look at how to overcome them and live as people who truly change the world with Jesus!

Chapter 2

Persistent Sin

Persistent sin is a huge barrier that Satan puts in our way of following Jesus. Our sin becomes an enormous obstacle between us, and living a life radically committed to Jesus.

We Live with Sin

When we think about sin, we shouldn't just think about the "really bad people who sin"; rather, we must think about ourselves, because each one of us sins. We all live with sin in our lives, which is why it is uncomfortable to talk about sin.

Persistent Sin

The reality is that all Christ-followers have persistent sins which are part of their life, their character, and their routine. They are sins that are committed repeatedly; that's what makes them persistent sins. Our persistent sin is that sin

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that we do over and over again; that sin we feel that we can never get away from; that sin that even defines our identity.

We Need It

Because our persistent sin is part of who we are, we feel that this sin identifies us; that it fulfills a need we have; that it's part of our lives; that it is what we use to get through life.

So then, it is difficult to even imagine life without this sin. We desperately struggle to justify it. We feel anguish when we think about stopping it. We believe the lie: "I just can't live without this."

We Love It

We are mesmerized by our sin. It's what we really want in life. It's what gives "joy" or "peace" to our being. We look to our sin to satisfy us and make us feel complete. It isn't enough to merely say that we like our persistent sin. It would be more correct to say that we love it.

Bigger Than Just Us

When we think of our sins, we tend to get defensive and start to justify the bad things we do. We even come to believe that our sins are not so bad. We focus on our desires. We talk about our rights. Sometimes, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, we blame others for our sin. We focus on us, our sin, and how changing it would affect our lives.

The reality is that our sin does not just have to do with our own lives. Let's not forget that Satan is doing everything he can to diminish our capacity to change the world. More than

anything else that it might be, our sin is a potent weapon in the hands of our enemy. He uses our sin to pull us away from the radical life that God desires for his children.

We Don't See a Connection

We love our sin persistent so much that we have difficulty seeing the connection between it, and the desire of our enemy to decrease our ability to change the world. We believe that our sin does not affect us that much. We don't realize that Satan uses our sin to keep us useless in God's hands.

Sin Is ...

To understand the power of sin, we have to begin to see what sin really is. Sin is a broad category that includes many actions, thoughts, emotions, and words. The most concise definition of sin is simply disobeying God. So then, we sin when we do something God has forbidden. We also sin when we don't do something that God asks us to do.

Since it is disobedience, all sin is rebellion against God. When we sin, we are saying to God: "I don't care what you want for me or you ask of me. I'll do whatever I want."

The Bible gives many examples of sins. In fact, God is very specific in revealing his will for us. For example, in Ephesians 4 and 5, there is a large list of different sins. Here, the apostle Paul names many sins, including:

- Lying
- Stealing
- Not sharing with those in need

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- Sinning in anger
- Speaking evil
- Insulting someone
- Getting drunk
- Bitterness, anger, and screaming
- Sexual impurity
- Coveting things one doesn't have

Even without reading this list, there is something inside us that makes us know that we are doing something wrong when we do the things God has forbidden. Our problem isn't that we don't know what God wants, but that it is difficult for us to obey Him.

His Strategy

Since our sin is rebellion against God, Satan knows that if he can get it into our lives, it will block us from working with God. We can not completely serve God when we are actively rebelling against Him. So, our persistent sin becomes a huge barrier to living a radical life with God.

Main Idea: Our Disobedience Blocks Us

Our sin doesn't just have to do with our desires and our rights. The reality is that our persistent sin prevents us from living the radical life to which Jesus calls his followers.

The real reason why most of us, during much of our life, don't have the impact that we could have as world changers, is simply that: We live with persistent sin that the enemy uses to decrease our ability to change the world.

It Limits Potential

Our sin blocks us from living a radical life because it limits our potential. In his second letter to young Timothy, the apostle Paul describes the effect of sin on the life of a Christ-follower.

2 Timothy 2:20-21

20 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. 21 If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

Here, Paul uses a metaphor of the utensils and dishes that are found in a kitchen. In a large kitchen, there are dishes, tools, buckets, utensils, and basins. Some, like the fine silverware, china plates, expensive pots and pans, and crystal glasses, are very valuable and extremely useful. Other things, in the same kitchen, are not as valuable. They serve more of a common purpose — things such as garbage cans, forks and spoons, wooden spoons, and the old, well-worn pans.

The comparison between kitchen utensils and people in Jesus's Kingdom is straightforward. Everyone in the kingdom is valuable. However, the apostle Paul is saying that some people are more useful than others. This doesn't make them more important nor more loved by God, they are simply more valuable in the sense that they are more useful in Jesus's hands. They are the people that Jesus can use to change the world.

Yes, But...

It's not luck that creates this difference between people. Many times, what makes one person useful and another not so useful, is the persistent sin in each person's life. No one will ever be perfect, but the more we leave our persistent sins behind, the more useful we will be in Jesus' hands.

Why Is It a Barrier?

There are many good reasons why our sin is a barrier between us and being useful to Jesus. Let's look at three of the biggest reasons that persistent sin diminishes our capacity in Jesus's Kingdom:

1. You Don't Win Anyone with Hypocrisy

When we say we know God and follow Jesus, and at the same time lie, gossip, are bitter, drink too much, are sexually impure, or practice any other sin, in reality we aren't demonstrating a relationship with God. What we show all who observe our life is religion, but not a relationship with the Almighty Being who transforms us.

The people in our lives who are looking for an authentic relationship with God see this hypocrisy and run — they don't listen to us nor want what we have. They know that if we really knew God, we would live very differently.

This isn't saying that Christians should hide their sins in order to appear to be perfect. Rather, we should be open with our imperfect state. We shouldn't pretend that we have everything under control and that we don't struggle with anything. The truth is, this struggle is evidence to a non-Christian of our authentic relationship with God.

What alienates those who do not know God is when those who profess to be God's children live openly, habitually, and comfortably in persistent sin. It's when they see Christians who live in the same sins year after year, without seeing any confession, repentance, or evidence of a struggle to change.

Our persistent sin alienates others from God, and therefore limits how God can use us to bring them into his family.

2. You Can't Give What You Don't Have

You cannot lead another to a place where you, personally, are not. It is difficult to help someone else enter into a relationship with Jesus, if your relationship with Jesus is distant and ineffective. If you are not experiencing the transforming power of Jesus in your life, it is challenging to lead another person to experience this power. In other words you cannot lead someone into a transforming relationship with Jesus, if you are not involved in a relationship with Jesus in which you are being transformed.

This doesn't mean that you have to be perfect before helping someone else come to know God. That would be impossible. Nobody would be able to lead others to Jesus. However, if you are living in persistent sin, then you are not experiencing the relationship with Jesus that you could have. It is difficult to take another to a place where you aren't.

3. They Move You Away from God

Perhaps the biggest reason that our sin limits us from being used by God, is that our sin is rebellion against God. When we live with persistent rebellion against God, we gradually move away from God. Practicing the same sin repeatedly —

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without confession, without remorse, and without fighting against it, has the effect of hardening our heart more and more — we move away from God.

The more we move away from God, the less He can use us to change the world. Our persistent sin becomes a huge barrier between us, and the life of impact that God wants his children to live.

Radical Holiness

The solution to this satanic barrier is radical holiness. Holiness is the opposite of sin. It is obeying God. It is becoming like Jesus. If we really want to follow our Lord and live radical lives, we must pursue radical holiness. The only way our enemy can't limit us with sin, is for us to fight valiantly against our persistent sin.

Paul identifies this same strategy when he encourages Timothy to be a useful person in God's hands. In the verses surrounding his metaphor of special and common kitchen utensils, he reveals the key to being useful to Jesus.

