

# Restless Contentment

## **What's in the book?**

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## What's This About?

Restless Contentment-how can you be restless and content at the same time? I am restless because I do not remember a time when so few people who say they are Christians are not really following Jesus in such a way that their life is distinctively different from the rest of the people living in the world. Most of the people I meet who attend some kind of church do not know what being a disciple is and certainly do not have any grasp of how to make disciples. This seems to be reserved for those whose vocation is some kind of Christian ministry but certainly not for the ordinary person. I live in the midst of affluence because I live in the United States and in particular in Colorado. Most Christians are chasing the same things as everyone else on the front range of Colorado. However, this is not peculiar to Colorado. It is rampant throughout the country and most of the Western world.

I am writing this to awaken all of us from a slumber of indifference to what Jesus is all about and what has been on God's heart since day one. I am writing this so we will change...really change because it is breaking God's heart for us to live as we are and we are preventing so many of our friends from experiencing life in Jesus because they see basically no difference between their lives and ours. I am restless because I believe that unless we create some entry points for those not yet following Jesus to find others who do know him, many now and in future generations are not going to understand that there is a solution to the problems and issues they deal with every day. They need to know they can have a real relationship with Jesus. They need to know that Christianity is not some "harmless delusion" but that God is more than a word and that Jesus the real deal.

I am content however in knowing and following Jesus in my life. Even though my heart breaks for friends I know and others I don't know who have no idea what Jesus is or that God is real, I enjoy the times I have with Jesus and how personal he is in speaking into my life about who he is and what he wants. And so I live with Restless Contentment.

Take your time and think about each of the topics or thoughts in this book. Don't rush. Think about spending a week on each topic before going on to the next one. Let God determine your pace. Each topic has a couple of questions to further help you think through following Jesus. The Appendix has other projects you should consider because they will give you more muscle and help you pass some of it on to someone else. The last Appendix lists the books I have read that are related to all of these thoughts.

# Culture Who is determining the right way to live?

## Does it really matter how many times I do this? **Making a difference**

There are many challenges to living as a follower of Jesus in the culture we are presently living in. In such a technological age there is a danger of replacing simplicity with complexity in following Jesus. The first 40 years of my Christian life was marked by complexity and it has really only been the last 5 or 6 years that I have begun to understand what the simplicity of following Jesus is all about. We must be aware of the day in which we live while remembering that Jesus has given us everything we need when we have an intimate relationship with him. ( **1 Corinthians 1:9 and 2 Peter 1:3**) I want to look at our life as we seriously follow Jesus today.

In many ways what we have been doing in trying to make a difference in our culture is having diminishing returns and is not really producing as many radical followers of Jesus as we should. We could continue on this track and it is easier, but we need to stop and think. Einstein said "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." I have taken many people through many discipleship groups but it seems that many are not radical followers of Jesus now and I question many of the strategies I used in these years. Many of our friends and neighbors are not going to show up at a religious meeting either because it does not make sense to them or it does not connect with what they experience in the daily grind of life. As for me, much of what I have experienced of church does not connect with the hard issues I deal with.

We must learn what it looks like to be the people God wants us to be because most of our not yet Christian friends do not have a clue about how to make life work. The sun comes up every morning and every day has its own challenges. People who are not yet Christians do not know how to correctly deal with these challenges and neither do many who show up at Christian meetings.

It is a different time. Some questions are the same, some answers also, but many are changing and we must learn to think. Not everything I write about will motivate you and you may not agree with some of it but my purpose is to get us to think, explore and begin or continue the adventure of following Jesus. We do not want to be guilty of a wasted life. ( **John 17:4,6**) I desperately want my life to count and make a difference with others who want that also. Do you?

### **A Further Step**

1. What does making a difference mean to you as you think of living as a follower of Jesus?
2. What would living a wasted life look like?

## I can't see the movie. **New Glasses**

What I am attempting is difficult within the Christian culture in which we live in the United States. But, we need to think differently—we need a new kind of glasses. In the 1950's some 3D movies required special 3D glasses. It changed everything to wear these glasses. We have the same message as did Jesus in century 1 but we need new glasses to connect it to our generation. Some things must change to reach those not following Jesus.

Most Christians wake up on Sunday thinking about when or if they are going to church. Most of the world does not think about this at all. After spending the night with friends until 2 AM, this is the last thing on their mind. Their conclusions about how to resolve the conflicts and issues in their life remain elusive. If we are going to reach them, we are going to have to think and live differently. In many cases they are not going to come to us; we are going to have to go to them. I have deliberately stayed away from church on some Sunday mornings just to see what is happening in my neighborhood. Many do not wake up until 10, some are mowing grass, kids are on bikes. It is just another day for most people.

Jesus said on many occasions “You have heard it said...but I say to you...” He was trying to get them to think differently. Think about the statements or questions Jesus made. They always caused someone to think. Or remember when Jesus was reaching many people and he would say something like “let's get out of here and go somewhere else.” This may have confused the disciples but sometimes this is what a relationship with Jesus does before it becomes clear what he is about. It is weird to think you are going to learn something new when you are confused.

We often have difficulty listening to or thinking about new ideas. It disrupts our comfortable lifestyle or deals with our pride in thinking we have it all together. Sometimes we do not need answers to our questions but rather we need new questions. Look at some of these verses in which Jesus' question or statement changed everything. ( **Matthew 4:19, 5:13,27,28, 8:26, 9:28, 12:3, 13:51, 16:13, and 16:15**)

We must understand that people have different ways of trying to make life work and connect the truth to them so they see the inadequacy of their pursuit without a connection to Jesus. We need more entry points with people to discuss spiritual things. Do people around you know they can ask you questions other than your opinion about the weather?

### **A Further Step**

1. What are some of the new questions you need to better impact the world you live in?
2. What are some of the questions the world of those not yet Christians are asking?

## Do you know what time it is? **Understanding our world**

**1 Chronicles 12:32** talks about people who understood the times and the strategy for their day. We must understand the day in which we live in order to know what needs to be done. Some things always work while others desperately need to change. We must know what people are thinking, how they think, what is important to them, and what is not. We have to spend time with people who do not know Jesus to learn about those in our immediate culture. When we do this we will learn how to translate the gospel into their language. This involves sharing life with our neighbors, co-workers, people in our community and believers we regularly connect with. My wife and I have had neighbors over for a meal and gone to their kids baseball games to get to know them in other situations. Many Christians live in a bubble in which they are surrounded by other Christians and they have no regular contact with people who are not following Jesus. This cripples them in understanding our culture and the issues people deal with. Truth is not determined by culture and that is why Christianity is a challenge to a culture that values what is not Biblical.

People in our culture value tolerance-not stepping on anyone's rights, feelings or wants. When it comes to moral or ethical decisions, whatever feels right or is comfortable wins. How does the truth of the Bible deal with this issue?

Conflict evolves as we live in a culture that defines "importance" differently than the Bible. What do you do about that? Some people carry signs and yell at those with different opinions. That rarely accomplishes anything. It usually only solidifies the disagreement those not following Jesus have with Christians and polarizes everyone.

Jesus did it another way. He became friends without compromise and was welcomed into environments most Christians never get the opportunity to travel to. Instead of throwing rocks (opinions), Jesus built bridges of relationships and friendships.

Culture is really both the frame and picture upon which people paint their understanding of life.

### **A Further Step**

1. How can you begin to better understand this crazy world you live in?
2. How can you begin to build bridges with those in your world who are not yet following Jesus?

## I don't care how much it costs? **Affluence**

Affluence is having the ability to get anything you want whenever you want it. It is having more than you need and living without an awareness or concern for people who are in need. The focus is on stuff and getting more. Many in the western world live in or with affluence and it becomes easy to conform to the affluent lifestyle around us. But then there is Jesus not having a place to lay his head. He did not own a house, car, furniture, many clothes or much of what we believe we must have today. He also unloaded most of the concerns that accompany having these things.

He never had to wonder which hotel to stay in (3 star or 4), moving to the "right" neighborhood, what Consumer Report says about the car we want, what kind of warranty we get with our TV, or getting an extra 15% discount on that shirt we can't live without.

Why are we so focused on becoming more affluent? As individuals in the U.S. we don't save much but we are always encouraged to spend more. We need to remember the widow who gave a couple of pennies and was high fived by Jesus as giving more than the religious bunch who gave a larger quantity of coins. We really need to deal with our motives for going after things the world considers necessary.

Taking a mission trip or any adventure into a third world country helps to temper our desire for chasing an affluent lifestyle. We need to be honest with our heart here. The gospel will change our pursuit for things but only if we take it seriously. I vividly remember being in Albania in 1991 and standing in line for bread, going to a restaurant where there was only one item on the menu and you wanted to order 5 servings but only 1 was allowed. We all lost weight on that trip. I asked a man what kind of car he was going to buy now that it was legal to do so and he said he would never be able to afford one. Most of the people made \$150 annually. I did not know how to handle these things. Remember, it is easier for camels to get through a tight place than for a rich person to make it to heaven. Look at **Matthew 6:19-20, 19:24, Luke 9:58, 21:1-4, and 1 John 2:15,16**

### **A Further Step**

1. What are some implications for your life of Jesus being homeless?
2. How willing are you to eliminate the chase for more in your life? How do you know you are serious?

## Do You Want to Supersize that Order? **Consuming Less**

In light of the needs of people in the world today, how can we continue to consume so much? What practical steps can we take to decrease how much we consume? Having a spirit of generosity can cause us to give away more and consume less. Maybe we could give more each year to others or go without a meal and give what we would have spent to someone who has a need. There are more ways we can be reminded to not consume so much. My wife and I recently had a 3<sup>rd</sup> world month in which our goal was to buy only what we needed and not what we wanted. This was not easy but we did learn how selfish we are in thinking we deserve being able to have what we wanted. We gave most of the dollars we saved to some friends in need.

The United States consumes most of the world's goods that are produced. Our entire culture is driven by purchasing stuff we are storing in basements, attics and garages. We need 3 car garages for either the boat or to make room so we can get both cars in the garage. We have garage sales so we can clean out an area and replace it with more stuff. We should regularly read Ecclesiastes and learn that consumption only indicates how off track this thinking is. Our financial system including stock markets is driven by consumption.

Mother Teresa had one suitcase for all of her possessions. Why don't we want to think about her or Jesus and their lives with regard to how focused we are on consumption of whatever? We do not have to live like Mother Teresa to consume less but we don't have to live like we do either. We can and should change much in the way we are constantly looking for the deal we have been waiting for. We have to change if we are serious about following Jesus.

Take a look at **Luke 3:11, Acts 4:32 and Philipians 4:11,12.**

### **A Further Step**

1. What is one lifestyle change you will make that could cause you to be more content and not chase after more?
2. Think through the message of your lifestyle in light of Jesus' remarks to a man in **Matthew 19:16-24.**

## What is that smell? **The Poor**

We don't like to think about the poor. We can experience guilt or anger as we think about people who live on the streets. Most of us are rich in comparison to those living throughout the world. Even in the United States, Christians with wealth often have a heart for the poor but the larger problem is that we neither know anyone by name who is poor nor do we have or would we think of having a friendship with them.

It becomes easy to do everything we can to avoid the poor. There they are on the corner with their cardboard sign and we look for some way to change lanes. We might be ok in giving them something through some social agency but we are not as willing to give them friendship or share a meal with them. Some of this is due to our insistence on comfort and to be around the poor makes us uncomfortable.

In much the same way we often want to clean up the areas of town in which the poor hang out so that it becomes more attractive and might even encourage tourism in our city. It often does not sound too much different than how lepers must have treated in Jesus' day. I bet we would have walked around them rather than straight to them.

Che Gueverra who helped mastermind the Cuban revolution took a trip before he left for Cuba and encountered a religious group working with lepers. First impressions are not always right. The lepers were separated from the religious workers by a large body of water. This allowed the workers to continue to live their chosen lifestyle but deal with their conscience.

Who do you know who is poor? How could you get more time with them? Where do they hang out in your city? One of the groups of people Jesus came to be with was the poor. He was intentional in getting time with them. Someone commented that Mother Teresa would often leave a banquet and go to be with the poor. I struggle with finding the poor in my city and wondering what I would do if I met a poor person. Would I invite them to our house for a meal, a shower or a night's rest? Look at **Psalm 12:5; 72-12-14 Isaiah 25:4 and 41:17 and Galatians 2:10**

### **A Further Step**

1. What makes you uncomfortable about hanging out with people with great physical needs? Why?
2. What attitudes or perspectives would you have to change to become friends with the poor?

## This is too much for my brain **Rethinking our Life**

We need to rethink our life because there is more reality to what we cannot see than what we do see. There is a war going on we are often completely unaware of. I recently read about a young woman in another country who was executed because of her religious belief, yet I still complain about traffic. To do this is like pouring my life down a rathole. Our focus only shows that we think what we can see is more important than what we cannot see.

Rethinking our life requires time, focus and honesty if we are going to make progress. This is hard work and not many of us are going to start down this track. Jesus chose to live an opposite way from the norm of his day. He would probably not choose to live in the kind of house we do, eat out at the expensive places we do or live to purchase whatever.

So, how are we supposed to live? Do we sell everything and move under a bridge? I don't know the answer to this question for you but can only think of my life and ask God to alter any whatever needs to change in me. I have to come to grips with how Jesus lived in his day and what his perspective was on possessions, how to use time and what to talk about with people. He was out of step with the religious and secular culture of his day and sometimes I wonder if I really want to live that way. How much do I really want to be like Jesus? How many square feet do my wife and I really need in a house? We finished our basement because we thought we would need more room and now we have 4 bathrooms to clean and more stairs to climb. What the spank were we thinking? We know what Jesus wants but are not sure how to get there and what it might look like when we get there. I am sure fear is an issue in my life when I think of rethinking my life.

Check out **Ephesians 6:12** and **1 John 2:15,16**

### **A Further Step**

1. On any given day, do you have difficulty thinking about eternal things? Why?
2. How willing are you in being completely out of step with the lifestyle of your friends, family, or your community of believers?

## God Bless America or me...Really? **American Dream**

The world cannot afford the American dream and many of us can't either but we still pursue it. We should chase after what we cannot afford to miss-that being God's reason for making us in the first place. Look at **Isaiah 43:7**

The basis of the American dream is freedom and believing we have the right to have what we want to have, be who we want to be and do what we want to do. **1 John 2:15,16** has been mentioned earlier but has to be again since we are so set on going our own way. It is the ownership of a home, a car or cars, or whatever we want to buy that we wrongly think will give us the comfort, fulfillment and security we need. The American dream is not the dream God has for us. Relationship with him is what he is after.

The American dream has a capitalistic or democratic basis rather than a Biblical basis. If you and I are going to fight this pursuit the United States is on we must have relationships with people with a like heart who are going after Jesus as priority one, two, three... Finding someone who thinks like this is terribly difficult. It is difficult for me to think consistently like this.

Suburbs are the destination of many but they are the home of many forces of our enemy such as complacency, privacy and comfort. Someone has correctly said "suburbs are more dangerous than the inner city." Our focus on and interaction with the poor is usually eliminated by living in the suburbs. Think about where you want to live and then where you don't want to live and ask why. I have serious questions about where I am living now. Even though I have met a few neighbors on our street, interaction with them is tough. Most of the people who live near us seem to want to be left alone after a hard commute and day of work. I find it easy to retreat to the inside of our house and forget about those living near me. Is this really part of the American dream?

Look at **Matthew 6:19-20 and 33** as it relates to the American dream and God's purpose for you.

### **A Further Step**

1. What evidence is there in your life that would prove you are or are not chasing the American dream?
2. What are the conflicts between the American dream and God's dream for you?

## Do you have a “get out of jail”card? **Breaking Free**

It will take a lifetime for most people to break free from that part of our culture that is contrary to God’s design. Some Christians may think about it but when they see that other Christians are not that serious about following Jesus, they easily abandon the culture’s stronghold and relax, thinking “this is just the way it is.”

When we begin to think differently or actually begin to live contrary with our culture, we begin to realize the challenge of breaking free of our culture’s hold on us. It is easy to begin something but quite another thing to break a stronghold in our life. We can memorize verses and hear great Christian messages on it but the actual change in our thinking, purchasing, accumulating, wanting, etc. is the proof of our decision to live like Jesus. This is where I get disgusted with myself because I know I talk about this stuff but walk away from the hard decisions that must be made to not have my life defined by the culture I live in.