2 Timothy 2:19 & 22

19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

22 Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

The way to be useful to God is to flee from the sins that contaminate us and block us from being radical followers. The only thing that protects us from the barrier of sin is a radical commitment to be like Jesus.

How to Fight

We fight our persistent sin by constantly being in a process of purification. The Holy Spirit cleanses us as we do the following:

- 1) Identify our persistent sin. We cannot fight our sin if we do not know what our persistent sin is. We identify it by examining our lives, reading the Bible, and asking the Holy Spirit to make us conscious of our sin. The Christian always should be aware of his persistent sin. Of course, as he fights against this sin, he will overcome it. Then it will be time to ask once again: "What is the persistent sin in my life now?"
- 2) Confess our sin. Confessing is recognizing the sin we have committed. First of all, we confess our sin to God. It is also important to confess to other trustworthy Christians. In James 5:16, the Bible says that by confessing to another person, God breaks the power that our sin has over us.
- 3) Believe the Gospel. This part of the process is crucial in order to not fall into pride, legalism, condemnation, nor license in our fight against sin. In fighting our weakness, we have to remind ourselves of the Gospel

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over and over again: that Christ came into this world, became a man, was tempted in every way but lived his life without sin, died in our place paying the price for our sin, and was resurrected from the dead. The Gospel gives us the promise of complete forgiveness, in spite of not deserving it. It protects us from condemnation when we struggle and we fail, by giving us confidence before God. It protects us from legalism and pride by giving us the courage to admit our weakness. It protects us from license by reminding us of the example of Jesus' life, of the price He paid for our sin, and of the Father's approval that we have in Him.

- 4) Attack our sin with all the strength that God gives us. We attack sin by saying "no" to temptation. We attack it by avoiding the places where we are tempted. We attack it by filling our mind and heart with the Word of God. We attack it by praying when we feel weak. Fighting against our flesh and our sin is every Christian's continual battle.

No Condemnation

As we fight against our sin, we must not allow the enemy's condemnation to prevent us from living a radical life. Our enemy is cunning. When we start to fight against our persistent sin, he begins to accuse us, and to remind us of every time we have failed. He shows us all of our failings. As he does this, we easily start to believe that there is no

Persistent Sin

way we could have victory over our sin nor be used by God. If he can't keep us trapped in persistent sin, he will bind us up with guilt.

We have to remember that God says there is no condemnation for his sons and daughters.

Romans 8:1

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesús.

The purpose of this chapter is to make us see how our persistent sin blocks the work of God in our lives. But everything changes when we actively battle against our sin, this barrier is broken down — even though we never achieve absolute perfection in our lives. There is no condemnation. We receive forgiveness in Christ. God can use us more and more to change the world.

Productivity Flows

When we fight against our persistent sin, we open the door for God to work mightily through us. We begin to change the world with our Father. We enter into the radical life of a Christ follower. As we leave more and more of our sin behind, we become more and more productive in the Kingdom of our Lord. Every time we are freed from a persistent sin, God uses us more than before to help others come to know Him.

Chapter 3

The Lie of Balance

The next barrier we'll look at is very subtle. In fact, we probably would never think of this as a barrier to working with Jesus. In part, that's because it's not something we do, rather it is a way of thinking. It's a way of seeing life. It's a mindset that affects how we live.

This barrier is the idea that we must live balanced lives. It's very subtle, yet extremely dangerous. When we start to believe that our life should be balanced, we will automatically stop pursuing a radical life. Think about it: Jesus calls his followers to live lives radically devoted to his purpose to save others. However, if we think we must maintain balance in our lives, we will never give ourselves radically to this cause.

A Tempting Idea

The idea of having a perfectly balanced life is a really tempting idea. We would like to believe that we are able to

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divide our time and attention impartially between different tasks and priorities in life. This is because we have so much we need to do:

- Work to be able to eat and survive
- Care for our family: our marriage and children
- Run errands and buy the groceries
- Study and learn
- Relax by playing and being entertained
- Spend time with friends

We think that if we could only divide our time between our different tasks, it would all work out and we would be able to accomplish everything we need to do.

We Seek Balance

So, we spend our lives seeking balance. We work, but not too much — we don't want to be workaholics. We play, but within certain limits — so that we avoid wasting too much time playing. We spend enough, but not too much, time with our children and spouse.

We do a bit of everything because we want to accomplish it all. We think that by being balanced, we are being responsible.

Balance and Jesus's Call

When we hear Jesus talk about changing the world, we immediately try to find balance. We feel that we have to balance his demands with the rest of our lives. We look at what He requires of his followers, and try to figure out how

to integrate it into our balanced life, as if it were just another task.

We Don't Want to Be Radical

We want to follow Christ, we want to be God's children, we want salvation, but we don't ever want to lose the balance in our lives. We struggle our whole life to achieve this balance.

Everyone — ourselves included — expects us to be balanced people. So, the idea of giving ourselves radically to God is scary. We want to have enough of God in our lives to be saved and to become good people, but not so much that He consumes our whole life.

A Good Excuse

In the name of being balanced, we don't accept radical challenges. Being balanced becomes a good excuse to say "no" when opportunities to change the world with Christ are presented to us. In our culture, no one blames us for wanting to maintain balance in our lives. We have come to expect that following Jesus means living a normal life, and adding a bit of Christianity. Maintaining the balance between all the important things in our lives is the universally accepted excuse for not being radical.

Everything in Moderation

We come to God with the attitude: "I'll have a little bit of God, but everything in moderation." We don't want to overdo it. We don't want to be one of "those fanatical people". We go to church, we are saved, but we would never be radical.

An Impossible Goal

The irony of this barrier is that the idea of a balanced life is an illusion that we will never achieve. Trying to have a balanced life is an impossible goal. We reject the radical call of Jesus because we want to maintain balance in our lives; but in reality, we never lived balanced lives.

It Can't Be Done

No one can perfectly balance everything in their life. The longer we live, the more we realize that our life will never be balanced. No matter how much we try to equally divide our energy and time among all the things that are important to us, we never reach the goal of having a completely balanced life.

Unbalanced

The reality of our lives is that we give most of our time, passion and resources to two or three activities or priorities — and we virtually ignore everything else. In other words, we focus on what we are most interested in, and we do the minimum necessary to meet the other demands of life. We don't live balanced lives.

In fact, we all live very in-balanced lives. The truth is that they are out of balance in favor of our lives, our preferences, our passions, our desires, and our kingdom — instead of our Lord's Kingdom.

Costly

For Christians, it is very costly to pursue the goal of a balanced life. By saying "no" to radical opportunities in the name of balance, we miss out on the opportunity to change the world with Jesus. We forsake our purpose in this world as God's children. We end up living normal lives, instead of radical lives.

Main Idea: The Life of a Christ-follower Should Be Primarily Focused on Jesus's Mission

Jesus calls his followers to a life that is the opposite of a balanced life. It is a life focused on his Kingdom. It is a life that is out of balance. It is a life that is primarily centered around changing the world with Him.

Jesus describes this out-of-balance life in Matthew 6. He starts by talking about all the demands and needs we have in our lives: food, drink, clothing, etc. Then, he promises that God takes care of his children. Finally, He ends by saying what the focus of his followers' lives should be.

Matthew 6:33

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

After having recognized the demands and necessities of life, Jesus says that we should put our focus on Him and his Kingdom first, or primarily. He calls his followers to live a life that is out of balance, a life focused on his purpose in the world.

Radical Devotion

In the middle of a world that is worried about maintaining balance in life, Jesus calls his followers to be radically surrendered to Him. In the middle of a world preoccupied with the needs and tasks of life, Jesus calls his followers to a life that is completely focused on something entirely different.

Not Irresponsibility

I should clarify and say that Jesus doesn't call his followers to a life of irresponsibility. At one time, Jesus said we have to pay our taxes. The apostle Paul said that if a man doesn't work, then he shouldn't eat. He also said that if a man doesn't provide for his household, he is worse than a pagan.

Living a radical life doesn't mean we say: "I'm focused on the Kingdom, I have no time to work and pay my bills." Living a radical life is working, paying bills, taking care of the household, and being responsible, while not completely focusing our life on these temporary things. It is living as a responsible person, while directing our primary focus, passion, and energy on Jesus' mission.

He Never Asks for Balance

A couple of years ago, I started observing the natural tendency for us to seek balance in life. I discovered that my own inclination, and that of those around me, is to try to keep everything in perfect balance. At first glance, it seems to be the most logical way to live.

The Lie of Balance

However, what surprised me is that I also started discovering that Jesus never asked his followers to live balanced lives. Jesus never promoted a balanced life among his followers. Rather, in all his teachings of what it means to follow Him, He asked for the exact opposite. Jesus asks his followers to live lives that are radically out of balance in favor of his Kingdom.⁽¹⁾

What Should We Do?

On the one hand, we have a world and a culture that pressures us to live a balanced life. If our life is out of balance, we are told that it isn't good for us. If we focus too much on Jesus and his Kingdom, we are called fanatics.

On the other hand, our Lord calls us to live a radical life. How do we obey what He asks of us?

Accept Being Out of Balance

If we truly want to follow Jesus, there is only one solution: we must accept a lack of balance in our lives. We have to accept that when we follow Jesus, our life will always be out of balance. We must accept that we will be more focused on the mission of our Lord than on anything else in life. We will give many of the important things in life a certain level of priority, but it will be a low priority. The only thing that will have the highest priority is working with Jesus.

(1) Luke 9:23-25, Luke 9:57-62, and Luke 14:25-33

Yes, But...

We Will Change the World

When we accept the out of balanced life of a Christ-follower, we will put our focus more and more on his Kingdom and his mission. The more we do this, the more we change the world with our Lord.

At the same time, we also experience the hand of our Father in our lives. Look again at Matthew 6:33. Do you see how it ends? Jesus says that as we focus primarily on his Kingdom, God takes care of us. We don't have to find balance in life, because we have a Father who provides for us. This gives us security in the midst of an out of balanced life.

Chapter 4

The Illusion of Security

Our desire to have security in our lives is one of the biggest reasons we do not live as radical world changers. Seeking safety is an enormous barrier that Satan uses to distract us from fully following Jesus.

I Want Security

Having security is a basic need that we as human beings have. In fact, security is often what we want most in life.

We want economic security. Economic security is being comfortable enough that we feel that no matter what happens in life, we'll be fine. It's having money in the bank; it's having everything paid for; it's preparing for expenses in advance; it's never having to go without and never being in danger of not having enough.

We want physical security. It's knowing that the police are controlling crime; it's wanting to not live in dangerous

Yes, But...

neighborhoods; it's putting on our seatbelts in the car; it's not going to dangerous places. We want to feel that we are safe.

We want our health to be secure as well. We exercise. We eat well. We go to the doctor for regular checkups. We want to protect our lives and our health. What's more, we buy health insurance and life insurance, just in case all else fails us.

We also want relational security. We want to be sure that the important people in our lives will always be there. So, we work to take care of our marriage, we invest in the lives of our children, and we try to develop friendships. We want the security of knowing that nothing will happen to damage these important relationships.

Not Something Bad

Our desire to seek security for ourselves and our family is not, in itself, a bad thing. It is good to work, to save, to be careful, to eat right, to exercise, and to take care of our marriage and our children. In and of itself, our desire to have security is positive. It produces responsible habits in our lives.

I Can Be Safe

As we chase after security, we start to believe that we actually can be completely safe. We think that it is actually possible to eliminate risk from our lives.

We think that if we make wise decisions and live responsibly, that we will be able to control our lives. We think that if we

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work enough, save more, and take care of ourselves, then we will truly be safe.

My Focus

We know deep down that it isn't possible to obtain complete security in every area of our lives. However, we feel like it is something that is almost within our reach, and little by little, we start to focus our lives on the goal of being secure.

We end up living lives focused on making ourselves safe: on saving for the future and protecting ourselves from anything bad that could happen. This causes us to devote ourselves to things that are not bad in and of themselves, but they become the focus of our lives. Some examples are: saving money, protecting our family from bad influences, and taking care of our health.

Missed Opportunities

When we focus on our own security, we miss many opportunities to change the world. Instead of living a radical life with Jesus, we dedicate ourselves to achieving safety and security in life.

We Evaluate the Risk

We miss opportunities to change the world with Jesus when we focus more on the risk we run by taking the opportunity, than on what could happen if we did do this with Him. Every opportunity to change the world with Jesus comes with risk. We risk rejection when we ask a non-Christian friend if they want to study with us. We risk losing money if

Yes, But...

we devote a significant part of our life to working with Jesus. We risk losing a huge amount of resources if we start a new church. We risk losing privacy if we start to live in authentic community with other Christians. We risk disease and danger if we go to another country to work in the Kingdom.

It is wise to think through every decision — to assess the risk and think about the potential benefits. However, we must let Jesus, not our risk analysis, determine our ultimate decision. Sometimes we let opportunities pass by because Jesus's Spirit leads us to not take them. Many other times, Jesus leads us to say "yes," but our fear of danger, risk, and sacrifice makes us pass up the opportunity.

When we value our own safety too much, we decide not to take the risk, and we end up missing out on many opportunities to change the world. The irony is that our Lord risked — and lost — everything to save us. He doesn't ask anything less of his followers.

An Illusion

Ultimately, pursuing a safe life doesn't make sense, because having a safe life is an illusion. We can't create it. We miss out on great opportunities to change the world with Jesus, because we feel that we must protect our lives, but then we end up not even achieving that goal.

What life teaches us is that no matter how hard we work, how much we try, how long we fight, and how well we take care of ourselves, our life will never be safe nor secure. We can lose all our savings in one day. We can eat healthily and exercise, and still end up sick or dead. We can do everything

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possible to protect the important relationships in our life, and still lose a good friend or see our marriage end in divorce.

How ironic! We miss out on living a life as a radical world changer with Jesus, in order to seek after a safe life that ends up being an illusion.

Other Factors

The reason we can't completely control our life is that there are many factors beyond our control. No matter how hard we work, save, and take care of ourselves, we can't control everything.

We simply can't control the economy, our job, the weather, or cancer. Most of the time we can't control what other people do, nor how the decisions they make affect our lives.

It is impossible to make our life completely safe.

Responsible

When we face the reality that we can't guarantee or control our lives, we logically could say: "OK, whatever. Why try? I'll live in the moment, and not think about the future." But this would be the wrong way to respond.

Our response to life's uncertainty should not be to live irresponsibly. Throughout the Bible (for example, in the book of Proverbs), God teaches the importance of being responsible. We shouldn't be irresponsible, at the same time, we also shouldn't pursue security as our primary goal in life.

(In)Secure Lives

When we accept the reality that our lives will never be completely secure, we can fully enter into the radical life of a Christ-follower. Jesus calls his followers to abandon the pursuit of security, to live radical lives, and to depend on God for their safety.

Main Idea: A Christ-follower Seeks the Kingdom, not His Own Safety

Jesus teaches us that, if we intend to follow Him, we must focus on his Kingdom. We cannot focus on securing every aspect of our lives. Our first priority should be his work. Jesus promises that when we live in this way, God will take care of our needs.