Israel was to be a people “set apart” from the other nations and their lifestyles. In fact, God told them to destroy some nations in part because he knew they would quickly begin to incorporate some of their practices and dilute the purity of their nation. God wants us to be different from those around us by becoming free from the “patterns” in our culture that are stealing life from us. If I don’t stop watching the mini Cooper ads on TV, I will never break free from this.

There is also a “Christian culture” in the United States that has either diminished or eliminated God’s power from being released to change people or our country. We just can’t live with our Christian meetings being messy. What would we do if 3000 people wanted to start following Jesus and asked us to show them how? Whether secular or religious, God wants us to break free from any of the traps that bind us from the lifestyle of Jesus we see in the Bible.

Check out **John 8:31-32, 2 Corinthians 10:5 and 1 Peter 2:9-11**

### **A Further Step**

1. What are some fears you have as you think about living contrary to our secular or Christian culture?
2. What has been your experience in how easy it is to begin something and how challenging and often difficult it is to complete it?

## This picture is not clear at all **Contrast**

My wife and I have travelled to several countries and different cultures during our marriage. In some cases we found life to be very much like ours but in others, the difference was huge. We thought that some beliefs we had before we left the United States were absolutely right and should be adopted by everyone in the world. When we returned to our country we knew there were other ways to live and some were more grounded in how God intended us to live than what we had been taught in the United States. Some of the Christians we met really “got it” when it comes to living in community with other believers. I have never seen this done in any of the churches I have been in.

If you and I choose to live on the margin or boundaries of our culture, we are really questioning or challenging everything that most people think is the right way to live. Both Christians and those not yet Christians avoid living in ways that betray the assumed right to live as we want to. I mean don't be stupid, this is America.

To become relevant in our culture is not the goal. In one sense, Jesus was not a relevant man within his culture. His life demonstrated a strong contrast to the way both secular and religious people were living. We must be careful to not adopt the “relevant” things in our culture in order to connect with it. Someone commented that “Jesus was not cool or normal.” He was modeling a different way of living in the world and so must we. There is much opposition to this among Christians who are seeking to follow Jesus but who are not willing to give up lifestyles completely different than his. This is too easy to just talk about and therefore believe we are serious about following Jesus.

When we talk about following Jesus while hanging on to those aspects of our lifestyle that are not a part of Jesus' life at all, those not yet Christians see a blurred picture of the truth at best and wonder if God really is real and has anything for them. Clear up the picture for them so they can see what life was intended to be.

Look at **Matthew 9:9-13 and 20:25-28**

### **A Further Step**

1. In what ways could your neighbors, co-workers, extended family members tell you are living contrary to the accepted lifestyle of your culture?
2. In what ways does your following Jesus cause you to stand out from how other Christians are living? Or, is there no difference?

## Adding color to a black and white world    **Bringing Change to Where We Live**

A country can be changed somewhat quickly by revolution or gradually over a long period of time. However, a more significant way to change where we live as someone has said is to “tell and alternative story.” This means we need to talk with people about things they are not going to hear from anyone else. This involves telling them about what Jesus has done in our life, how he makes a difference in dealing with the issues we all have to deal with in everyday life, how he shows us the point of life, and whatever ways he has changed us.

People everywhere are starving for answers and they don’t know where to get answers to their questions but we have some of those answers. Telling them our story gives them the opportunity to deal with information they cannot access except through a life changed by Jesus.

It is never enough to get people to just show up at our Christian meetings because we are to transform our neighborhoods and communities. Many if not most of the people we know are not going to show up at our church meetings even if we have great drama, power point presentations or “lights out” worship. Getting people connected to believers in our church may be a part of the deal but usually we have to get the truth onto the turf of those without Jesus first and that happens as we paint our world with color.

Telling an alternative story is adding color to a world that is full of black and white stories that do not provide the right understanding of why we are on the planet. We can bring change where we live but if we do not change, they may never know Jesus.

Take a look at **John 9:24-25** and **2 Corinthians 5:17**

### **A Further Step**

1. Describe the typical topics of conversation you have with your friends, co-workers and neighbors.
2. How often do you bring up spiritual things in your conversations? How can you begin to do that?

## Who made this map anyway? **Questions of our Culture**

Jesus connects with people from every background. In traveling overseas several times I have found that it does not matter what country a person is living in, the questions are the same. **1 Corinthians 10:13** indicates that temptation is common to everyone and so are our questions about life. The church we attend has a saying that drives the mission of this church—"figuring out life and faith." Most people do not know how get anywhere near to understanding this and so they simply push the snooze button and sleep a little longer or stay a little longer at their favorite bar.

As followers of Jesus, we have many answers but we need to be sure they are connecting with the questions people are asking today. An examination of statements not yet Christians ask helps to reveal their questions without them asking the question. A statement like "it sure is boring here on Friday nights" reveals a question like "what is the point of my life?" or maybe "How do I find any friends?" It might be helpful to get several believers together who are intentionally connecting with people not following Jesus and think through what questions are being asked and what answers the Bible gives to help them understand how Jesus must be part of the formula to understand life.

People who do not know Jesus are described in **Proverbs 2:15** as "people traveling paths that go nowhere, wandering in a maze of detours and dead ends." (Message Translation) If you have lived very long, you know about the detours and dead ends. People like this have questions we need to have answers for. It is also ok to not have an answer for every question. If we are honest, we have the same questions and have not yet figured out the answer. When we are honest and tell someone "I don't know the answer to that question and I struggle with it myself", we open rather than close a door. I have more questions now after being a Christian for 47 years than I did before I became a Christian. I also have a few more answers.

Jesus often answered people's questions with a question. Doing this is not avoiding a person's question but may help us get to the core issues driving the question. We have to know what really bothers people.

Look at **John 18:33-38** and note the questions being asked and how Jesus handled them.

### **A Further Step**

1. What are some of the questions people have about life whom you come in contact with regularly?
2. How can you get more involved with not yet Christian people to discover what their questions are?

## I like to travel but I'm not going there    **How the World Views Christians**

There are some places we usually prefer to travel to and others we would just as soon avoid. There are people in those places we usually avoid who are probably very different than most Christians, who have questions, the same issues Christians do and they loud opinions about Christians. We will not like what they think and how they see us, but we need to know and we better get to know them.

The book "Un-Christian" has some of the best information on how people who do not follow Jesus see us. We have to learn how the gospel intersects with their issues and deals with questions people have. Many who do not follow Jesus have issues with Christians but are curious about Jesus. We need to learn how the gospel has been distorted over the years and people who do not follow Jesus can help us understand that.

Many who are not Christians see Christianity as rules or ideas that do not relate to them in their everyday life. We must learn how to translate the gospel into language that connects with them. They know there is an emptiness in them from time to time but do not know how to fix it. They need to know how Jesus answers these questions, difficulties and issues in their life. Of course, we need to know this also if we are going to speak with integrity to them about it. If they see us get up on Sunday morning and going somewhere with a Bible but see nothing of us the rest of the week, they will remain uninterested in what we have to say. This is a huge disconnect now between those following Jesus and those who only use his name at a football game.

Look at these verses **1 Corinthians 9:19-23** and **2 Corinthians 6:3**

### **A Further Step**

1. In what ways have Christians distorted what the gospel is about? How have you contributed to it?
2. Why do you think those not following Jesus might be more interested in Jesus but have issues with Christians they know?

## There is no way I am buying a foreign car **Gospel Ignorant or Resistant**

There are many people who are only going to buy “American” who do not understand how many automotive parts or computer parts are made in another country. They are ignorant of the origin of the internal parts of those things.

Many people we meet do not really know what a real Christian is and they are either uninformed or misinformed about what Christianity is all about. They do not know how a person becomes a Christian. As to why people become Christians, they have many ideas but often think it indicates weakness. They may have an interest in spiritual things but it is often related to the “new age” or something far from the truth. Think about where most people who do not know Jesus have access to the truth. Their routine rarely brings them into contact with believers who know how to communicate the gospel with them and they are not usually showing up at a local church to check it out. It is like you and I knowing the ins and outs of the banking system of Iceland. This is not a usual topic of conversation for us and we do not meet many bankers from that country.

A few people we meet really do have issues with Christians and they actively resist any discussion of Christianity. Many of these people have had a bad experience with someone in a church and have turned against the whole deal. A few are aggressive in resisting and gospel and encourage others to do the same. Many of these people are found in University communities and challenge everything except freedom. We could help them with that one. For the most part, these people have probably never seen an authentic Christian or they have had something pushed on them. If people have the opportunity to see the authentic gospel and Jesus in us, they are going to not only be curious but some are going to be eager to know Jesus.

Check out **Romans 12:9-21;15:20** and **1 Peter 3:15**

### **A Further Step**

1. If you had 5 minutes to tell a non-Christian what a real Christian is and what Christianity is about, what would you say?
2. Where do those not yet Christians have access to the truth about life if they do not go to a church meeting on Sunday? Any way you could change that?

## It's only a toy gun    **Violence**

This is where I will part company with many of my Christian friends but anyway... God did not create us to be violent in any way. We were made to love God and people and receive love from others. However, we live in a violent culture. It begins as children who have games with toy guns, swords or other things to play a "game" with others. The winner of course kills someone. But then we graduate to computer games that focus on destroying someone or something. These games are some of the best sellers in the United States and the companies that create them make people a lot of money on the stock exchanges. But, there only games ,right?

One of the first steps leading to the downfall of a culture is when we laugh at a game or the TV show that promotes violence or some sinful activity. Some activities that people call "sports" are applauded after a violent punch or tackle. In hockey, fighting is expected and there is disappointment if there is not one real good fight in the game. Ultimate fighting which has been called the fastest growing "sport" brings to a climax just how violence has captivated many. Unless there is blood on the mat, why waste your time watching.

And of course the culmination of a violent culture is war. We glory in the massive armory that has its intent in destroying someone or something. I can remember sitting at the University of Wyoming versus Air Force football games and along with everyone else feeling an excitement at the Air Force jets as they flew over the game. The rush of adrenalin was much stronger than the game. The thought of these jets flying over an enemy country gave everyone a charge. As a culture, we are very good at destroying but not at creating. God is a God of justice but the type of life that focuses on destroying does not reflect God's nature. He is powerful but that does not give us reason for cheering the violence in our culture.

So, the Old Testament seems to express God's violence as an attribute of judgment or justice against the evil of people while the New Testament shows his love. We usually come down on one of these, so if I have to choose how to respond to evil, I choose love. Jesus death also shows how he responded to evil in his day. He stayed on the cross when he could have come down and wiped everyone out.

Look at **Matthew 5:39 and Luke 23:34**

### **A Further Step**

1. In what ways have you participated in the violent culture we live in?
2. How can you change anything in your life so you focus on creating rather than enjoying the violence shown on our TV's or computer screens?

# Lifestyle

## What to believe is important but how to live is critical

### Why are they leaning over on that track? **Running the Race-Right Living**

What's life really about? I mean, who really thinks about this? It seems like a crazy question but the answer to this question is essential if our life is to have a point. The answer is not complex but rather simple. If we would look at how Jesus lived and do what he did, think like he thought, speak like he spoke we would live in a way that honors God, is fulfilling and defines the point of life.

Solomon was a man who had more than anyone in terms of material things. He could build what he wanted and have anything made he desired. He had it all and anything he could think of, he could have. He concluded the book of Ecclesiastes with one of the most important statements in the Bible. "The end of the matter, fear God and keep his commandments. This is the whole duty of man." (**Ecclesiastes 12:13**)

The more I think about this, the more I think how far off base I am from God's original intent for me. I see glimpses of it in my life but have many days in which I don't know how to get from where I am to the starting line. I wonder if it is worth trying to find that starting line when so many Christians are not even aware there is a race.

How about you? Are you living the way God planned it? Have you been on the track lately or lying on the couch too much?

Look at **Ecclesiastes 7:29** and **2 Timothy 4:7**

#### **A Further Step**

1. In one sentence, what is the purpose of your life? (Base this on what God says about it)
2. In one sentence, what is the purpose of your life? (Base this on how you used your time over the last 6 months) How will you reconcile the difference?

## I hate the coach's training program    **Brokenness**

We can get excited about people seeing Jesus in us and even being wanting to become a Christian but before that is possible, something critical must be addressed. It is like thinking about the big game but hating the practice session which not only deals with improving my skill but also my attitude. We want people to see how good we are and that hits the problem head on.

Nothing trumps personal holiness. God uses people who are broken and that is painful and why most avoid the whole idea of it. But God is a holy God and never backs away from it. We blow it off with statements like "God knows that is just the way I am." To try and bring Jesus to people without dealing with the sin in our life never works. It is life without power. But then we easily say that job is for "full time pastors." Brokenness releases God's power and we should not take a step to share his life without beginning to deal with this in our life first. We must face the evil in us. The cross is the only way to deal with those aspects of our life that must be changed if we are to bring Jesus to people.

It is so spanking easy to believe things without them really affecting my lifestyle. The real test of what we know is how we live. Right thinking is important but right living is essential. It is important to think like God wants us to but it has to change us. No change, then who cares because we look just like everyone else.

What are the big issues to address here? It is not so much that we need to just study Christianity, but rather we need to live out what Jesus said and did. Check out **John 13:17** on this idea.

Do people see the truth when they see us? Our life should bring clarity to people looking for answers to the questions life throws at us. We are the salt of the earth. (**Matthew 5:13**.) We can have a distinct influence in our employment, neighborhood and community but it requires radical changes in our lifestyle and most are not going to go for the change. We are only having minimal influence in these areas of our life and not many are wanting to explore Jesus. Most Christians do not even know the names of their neighbors and prayer is a ghost. God is committed to us being able to make life work and impact our community so he set us up with building plans in scripture.

Right thinking connected with right living is a driving force of a missional lifestyle.

Look at **Psalms 51:17;127:1 and Isaiah 57:15**

### **A Further Step**

1. What does the idea of brokenness suggest to you? Do you like it? Do you need it?
2. What aspects of your life do you know need to be dealt with? Will you deal with them?

## *What's that Noise I Hear Under the Hood?*    **Close Examination**

I am one of the worst at maintaining a car. I defer maintenance until it is absolutely necessary. This is not always good as I can recall a couple of trips that ended well but they allowed me to spend a lot of time in places like Lusk, Wyoming longer than I could have imagined. With a closer examination before I left on the trip, I probably could have avoided the memorable experience.

In **Haggai 1:7** is a verse that deals with a close examination of our lifestyle. "Give careful thought to your ways..." What does this mean and how do you begin to do it? The New Living Translation says "Look at what's happening to you." Think of the word "careful". What does that mean to you? I think of taking my time, and not rushing, not overlooking areas of my life I want to avoid looking at, asking God to give me insight into how I am living my life and a few other things. This is not a glance but rather is deliberate focusing on my life. It requires no distractions and perhaps a day away with God.

The second word to focus on is "thought". Is it difficult for you to think this way? I find it easy to rush through and miss the heart of what God is wanting to say to me. Part of what this means is to think about what God's purpose is for me and think about how my life looks compared to it.

The word "your" makes it personal. I do not need to think about how someone else is missing it but rather only look into my life. There is enough here that I will not have time to critique someone else. **Romans 14:12-13** speak plainly to this.

And finally "ways" is a word that speaks to our lifestyle. How am I doing with my spouse, friends God has brought into my life, people in the small groups I meet with, my disciplines, temptation areas, distractions, busyness, the church aspect of my life, following Jesus, being distinct from the culture I live in. You get it I am sure. Take some time and let God show you the areas of your life he wants you to "carefully" examine. What would your life possibly look like 6 months from now if you did this during this week?

### **A Further Step.**

1. When was the last time you seriously looked at your life and asked God to show you what needed to change, be added to or be subtracted from your lifestyle?
2. Describe what the word "careful" means to you in terms of Haggai 1:7

## I get so distracted here **Focused Thinking**

What if Jesus really meant everything he said? Of course we would say yes but really, do we believe this and is it changing us? What does it mean to take someone seriously? If we do, we will act on what they say. We may have to think about it for a while but we will definitely do something about it. If what Jesus said is not practical today, it never has been. What really matters? Are you and I focused on what really matters or are we dabbling in distracting things? Think about some of the distracting things in many Christians' way of doing the Christian life. Having to have the inside of a church building have just the right appearance, making sure the music relates to the talk, etc. It goes on and on.

We could tell someone we believe in communism, but does that make us a communist? Not necessarily. But if we follow the teachings of communism, our life will show it. To really believe Jesus meant what he said and that he is speaking to me about it means my life is going to look like his when I am in my neighborhood, or workplace, on the golf course, basketball court or wherever. If we do not stand out from others, we need to question whether we are living like Jesus. How do you believe your life would change if you really believed Jesus meant what he said?

If we believe Jesus meant what he said, it is going to change what we have previously believed. Sometimes this is harder than changing behavior. God always alters something in us when he speaks to us. So, we need to tell ourselves we could be wrong in what we have thought. Be careful to not major on excellence to the neglect of allowing God to interrupt the service or the way you have always thought about something.

Humility is one of the most important virtues in learning how to live like Jesus did. The religious people of Jesus' day had no interest in learning about what he was talking about nor were they going to change anything. If you and I are not willing to change and give up control, we can forget about God speaking to us. What would be the most difficult belief for you to change? Can you identify where these beliefs came from? Think about how you do church, what you believe church is, why we build privacy fences for our houses, have decks in the back of the house and do not have front porches, why we work 50-60 hours a week, why we are captured by the latest tech toys or fashions...

Look at **Luke 11:39-54** **John 13:17** **Philippians 3:7-14**

### **A Further Step**

1. How do you know you are focused on what really matters? Does your neighbor or roommate know what you are focused on?
2. How do you believe your life would change if you really believed Jesus meant what he said?

## I don't like this color of paint    **Transitioning**

When you change the color of paint on a wall, it might look strange at first and you may wish you hadn't begun this project. The old color looks ok you think as you continue to paint. But the further you get, the better the room looks. The same is true for transitioning into another ministry midset. Keep going if God has put it on your heart.

Change is inevitable and this is especially true as we begin to follow Jesus. To live a "missional" lifestyle will mean sacrifice that is costly. It will cost time and money to get close to people outside of the religious zones. Courage will be required because most of those who are Christians are not remotely thinking of life like this. There is this glaring fear of not knowing what to do as we reach out to people like Jesus did. Mother Teresa said when she began her ministry in Calcutta India that "in determining which work would be done, there was no planning at all." She said "I headed the work in accordance to how I felt called by the people's suffering. God made me see what he wanted me to do."

The leader of a large Christian organization recently resigned and he and his wife began to work with homeless and poor people. He asked one of the leaders of a ministry that works with these people how they measured success. The leader said "we bring Jesus to these people." What does this make you think about in terms of what you have believed are the critical things in ministry or life? Think about what Mother Teresa's 5 year goals would look like with this strategy. How about yours?

When we begin to follow Jesus into the lives of those outside our safety and comfort, it will look chaotic, perhaps confusing, or wrong by those satisfied to live in the "protection" of the Christian bubble. Jesus will make it clear what to do but in ways not like how we would prefer.

Look at a couple of ways he healed blind people in **Matthew 9:27-30** and **John 9:1-7**. Why didn't he do it the same way? What are the implications of his healing people differently? For you?

### **A Further Step**

1. What are you really afraid of in changing your lifestyle in order to do what God wants for you?
2. What word or words would you use to describe your feelings and thoughts about altering your way of living or ministry?

## Why don't homeless people get a job? **Real Caring**

How do we know we are following Jesus...really? We can think we are but it is more in our mind than in our heart. When it is in our heart, it is in our life, there is evidence and we can only then say we are living as Jesus intended us to live. Belief remains in our mind but conviction is in our life and must have evidence for us to know it is real.

Many people listened to Jesus, I mean, no one ever talked like this, but that is as far as it got with most of them. This is a lot like listening to a great speaker and even being challenged but 3 days later we have no idea what was said nor why we would have gotten so emotional about it. Was I really in tears when the finished talking?

When we care about others like Jesus did, something changes in us and our resulting action comes from our heart rather than just from our mind. Someone named Beauchene said "You are never a great man when you have more mind than heart." So, we need to get real about this stuff or put another DVD in and get a beer and forget about all of this.

We may not be able to care for the needs of people throughout the world but we can care for those in the part of the world we live in. When was the last time you ventured out of your immediate world to touch those no one else will? Who are the lepers in your world (country, city...) today?

It is way too easy to agree with this but never do anything about it. Our comment might be "you can't be serious" as we think of the lifestyle change necessary to care like Jesus did. God wants to intersect our life with people, but we are not available and without real caring, our life negates what we say we believe. If you think life sucks now, if you don't really follow Jesus, you will become a "black master" and have a more complete definition of "life sucks."

Is it possible to be a Christian and not follow Jesus? Be careful how you answer this. Ask a Chinese believer in the underground church or a first century follower of Jesus and think about how they would answer this. If your answer is yes, you will not need to read any further. If you keep reading, look at **Matthew 25:31-40**.

### **A Further Step**

1. What beliefs do you have that have yet to become convictions? How is that going to change?
2. What would you include as rules in the game of "Not really following Jesus?"

## What are the names of your imaginary friends? **Perspective**

When someone asks us “what is your perspective on this?”, how we answer may be different. Why? How we see something with our eyes, depends on where we are looking from. If it is about our viewpoint, our perspective is determined by many factors-our studying, other’s influence and teaching, our willingness to examine other viewpoints, etc.

What about how we should live? How accurately does our answer reflect God’s perspective? How do you know and how would you get God’s opinion about it?

It is so easy to go through a day or week or all of life and not think about what is going on around us. Our urgency seems to be whether we can get to the store early enough to get the sale price. What was Jesus’ urgency? In **Ephesians 5:15-17** in the Phillips translation it speaks about “living with a” due sense of responsibility and understanding the meaning and purpose of life.” Do you do this? Do your friends, neighbors or co-workers know what life is really all about because of your life?

Look at **Isaiah 43:7 and Romans 8:29**. Does your life clearly show people that we are made for God’s glory and that we are to become like Jesus? Showing up at a Christian function does not show this at all to those without Jesus.

In his conversations with people, Jesus brought people to a decision about who he was and what he was talking about. They had to make a choice. Is his perspective and urgency of living like he talked about your perspective? Check out **John 5:24, 10:10 and Hebrews 9:27**.

Maybe you get scared when you think of how God thinks about life, but when you and I live with his perspective, we can handle what life throws at us. Our neighbor lost her home due to an adjustable loan resetting to a higher monthly payment. She does not know Jesus but if she did and had his perspective, her response would have been very different. Perspective determines how you and I view a financial crisis or any other situation that happens to us.

Isaiah 55:8-9 are verses that are essential for us to remember how God looks at things differently than we do. When we follow Jesus, we begin to see life and live it like he did.

So what is your perspective on how we are to do church, live in our neighborhood, relate to Christians not following Jesus (if it is possible to be a Christian and not follow Jesus), live in an affluent culture...?

### A Further Step

1. If Jesus moved into your town and decided to be a part of your church, how do you think his perspective would be different from yours? Your pastor or elders? Why might it be different?
2. How would you describe your willingness to learn from someone very different from you?

## You need a complete change of clothes    **Repentance**

Looking at an anticipated place you want to visit on a web cam stirs up some emotions as you see yourself sitting on a bench overlooking some cool spot. But getting there causes you to pause as you consider what it's going to take financially. You are going to have to save a considerable amount or it will just be a wish. You know you will have to alter your spending habits in a big way to pull this off.

It is the same as you and I think of how God wants us to live and how we would really like Jesus to do his stuff through us like he did way back when. But we know this is going to require us to rethink how we are doing life-by-ourselves, with our families, with those not yet following Jesus and with other believers.

This is repentance-looking at our life and then looking at Jesus' life and making the necessary adjustments to live like he did. We are more off base with this than what we think. It is going to take courage to look at Jesus' life and ours and note the differences and be willing to make whatever changes necessary to change. But this describes why Jesus showed up in our world. Check out **Proverbs 1:10** ( a sinner is someone going in a different direction than God) and **Luke 5:32**.

Think of a few words or thoughts you have that describe what your life looks like now. Be honest and don't embellish it. But go further with it and write down what you know needs to change. Don't be trapped into the typical changes related to dieting but rather get hard with yourself and think about your relationships, bad habits, your thought life, discipling another person... What do you know God wants to see change in your life? Don't make a list of more than 5 things.

Repentance means a complete change of mind on how we are living life. It means getting serious about where life is going. Someone said that our life compared to eternity is about 2/5 of a second. Doesn't it make sense to get after it now?

### **A Further Step**

1. How willing are you to make essential adjustments in your life in order to live like Jesus did? How will you know you are serious?
2. What do you know God wants to see change in your life? Remember, only 5 things to begin with. Get a friend to keep you accountable to this.

## Maybe Wrong is Really Right **Different**

When Jesus walked into a room people noticed something different about him. What he talked about, how he looked at people, and how he spoke to them showed that he was like them but also distinctly different and their curiosity was aroused. His perspective on what really matters challenged both the religious and pagans of his day.

He was showing people there was another way of doing life and as a follower of Jesus, we are challenged to live for what really matters. Most people do not know there is another way of doing life or they believe a person in vocational Christian work is called to live differently but it is not for everyone. Where did we get this? The people Jesus hung with were ordinary people.

What does living differently mean? Part of the answer is that if we are living as Jesus did, we will not be chasing after the things most people do. If you are a high school student, college student, teacher, accountant, business owner or housewife it will have some different looks but it will be different from others in your age group or vocation. How might **Luke 16:15** look different for you? What do you highly value? Go through your check book and see what you are spending money on.

Even what we do to reach those not following Jesus will look different if we are really following him. Shane Clayborn said “people who change the world climb through windows rather than walking through doors.” Walking through doors is the accepted way and climbing through windows is the different way. Is your strategy of reaching those not yet following Jesus working? Is the church’s?

The Cadet Maxim at the West Point Military Academy states it like this:

“Risk more than others think is safe. Care more than others think if wise. Dream more than others think is practical. Expect more than others think is possible.”

This captures how a life should be lived differently than the norm. Jesus lived a normal life in the midst of people who while in the majority were living an abnormal life based on God’s design. Normal by most people’s definition is not the same as good or right and it does not come close to God’s definition.

We need courageous change. Especially for the large compromises that have settled easily into our lifestyle. However, to live with a different vision for our world will be a lonely thing. Many talk about this but few really are different.

### A Further Step

1. What are the evidences in your life that prove you are involved in the lives of those not yet following Jesus?

2. Do you live a transparent life? Why is this essential? How do you hide from being real?

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## Get out of the Christian Sub Culture **Involved**

Many people have not really seen Jesus in the Christians they know. Even Gandhi was fascinated by Jesus but when he met Christians, he felt let down. Why do people come to these conclusions? We must show people an accurate version of Christianity so they can come to a decision based on truth rather than a blurred vision of Jesus. Look at how Paul put it in **2 Corinthians 2:14-16**.

This means we must be involved with people in the non religious world and not be insulated from them. Check these verses: **John 17:20-21**, **1 Corinthians 5:9,10**, **Philippians 2:14,15**, and **1 Peter 2:12**. It is easy and comfortable to not associate closely to people not following Jesus but dead wrong. Jesus lived opposite from most Christians. He spent time with people who thought differently, probably cussed as a normal part of life, had beer in the refrigerator, and enjoyed wine after dinner. You get the point. Jesus was comfortable with these people. He even made wine for a wedding. Look at **Matthew 9:9-13** and **John 2:1-11**. The Christian "bubble" is poison if we only hang out with other believers and never get our feet dirty with people different from us.

Why not get out of the Christian sub-culture and get into the culture where the good news is not available unless we are there? We need to stop teaching people to leave the world's culture or these people have no chance. What are we afraid of? Not yet Christians need to see us live with transparency. We need to get real. We really know ourselves and to pretend to be who we really are not with Christian friends defeats everything. We have the same temptations, struggles and desires as those not following Jesus. Our honesty opens a door with people who are afraid to let anyone close to them.

We must develop a fabric of friendship with the community we live in. This is involvement. Have a bbq with neighbors, meals, deserts together. Help a neighbor by picking up their news paper and mail when they are gone

Jesus hung out with those people marginalized by the religious and even secular people. He had no problem with lepers, IRS types and the average guy. His preference was refugees and not those in the temple or in our day- mega churches. Today, he would have coffee with those with aids, the gay community or the homeless. In Boulder, Colorado he would spend many Saturdays on Pearl Street Mall. Most Christians avoid Boulder-what does that say? Jesus will take us to these places and to people who live or frequent these places if we are following him.

Jesus was a marginal person anyway-born outside of the local hospital in a barn, grew up in the wrong town, had a blue collar job as a carpenter, had his birth questioned-who was really the father? Where does God want to use you? One thing worse than dying is living a boring life. Can you be bored if you are following Jesus?

### **A Further Step**

1. What is the evidence that you are involved with those not yet following Jesus?

2. Do you live a transparent life? Why is this essential? How do you hide from being real?

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## Move to Albania and simplify your Life **Simplicity**

Have you ever heard someone say “Ah, the good old days”? What does that mean? What made them the good days? Some people think about how simple things were then. There are several places you can move to outside of the USA and you will find life to not be as complex as it is here. But here, this is a fight for most people who travel fast in life.

The fight to have a life of meaning does not mean it has to be complex. And, it can be very simple but be light years away from God’s intentions for us. Some of the challenges however in maintaining a simple life include:

1. Not accumulating stuff. I go through my closet every year and give away what I have not worn during the past year-except a couple of shirts I keep so I can do it again next year. I have for the last several years been giving away books in my collection of books. Someone else can read them because I already have. It also saves them money. Have you ever thought about how free it is to live with less? Jesus had no home, very few clothes and not much else. Really we need to subtract rather than add when it comes to our stuff. My wife and I are praying now about selling our house and renting a small place because we do not need what we have and want to live with less. We haven’t gotten much encouragement to do this which seems to telling me we are on the right track.
2. Saying no. Every week say no to something. We are presented with too many “good” things that take our time. Almost everyone I know is overcommitted because they have said yes to opportunities someone presented to them.
3. Letting go. There is pain in letting go of things-but why? Recently my wife and I went through some “treasured” things of ours and gave them to some people who were having a garage sale so they could have more for some upcoming expenses. It was quite easy to do after we began to let go of some of these.

I can remember on some of our overseas mission trips how simple we lived. It really was freeing to have all you owned in a large back pack. We did not have to insure anything and if was stolen, so what. It would be easy to replace.

Another aspect of simplicity is to do what Mother Teresa mentioned-“do small things with great love.” It is not doing big things that is important but doing whatever God puts on our heart. This makes small things some of the most important things we could do.

Check out **Luke 12:32-34** and **Philippians 3:13-14** and note how they relate to simplifying your life.

### **A Further Step**

1. How do you react to the idea of getting rid of some of your things rather than accumulating more?
2. How does Jesus living as a homeless man for 3 years affect your living with simplicity? Why do some people say this is a wrong comparison for us to make?

## It is better to Travel Light **Eliminating Clutter**

Our bags weigh too much. When you fly (especially overseas) and your bags are over the weight limit, you have to really pay extra. We need something in life to put a check on how we live and what we collect. In Luke 9:1-6 Jesus challenged his disciples to take as little as necessary on a trip. What they and we see as essential is not close to how God sees what is needed in living as he intended us to live. Whenever we have or believe we need to have more than what we really need, it is clutter. I always laugh when I watch people at airports with 4 or 5 bags they are trying to roll towards the check in line. What a joke to think they need this much to have a neat vacation.

We also should eliminate the many Christian activities available to us in order to be available to others. Most of the Christians in the world do not have the facilities and resources available to Christians in the U.S. and yet they are impacting their countries much more significantly than we are ours. They don't have access to seminars, books, dvd's, etc. that are considered normal and essential to do ministry in the U.S. We can learn from them.

We try to rationalize our complicated and busy lives by asserting that we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century or in a much more developed country. We need to learn to travel light. I take one back pack when I leave the country and love watching people desperately looking for their checked bag after the flight.

Think about the clutter in your life. Jesus was never in a hurry, never too busy, never pressured himself to get more done in less time, and never wished he could have had a neater pair of sandals or that colored robe. He did not overwork himself or burn out trying to get more so he could take with him on his trips with his disciples. Look at **Ezekiel 22:30** and note God's purpose and perspective. Does this connect with you? Would you have to get rid of something to be this person?

We are going to have to eliminate the clutter in our home or life to be available to people and be focused only on what is on God's heart. **2 Chronicles 20:12** speaks loudly about why God uses some people. Their eyes are on God. For us, Jesus must be the strategy for showing us what we must get rid of so our lives are not so cluttered with insignificant trivia. We discuss so many things that are useless and do not matter at all. Travel light in your conversation and talk about what really matters.