Luke 12:22-27

22 And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! 25 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 26 If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Rely on God

What Jesus is saying in this passage is that it makes no sense to worry about making our lives secure. We cannot do it. However, Jesus does not leave us there. He goes on to say that we can — and must — rely on God for everything that we need in life.

Luke 12:28

28 But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!

Jesus's message is much bigger than simply telling us to not worry because we can't control our life. He wants us to understand that if we are God's children, then we can trust our Father. God takes care of his children.

Give Up the Pursuit of Security

So, we should give up our pursuit of security. Yes, we should live responsibly, but we shouldn't depend on ourselves to meet our needs. If we depend on God for everything, then we won't have to worry about manipulating and controlling everything in life.

Luke 12:29-30

29 And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. 30 For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.

Yes, But...

If we are going to follow Jesus, we must abandon the idea that we can make our lives secure. We will always work, save, and take care of ourselves, but we won't depend on doing these things for our security. It is God who takes care of our lives.

Live Radical Lives

This attitude — being responsible but not worrying — frees us from the desire to pursue the illusion of security. At the same time, it puts us in a place where we can seek to build Jesus's Kingdom with our lives.

Luke 12:31

31 Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Our life's focus should be on building Jesus's Kingdom. So then, we should live radical lives. We should dedicate ourselves to helping others come to know God. We should spend our resources and energy in working with Jesus. The life of a Christ-follower is a life completely surrendered to Christ's purposes. It is not a life that is focused on finding security in this life.

A New Security

Look closely at how Jesus ends that last verse. When we forget about our lives and our security, and live radical lives with Him, God assumes responsibility for taking care of our lives. By not pursuing our own security, we end up finding true security.

The Illusion of Security

When we realize that our security doesn't come from ourselves but from our Father, we feel more secure than ever. We aren't secure because we work hard, save wisely, and take care of our health. Of course we try to live responsibly in every important area of life, but this doesn't give us security. Our security comes because we know that we have a Father who loves us and takes care of us.

God Provides

We have a Father who provides for his children. He has promised to never leave us and always provide for our needs.

Hebrews 13:5-6

5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6 So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

The Bible is full of promises like this one. Over and over, God says to his children: "I've got it; I will take care of you."

This Gives Peace

Do you see what happens when we truly believe that God takes care of us? We can say "God is with me, and he will help me." This reality gives us peace. We don't have to fear anything that could happen in this life. This confidence in God removes all our fear and insecurity when life gets tough. God takes care of his children. So, no matter what is happening to us, we can have peace.

Abandon the Pursuit of the Illusion

If we are going to live lives that are radically surrendered to Jesus, we must abandon the pursuit of the illusion of security. We have to accept that God is in control of every area of our lives, that He will take care of us, and that we can trust our Father.

Inspect Our Life

Now, it's time to inspect our lives to see how much we focus on pursuing our own security, instead of Jesus's Kingdom. These questions will help us analyze our life:

- In what area of life am I pursuing my own security?
- Do I work hard because God gave me the job I have and I am being responsible, or because I find my financial security in my employment and my money?
- Do I eat healthily and exercise in order to take care of my mind and body, or because I fear disease and death?
- Do I take care of my family because it is my responsibility before God, or am I carrying the burden of making sure that nothing bad happens to the people around me?

God calls us to repent of trying to make our own life completely safe, by entering into the radical life of being his follower, and by trusting in Him alone for our security. This repentance brings freedom: freedom from feeling responsible for how everything turns out in our lives, and

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freedom to be able to give ourselves completely to Christ's purposes in this world.

Chapter 5

The Wasted Life

There is a barrier in the path of radically following Jesus that doesn't appear to be a barrier. It enters our lives secretly, and it eventually robs us of the opportunity to change the world. It is the barrier of a wasted life.

Unfortunately, we only find out that we have wasted our life when it is too late; after a lot of time that we can't get back has gone by. Here, we will examine the wasted life, so that this barrier doesn't stop us, and so that our lives end up counting for something eternal.

We Are Radical

We can talk about "being radical people" as if the decision is either to be radical or to be normal. This isn't completely accurate. Actually, it isn't our choice if we will be radical or normal: we are all radicals.

Radical Devotion

We are all radicals. Even the most normal people are radicals. Everyone gives their life radically to something; everyone is known for something; everyone lives for something; and everyone gives the majority of their time to something. Every person devotes their life radically to some purpose or other.

We are all radicals because we are creatures of passion. We are made to need a purpose, a reason for living. When we start to see something as being the thing which gives meaning to our existence, we devote ourselves to it with passion.

When something gets ahold of our passion and our heart, we give everything we have without holding back. We don't notice the money and time we spend on it. We can spend hours and hours involved in whatever activity has captured our passion. Our mind dwells on it. We don't have to try to give it our attention, because the object of our passion captures our complete focus.

Different Things

We are all the same in that we are all radicals. We all give our passion and our lives to something. However, the object of each person's passion is different. We all give ourselves fully, but to different things.

Some feel this passion for sports, others for work or making money, others for their family. Still others give themselves to recreation, entertainment, shopping, accumulating things, education, vices, fishing, video games, etc.

What unites everyone is not that we all have the same passion, but rather that we all have the same level of radical passion for something in our lives.

The Same Results

It doesn't matter what the object of our radical devotion is, the result is the same for everyone. When something is at the center of our heart, when it gives us purpose in life, when it makes us feel valuable and gives us significance, then we give ourselves to it completely. We devote ourselves to the object of our passion by giving our time, our money, and our thoughts.

We are all radicals. We all give ourselves radically to something. The only difference between every person is the object of their passion and purpose.

Two Paths of a Follower

Jesus described this idea when He told the Parable of the Sower. You can find the whole story in Matthew 13. Here, Jesus compared people with different types of ground, and his word with seed. He explained how different types of people receive his word. He started by talking about the people who don't receive his word, and those who hear, but it doesn't take root in their heart.

He then finished with a description of two other types of people. Both receive his word, and this word takes root in their lives. The difference is that some give their lives radically to the things of this life, and the others give themselves radically to Jesus's Kingdom.

Yes, But...

Matthew 13:18-23

Mat 13:18-23 22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Once we start to follow Jesus, there are two different paths that we can take. Every Christ-follower takes one or the other.

Choked out

The first path that Jesus described is when we focus our passion on something in this life. He's describing a person who lives devoted to his own life. You could say that this is a radical person — so radical that the object of his life's focus literally chokes out his relationship with God.

Jesus didn't say if this person lost his faith or not. He didn't say if he is saved or not. What he did say is that his life is completely fruitless. In the context of plants and seeds, "fruit" is reproduction. Jesus wants us to know that if we live our lives focused on this earthly life, we won't bear eternal fruit. In other words, we won't change the world with Him. We won't help others come to know his salvation and become children of God. We won't guide others on their path towards God. We will waste our lives.

By not saying if this person is saved or condemned, we are left to understand that in Jesus's eyes, it is more important

to not waste our lives, than simply to be saved or not. Loving this world leads us to waste our lives.

Devoted

The second path that Jesus mentioned is also radical. However, instead of a radical devotion to this life, it is a radical devotion to his Kingdom. His word grows in this person and produces something. Here, Jesus gives us a description of an unwasted life, of a life that counts for something, of a life devoted to his Kingdom.

One or the Other

What this parable teaches us is that we all have to choose: if we will live radically for our own life, or if our focus, passion, and purpose will be Jesus's Kingdom. It can't be a little bit of both. It will be one or the other.

Main Idea: The Only Way to Not Waste Our Life, Is to Devote It to Jesus's Kingdom

We live in a time when we can devote ourselves to countless activities; we can give our whole life to any number of different purposes. Since we all look for purpose in something, we are surrounded by people who do exactly that. So, it is perfectly normal to be a radical person, a person who lives with a great passion for something in life.