### **A Further Step**

1. What needs to go in your life in order to live without being in a hurry, or becoming too busy or trying to get more done in less time?
2. Are you available for God to bring someone into your life you can disciple? What does the answer "no" mean?
3. Do you need everything in your house? Give something away each month to someone who could use it.

## Who's in Charge Here? **Responsibility**

There are some aspects of following Jesus that are our responsibilities and some that only God can do. When we attempt to do what only God has said is his responsibility, we get bloody running into walls. For example, we can bring truth to a person's ears but only God can bring it to their hearts. Look at **John 6:44 and Ephesians 2:8-9** in this regard.

One of God's jobs is to "comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable." Think about how many times he did this. The New Testament is full of people Jesus met who challenged him at every point and others who hung on every word because it was relieving their suffering or answering some question or stimulating their thinking. It is our responsibility to introduce people to Jesus and allow him to be the boss in their life. If you and I argue with someone about some truth and convince them we are right, how long will they be on our side? If God convinces them it goes from belief to conviction.

When God works in our life it always disrupts something. This disruption exposes our idols, reveals our needs, stimulates our growth and leads us to consider old or traditional things in new ways. Our church recently has moved from meeting on Sunday mornings to Friday nights with a meal, interaction, teaching and worship. The idea is to invite friends to an atmosphere where they can listen in total informality. They can discuss, ask questions or just eat. In dropping the Sunday service, some have expressed concern over whether you can have "church" on Friday. God has led us to consider doing "old things" in a new way. It is not my responsibility to convince someone this is right, but I have to let God do the convincing.

When we begin to get this, we eliminate a lot of stress from trying to do what only God does. We also experience a freedom and a pace to life that he intended us to live. Check **Matthew 11:28**

### **A Further Step**

1. What would you include in a list of responsibilities that are ours and those that are God's?
2. What happens when we assume God's responsibilities? What doesn't happen?

## There is Always some Gravel on the Road    **Enemies**

“I will only believe it if I see it.” I bet you have heard this or said it many times .We live in a world at war. It is not Iraq or the Sudan but a spiritual war going on around us even though we are often put to sleep by the lifestyle we have adopted or by those around us who are completely unaware of this aspect of life. I am thinking of those calling themselves Christians as well as those not following Jesus. If God pulled back the veil that is keeping us from seeing as he does, we would no doubt be alarmed. **Ephesians 6:10-18** details this clearly.

One enemy we often do not recognize is “busyness.” Why don’t we see this? The sad question I hear over and over is “Are you keeping busy?” and the equally inadequate answer is “yes.” The truth is that the busier we are, the less we care about people God wants to put into our life. **Matthew 9:36** is a thought that rarely crosses our mind. When we see the crowds of people we get disgusted that we can’t get the park bench, or picnic table we wanted.

Our focus on a job, a relationship, finances or whatever steals the thoughts that were always on Jesus’ heart. Life ends up draining us and we easily conclude that this is the normal way to live.

**Matthew 6:24** is a reminder that we must focus on following Jesus only. There can be no competitor to pursuing what Jesus’ agenda is. It never changes because he never changes. When a student who was involved in a Christian student group is away from the campus for several years, it becomes easier to conclude that their commitment then cannot be expected to be the same now that they are in the “real world” but that thinking will eliminate them from the game. Are you still in the game?

It may not seem like an enemy but showing up when a church meets can become an enemy to following Jesus because if this is our only definition of the Christian experience, we are like an athlete who listens to the coach but goes out for a burger and fries instead of putting on the uniform and getting into the game. The church meeting can be ok if we remember that our enemies are waiting just outside.

Be on the lookout for your enemies!

### **A Further Step**

1. How often do you really think about the spiritual warfare going on around you?
2. What are some of the more significant enemies that are distracting you from God’s purposes for you that you can recognize? Ask a friend what some of theirs are.

## Tiptoeing Through Life    **Misplaced Fear**

To walk through life stealthily or cautiously on your tiptoes reveals a misplaced fear of people who are not going to venture out with Jesus into the hard places of where life is lived by many. There is nothing wrong with being cautious...at times. Jesus disappeared in crowds at times. We must live with non-Christians with complete visibility however. We do not mind living visibly with some people but not with others. Jesus lived the same with everyone and so should we.

In **Galatians 2:11-14** Paul challenged Peter because he had been eating with outsiders when the religious gang was not around. When they appeared, Peter got away from the outsiders. He was afraid of what the religious types would say about him. His behavior affected others on the team and they also withdrew from the pagan bunch.

Paul hammered this one. He said hey, you are not acting in line with the truth of the gospel. It is no different today when you begin to live intentionally with those not following Jesus. There is opposition from those who have no intention of being around outsiders except at a grocery store when they check out. And most would go through the self check- out lane if they can. Plan on being accused of compromising something or giving up the faith altogether. Many "Christians" are not going to follow Jesus into the market place of life.

We have to be careful not to tiptoe into doing life with people who can't figure life out but rather walk into it with them boldly. Don't just get your toes dirty. Forget about those with religious check lists to make sure they don't cross the lines they have drawn that define following Jesus for them. If we are really following Jesus, he will erase some of those lines and show us the ones that really matter. Forget the labels people will give you.

### **A Further Step**

1. Look at **2 Timothy 1:7** and discuss with some others how this misplaced fear has kept you from venturing out into the market place where those not yet Christians are hanging out.
2. What are some Biblical boundaries that do matter in living with non-Christians?

## They have a Magnetic Personality    **Life Qualities**

It is easy to see that some people have personalities that seem to attract people to them, but then there are those who seem to walk through life collecting metal of all kinds that attach themselves to their body, their attitudes, speech, etc. No two people are quite the same and we have different temperaments and personalities but there are some aspects of being the kind of person God made us to be that are essential if we are to make any difference or just be like any mosquito that is killed in the summer. Do you remember any mosquitoes you killed last summer? Were they that distinct that there is no way you are going to forget them?

Certain character qualities, attitudes, thinking and values are necessary if we are to have an attractive life around those not following Jesus as well as those who are. We make the choice to let God do what he alone can do and people see the difference. Look at **Galatians 5:22-23**.

Think about these 6 for a few minutes or longer...

1. Having a focus on the internal change of a person rather than just being involved in activity. It is easy to think we have to do something rather than be something. Check **John 6:28-29**
2. Having a perspective that values diversity and creativity. People are different and we can learn something about God from everyone. God is the most creative being ever. **Genesis 1**
3. Being honest rather than superficial in relationships will take you to levels in your friendships that demand much but result in freedom and fulfillment.
4. Letting people know you are on the same road as they are with questions that do not always seem to have answers.
5. To live with the impact of "I have no place to lay my head" as Jesus commented one day as it relates to consumerism and the plastic American lifestyle with a focus on myself to have whatever I want.
6. Living to meet the needs of people I know and some I will meet rather than only thinking about mine. Living with a servant heart.

### **A Further Step**

1. What deficiencies are you aware of that you need to work on in order to more significantly make a difference where you live and work?
2. Why do you believe you have not made progress in dealing with these life qualities you know you should have in your life?

## What's in Your Tool Box? **Life Skills**

Being the person God wants us to be is a life-long process. We can work on these “Life Qualities” and still not make the difference in our world as we could because we also need some “Life Skills” to go along with this. It is like a guy who really has a heart to play baseball but has no idea how to stand in the batter’s box or how to field hard grounders. They have to have some skill to make the team. Look at **Proverbs 22:29 & 2 Timothy 2:15**.

Or think of it this way...you only have a hammer in your tool box but you need a screwdriver to remove a screw that is in the wrong place. Now, you can hammer the wall to pieces and remove the screw or you can add another tool-a screwdriver to your tool box and remove the screw and leave the wall intact. It is the same form making a difference as a Christian in the world. We’ve got to have some skills to go along with our life to help people follow Jesus and impact people.

Here are some skills we need to make sure are in our tool box as we seek to make a difference in our world...

1. Learning how to listen to people. Think about how much you learn when you do most of the talking. You do not learn anything about the other person. Whatever a person talks about and how they express it will help you understand what is important or not important to them.
2. Being a source of encouragement to people. We must learn how to encourage people to keep moving toward Jesus. Encouragement should be 90% and criticism 10% and not the other way around.
3. Knowing how to develop a friendship is critical. In a friendship you enrich each other’s lives. Help them with the agenda God has given them and not how they can help you with your agenda.
4. Learning how to identify the roots of a person’s needs and not just the symptoms will help them resolve issues on a more permanent rather than temporary level.
5. Knowing how to share Jesus will release people from the traps and prison’s many live in. Learn to share the gospel and your story of how Jesus is helping you deal with the issues life throws at us.
6. Learning how to have a meaningful conversation with people. The superficiality of conversations today is beyond lame. It is tragic. Staying on meaningless topics is as useless as walking a dog that has 1 leg. Help people develop questions that bring out meaning and purpose.
7. Learning how to ask critical questions will help people see their need for Jesus and begin to see how God really does love them without conditions.

### **A Further Step**

1. Take one of the above skills and work on it for a week or two and journal your thoughts about your progress.
2. Get with a friend and discuss these life skills and add to the list others you know you need.

# Following Jesus Is this Simple or Impossible Today?

## This Changes Everything Follow Me

It is challenging, dangerous, life changing and incredibly fulfilling to follow Jesus. Jesus' statement in **Matthew 4:19** was a life altering challenge. All he said was "follow me." This would forever change these men's lives but they did not hesitate to leave their vocation and do just that. I can remember the February night in 1962 walking across a college campus in Texas and responding to Jesus' call to me to follow him. I did it without hesitation and my life was altered.

These early disciples understood some things about following Jesus but had much to learn and they were eager to learn. We have to carefully define what it means to follow Jesus because many in American Christianity have this confused at best and messed up at the worst. An accurate understanding of what it means to follow Jesus is like the rudder on a ship. If we set the rudder in the right direction, the ship will more likely get to its intended destination.

It is not that we have made it complicated but rather we have made it too easy in an effort to justify a lifestyle that is dramatically off base with Jesus' call to every person. Jesus is always looking for followers and not just believers. A follower is one who is arranging their life in such a way to honor Jesus in every aspect of their life. Whatever Jesus says, they are going to do, think, be or live. There is no hesitation because a follower of Jesus had made a decision to be a bond slave of Jesus. Look at **Philippians 1:1**. Paul identifies himself in this way. A servant can choose to do what his master says or not, but not a bond slave. The Greek word "doulas" is used in **Philippians 1:1** to describe a follower as a bond slave. When a person makes this decision even though they may stumble at some point, they continue to validate that original decision by starting again.

This starting again does not allow for us to do whatever we want and then ask God to cover us with his grace. His grace is always there but our lifestyle of following Jesus means there is real evidence in our life that we are increasingly obeying Jesus. There must be change in our life or we are not following Jesus. Discipleship is never optional for any follower of Jesus. (**Matthew 28:19-20**)

What has changed in your life?

### A Further Step

1. What are the implications of your being a bond slave of Jesus Christ?
2. Look at the "follow me" statements in the gospels. Write them down and consider whether you are hesitating to do any and how you are rationalizing not doing some of them.

## Tour Bus Theology    **The Wrong Neighborhood**

Most people only see through the front window of the bus and a few glance through the side windows while many sleep on the bus. They are for sure not getting off of the bus unless the guide says get off. If Jesus was the guide what would the trip look like? It might stop at the cathedral in order for Jesus to point out how this disgusts him and then he would hit the back streets that are very dark. You might cringe a little when the bus comes to a stop in a dark looking alley and Jesus says “lets go.”

Jesus was and remains a revolutionary leader. His expectations are the same even for those who live in 3 story homes today. We are so far removed from this man that it seems crazy to think he could mean the same things he talked about two thousand years ago. What does a revolutionary man think about our vocation, neighborhood, social activities or religious activities?

We want to stay in and really pursue comfort and safety and say we are following Jesus. It can't be done. Jesus will have none of it. His lifestyle takes him and you and I (if we are really following him), to neighborhoods that are filled with people with whom we are not especially comfortable. **Luke 9:23** further defines how Jesus views following him. I often sit in my comfortable house and wonder if I am going to get out of my chair and into those areas of my community that most Christians avoid. I easily prefer the view from the window on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor but Jesus has long since left the house.

Do you and I really believe Jesus meant what he said? Consider **John 6:51-63** and think again. These words are not difficult to understand but the challenge is that we do understand them! So, because we “get it” we find ways to believe this was meant for someone else or maybe for those who lived when he did. But, Jesus always separates belief from following him. Check out **Luke 14:26-33** and **John 6:60 & 66**.

### **A Further Step**

1. When does what you say you believe become a conviction? What's the difference?
2. Get out of your comfort and safe places at least once a week. Are your hesitations valid?

## Blowing Up The Bridge    **No Return**

If we are really following Jesus, our life should be filled with adventure. Imagine the disciples waking up and talking with each other about what they imagined Jesus was going to do that day. Jesus had changed their life to such an extent that they would never go back to how they were living before taking off to who knows where.

I remember a time in my life when I was ruled by the “to do list.” It was easy to measure “success”. All I had to do was check something off of my list. What kind of life is this? Basically it is boring, predictable, common and void of any sense of adventure. But to think of the mystery and uncertainty in getting rid of the list and waking up talking to Jesus about what he wanted to do that day-this would be sweet!

This “list life” could be a bridge to blow up but only if you want to take an adventure with Jesus. What might Jesus want you to today? Why do we define accomplishment as getting something checked off of our list? Do we really want to be changed forever? Think about **John 1:35-39** and whether you would get fired up about Jesus saying “come and see” in answer to your question about what he wanted from you.

We don't mind going a different route to get to a destination but we are not about to blow up the bridge. I mean just in case Jesus doesn't come through we have our escape. Or we are not going to throw the chips into the trash but instead put them in the cabinet where we can't see them and therefore won't be tempted to eat them. This is not seriously dealing with getting rid of a way of thinking or living but an excuse to continue to call the shots. Blow the bridge up and build another one in a more challenging direction. Check **Matthew 19:21-22**.

### **A Further Step**

1. What is there in your life that needs to be blown up? Is it a belief system, some aspect of control, becoming financially secure with a retirement plan?
2. What are you hiding rather than eliminating that is keeping you from taking the next step with Jesus?

## Driving in Wyoming...at Night...in the Winter **Danger**

I have spent 35 years either living in or driving through Wyoming and one lesson I have learned is I am not going to drive in the winter at night. There are too many animals, black ice or wind that could make the trip more memorable than I would like. In short, it is dangerous. But why do we avoid following Jesus into some places or ways of thinking and living life that seem to be and are dangerous? The inner city can be more dangerous than suburbia because of the comfort and safety of the nice neighborhood. When we are not in a dangerous place, God does not need to show up and help us.

Relationship with and following Jesus always involves risk. He is going to ask some things of us we have not thought about or maybe we have. When the risk involves changing a way of thinking or living counter culturally that can be too much. After all, who else is thinking about this stuff? Who else really lives this way?

Check out **Matthew 10:16 and John 8:54-59**. Are you sure you want to follow this man? Jesus chose to live his life on the edge of chaos or in a spontaneous way rather than staying on a comfortable couch. What if I had to get off of the Christian couch where all of my friends are Christians and start connecting with people I don't know or like? Jesus spent a good bit of his time doing things most of us would not begin to think are possible or practical today. He walked on water, healed lepers, confronted religious people, violated religious laws and traditions but he also dealt with the everyday grind we face. While these things Jesus did do not seem boring, danger is written all over them.

Predictable Christianity is not what Jesus is about even though that gives us a sense of security and safety. What Jesus is after is to be our security and safety.

### **A Further Step**

1. How willing are you in being the only one you know who is thinking about living a life that really is counter cultural?
2. What are some things in your life that give you a sense of safety or security? What are your fears as Jesus makes it clear these things are to be replaced by him?

## You Need Another Lab Test    **Reexamining Everything**

“We need to get another blood sample from you.” These are not the most encouraging words a lab technician would say to you but it may be necessary to have an accurate picture of what is going on inside of you. Every time Jesus got up close with someone, they were challenged to re-examine something they believed or thought was right or better. Take **Luke 6:1-5** for example. There were specific ways to live on the Sabbath. The religious guys took the law and made a bunch of rules that completely missed God’s intentions. They became a list of “do’s” and “don’t’s”. Jesus consistently violated what they considered critical in following God.