The most important message that we need to hear in the midst of this environment is: if you dedicate your life to any other purpose — apart from changing the world with Jesus — you will waste your life.

Innocent

Saying that we have lived a wasted life sounds very harsh, because many times the object of our passion isn't something that is bad in and of itself. In fact, the majority of the things that come to be in the center of our lives are good things, like for example: work, family, money, possessions, working out, sports, and different hobbies.

What makes these good things become bad things, is when we give our life, passion, and heart to them. Putting anything — apart from Jesus — in the center of our lives, will lead us to waste it.

Vanity

Giving our passion to something in this life is a waste of our life, because nothing in this life will matter after it is over. There is very little of what we can do during this life that will matter once we die.

The only thing that will matter after death is our relationship with God. So, what we do in this life that leads us to walk closer to God, will have value after this life. Also, what we do to help others come to know God and have a relationship with Him, will have value.

Aside from this, everything else that we do during our lives will not have eternal significance. That's why, at the end of his life, king Solomon said that his life was vanity (Ecclesiastes 1 and 2). This was the conclusion of the man who had been the wisest man on earth, of the man who had experienced more of life than most will, and of the man who had achieved more than everyone before him and almost

The Wasted Life

everyone after. However, at the end of his life, he came to the conclusion that it had all been vanity.

The only thing we can take with us from this life to the next is 1) our relationship with God and 2) having helped others come to know Him.

We Don't Change the World

The great tragedy with most of the things that we put at the center of our heart, is that they sidetrack us from the purpose that Jesus has given us of changing the world with Him. Jesus wants his followers to devote their lives to helping others come to know Him. His desire is that this goal would be the object of our passion. He wants the work of guiding people to Him to be the source of our purpose in this life.

When we let sports, family, exercise, hobbies, work, or anything else be at the center of our heart, then we don't change the world with Jesus. On the other hand, when we put Jesus in the center of our heart, we live life radically for Him; we change the world with our Lord.

Determine Your Purpose

So, the question isn't if you and I will be radical. We are and will be radical people. Everyone is. We will look for and find purpose in something. Actually, the real question is if we will be radically devoted to changing the world with Jesus, or if we will replace this purpose with another. So, we have to determine what our purpose will be.

What Is Yours?

In order to put Jesus and his mission in the center of our hearts, we will have to first analyze: what is actually at the center of our heart? It isn't difficult to figure out what the object of our passion, the focus of our life, and the source of our purpose is. We only have to look at how we spend our time and money, and what we think about and what we desire.

If you want to know what is at the center of your heart, ask yourself these questions:⁽¹⁾

- What do I spend my time and money on?
- What occupies my thoughts?
- What makes me happy?
- What do I desire in life?
- What do I fear losing?

These questions help us clearly see what is truly at the center of our heart; what we are truly passionate about; what we truly worship. If this is something other than God, then it is an idol — that is, something that has taken God's place in our heart.

One or the Other

We have to choose between this idol, and being totally devoted to God. We can't live a life radically devoted to Jesus and his purposes, and at the same time have this other thing in the center of our heart. We have to decide if we truly want to put Jesus in the center.

(1) Inspired by a list that Dr. Timothy Keller shared in a sermon

Kill the Idol

In order to live a radically devoted to Jesus, we have to kill our idol; we have to remove it from the center of our life. This is difficult, but it is the path to freedom. For some, killing their idol means completely leaving it; it has owned their life for so long, that the only way to not live their life devoted to this idol is to totally remove it from their life. For others, killing their idol means adjusting their priorities; taking this idol down from the center of their life to a healthy place.

Put God in the Center

It isn't enough to only kill or remove that thing which has our passion. We have to replace it by putting God in the center of our life. God becomes the center of our passion as we spend more time with Him. The more we read the Bible and pray, the more passion we will have for Jesus and for his purposes in this world. Also, God's mission becomes our mission more and more as we start to work more with Him. This means continually accepting more opportunities to fulfill the mission that He has put around us.

A Life that Has Value

The more we put Jesus in the center of our heart, the less we waste our life. This is how we live the life that God wants for us, how we fulfill his mission and his purpose for our lives, and how we devote ourselves to something that will matter even after we die. This is how we don't waste our lives.

Chapter 6

I Wouldn't Know What to Say

The next barrier we will look at comes from within us. It arises when we look at how huge the task of changing the world — or even of talking to others about Jesus — is, and at the same time we also see our lack of capacity. We realize that humanly speaking we aren't able to do the tasks that Jesus gives his followers.

This barrier could be called: “I wouldn't know what to say”, and it causes us to watch others live radical lives and to change the world, while we let opportunities to work with Jesus pass us by.

Mission Impossible

This barrier grows out of an enormous reality. This reality is that what Jesus asks of his followers is a huge task: be

Yes, But...

radical, change the world, and live all of life to help others come to know Him and to have peace with God.

In order to accomplish this, we have to do a lot. We have to live lives that go against cultural norms. We have to work in order to survive, but not let that work consume our lives. We have to meet the demands of this life, without focusing exclusively on them. We have to be radically generous and give much of our money and time to the poor and the lost. We have to use our time, treasure and abilities to help others come to know Jesus and enter into his Kingdom.

Maybe the most difficult of all is that we have to talk. We have to talk with others about their lives, about their pain, about their dreams, and about Jesus. We have to ask them to study with us. We have to offer to disciple other Christians. We have to open the Bible and explain how to be saved and how to follow Jesus.

I Wouldn't Know What to Say

In order to change the world with Jesus, we have to talk to others about Jesus. We have to instruct, confront, and exhort. We have to explain the Gospel, the Kingdom, sin, and God. We have to teach why and how to follow Jesus.

But talking about Jesus is difficult. We don't know how. We don't want to say something weird. We don't want to say something that is wrong. So, we end up not speaking because we wouldn't know what to say. We wouldn't know how to offer a study to an unbeliever, how to suggest a discipleship study to another Christian, or how to open the Bible and explain how to have peace with God.

Others Can Do It Better

We look around, and the leaders who are in front of our church, our small group, or our study appear to be much more eloquent than us. They do know what to say; and they know how to say it too. They seem to be able to talk about God easily.

We feel like we just aren't like them. We don't think that we would ever be able to explain the things of God like they do. So, it would be better to leave that work to them. We let them do the studies, handle the difficult conversations, disciple new Christians, and talk to others about Jesus, his Kingdom, and eternity to others.

We Never Start

Because we think we can't, we never start. We never talk to others about Jesus. We never ask a friend to study with us. We never open the Bible and guide another Christian.

This is a strong, powerful barrier, because it stops us before we start. It shuts us up, even though our Lord asks us to speak.

Main Idea: God Equips Those He Calls

The Bible is full of examples of people that God called to do a job, but who couldn't do what He was asking of them. Time after time, we see the same pattern repeat itself: God calls someone and asks him to do something impossible; then He equips that person whom He called. What ends up happening, is that those who respond to God's call always do the impossible.

Yes, But...

Mission Impossible...

Sarah and Abraham were so old that it was impossible for them to have a baby, but God told them that they would be the parents of a great nation, through which God would bless the whole world.

Elizabeth was sterile when God told her that she and her husband were going to have a son who would prepare the way for the Saviour.

Mary was a single, poor young girl. God told her that she would be the mother of the Messiah.

Moses couldn't speak well — he stuttered, and God sent him to negotiate his people's freedom from the most powerful king in the world.

God told the Israelites that they would travel to the land of Canaan, but they had no way to cross the Red Sea or the Jordan River.

When they arrived at Canaan, He asked them to conquer it and take the land. It was totally impossible that the twelve tribes of Israel would conquer the nations that lived in Canaan.