Where do the beliefs you have come from? How secure are they? When we are surrounded by Christians we may never own our beliefs. A belief that is owned is a conviction. Beliefs are in the head while convictions are in the heart. It usually takes opposition or persecution for a belief to become a conviction. Some of the opposition will be from non-Christians but what about the opposition from Christians?

Most of the opposition Jesus experienced came from the religious leaders of his day. He not only made them think, he challenged them to re-examine what they believed and in the process they decided he needed to be taken out. Why would they react this way when others thought Jesus was the best thing since white bread? Does this still happen today? If you are not sure about this, have you really examined what you believe and why you believe it? Jesus will not allow you to travel on this road if you are going to get off at every rest stop and park on the way.

The trip from “I think” to “I know” is challenging but the only way to live. God delights in the trip it takes to get us there. Your trip will look different from mine because God knows what it is going to take for you to move. If we really believe God has our best interest in mind, why don’t we take the trip?

**Without convictions, our life will remain shallow and viewed by others like we might view some treasure in a glass case. It may be interesting but we don’t want it in our house.**

### **A Further Step**

1. Has Jesus pointed out anything to you that is contrary to some accepted Christian tradition most or all of your Christian friends believe is true? What did you think about as you shared what God had made clear to you that your friends or religious leaders disagreed with?
2. How do you think God wants you to live? What do you know for sure?

## Sleeping In **Satan's Game**

Our enemy really hates it when we talk about following Jesus but for many Christians he just yawns when they wake up or he looks at the clock and goes back to sleep for the rest of the day. He knows he only has to get us into some habit or sin and it is over for us by 9:00 AM. I've thought about the times I was determined to not repeat something that God hated only to listen to the enemy and be wiped out for most of the day.

But our enemy's game plan is not just related to those sins that dog us. He also knows he can get us involved in valuing a perspective of Christianity that does not question certain religious practices that might have value on another planet but not ours. He does not want us to be stretched in our thinking.

We are going to have to get out of bed earlier in the day if we are going to follow Jesus because he is taking us down roads that we have not been down before and that is his classroom. The destination can be uncertain but the trip will be exciting.

A great deal of moral failure is the result of an excess of caution rather than bold experimentation with new ideas. J. Oswald Sanders said "The frontiers of the kingdom of God were never advanced by men and women of caution." So, when you decide to really follow Jesus, you no longer look to methods and rules, which may have a place at times, but you focus on a relationship in which Jesus speaks to you about life.

Oswald Chambers said "Jesus has no tenderness whatever toward anything that is ultimately going to ruin a man in his ministry with him. He wants to hurt it to death." Don't use the excuse that this is only for pastors! Think about **Luke 9:5- 62**. We can be fiercely ready but never go. When Jesus speaks to us, we begin to follow and should never stop following. Check **Psalms 119:60**

Following Jesus involves mystery and a new map. We need mystery so we will continue exploring but we need a new map because the old maps do not allow us to connect with Jesus or people who have no maps or wrong maps. To only show up at Christian meetings is not joining Jesus in a reckless adventure. **John 10:10** in part means that Jesus came to show us how to do all those crazy jumps we see kids doing in skate parks. Well at least we can go to the skate park with Jesus.

### A Further Step

1. What is the most stretching thought you have had in the last few months? What did you do about it? What if you have not had any thoughts that have made you think? What could that mean?
2. Where have you exercised too much caution when you knew you should have been bold?

## I'm Not Giving Up My Dr. Pepper **Change**

Earlier I wrote about how what Jesus said and that how he lived changed everything for people who were wanting to follow him. The gospel is good news but the good news changes life in ways we long for but there is cost. It defines why we are on the planet, deals with how we get totally lost in trying to do the right things, how we struggle with life and what we value. God could not get any clearer in showing us what life is about and why people do what they do in our world. But we have to take one road or the other. We can jump in the pool, put our toe in the water, or forget about swimming altogether.

The gospel adds color to a black and white picture. All of a sudden we see implications of our values, beliefs and assumptions. It really does make a difference what we believe. When we are completely following Jesus maybe people get to see for the first time what has been on God's mind for a long time and they see his unconditional love. Without the gospel, who can know the point of life? Life gets confusing, frustrating and we come to conclusions that do not connect with anything but our present emotional state.

World views come from presuppositions from which we base why we are living and what it all means. If these presuppositions are wrong then our conclusions and definitions of what life is about come up short. Trying to figure out life on our own is like walking through a mine field that still has the yellow tape around it. Jesus wants to change what we stubbornly hang on to. **Luke 4:18-19** describes good news to the poor, prisoners, blind and the oppressed. Our picture and everyone else's is hanging on this wall.

The good news frees us but it requires lifestyle changes for us. Jesus was always asking questions or making statements that altered a person's understanding of what was important in life, what was required and what decision would need to be made in their lifestyle if they bought in to what he challenged them with. Think about **2 Corinthians 5:17**.

### A Further Step

1. If you discovered that your world view was wrong, how would you go about changing it?
2. What are some of your fears about changes in your lifestyle, perspective and thinking if you get serious about following Jesus?

## Where is the Party Tonight? **Now it Gets Exciting**

What do you get excited about? I get excited about watching certain football teams or going to Boulder, Colorado or Old Town in Fort Collins, Colorado on Saturday nights. The atmosphere is just charged and to drop into the “Starry Night” coffee shop only adds to the evening. I bet if you asked this question to almost everyone they would almost universally not include spiritual things. But wait, Jesus was all about spiritual things. He didn’t divide the world into secular and sacred. Have you ever wondered what got Jesus excited? I mean everywhere he went something happened you were not expecting.

Here’s a statement from The Word on the Street Bible. **Luke 19:10** “Jesus, in his **excitement**, says, “Liberation makes house calls”... This is why I’m here: to track down the missing persons and reintroduce them to life.” Jesus got fired up here. Liberation makes house calls-are you kidding me? Most of the time when Jesus showed up, there was a party. I mean, he made wine at a wedding...right? Wouldn’t you love to take a trip with him? Anytime, anywhere I’m on the plane.

I am sure he had a great time hanging with Matt’s people at his party. He was in a total pagan environment and was enjoying himself. Everyone else was having a good time except the religious types who were peeking in and questioning what he was really up to. Look at **Mark 2:13-17**.

But notice in the Luke verse what is fueling Jesus’ excitement. He is tracking down missing people so he can reintroduce them to life. Does this get you off the couch or do you wonder how anyone could get excited about this? Do you enjoy being with people who are totally different from you in more ways you can imagine and you feel uncomfortable around them especially in their environment? This was a house call for Jesus! He loved it because now they got the opportunity to see first-hand who this was and to hear something they had wanted to hear all of their life. The sweet thing is that you and I get to bring Jesus into the lives of people like he did and their reaction could be the same.

### **A Further Step**

1. Honestly, what stirs your passion and gets you excited beyond words? Would Jesus be as excited about it as you are?
2. Where are you most comfortable-at a party at a Christian’s house celebrating a birthday or with a bunch of people who do not know Jesus and someone just brought in a keg? Why?

### *Where's the Closest McDonalds?*    **Questions...Uncertainties...Yes!**

In **Luke 9:10-17** is a familiar story but really, can you make any sense out of it for your life today? The crowds of people had interrupted Jesus and the disciples enough. They wanted and expected some hang time with Jesus. It was almost dinner time and they wanted Jesus to tell these people it was time for them to leave and get a motel. Didn't Jesus get it-there was no food here. There must be some fast food places in Bethsaida.

Do you and I get it? There are times when what I see happening or not happening does not make sense and so I question God to do something. Why do I come to these conclusions? Why were the disciples trying to change the situation anyway? I bet Jesus planned it this way-to be in the middle of nowhere without food and a crowd of people. Jesus knows us so well that he knows what it takes to improve our sight, cause us to be thankful, to love people like he does...

He tells them to feed these people. What is wrong with Jesus...or...me? How outrageous for me to not believe or allow Jesus to do what he wants-to let his agenda be mine. When was the last time Jesus has said something to you that did not really make sense and you questioned how he could really mean it? These people were hungry but feeding them seemed so unreasonable.

I can see these disciples waking up wondering what kind of rabbit Jesus was going to pull out of his hat today. Do you wake up with this kind of anticipation of what God wants to do in and through you today? It may be a normal day but some days God shows up in a different way and guess what he might have up his sleeve?

#### **A Further Step**

1. Is God trying to tell you something that from your perspective seems unreasonable?
2. Do you wake up wondering what God has in mind for your day or in what way he might show up and do something through you? Why wouldn't you?

## I'm Getting Dizzy Going Around in Circles    **Strategy**

Have you ever put your head on the top of a baseball bat and gone around and around for a minute or so and then tried to walk? You know what I mean. You can hardly stand up. Unfortunately, this is how many people live their lives. It is also how many Christians try to figure out life or make decisions or do ministry. One of the most difficult aspects of following Jesus is to understand that **he is the strategy**. Look at **John 5:19 and 30** and you will see that Jesus did not do anything on his own. He always looked to see what his Father was doing and then joined in. So what?

We can't figure out life on our own. Neither could Jesus without the Father. We can make our plans, develop ministry strategy, think about how we are going to lead a group, what we are going to do next weekend but if we do not become completely dependent on Jesus for the answer to these and every issue we deal with, we could miss it. God loves to get us into situations where our formulas about how to do whatever do not work and we have to learn that **he is the strategy**.

It may look like chaos but really it is spontaneity in allowing Jesus to define how I approach the world of people who are not following Jesus. There are times we need to rethink everything we do. Distance from the God who wants to be our strategy can be in terms of perspective and not just how far we think we are from him.

What would you do if you were offered a beer with a meal in Germany or in the home of a neighbor? Jesus is not going to ever tell us to do something contrary to the Bible but remember the wine he made at the wedding was better than the wine that ran out. Coke may think it is the real thing, but this was the original. So, what would your strategy be if offered the beer? Only Jesus can give you the right answer and it may be different from the answer he gives me. Talking to him rather than determining for myself or focusing on someone else's strategy means you are allowing him to **be the strategy**. Check out **John 2 ;1 Corinthians 9:22 and 2 Corinthians 10:4,5**.

### **A Further Step**

1. What challenges you the most in allowing Jesus to be the strategy for how to live life, develop and define ministry?
2. Try explaining that Jesus is the strategy to someone and see if they are confused or have questions.

## What Kind of Box Do You Want? **A Different View**

For quite a few years I would not have described my life as being a prisoner to a limited understanding of how to disciple men. I might use the term “narrow” and try to persuade someone that only a few really get it. It is true that most people will drive on nice blacktop roads but only a few will drive a jeep and get off those roads and get a view that cannot be described to those on the pavement. The way of following Jesus is narrow but discipling people can look very different and accomplish exactly what God wants. Think about **Matthew 7:13-14** as you consider how many really are going to follow Jesus.

However as much as I would like to think I was one of the few on the right track, really I had a “Box Theology or strategy” of discipling people or how to live the Christian life. “Box strategy” basically says there are rules for how we are to live life and there are no exceptions. What is acceptable is inside of the box and what is not is outside of the box. This perspective says there is really one right way to do ministry. But, what should be preferences easily become absolutes. It goes like this-I try something and it works so you should do it the same way. Maybe I use a notebook to record my quiet times or use a certain approach in sharing Jesus with someone or have a notebook of discipleship stuff that must be learned exactly as it is presented. Exceptions are frowned upon or worse, not allowed at all. These methods can easily become the criteria for a ministry to be successful.

Others however think “outside the box”. What this often results in is doing ministry or living the Christian life in a self centered or innovative way and it is promoted as really listening to God. There are some valuable aspects to thinking “outside the box” but there is another perspective that I believe gets closer to the heart of God and develops intimacy with him.

That perspective says there is no box. In effect, Jesus becomes the one who sets the boundaries or perimeters of how we do what we do as his follower. In **John 1:43-46**, Phillip answered a question about whether anything good could come from Nazareth with “come and see.” Nathanael had the messiah in a box and Jesus did not fit in it. God will often surprise us or challenge our box theology. He did this on many occasions with the religious guys by doing stuff on the Sabbath that did not fit into their box either. Jesus tore down the “no healing allowed” and “no grain picking” signs of his day.

Jesus has to define what we are to do, say, be, how to think, how to disciple people. He determines what is acceptable for us, for a culture or for a certain time. Consistently reading the gospels shows us how to track with Jesus on a daily basis. It requires that we have an active and sensitive relationship with Jesus. We have to talk to Jesus about what he wants and he becomes the strategy. He destroys the neat categories of discipling we like to build.

People who live this way often reach segments of a culture that the box theology misses or avoids. What about using “Facebook” or “Twitter” to reach a segment of culture that is not going to show up at our scheduled locations to meet Jesus. They are going to a different movie theater where they can comfortably

discuss life issues without having to make the cultural commute to where most Christians do life. I think of this as “West Coast” thinking rather than “Middle America” thinking.

Formulas may have been birthed in the heart of God but are often followed because we do not have to think and we can remain in control. Jesus is the formula.

We must always remember that we are discipling people to Jesus not us or our discipling plan.

### **A Further Step**

1. Is what you do to grow as a Christian or in helping another grow “inside the box thinking?”
2. Are you willing to rethink everything in your lifestyle and ministry? How do you know?

## Walking on Land or Water **Way Hard**

Wouldn't you love to have a DVD of some of the stuff in the Bible? I mean really, wouldn't you like to see Jesus strolling on the lake and glimpse at the faces of the disciples in the boat? Or, what about watching Peter take a step on the water and turn around and grin at the other guys who stayed in the boat? But what if Jesus showed up at Lake Windsor where I live and as I was walking around the walking path around the lake, he said "hey, lets take a walk on the lake today?" I mean this would be one for the Denver Post and I would be the one they interviewed. Dramatic stuff right? It would require a lot of faith.

However, it requires more faith to walk on land than on water. No way you might say. But think about it. The water event is the "big deal" and the land is, well, we never think about that because it is everyday life. That is exactly the point. It becomes harder to trust God in the ordinary and maybe boring stuff of everyday living than for the big deals that come into our life.

Trust is hard to develop in relationships with people. Can I really believe they will be there when they said they would? They said they would help with the financial part of the deal but will they? I know they said they love me but can I believe them when I screw up?

What about trusting God with his being sufficient for my needs throughout the routine chapters of life? Some of the stuff we do each week seems so trivial but this is where believing God becomes the "Hard Stuff" of life. It is way tougher to trust him on land than water.

Following Jesus is hard. **Matthew 8:18-22, Luke 9:23 and 14:26,27 and 33, John 6:53-58 and 60** all open up a can of worms when you begin to think about following him throughout your daily life.

### **A Further Step**

1. Why do you think it is harder to deal with everyday life issues than trusting God for the "big stuff?"
2. With what or with whom do you have the most difficulty trusting? Why? Talk to some others about their issues with this.

## The Follow Jesus Exam **Serious Stuff**

Someone said “we need to lower the bar as to how we do church while raising the bar of what it means to follow Jesus.” **Hebrews 13:8** says that Jesus thinks today exactly like he did when he live here. Nothing has changed. People who followed Jesus then were beaten, stoned, cussed and killed. It cost more than any car or house we could buy today. In those days you did not follow Jesus because he was cool. People who are cool are not killed like Jesus was. But we like to use this word to describe worship music, Christian speakers or “cool” concerts. This whole idea is contrary to Jesus. He was the most radical revolutionary man that ever stepped on stage. He demanded we make a 4.5 on a 4 point scale on his “Following Jesus” exam. He is and never has been satisfied with partial obedience. He lived radically different from the accepted cultural lifestyles of his day. We need to rethink why we attach “cool” to Jesus or things we do in ministry to get people interested in checking out Jesus.

He would be seriously out of step with many churches and ministries today. For early Christians, it was impossible to be a Christian and not follow him. Today however, many people in churches and ministries believe you can be a Christian and not follow Jesus. This is a total contradiction and allows a person to live a self centered life. **John 14:21** is about doing exactly what Jesus says as an expression of our love for him. We don’t prove our love for Jesus by singing some song and having a tear in our eye.

Jesus’ agenda every day was to interrupt the status quo. He turned everything people valued or were chasing upside down. It did not fit in the warfare mentality he had and still has. Remember, he is still the same today as yesterday. If Mother Teresa would sneak out of banquets to eat with beggars, how would Jesus interrupt your thinking or lifestyle?

Making disciples meant discipline and training to become the kind of person who lived in but apart from the Roman world. **1 Peter 2:9-11** has never been a game!

You and I can’t go deep with God unless we make room for him. We are not able to rush into and out of God’s presence. Our insane busy lifestyle is not a valid reason for not spending the time needed to develop intimacy with Jesus. Neither is being involved in many religious meetings. **Hosea 6:6** puts it plainly-God wants us to know him and or sacrifices mean nothing to him if we neglect the relationship.

### A Further Step

1. Why do we like to use the word “cool” in thinking about Jesus or some “Christian” event or personality?
2. Why do many people today believe you can be a Christian and not follow Jesus? Do you?

## How are You Looking at Life? **Perspective**

The junk we have to put up with every day can drive you to the edge, cause you to laugh, make you want to leave, or have so many other disturbing thoughts that you wonder if it is worth it. For many, on rare occasions it even makes you think something about God. We see things so differently from other people but compared to Jesus and his perspective it is easy to just go to bed and not try to figure out anything.

Ask several people who attend Christian meetings what they think it means to follow Jesus and live as we are suppose to and you get so many conflicting answers that you can easily conclude that your search was a huge waste of time. But it is critical to get it right. Can we ever see what Jesus is talking about and how to do something with it? It is easy to conclude that this is as difficult as looking for a cat named Sugar in Denver.

Some guys asked Jesus what they had to do to be all about what God wanted. His answer left them scratching when he said “believe” in the one God sent. “Do” and “Believe” are not on the same page. Sometimes we conclude that the Christian life and following Jesus will always be just a step beyond us and it allows us to justify a mediocre Christian lifestyle. This is not the gospel and Jesus will not let us hang out here trying to follow him. Look at **John 6:28-29**.

Consider Jesus’ perspective in these statements.

1. Actively resist everything that destroys life-independence rather than interdependence, believing that bigger is better, living life alone. Look at **Colossians 3:1,2**
2. Remember that influence is a primary measure of a person or church. **Matthew 5:13-16** speaks to how our lives should be affecting other people. To what extent am I or the church making any real difference where I live? Is anyone curious or angry about my life because it is challenging the socks off of them?

Also, consider the “you have heard it said, but I say into you...” statements in the Bible. These show how different Jesus’ perspective was than the voices of his day. Start with **Matthew 5:21-22,27 and 28**.

What really equals discipleship? Showing up for the event or meeting doesn’t touch it. When we are following Jesus, our dislike of certain people, our greed and drive for success in the eyes of the culture, having more than what we really need or being entertained by the violent culture we live in are pinned to the mat by Jesus. We know we are following Jesus when our life is being turned upside down-there is real change.

### **A Further Step**

1. How do you know you have Jesus’ perspective about what the gospel is or what a Christian is or what it means to follow Jesus?
2. What is destroying the life that God intends you to live?

## Let Me See Your Drivers License    **Identification**

Have you ever left the country you live in? If you have, you know someone somewhere is going to come up to you and say "Identification". You better have your passport or you could end up spending up more time there and you would not be looking at the tourist sites. We know who we are so why is this guy giving me such a hard time about who I am?

What do you want to be identified with? Do you want people to know you are from Texas or that you drive a convertible mini cooper or that you live in a certain neighborhood or what your preference of beer is? There are some things we want to be identified with and some we hope never come up in the conversation.

How about being identified with Jesus? Do you like the terms "Jesus" Freak" or how about "Bible Thumper" or "Religious Nut Bar" or "Church Guy? People have such bizarre or inadequate understandings about who Jesus is and so if you and I are following him...watch out!

But to follow Jesus is to be identified with him. This is how it all started. The early followers of Jesus were called Christians because they were just like him. As you do what Jesus says you begin to change. Maybe at first it is your language. People can actually understand what you are saying because a number of words are no longer in your vocabulary. But they detect a certain interest from you because you are asking questions about how their week really is going or they see you talking to someone they would never say a word to. They begin to see in you something they do not see in themselves and they wonder what the spank is it about you.

Then at some point we begin to realize that to keep following Jesus means that those subtle sins or small compromises have to go. People follow Jesus for a reason and they stop sometimes for the same reasons. In John 6 Jesus pulls back the veil enough to show people what he was looking for in followers. A few stayed but most left. They liked the meal but they weren't cleaning any dishes. We are not being honest with a person who wants to follow Jesus when we don't tell them the whole story of the gospel and how they do not get to call the shots any more.

Jesus fed 5000 people one day. If we are following him, we probably won't feed that many in a day but we will live as generous people. This is identification. Jesus modeled many things like this and as we identify with him, people are going to see Jesus in us. Take a look at **John 8:31-32** and think what identification with Jesus means and what the results of that identification are.

### **A Further Step**

1. Why is it important for a person to know what following Jesus really means before they decide to become a Christian? How would you explain it?
2. Why is it critical for your friends, neighbors or co-workers to know you follow Jesus?

## You're in My Face    **Opposition**

Critics-didn't bother Jesus. Approval from peers or religious people-irrelevant, because he knew they would oppose him. Truth frees those wanting out but angers those who control the matrix most people live in. In **Luke 6:26** Jesus lays it out clear. If we smooth the message when it is rough, our critics will be ok with us. But just say something that may dislodge them from their supposed authority position and all hell is going to break loose.

Why do we think we should or will have it easier than Jesus did. We do have it easier but it is not because the gospel has changed but rather because we have lost our courage to confront a politically correct culture that has concluded that to speak out against something really shows you do not love someone. What a crazy definition of love.

Most of us in the Western culture will never know what real opposition and persecution are. Those who do experience it also have a joy we will never be able to touch.

What about **2 Timothy 3:12**? What do you do with this one? We can try all we want to redefine persecution due to our unwillingness to stand for truth, but it does not fly. This verse challenges me to the core. I want to completely follow Jesus but I do not understand where persecution will come from in the United States. Most of the opposition I have experienced has come from people who say they are Christians. How lame is that? I really believe some who say they are Christians are not really following Jesus and are trying to redefine the term Christian so their lifestyles do not have to change. If you really follow Jesus, there will be many religious types who will oppose your conclusions.

Much of our preoccupation with wanting to be liked by others keeps us from getting close to those who are not following Jesus and who might ask challenging questions. Why do we prefer superficial conversations that never allow for opposition unless they like a different football team?

### **A Further Step**

1. Why do you think much of the opposition Christians in the Western culture face is from people who call themselves Christians? Describe to someone what opposition you have faced.
2. What might be some of the root causes or motivations behind our wanting to be liked by others?

## This is a Dark Alley and might not be Safe    **Danger Ahead**

I have travelled down some alleys and streets that I remember that I wished I had a few more guys with me. Most of these have been outside of the United States. The most vivid experience was in Prague, Czech Republic. I had spent the night by myself in the train station on a bench and early in the morning I took a walk outside before the sun came up. In a square I remember two men approaching me at a fast pace. I quickly left and got back to a small group of people. It was a very scary time for a while. It was not safe for me to have made this trip alone.

But when we follow Jesus, who would make Ernesto “Che” Guevara look like a pansy, danger could be right in front of us or around the corner. But it was with him everywhere he went. He did heal people and offered kind words but he always had a whip with him and we know he used it at least once. We don’t usually think of Jesus like this but he actively fought the war with our biggest enemy.

Jesus was intent on returning life to what God intended and this meant destroying strongholds-both religious and secular that we have erected for status, protection or whatever. This did not go over well. Even his closest buddies did not get it at times. Check out **Matthew 15:1-20 and John 8:54-59**. He will often send us into dangerous situations or to people who actively hate him and perhaps us. Look at **Matthew 10:16**. Wolves are sweet to look at but we would not be comfortable hanging with them because they want us out of the picture.

Some danger comes in the form of suffering. We avoid this at any cost and sacrifice the one aspect of following Jesus that deepens our trust in God and causes us to grow spiritually as nothing else can. Look at **Romans 8:17 & 18 and 2 Corinthians 6:3-10**.

### **A Further Step**

1. What are some of the strongholds you see in religious and secular life in America? Or how about in you?
2. What part of God’s agenda do you wish was different because of the danger you see it might bring to you?

## Can You Make a Cabinet?    **Discipling Others**

The other day I looked in a mirror and realized what I think I already knew. I couldn't be pregnant could I? It sure looked like it but then I realized who I was and that for the past several years I have been eating just about what I wanted to. Ok, so now what? I know what to do but will I do it? Sometimes however we do not know what to do. Take discipling another person for example-Do we know how to do it?

Following Jesus means we take everything he said seriously and making disciples who know how to make disciples is a part of it. In **Matthew 28:19-20** Jesus makes it clear we are to make disciples (those who are practicing all he taught these first guys) and then make disciple makers. We have to know what it means to be a disciple if we are going to make disciples. It is kind of like making a cabinet. We have to know what one is first. In this case we must be practicing what he tells us in the gospels and throughout the Bible.

Discipling another person is not like a teacher-pupil relationship but rather like a brother to brother relationship. We both learn from each other. Implied in this is that we have been humbled by truth. The truth of the Bible exposes our sin and must be dealt with as we help others follow Jesus. **Isaiah 66:2** indicates that God uses people who are humble and broken.

In thinking about helping others follow Jesus, we are not calling them to be involved in our church or ministry group but rather to be involved in following Jesus. When we connect them to Jesus, they can leave us or we can leave them and they can continue walking with Jesus. They must learn from Jesus or they will be crippled when we step out of the picture. Another important aspect of this is that if they leave us and move to another city, we should do everything we can to connect them to a church that has a like heart and is focused on discipling those who show up for the meetings. Then, they can continue to help the person we have helped continue to follow Jesus and raise up others who will do the same.

Discipling means helping them learn to walk intimately with Jesus and not just apply principles. No relationship is required to getting the principles right. We are created for intimacy with God. In fact **Matthew 7:22-23** tells us that relationship with Jesus is the only thing that matters. Relationship with Jesus helps a person solve whatever life brings them. Some principles help in a 100 meter race but we are in a marathon.

### **A Further Step**

1. What are the most distinguishing marks of a disciple in your opinion? Connect them with scripture.
2. What do you believe needs to happen with you in order for you to help another person learn to follow Jesus? From whom can you get the help you need?

## I Thought This was Right **False Assumptions**

Have you ever told someone something you thought they wanted to hear because they asked you what you thought of their attitude? After picking yourself up from the floor when they hit you, you realize you assumed they wanted an honest answer but they didn't. We make false assumptions about all kinds of things and following Jesus is no exception. Peter probably thought Jesus would be pleased that he hacked an ear off of a guy to defend Jesus. He was wrong again. Look at **John 18:1-11** for this story.

Most people believe about all we can do is the best we can in following Jesus. This mantra easily leads to making excuses for not dealing with the hard issues that arise in following Jesus. To think this way causes us to settle for short little tips on how to live that never get to the heart of following Jesus. Check out **Romans 3:12** if you think that doing your best will get you a trophy. Thinking this way is like using a currency of another country to pay for lunch in your town. You might get a funny look but you won't get lunch.

We need to know what we are getting into when we decide to follow Jesus. This is not usually adequately explained at the starting line. If you look at some of the commercials on TV trying to get you into the armed forces it looks like you are going to come out as a technological guru when your tour is over. But when you are in Iraq and the roadside bomb goes off and you are wounded and your buddy is killed, you might be thinking "I didn't sign up for this." You have made a false assumption. It is the same with following Jesus. If we don't adequately explain at the beginning what following Jesus means, a person may bail when they find out or maybe worse they will believe you really can be a Christian and not follow Jesus.

Cute sayings and neat principles work if you want to be a religious person but you are following a revolutionary homeless man who demands everything from you and will always be telling you to deny yourself and he even examines every motive you have.

### **A Further Step**

1. What have you assumed to be true about being a Christian that you are now questioning?
2. Has anyone ever talked with you about something that is contrary to what you believe about Christianity?  
What is bothering you about what they said?

## You Don't Want to Play for This Team    **Challenges**

When I was in Albania, almost every day a certain Albanian man challenged me and another team mate to some kind of physical challenge. One day it would be pull ups and another it would be pushups. He always let us go first and then he would do one more than we would. But he challenged us and we became better at everything even one arm pushups. We have to have challenges in our life or we will become even more complacent than we are now. Some challenges are directly from God while others are the result of following Jesus in a world in which he is a contradiction to our culturally accepted lifestyle or even our accepted Christian lifestyle in the United States.

How about this one? **We have to wrestle with how to hear God speak to us and then with what he says.**

Because we hear many voices speaking into our daily life, this becomes a challenge in hearing God accurately. The more consistently we look into the Word, the more we will recognize God speaking to us. Then we have to deal with what he says which can be more challenging because it will be in contrast to our accepted culture-both secular and Christian. Do you believe God can speak to you or is it reserved for those whose vocation is "full time Christian service?" **Ephesians 4:11-13** should encourage you then because ministry is done by ordinary people so it follows that God would speak to them.

Or what about this? **Extracting what Jesus meant by "follow me" and translating it into a 21<sup>st</sup> century world** is seriously challenging. Just because very few now live as he did does not excuse our seriously following him nor does it negate what he told people every day when he was here. Think about how we have allowed our Christian culture to dictate what following Jesus means and what it could not mean. Toto sang a song with an interesting line in it- "frightened by the thing I've become." As you take Jesus seriously, you might be scared to death by what you have become. I recently realized just how far I believe I am from seriously following Jesus. What do I do about that?

Oh, what do you think about this one? **Jesus changed history as a lamb and not as a soldier.** He assumed a humble position of power and really redefined it in a way our western military focus cannot understand. How do I allow Jesus to live through me and change people without forcing him into their lives? Living in a culture where pride dominates is seriously challenging. While in Thailand my wife and I asked some university students where they would like to go in the world for two weeks and money was not an issue. Not one mentioned the United States. We asked why. They said our country had more people in prisons, more divorces, more crime...why would they? This should silence our arrogance and pride but Jesus is still outside in the cold.

### **A Further Step**

1. What opportunities have you missed in life? Why haven't you taken advantage of them?
2. Do you want God to speak to you about what he thinks must change in your life if you are going to really follow him? Why or why not?

## Want to Try for Another Team? **More Challenges**

Maybe that last team with their challenges were really unreasonable. I think I will try another team. Let's see what they have to say.

**Jesus challenges the status quo that in no way represents his kingdom.** He never changes who he is or his purposes and the challenge for us is to confront those aspects of our culture and lifestyle that do not reflect his kingdom. He is building his kingdom and not playing games. **Matthew 6:33** gives the priority.

**Memorizing verses, learning how to do Bible study and other disciplines without really hearing God speak to us is like spiritual abortion.** The Bible never comes alive and we miss the point entirely. It is easy to measure our spiritual growth by how much we know rather than how well we know the author. Do you know someone who is consistently hearing God speak to them through the Word? Don't let them out of your sight.

**Examine Jesus' life and see what was not present in him.** Hatred, violence, greed, excess, earthly power, material wealth, a consumption focus were not part of his life. How about yours? We are exceptionally deceived when we try to justify their presence in our life when they were absent in his. **Luke 16:15** is top shelf of challenges. Jesus detests what we admire. He did not come to make our life easier but comes to make it more difficult. He is always trying to see who really wants it.

**We do not have to act in an obnoxious way that causes people to not like us but if we are really following Jesus, people will oppose us.** If we are focused on his kingdom and not the political, economic or religious kingdoms, people are not going to like our conversations and may actively oppose us. In our "politically correct" culture, this is not going to go down well for us. Who decides what is "politically correct" anyway?

Regardless of these challenges, Mark Twain said "Twenty years from now we will be more disappointed by the things we did not do than by the one's we did do..." Opportunities we take in life define us but so do those we miss. We can't control the outcome (what following Jesus will look like) but we can control every choice we make along the way.

### A Further Step

1. Think about your last few months. How are you working with Jesus to build his kingdom or are you occupied with playing games? How will you change that? What Christian games are on the best seller list?
2. What have you tried to justify keeping in your life that was not present in Jesus' life? How have you tried to justify keeping these things?

## Be Sure to Read the Fine Print    **Implications of Following Jesus**

I get opportunities to get new credit cards all the time. I never read all of the fine print and quickly discard the invitation to get the card. However, some people get the card but don't read the fine print and are shocked when they get charged big time for not paying off their balance. It was in the fine print. Jesus is not trying to conceal anything from us but we need to read the fine print when we decide to follow him.