Jesus ordered his twelve disciples to go into all the world, to talk about Him, and to make other followers from among all the nations. They didn't have even a fraction of the capacity required to accomplish this task.

In these examples, we see just a few of all the people in the Bible that didn't have the capacity to do what God asked of them.

...Made Reality

What all these examples have in common, is that everyone in them ended up doing what God had asked of them.

Sarah had a son who's descendants became a great nation.

Elizabeth's son prepared the people for Jesus's arrival.

Mary became the mother of the Saviour.

Moses appeared before Pharaoh, and brought God's people out of Egypt.

The Israelites didn't just cross the Red Sea and the Jordan River, they also took the land of Canaan, and conquered the nations that were much stronger than they were.

Jesus's disciples started a movement that to this day continues to bring God's Kingdom to this world.

They all received an impossible task, and they all completed that task.

God Equips

The "secret ingredient" in each one of these situations is that God didn't just call them to do something impossible. He also gave them the ability to complete the task; He equipped them. The task didn't end up being impossible, because God made it so that they were able to accomplish it.

What can we learn from these stories? When God gives us a task, He will also give us what we need to complete that task. He will equip us — or beforehand, or in the moment.

Yes, But...

The God Who Calls Us, Also Equips Us

When we hear Jesus's call to change the world, we are completely justified when we react by saying that it is an impossible assignment. God always asks his children to do the impossible.

However, we commit a grave mistake when we do not attempt to accomplish the impossible tasks that He gives us. History shows us that God will give us the ability to do that which He asks of us.

Moses committed the mistake that many times we also make. God asked him to speak on his behalf to the Pharaoh. Moses couldn't speak very well. In fact, he stuttered. God was asking him to tell the most powerful king in the world to free the entire Jewish nation, who just happened to be his best slaves. It wasn't conceivable that the Pharaoh would listen to anyone who asked for their freedom, much less someone who couldn't speak well.

So, Moses did what many times we do when God asks us to do something impossible. He told God that He had made a mistake, that He had chosen the wrong person for the job. Look at how God responds to Moses:

Exodus 4:11-12

11 Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."

I Wouldn't Know What to Say

I think that God would say exactly the same thing to us when we tell Him that we can't talk about Jesus or study with others, because we wouldn't know what to say.

Jesus Calls Us...

Jesus calls all his followers to talk about Him, to guide others in their relationship with God, to change the world. How we do it depends on our personality and our gifts. However, what is certain is that Jesus calls everyone to work with Him and talk about 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."

This is the big idea of all of his teaching. The call to make disciples, help them make the decision to repent and be baptized, train these new followers, and repeat the process with others, is the task that Jesus gives to each of his followers.

...Jesus Equips

If we aren't able to do what Jesus asks of us, if we don't have the abilities or we don't know how to talk about Jesus, that really isn't a problem. Our Lord always equips those He calls. That is precisely why He sent the Holy Spirit, to equip

Yes, But...

his followers. The Holy Spirit gives us words to speak. The Holy Spirit helps us to talk about Jesus. Jesus's Spirit gives us the ability to accomplish the tasks that Jesus assigns us.

Preparation

I don't mean to imply that it isn't important to prepare ourselves for the spiritual opportunities that God puts in our path. Actually, the life of a Christ-follower should be a life of constant preparation. The key is to never use a lack of preparedness as a reason for not accepting a task that God asks of us. That being said, we should continually prepare ourselves, even when we don't have a new assignment waiting — because God uses our preparation for future tasks.

The Bible

The main way for us to prepare is by reading the Bible. The Bible is the word of God, and He says that his word is living and powerful.⁽¹⁾ Knowing more of the Bible is the best way to prepare ourselves for every task that Jesus will give us.

Studies

We also prepare by learning how to explain our faith. It is very helpful to learn to teach non-Christians how to make the decision to follow Jesus. One way to do this is by learning how to teach an evangelistic study (like "I Want Peace with God", www.IWantPeaceWithGod.com). Knowing how to guide someone else through the salvation decision prepares

(1) Hebrews 4:11

us for that moment when we will be able to explain it to one of our friends.

In the same way, we equip ourselves by learning how to teach discipleship studies (like “My Next Step” or “Foundations”, www.IWantPeaceWithGod.com). These are studies that we can use to guide new Christians.

Constant Movement

Our preparation is important. However we should never stop following Jesus and changing the world with Him while we prepare. Our process should be the opposite: we should prepare ourselves to work with Jesus while we work on the assignments that God has already given us.

In this way, the life of a Christ-follower should be a life of constant movement: a life of always listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, of taking the opportunities that He puts in front of us, and at the same time working to be better prepared. It is moving forward in spite of not being completely prepared, and trusting that God will prepare us on the way.

Opportunities

This movement starts when God puts opportunities before us — opportunities to be someone's friend, to talk about Jesus, to explain to them how to decide to become his child, to guide others in their faith. The Holy Spirit gives us a nudge, and we know that we should start a conversation or ask if they would like to study the Bible.

Move

Every time God give us another opportunity to work with Jesus, it's up to us to take the next step. We will have many reasons to not do anything, to not say anything, to stay quiet. The biggest reason many times is that we think that we wouldn't know what to say or that we aren't prepared. In that moment, Jesus asks us to move forward and take the opportunity that He gives us, in spite of our lack of preparation.

Start the Task

When God gives us a task, something that He wants us to do, our responsibility is to start the task. We don't have to worry so much about what we can or can't do. We don't have to wait until we feel prepared before we start. We shouldn't hand the task off to someone else.

What God wants is that we start to do what He asks of us: start a friendship; ask someone to study; talk about Jesus; disciple a new Christian. God wants us to help those around us to move closer to Him.

When we start the tasks God gives us, He also gives us the ability, the time, the words, the resources, and the knowledge we need to be able to do the work that He has asked us to do. At the same time, He uses our obedience to save the lost, mature his children, and build up his Kingdom.

Chapter 7

It Won't Matter

Another barrier to working effectively with Jesus, is feeling that all of the work we do and the sacrifices we make won't really matter. This attitude starts to grow, and little by little takes away all of our purpose and motivation. Believing this stops us from starting new work with Jesus, because if it won't accomplish anything important, why would we sacrifice so much? Also, this attitude discourages us in the projects and work that we are already doing. We think: "If what I am doing isn't going to matter, it doesn't make sense to continue".

Slowly

This barrier is based in something that is very real: It is difficult to change the world with Jesus. Many times, the work that we do in the Kingdom produces so few changes, that it seems like nothing is happening.

People

The big goal of the entire life of a Christ-follower, is that other people would come to know God and that they would also become Christ-followers.

Now, in order for this to happen, these people have to change. They have to come to recognize their sin and rebellion. They have to desire to enter into peace with God. They have to be willing to surrender all of their will to God (repentance) and to make a public decision (baptism). They have to recognize the vanity of what currently fills their life. They have to enter into Jesus's mission, and take it on as the greatest purpose of their existence. These are huge changes. Which is why following Jesus means entering into a brand new life. His followers end up becoming people who are completely different from what they were before.

Now, the reality is that normally people change very slowly. However, when we convert to Christ, the Holy Spirit causes us to be born again instantly — in a single moment.⁽¹⁾ But getting to this moment of conversion often takes a long time. And afterwards, living like a new person also takes a long time — a lifetime.

Here is precisely where the problem enters. As we look at see the people that God puts in our life, it's difficult to imagine them changing that dramatically. We feel that it doesn't matter how many times we invite them to church or to a study, they will never come. We think that they won't say "yes" to studying the Bible with us. We believe that it is impossible that they would leave their bad habits and sins, and decide to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior by

(1) John 3

repenting and being baptized. We can't conceive of them living as fully-devoted followers of Christ.