One topic mentioned in the Jesus' "Follow Me" manual is Discipleship. We need to read it. What does it look like? How do you define it? These are critical questions that must be answered correctly. Let's look at the "Discipleship" topic.

Discipleship is being increasingly committed to being shaped and changed by Jesus to reflect his lifestyle and teaching. Change means making adjustments in my life as God points them out. If there is a gap between what I say and what I do, I will either be caught in the hypocrisy or will become indifferent or I will change. Knowing the meaning of life and living a life of meaning are not the same thing.

What captures your imagination? Look at **Matthew 6:21**. Does wealth, power, sex, reputation grab your thinking? These things or others can be our priorities and they define us. They show the map to our treasure. How you live is the strongest statement of what you believe. Have you read the fine print?

Dallas Willard talks about how we in the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. Discipleship has become an option. Many church members have not decided yet to follow Jesus. How did that happen? This is as far away from the truth of the Bible as Chaing Mai, Thailand is from Bill, Wyoming.

Growth should be measured by examining my life in relation to Jesus-not by a program of discipleship that only expects completion of curricula as a measure of following Jesus. Discipleship plans are ok in so far as they enable a person to love God, follow Jesus and teach people how to live, love people and how to disciple another person.

Discipleship must be done in real life conditions. That is how the Hebrews did things while the Greeks used more of a classroom approach. We most often side with the Greeks. Jesus lived with those he was discipling. We have to share life with those we disciple also. It will mean working with fewer people.

If we do not disciple people, the culture will. TV, the internet, video games and music do just that. Most of the input from these sources are from people without any connection to Jesus so guess what the finished product looks like?

### **A Further Step**

1. Is there a gap in what you believe and practice? Why? What aspects of this discrepancy are the most glaring and need to change?

## Is the Fat Lady Singing? **The End or Beginning**

What do you think? Is following Jesus something you want to do with courage or is it too much to think about this when you do not see too many others mounting their horse and heading off to discipleship land. It is safe for a ship to stay in a port but ships were made to be out on the open water. Safety is easy to find, just look around and many of the people who show up at Christian meetings have found it and even though it is not the pearl, they have paid a lot to stay there.

But then, who Jesus is and what he expects and never backs down from is all that matters. Our purpose comes from a deep and rich relationship with Jesus. As our relationship with Jesus grows, we begin to see the world as he does and our life is clarified and connections with others are deepened.

Some things end but others begin. That is what **2 Corinthians 5:17** is about. We have a new link to the Liberator and are beginning to understand our freedom. For example, we are not bound by consumerism as we have been in the past because our focus has changed to “need” rather than “want”. We are beginning to eliminate those influences that cause us to give in to socially acceptable living. This requires a knife rather than a band aid.

The rudder on a ship determines the direction the ship travels. We must get it right when we think of following Jesus or we could speed along like a speed boat but either be headed in the wrong direction or worse in circles.

“We often see something God wants us to be involved in but because of the difficult and challenging nature of the journey to get there, we hide behind what is familiar or what we can control and therefore miss the joy of the experience.”

### **A Further Step**

1. What do you think it has cost you to relax in the comfort and safety of normal American Christianity?
2. How would you know that you really want what God wants you to be involved in? Why does a difficult journey to get there keep you from getting on with the trip?

# Unlikely Friendships

## Jesus was their Friend but are We?

### Do you Like Me? People Outside the Faith

Why don't you like me? This is a question many not following Jesus ask most of the time without words. They have listened to us through our actions, overheard our conversations and noticed where we don't hang out. So many people have lost their heart for those outside the faith. Why does it happen that when a person gets serious about following Jesus it seems that the friendships they had with non-Christians disappear. Most of their friends now are Christians and believe me, their former friends notice.

These non-Christian people are the ones Jesus hung out with and liked. As mentioned earlier, in **Luke 19:10** Jesus says "Liberation makes house calls...I'm here to track down the missing persons and reintroduce them to life." The Word on the Street Bible. Christians on the other hand readily hang out on the edges of the culture pointing fingers at outsiders, judging and condemning those who do not follow Jesus.

But think about **John 3:17**. Jesus did not come to our house to condemn what we were doing wrong but to show us how to do it right. So, you and I need to find ways for non-believers to explore what commitment and following Jesus mean. Many of them are not going to do this on Sunday morning in a building where they feel on edge and people look different from them. If it the only option they have they might come with someone they know but if we provided some other entry points to learn about Jesus, they might even be more willing to check Jesus out.

So, many of these people have concluded that Christianity is a "harmless delusion." They would like to know that we care about them and are willing to get with them in their apartment and have a meal there. We should like them because they are no different from us. They have the same questions about life but they are more honest about it. Maybe that is why we stay away from them as much as we can. But Jesus does not live on the same street as we do. I believe he lives somewhere near the alley we will never walk down, or maybe in that group of run down houses we think should be torn down, or...

### A Further Step

1. What are some ways to tell if you have a heart for people who don't know Jesus?
2. What are a few practical ways you could help those not following Jesus explore what it means to be a Christian?

## Why Do We have to Cross the Street? **Up Close with People**

Truth must be presented up close and not from a distance because people can then examine in us what we are talking about. God wants us to infiltrate and stake a claim for the rule of Jesus in every facet of life. Life must be seen as mission, and ministry opportunities are often unexpected and may interrupt what we are doing or how we are living. We must dance as close to people without Jesus as possible and cross the lines that unnecessarily separate the people God has found from those he is still looking for.

People should not have to make a cultural commute to our way of doing life and church to find Jesus. They should be able to meet Jesus where they live, work, play and share life. We can make the commute to them and create safe places for them to discuss life issues. The average person wakes up on any morning with questions about life, frustrations, fears and challenges with no meaningful way to get answers. We live next door or work with them.

**Mark 2:1-12** illustrates what meeting Jesus in a non threatening environment can result in. When people said “we have never seen anything like this” they were not only telling the truth about what Jesus did but maybe another implication for us might be that it occurred outside of the traditional “God is here” meeting places associated with the temple and we know as church buildings.

The gospel must be lived up close with people so they can see how it meets their deepest needs and penetrates their worldview and helps them understand how they can follow Jesus in their world. (**Philippians 2:5-11**) We need to be people who bring truth/life to people who are busy, isolated, lonely and disconnected without any solutions to resolving issues they face daily.

**Romans 15:20** captures this vision. The name Jesus is known all over our country but he is not known by most. We must be intentional in living out the gospel. Everything in Jesus’ life screams this. Check out **Matthew 9:10-13** to see how we can begin to do this. Jesus welcomed being misunderstood as it revealed his purpose and others perspective. He intentionally involved himself with people who were real.

**Colossians 2:8** warns us to be on guard against deceptions imbedded in our culture. This can’t keep us from getting up close and developing friendships with those who think and live differently from us but it should keep us alert.

### A Further Step

1. Discuss why you might be uncomfortable meeting with non Christians where they hang out?
2. Where are some safe places for those not yet Christians to meet and discuss spiritual things where they live?

## This Scares the Hell out of Me    **Fear of Engaging**

**Matthew 8:23-27** talks about one of Jesus' normal days but it was anything but normal for the disciples. They thought they were about to drown but he calmly asked them "why are you afraid, you of little faith?" The opposite of faith is fear and for us to be afraid of engaging with people outside of the faith really means we are coming up short with faith. Some of those not following Jesus ask more difficult questions than those following Jesus. This can make us scared or give us an opportunity to believe God for something we need to in order to grow and make a difference. Some of their questions will not have an answer and that is ok. We don't have to be a "religious barista" with all kinds of spiritual formulas for the questions people ask. We just need to care and love on them. We can be a resource of hope and a witness to the life we have with Jesus.

People want to know God is real and makes sense but their experiences usually lead them to believe this is not possible. This is why we have to connect with them in real life so they can see us being warm, compassionate, non-judgmental offering grace, peace and truth to them and this troubled generation.

People want and need a friend who will listen to them. They are more concerned about life before death than life after death. Developing these kinds of relationships is more effective in leading them to Jesus than all of the work that goes into getting them to show up at a Christian meeting.

**Ephesians 5:15-17** in the Phillips Translation says in part "live life with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning and purpose of life but as those who do..." Most Christians are in churches that neither expect nor train them to actually live like Jesus nor how to live responsibly in the world with those without Jesus. However, if we will live this way, we will stand out like a blooming rose bush in the snow and they may want to smell the roses.

James Blunt sings in the song "Same Mistake"... "maybe next time we meet we'll talk and not just speak." We must learn to talk with those God intersects our life with. The weather, politics, price of gas is irrelevant when compared to what is at stake here. People struggle with significant issues that have eternal impact for them.

### **A Further Step**

1. What are some of the difficult questions people who are not Christians are asking where you live and work? If you are not sure, how can you begin to find out?
2. Why is listening to your friends questions equally if not more important than your giving them information?

## Picking Up Hitchhikers **Safety First**

You have seen people hitchhike and wondered if you should pick them up. You say to yourself that you have to be smart these days and so you keep going and the hitchhiker cusses as you go by. I am challenged to think about people with little or no Christian background...who want a ride or might just be interested in a conversation about things that really matter.

In **Luke 18:35-43** Jesus picks up a hitchhiker. He is blind...at first. He is yelling...for a while. He is told to shut up by people with Jesus...he ignored them and shouted louder. Jesus stopped, asked a question and gave the man something that changed him forever. What were the disciples thinking now?

Many people peek into our Christian groups and it seems strange to them what we are doing. The language is different and they are not sure they will be accepted. So, they stand by the road waiting for the next person who might stop, meet them where they are, listen to their story, treat them and their questions with respect, give them time to think and maybe share a meal together.

We need to give people time to think about Jesus. They need time to check out Jesus and understand what it means to really follow him. We need to pick them up. Sometimes people are ready...the blind guy was. But most of the time they need to be welcomed to travel with us as we learn what it means to follow Jesus.

There are some hitchhikers out there looking for solutions to life's issues. Stop and pick one up.

### **A Further Step**

1. Why are you reluctant to get into a conversation about spiritual things with people with little or no Christian background?
2. Do you think you would have reacted any differently than the disciples did when Jesus was walking by the blind man? Why or why not?

## They Keep Deer Out but also People    **Fences Between Us**

I can remember a few times I have felt rejected by people. It is not a good feeling and makes you question yourself or those rejecting you. But one thing for sure, for most people they find it easy to avoid those who have rejected them. Many without Jesus feel and are accurate in their believing they are being rejected by so called Christians. I still wonder how a person following Jesus can reject anyone. But non-Christians see us disagree with their conclusions about life without thinking through the process they have taken to come to their conclusions and they feel rejected by us. A man I see frequently told me he wanted to tell me why he lost his religion. I anxiously await our conversation to see what got him to this place in life.

One survey concluded that non-Christians see Christians as anti-homosexual, judgmental, out of touch with reality, old fashioned, not accepting of other faiths, confusing, too involved in politics, insensitive to others and boring. Why have they concluded these things? Look at **2 Corinthians 6:3** in this regard.

In removing fences, we need to be real friends with them with no strings attached. We need to be real with people about our needs, struggles and questions and help them see we face the same daily grind as they do. When our motives are suspect, it neutralizes our ability to connect with them.

Christianity is often seen as another business with T-shirts, ball caps, posters, stickers on the rear windows of cars about their church and staff are seen as marketers of these products. Christian bookstores resemble big box stores complete with all the trinkets about what Jesus would do. I believe I know what he would do about some of these things. This comes across as religious stuff that has nothing to do with everyday life issues people deal with. This stuff is neither the gospel nor the reason Jesus lived, died and rose again. The Christian subculture has become a hindrance to people searching for real answers to their problems and questions.

James Blunt has a line in "Carry Me Home" that describes what I believe many without Jesus have concluded. "No one's got much to say in this town." Let's get this song off of the radio.

The gospels throughout show how Jesus focused on removing fences the religious people erected. John 4 is an example of how Jesus built a bridge of understanding and removed a fence a lady had between her and God.

### **A Further Step**

1. Get with some non-Christians and ask them to complete these sentences: Christians in this town or campus
  - a. always... b. never... c. should... d. and I would get involved with a group of people to discuss life issues if...
2. How can you focus on the process rather than the conclusions people have come to regarding Christians and Christianity?

## I Hear You but I Don't Get It    **Looking Through a Fog**

I know some professors who have rejected Christianity because they are certain they would have to check their brains at the door if they became followers of Jesus. What you and I are saying to them is not making sense to them because many of us have stopped thinking. To think does not negate faith but learns from life and God what are the important issues and how to navigate the difficult issues we face. We just need to be intellectually honest with others about our doubts.

Some non-believers see us as being told to do something and that our only choice is to do it. For them, they have the option of questioning but do not see that we have this option. Jesus questioned stuff all the time. I think they would follow him. Look at **Matthew 5:43-44 or 12:1-8 and 9-14**. The gospels are full of Jesus' questions to religious types. It does not knock God off of the throne for us to ask questions. The prophets did this all the time.

What you and I need to ask ourselves is "am I living an incomplete or inaccurate version of Christianity?" Without practicing what Jesus said (following him), we are living an inaccurate version of what it means to follow Jesus. Everyone should have the right to see who Jesus really is. A life based on truth has a significant impact on non-Christians and helps them to make right decisions about Jesus.

### **A Further Step**

1. Have you sensed that you have stopped thinking as a follower of Jesus? What are some examples?
2. What evidences are there that you are living a life of truth?

## Who are These Guys? Do I Know You?

I have talked to several Christians and asked them if they know the names of their neighbors. The response is usually no or not really. It is a challenge to know people on the block or apartment complex you live in unless you are living with intentionality. It is also crazy to think you will pray for these people if you don't know their names. We often live as strangers in our neighborhood.

Because of this, it is easy to make some assumptions about them without getting our information from the source. This is like getting a stock tip and running with it rather than doing your research. Do we know the challenges people without Jesus face?

My wife and I have been doing church on Friday evenings now for about 3 months. It has been interesting hanging out at coffee shops or restaurants for breakfast on Sundays. We are learning how the majority of the world lives on Sundays. Many of course are not out of the house until after lunch time but there is a completely different crowd at Whole Foods or Wild Boar Coffee shop than who would be in a Christian meeting on that day.

They seem to be having a good time as many of their needs are hidden from us or even from themselves and until they are exposed, they will continue to believe they are ok although they know they can't fix the stuff in their life. The pressures from work, home, kids, neighbors, busy lifestyles, frequently moving, debt, conformity, security, commuting, hobbies that take time, ambiguities of life, values of the culture, complexities of decision making, longing for meaning are hard issues to deal with and nothing seems to really last and it comes with an expiration date.

What are the things that make the average person in our culture: laugh and cry? Hope or despair? Believe or doubt? Love or hate? Trust or fear? We need to be close enough to know these things. They are often similar to our answers. **Romans 1:14-17** might provide motivation to find out the answers to these things.

We have to learn to relate the gospel to: The motives people live by; the values they follow; the beliefs they have; and their goals if they have any. We have to know how people think, how they arrived at their beliefs, lifestyles and values. There should be no fear in connecting with people who think and live differently from us. When we understand how people come to conclusions, we can understand how the gospel can relate to their reasoning. After all, the Bible is the story of a God who is always getting us out of the messes we make in the world. **Luke 8:16-18** Think about this as you try to connect with people without Jesus.

### A Further Step

1. How does the Bible answer the wrong assumptions of those not yet Christians? What are some of their assumptions?
2. What are some of the things that cause your friends to laugh or cry? Hope or despair? Believe or doubt? Love or hate? Trust or fear?

## Breaking Free from the Status Quo **Get Out of Jail**

I have never been in jail but I was detained for 2 hours in a car in the former East Germany on a mission trip. When your passport is taken and you are physically unable to leave, it changes the way you think about what is happening in the world around you.

Many Christians have no idea they are in jail when it comes to thinking and living differently from the Christian culture they are immersed in. In this jail a person is sheltered, aloof and insulated from how most people are living life. People in this subculture believe it is where they should be and not be contaminated by the world. This is like salt only staying in the salt shaker. Nothing is further from the truth. All we have to do is see how Jesus mixed it up in the real world. We must learn to be uncomfortable with comfort. Check out **Matthew 5:13-16 and Acts 13:47**.

To mix it up with the world does not mean compromise. Jesus modeled this and those who were not religious thought of him as their friend.