Projects

Not only do people progress slowly, but also the projects that we start in the Kingdom at times seem to move like a tortoise. If you have ever been part of a group of people who have tried to start a new community group or home study, plant a church, or start a new ministry, what you undoubtedly experienced is that this project took much more work, and produced far fewer results, than you had anticipated.

Important projects always take a while to develop. They are important because they help us reach the people in our lives who are far from God. Planting a new church opens up the Gospel for a new group of people. Starting a home group or Bible study creates a new community around the Gospel. Writing a book or a study equips those who want to explain the Gospel to their friends. Every project that grows the Kingdom is important.

However, these projects are never accomplished easily. They require a lot of work, energy, creativity, and time. They demand so much from us that the barrier of "it won't matter" starts to come up. When we work with one of these projects, it is difficult to see if it is really progressing. We do the same tasks week after week, and we don't see huge results all at once. The results do accumulate during the process, but it is difficult to see the progress along the way.

The Lie

Little by little, we start to believe the lie that: "what I am doing — or what I could do, won't make much of a difference in the world." We suspect that our work is in vain. The lie is that it won't matter.

Waste of Time

It feels awful to sacrifice ourselves to work hard with Jesus because we want to change the world with Him, while feeling that we are wasting our time. The lie of "it won't matter" makes us feel that everything we do for others and for the Kingdom is a waste of time.

Not Accomplishing Anything

The lie of "it won't matter" comes from seeing how slowly people change. This reality makes us feel that in spite of our dedication, we aren't accomplishing anything. As humans made in the image of God, we are created with the desire to create, to make, and to see progress. Our motivation disappears like a fog when we feel that our work isn't producing anything of importance.

We Don't Persevere

The result of believing the lie of "it won't matter" is that we don't persevere. We might work in the Kingdom, but we don't do it with everything we are, because we believe that inevitably, our work won't matter that much. Or we work a little with God, maybe so that we don't feel guilty for

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not doing anything, but not because we believe that we are really changing the world with Jesus.

The effect of believing the lie that our work won't matter is seen in our lives in three different ways: we don't start, we don't give our all, and we don't finish.

We Don't Start

The Bible repeatedly demonstrates that God always gives his children jobs to do; He presents them with opportunities to work in his Kingdom. It could be the opportunity to help a poor person, write a study guide, start a Bible study group, disciple another believer, invest in a non-Christian and attempt to to guide him to Jesus, or even start a church.

When we aren't convinced that our work in the Kingdom will accomplish anything, we start to think of all the reasons why it won't work out or it won't have a permanent impact. We decide that the opportunity that is before us probably won't accomplish anything.

This leads us to not start the task that God is giving us. We decide that it isn't worth beginning the project. We don't take the first step. We don't even start because we believe that it won't make a difference.

We Don't Give Our All

Even when we accept an opportunity that God puts before us, this barrier makes us not give it 100%. Maybe it's very obvious that God is asking us to do something; so clear that not starting would be disobedience. So, we start the task. But since people change so slowly, we begin to believe that

Yes, But...

our work isn't achieving very many results. Our enthusiasm drops, and we don't work as hard nor with as much devotion. We don't give ourselves to the work like we did at the beginning. It becomes more like a duty or a commitment, something we have to do. We work at it, but we don't feel like we are changing the world.

We Don't Finish

The more we believe the lie that "it won't matter", the more our enthusiasm drops. Our hope wanes, and we start to abandon the projects and jobs that we do in the Kingdom. We think it through, and determine that since it doesn't appear that we are accomplishing very much, it would be better to stop wasting our time.

We leave things half done. We don't continue with the people we have been guiding, evangelizing, or discipling. We step back from projects and ministries. Instead of finishing the tasks that God has given us, we leave them half-way through.

Main Idea: Being a World-Changer Requires Perseverance

There is a truth that saves us from the lie of "it won't matter". It is the same truth that gives us the proper perspective when we see slow progress in the those whom we want to guide to God. This truth is that being a world-changer requires a lot of perseverance.

Yes it is difficult, it costs a lot, and it takes a long time to change the eternal destiny of other people. It isn't easy

It Won't Matter

to start a church, a ministry, or a study group. Discipling someone is a long, hard process.

But God is working. He is bringing his Kingdom to this world. Yes, it seems to be happening slowly, but without a doubt it is advancing.

These two realities are the reason that being a world-changer takes a ton of perseverance: God is working, but our part in this work requires dedication. His children have to work persistently if they are going to achieve his goals in this world.

God Asks for Perseverance

There are various passages in the Bible that explain the idea of how necessary perseverance is in order to serve God: Luke 8:15, Galatians 6:9, and Hebrews 6:11-12 are a few examples. You could say that this is one of the themes that runs through the entire Bible. God always asks for perseverance from his people.

At the end of his first letter to the church in the city of Corinth, Paul encourages them to persevere as they work with Jesus:

1 Corinthians 15:58

58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Here, Paul gives us two reasons to persevere. First, we persevere because we are working with Jesus. Second, we persevere because our work will produce results.

Yes, But...

We Work with Jesus

The reason that the barrier of "it won't matter" is a lie, is because when we work in the Kingdom, we are working with Jesus. Every time that we invest our life in someone and try to help them know God better, every time we work hard to start a ministry or a church, every time we are generous with the poor, we are working with Jesus.

What we forget when we start to believe the lie of "it won't matter", is that Jesus is at work in this world. When we give our lives radically to change the world, we are working with Jesus; we are joining the work that Jesus is doing in the world.

It's Not in Vain

Jesus is at work and we are collaborating with Him. That's why our work will always matter, will always bring results, will always change others' lives. If we were attempting to change the world by ourselves, many times our work would be in vain, but that's not the case here. We are working with Jesus, and so our work is never in vain.

Jesus always works his purposes through our work. God produces the results that He desires when his children persevere in the tasks that He gives them.

Practical Perseverance

So, how do we put into action this perseverance that Paul describes? It starts by looking at the opportunities to work with Jesus that He has put around us: people in our lives that we can guide to God; the ideas to start communities,

It Won't Matter

groups, studies, or churches; and people with physical needs that we can meet. The Holy Spirit guides God's sons and daughters towards accepting the opportunities and tasks that He desires them to do.

Start It

In order to persevere in the work that Jesus gives us, we have to start it. We have to take the first step. It could be that before starting, we don't think that this work will make a difference nor that it will accomplish much of anything. That doesn't matter. The only question we have to ask when we see an opportunity to work with Jesus, is if Jesus is asking us to do this work. If the task comes from Him, we shouldn't over-analyze it, we should just start it.

Continue It

It can be easier to start a work than to continue doing it time after time. It is in the repetition of the task that we get discouraged. We can be enthusiastic at the beginning, when everything is new, but continuing on is difficult.

It is difficult to pray every day for the same person that doesn't appear to be changing, to open one's home for the same study group or community group for another meeting, to teach or serve at church again, or to have another coffee meeting with the same non-christian friend who is still very far from God.

These are all examples of the repetition that Kingdom work requires. In the moment, repeating the same thing one more time doesn't appear to have much purpose. However, the majority of great spiritual achievements are the result of the

Yes, But...

work of people who time after time did the same task over and over again.

The ministries that impact others, the studies and community groups that transform the faith of their members, the people who come to repentance and baptism, and the churches that change their city, all are the result of the perseverance of people who believe so much in their work that they repeat it time after time. They continue their work even when they feel that it won't make a difference.

Don't Stop

The most common reasons for leaving spiritual tasks are discouragement and boredom. Discouragement comes because we don't see the changes. Boredom enters because of the monotony of repeating the same task. World-changers persevere, even when they don't see progress or they are bored. They continue because Jesus gave them the task, and until Jesus gives them another job, they will continue with the current one.

Of course, the moment can arrive when it is time to leave a task in order to do another. But generally, perseverance means choosing a path — a ministry or a task, and continuing there. The rule that I use to know if I should persevere or not is: I only leave a task that Jesus has given me if the Spirit guides me to do so, and normally this is only because He gives me something else to do that is a bigger responsibility. When I feel discouraged or bored, I know that it isn't the moment to leave or stop what I am doing, rather, it's time to continue with new enthusiasm.

Increase It

What Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 15:58 is that persevering in the work that we do with Jesus isn't just about continuing to do the same thing. True perseverance means always doing more. In this text, Paul says "always abounding in the work of the Lord." Another translation would be: "working more and more".

The idea is that continuing to work with Jesus, means increasing our level of commitment to his work. It means committing to what we started, and then doing more.

It is difficult for us to persevere with the people and the works that we start in the Kingdom. Paul wants to tell us that true perseverance is always increasing the work we do. It isn't simply struggling to not leave the work we are doing; rather it is always looking for ways to do more.

This idea didn't originate with Paul, it is what Jesus taught.

Matthew 25:23

23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

Jesus taught that in his Kingdom, the reward for work done well is more responsibility — that is, more work. When we are responsible with the tasks that Jesus gives us, He will give us more tasks to do. In this way, persevering in the work that Jesus gives us means working more and more with Him.

Yes, But...

You Will Change the World

In order to accomplish what God has destined for our life, we have to be persistent in the work and the tasks that He assigns us. Starting something and leaving it doesn't produce results. Results come when we start the tasks that the Holy Spirit gives us, when we repeat them over and over again, when we continue faithfully in moments that discouragement and monotony bring us down, and when we always try to work more and more with Jesus.

This is how we change the world; this is how we change the eternal destiny of the people who are around us.

Chapter 8

I Just Have to Finish This First

The final barrier we will look at is one that seems to be very small and insignificant, however it ends up robbing us of all our productivity in the Kingdom. The barrier could be called “I just have to finish this first”. It arises when God gives us an idea of something that we could do in the Kingdom, and we even want to do it — it’s just that there is something a little bit more important in our lives that we have to finish first. Later, when we have finished this thing that we had to do first, another important task comes up, and then the cycle repeats. The result is that we are never freed up enough to be able to truly serve Christ. Let’s look at how this process works.

The Process

This barrier always follows the same pattern, and then repeats itself. Its effect on our life and ministry is devastating.

We Have an Idea

Everything starts when we get an idea of something we could do with Jesus in his Kingdom. The idea might be nothing more than a good idea we had, or it could possibly be a leading we have received from the Holy Spirit. Either way, this idea is an opportunity we have before us to work with Christ.

The problem isn't that we don't know what we should do. Rather, we know what God wants us to do; we know that it is important that we do it; and many times, we even decide that we are going to do it.

Something More Important First

When this barrier arises, we don't reject the idea that we had; we don't say "no" to God. What happens is that we decide that we can't do it right now because there is something a little more important that we need to do first. Maybe it is with work, a family commitment, school, sports, or a project around the house — it could be anything. It always is something important; something urgent; something that we think we can't do while at the same time starting the idea we had; and it is always something that we think we will finish soon.

We do not reject the idea of changing the world with Jesus, we just think that we'll do it later. After reaching our goals

at work, we'll have more time to devote to the Kingdom. After saving enough for our retirement, we will be radically generous. After our kids start school, finish school, or graduate from college and get married, then we'll work a lot more with Jesus.

We feel that the demands of our life are very urgent. At the same time, we believe that the Kingdom can wait. We think that after we take care of what is really urgent in our lives, then we will dedicate ourselves to the Kingdom.

So of course, we don't even have to think twice. The only logical solution is to first finish this "something" that we need to do, and once we are free, then we will work on the task that God gave us. It seems like the perfect solution. There is only one small problem: it never works.

It Repeats

This plan never functions because the process repeats itself; as soon as we finish with what was so important, another equally important demand, need, or opportunity comes up. What is happening is that our enemy — Satan — learns the things for which we are willing to postpone working with Jesus, and inevitably, as soon as one is completed, he orchestrates another. Over time, all of these important tasks become a giant series of things that we have to finish before we can truly work with Jesus.

Our enemy is very smart. He knows that if he can keep us busy taking care of things in our own lives, we will never enter into the radical life of a Christ-follower. So, every time we get close to achieving our goals and being able to truly dedicate ourselves to the Kingdom, he makes something

Yes, But...

else become so urgent that we can't possibly ignore it, and we have to make Jesus wait a little bit longer. As long as we let him play this game with us, we lose many opportunities to work with Jesus in his Kingdom.

First Things First

The only real solution to this barrier is to put first things first. In other words, when Jesus gives us an idea of something we could do with Him, we should start doing it immediately.

In his gospel, Luke tells how several times people wanted to follow Jesus, but they each had something very important that they had to finish first. Jesus's answer to each one of them was that they should follow Him immediately; that they should not let the demands of their lives become a barrier to following Him.

Luke 9:57-62

57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." 60 And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Main Idea: We Should Put the Highest Priority on the Tasks that Jesus Gives Us

We shouldn't let the tasks of our own lives have a higher priority than the tasks that Jesus gives us. We should start the work Christ gives us, even in the midst of our lives' demands. We can't wait until we have everything in our lives completely ordered, before being able to truly work with Jesus.

How to Overcome This Barrier

We overcome this barrier by simply following the Spirit's guidance; by immediately starting to work every time He gives us an idea. The process for being productive in Jesus's Kingdom — no matter how busy our lives are — is:

- 1) Listening to God: This is training ourselves to be very sensitive to the Holy Spirit's voice so that we hear when He gives us ideas of things we should do in the Kingdom.
- 2) Starting immediately: This is immediately starting any task the Spirit gives us. This means not making excuses; not putting anything before this task; doing it without waiting; giving it the highest priority on our to-do list.
- 3) Carrying out the things we have to do in life as well: This is continuing to be faithful with the other responsibilities of our lives. We can't stop meeting our lives' obligations, however when we immediately start working on the tasks that God gives us, we learn to work in the Kingdom and at the same time live our lives and do all the other things we have to do.

Yes, But...

Yes, You Can!

When we don't wait before starting the tasks that God gives us in his Kingdom, we discover that the Holy Spirit gives God's children the capacity to be able to do everything that God asks of them.

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.

Here's how it works: we see all the demands of our lives, and at the same time we see the tasks and projects that we should do in the Kingdom. We think that it isn't possible to do it all. And we are completely right: In our natural capacity, we can't do everything that God asks of us. What we don't take into account when we add this up is that God equips his children to be able to do everything He asks them to do. So, we can boldly accept the tasks and start on the ideas that God gives us, because if He asks us to do something, He will also give us the capacity to do it.

Epilogue: A Challenge

A Radical Call

Following Christ isn't just about being saved, well-behaved, and normal. Jesus calls us to follow Him radically. Following Him means living life as He lived, it means living with his purpose; it means losing one's life in order to accomplish his mission; it means working with Him to change the eternal destiny of other people.

Diminished Capacity

If you are God's son or daughter, your enemy — Satan — seeks to diminish your capacity to be able to change the world with Jesus. To do this, he puts barriers in your way; he does everything possible to distract you and sidetrack you from the work that Jesus has for you.

Break Down the Barriers

What are the barriers that the enemy has used to diminish your capacity in your Lord's Kingdom?

What could you do to break these barriers?

Yes, But...

The challenge for you, for me, and for everyone who wants to truly follow Jesus, is to identify the barriers in our life, and tear them down. Only then can the power of the Spirit flow in our lives, and only then can we truly change the world with Jesus!