When you break free from the "New Sabbath Rules" it will interrupt the status quo of many who say they are following Jesus and they will disapprove of your lifestyle. Since a tree is known by its fruit, you and I have only to live as Jesus did and if God wants others to break free, he will bring it about. Many have a stated interest in the status quo but Jesus turned upside down the world of religious people of his day and we will as we leave the accepted lifestyle of a majority of Christians in our culture. Just make sure and Jesus are tight.

### A Further Step

1. How would you help a Christian understand the necessity of getting involved in the lives of people not yet following Jesus?
2. Describe in a paragraph or two the accepted lifestyle of most Christians in the United States.

## The Starting Blocks    **Build the Road as You Travel**

I was part of a team that helped to build a road to a maternity hospital in Albania. I use the term build and road very loosely. We were issued a two picks and two shovels. We worked on it as the Albanians watched in disbelief. We had no plan except to level the road, get the huge holes filled so some kind of vehicle could negotiate this road. We really did build it as we walked on it.

If you and I want to connect people to Jesus you have to start...but how? Remember that Jesus is the strategy. Just get out where people are and start talking or helping in some way. Talk to Jesus about how to begin. He has great ideas. It is not distant acts of charity but rather practical acts of love that get us started. You visited me, clothed me...Jesus. (**Matthew 25:31-46**)

Jesus involved himself with ordinary people by going to their parties, playing with children, frying fish for breakfast, providing wine at weddings... We just need to embed ourselves in our culture without compromise. Bring Jesus to people.

People who isolate themselves or are on a crusade will not have much influence on those outside of the faith community. People are attracted to Jesus by being accepted and respected. They know we disagree but when they are not accepted with a different belief, nor respected, they basically tell us to get lost.

The friendships we make with those not yet following Jesus must be real and we have to have a genuine interest in them. People can read false motives. Salvation is our ultimate motive but not our ulterior motive. In most cases we are really bringing Jesus a little closer to people.

You build the road as you travel on it. Just start and trust God to show you the what, where, when and how.

“Hope looks for something to feed it every day, otherwise life would get too grim to continue.” Quo Vadis

### **A Further Step**

1. How can you embed yourself in your community without compromising how God wants you to live?
2. How comfortable are you in learning as you go rather than having a set of steps to connect with those not yet following Jesus?

## Wolves are neat to watch but they want to invite you for dinner **Be Alert**

Two of us were walking down a road in Lipik, Croatia as the war in that region was still ongoing. All of a sudden some soldiers burst out and warned us to turn around because there were snipers not too far ahead of us. We very cautiously started walking back to a semi-safe area but we learned an important lesson. We had been casually strolling down the road picking up empty rifle cartridges without a clue what was ahead of us. We were really unaware of the war that was still in progress.

We so easily live this way today. We don't usually wake up thinking about having a warfare mentality. The enemy lives to defeat our life and has many weapons. **1 Peter 5:8** has much for us to remember. Satan wants to destroy us-wakes up with this on his mind every day. We must do what **Ephesians 6:10-18** says on a regular basis or a sniper may take us out.

You may not enjoy the war we are in but as long as we are here you're going to have to pick up your sling shot. It was said of George Patton (World War 2 General) "The absence of war will kill him." Are you so involved in spiritual warfare that to just wake up, read the news, go to get coffee, have lunch, nap, have dinner and go to bed so you can do it again tomorrow would kill you?

In developing relationships with non-Christians, where they live, we are in enemy territory so we must be alert to several things.

- People will emphasize that truth is subjective. If this is the case then anything you want to believe becomes the truth. That in itself is not subjective ,which disproves the argument. Think about why truth must be absolute.
- You can be tolerant of another's beliefs but be ready to point out error when necessary.
- Some people will tell you that personal experience trumps the Bible. Watch out!
- Be careful to not maximize physical and social needs and minimize spiritual needs.
- People who are comfortable with their Christian lifestyle are not going to be your buddies when you begin to talk about change.
- Many Christians talk about change but will not be accountable to living the lifestyle of Jesus.
- Many prefer a focus on information rather than transformation.

**"Never let your vision be limited by men of limited vision."** Max Barnett

### A Further Step

1. What are some of the ways you have seen satan try to knock Christians or you out of the race?
2. How can you prevent this from happening to you?

## This is Really Expensive **Cost**

Just about everything goes on sale around Thanksgiving in our country. But think about if you had a guest come up from Thailand to visit and you took them shopping. If they are from Chaing Mai in northern Thailand they are used to going to the Night Bazaar where you barter for everything. They might look at the prices in a store and begin to barter because the cost is so much. We look at the cost but then we have “plastic” to take care of it.

Or we are used to hearing a coach talk about how much it will cost to get to the final four of college basketball. Anything of value costs. But then Jesus begins to talk about cost in a heavier way than any of these examples. You have to empty your bank account to follow Jesus...I mean to really follow him. When we say we will pay it, he mentions the cost of connecting with those outside of the faith community. Our faith is not tested in the Christian bubble but it is in the marketplace. This is why most people who attend church meetings avoid the marketplace. Think about some of the cost associated with **Luke 9:23 or 14:25-35**. Some of the costs to make a difference in the marketplace would include:

- Time and availability. This will eliminate people with demanding jobs that come first and people with kids in all kinds of activities or time consuming hobbies. It might be easy to conclude that you really can't follow Jesus in our culture or just define it differently. But this is dead wrong and only reveals our unwillingness to deal with those things we refuse to change. As long as we call the shots, Jesus cannot use us to impact those not yet Christians. To hang with non-Christians is a long term commitment which means being with them with no agenda at all much of the time. Check out **Romans 16:3-4**. Risk your life for what really matters.
- A transformed life. Knowing a lot of stuff does not count. Change is all that matters. God never changes and therefore he expects our life to be changed or transformed. Without a radically different life we are only different from those outside the faith community by the fact that we show up at a Christian meeting and they don't. (**2 Corinthians 5:17 and Colossians 3:9-10**)
- Hospitality. The issue with our home is “who owns it?” Does it belong to me or God? To impact our neighborhood we have to give the deed to Jesus. This means using our home for the best parties and allowing people to drop in whenever. (**Romans 12:13**)
- Generosity. Our focus must change from getting, buying, and having, to giving whatever people need. Sometimes it is money or a vehicle, something in our house, or our time. **Psalms 37:23-26**

### A Further Step

1. What costs will you have to consider in connecting with non-Christians?
2. Explain why something that is valuable costs more? How does this relate to following Jesus and connecting with those not yet Christians?

# Church Whose Idea was this?

## Who Wrote this Dictionary? Definition

The church is God's idea and therefore essential in living life as he intended us to live. God's idea was that a church should be a community of God's kingdom and that people be tight with one another. It is a faithful, determined, loving, honest community of friends who have been captured by an extraordinary vision. It is a dangerous and revolutionary spiritual force. It is a place to connect with others who are really following Jesus. It is a group of people who are reaching deep places in each others' hearts that are not often or easily reached. These people have longings to know and love God that is intense and stronger than any other passion. They laugh together, eat together, pray together, raise families together and share Jesus with those not yet Christians. This does not mean more scheduled meetings but more informal time together.

Along with others, I have always wanted to be a part of a movement, with real friends and doing something significant with God. I want to do something outrageous (not stupid but so different from the boring Christian experiences we often have that it looks outrageous), be on an adventure and do some exciting things with others to make a real difference in other people's lives.

Have you found a group of people like this? Do you want to? Remember, it was God's idea that we be connected in real and meaningful relationships.

Jesus talked with a woman at a well in John 4 and she asked him about the location of church. Jesus changed her perspective with "...you have it wrong. It is not a place but God looks for people to worship him in spirit and truth." We need to take a hard look at real implications for our day and time.

Many people may show up at a typical church meeting in the United States, not all are Christians-that is not all are really following Jesus. They may be members on a roll but that gets a failing grade for the final exam. Check out **Matthew 7:21**.

## A Further Step

1. Why is it critical to have a right definition of church? Is it more important today than when the church began? Why?
2. What are some constants and some variables of church?

## What's Your Family Look Like? **Community**

I have always been a bit envious of families in which there are several kids because I grew up in a family of one kid-me. My family looked small and ordinary. It was a good family for the most part until I started to bring home dead snakes and owls. But I wonder what it would have been like with several contending for the favorite chair or last piece of lemon pie. We all have memories of our families-some are good and others we would just soon forget. How about your church family? What's that look like? Maybe a bunch of people left because they didn't like the color of the new carpet and you never got over wondering what that was really about.

The Bible talks about church as family and as a community. It is shared life, worship, meals, adventure together, serving together, playing together, battling together, learning together and hanging out at each other's house. Sound like your church? Or are you like me wondering what the spank did I just write. I have never experienced this. To do this suggests proximity because it is difficult to do these things when a distance of 30 minutes is involved to get to someone's house. **2 Timothy 3:10 and 11** illustrates what can be observed when we spend a good bit of time together. This makes living in urban settings challenging.

People are designed for relationships and community because we all need to belong. When church meetings that usually meet on Sunday mornings happen, many needs go unmet especially if we only see these people for an hour or so once a week in a programmed way. For some, church must be brought to them rather than them having to make a cultural commute to a location that is not only some distance in geography but also in lifestyle. People want to be accepted where they are and for who they are. This does not happen automatically.

**Acts 4:32-35** gives us a glimpse of the church in the early days. This was a community which we must get back to. It will not look identical but will allow people involved to share their lives and develop relationships that mean something.

### A Further Step

1. Write out **2 Timothy 3:10,11** in today's language and how you could participate in a "learning lab" like this.
2. What kind of church experience would connect with people you work with, those at your local coffee shop, your neighbors or the parents of the kid's on your kid's soccer team?

## Is This Real Sugar? **Artificial Environments**

There is nothing like artificial sweetener. Some are close to the real thing but they all miss the mark. Some experiences of Christians getting together get close to the real thing but most seem to be fake and can be like tasting artificial sweetener by itself. Ever done that? Don't waste your time. In fact, what are we doing with our time if we never get real with each other? Do your Christian friends know what you cussed at this week? Is there a context within your church in which you could honestly talk about what got you so angry?

Francis Chan talks about church being a group of believers who are willing to think Biblically rather than conventionally, to be a part of a church where radical living is becoming the norm. (See *Crazy Love* by Francis Chan). Have you ever been a part of something like this? I keep wondering where in the world this exists. But if we don't experience life like this, what is the point of getting together with other believers? There is no point. Part of the issue is that we do church in "artificial environments." We need people to speak into our life, to crawl around inside our head and heart. It's got to be real. Artificial environments are closed religious systems that have little relational, social or cultural association to the outside world that most of us and our friends live in. The gospel can seem artificial to people because people are used to their own world. If non-Christians could see a bunch of Christians living in real life, they would more readily conclude that Christianity is not abnormal. We need communities of faith where life gets personal or we are going to lose the ability to speak to people with wisdom and relevance.

Our communities of faith should allow for **confession (James 5:16)** which is reality without masks, **application (James 1:22-23)** which would include honestly sharing the temptations we face each week, **accountability (Proverbs 27:17 and Romans 14:12)** which has the idea that we want someone to help us live God's way and to know we are serious about it, and **direction (Acts 13:1-3)** which is really helping each other listen to God and being willing to share with others the decisions we need to make this week.

### A Further Step

1. Do you know anyone who would like to be a part of a group of Jesus followers who will be dead serious about honestly sharing their life with others and who want to radically live life?
2. Discuss with a group of believers what the dangers are of trying to experience Christianity in an artificial environment.

## Oh Baby, That's Too Personal    **Communities of Faith**

I remember a couple whose house resembled a hotel. In fact it was nicknamed "The Johnson. Hotel." There were people there at all hours of the day and night. Maybe some were there too frequently but it was a real community of people sharing life together. Developing communities of faith (church) requires developing relationship with each other that takes much time together. This means doing life outside of the scheduled worship and small group times. The closer people are geographically, the more likely this can happen.

**1 Thessalonians 2:8** illustrates this. Paul said that these people were so much on his heart that he not only talked to them about the gospel but also shared his life with them.

For communities of faith to begin, grow and continue everyone needs to be on the same page when it comes to being honest, open, hospitable and unselfish with time and resources. Many viewpoints can exist in this kind of group because they help in understanding reality. There are no boundaries put up to keep someone else from asking hard questions. In fact this group invites hard questions because they are desperate to understand how life and faith intersect. This is where real discipleship takes place. There needs to also be an outward view and thinking about people who are not connected to God in any way. This means that non-Christians are welcomed into the group so they can see what Jesus is all about.

One goal of communities of faith is transformation (making adjustments in my life as God points them out) rather than just gaining more Biblical information to put into a notebook. Effort and courage are required to relate faith to daily life. If we do not work on this, the gap between belief and everyday experience grows wider and this stops what God wants to do in and through us. If the gap grows, others are not going to trust us and we will become indifferent and either of these diminishes our influence. We have to have believers doing this with us because tough times are ahead for all of us and we need encouragement.

**Philippians 2:2-4** is the basis for the commitment required. Basically our commitment can be summarized like this: "I have decided that individuals in this group are more important than me and I am going to live as if they are." Are you willing to say this?

Individualism, obsession with home ownership, the emphasis on freedom to do whatever I think is right crashes head on with a community of faith where others are my priority.

### **A Further Step**

1. How do you feel about being completely honest, open with another and hospitable with a group of people? How about unconditional love?
2. Why is transformation and not just getting more information one of the critical aspects of church?

## You Don't Need a Reservation **Connection**

How would you like to be invited to a Super Bowl party where there will be the expected chips, beer, coke... and what you are really excited about-a 120 inch big screen TV to watch the game on along with Bose speakers? You show up and there it is. The host passes out the chips and other refreshments and sits down. You nervously pick up the remote and start clicking but nothing happens. This goes on for several minutes and someone notices the TV is not connected to the wall plug. Everything changes once this is done.

Connection is huge in doing church. Unfortunately it does not happen very easily when we show up once a week in the same location and do the same thing every week. People live different lives during the rest of the week. Are you developing connection with other believers throughout the week who do church with you?

A TV show called "No Reservations" is about a man who goes all over the world and drops into cultures that are usually very different from his. This is how we should live with believers. There should be no reservation required for them to drop by and see us...they only have to show up. When you do this, connection is beginning.

When you look at **Acts 4:32-35, 5:42, 17:17 and 18:25-26** you see a group of believers doing church together. They lived, fought and celebrated together. They were intimate allies. It was a fellowship of the heart. It would be significant if we could find this today but dangerous if we do not. Intimacy in our relationships with others is a way of knowing we are connecting.

In the Fellowship of the Ring there is a statement that captures this" "Fate has chosen him, evil will hurt him, and a fellowship will protect him." This is the Christianity the world needs to see and the church needs to focus on.

### **A Further Step**

1. How would your lifestyle need to change for you to be seriously connected to a group of believers? How about your attitude?
2. Why would many Christians prefer to see each other once a week in a traditional church meeting rather than throughout the week in real life? Where do you come down on this?

## No One Knows What I am Telling You    **Intimacy**

Do you have anyone in your life that you can talk with them about everything and they can with you? I mean there is no holding back. You can ask any question and so can they and both of you will get an honest answer. We all need these kinds of relationships. To have one relationship like this is rare but to have many who have banded together to do church is crazy thinking. But this is exactly how it should be.

We are made for intimacy and this has a better chance in small groups of people getting together than large institutional type meetings. It is not possible to have intimacy without commitment. This is why however not all small groups have developed intimacy. It is unreasonable to think you will get to this level if the focus of the small group is on Bible study alone. Bible study is a real and necessary component for dialogue about truth but whether I am going to share with you about a major struggle in my life or not does not depend on an understanding of scripture but rather on commitments we have made together.

The metaphor of “family” describes church as God intended it to be. Not that every family does this or is like this but families do know the members of that family well. They see the flaws as well as the great aspects each brings to the table. Selfishness and unselfishness is not hidden. Some of this is because families spend time throughout the week living life together. This is authentic community.

Some of the heart attitudes necessary for intimacy to develop include things like: honesty, vulnerability, putting the success of others before myself, clearing up relational problems, giving and receiving scriptural correction with love, trust. Check out **Matthew 5:23,24, Philippians 2:4, Ephesians 4:25, 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Hebrews 3:13** for example.

In an institutional church, participation may be encouraged but not necessarily expected or required. Change is not required to just show up (in a small or large group), listen passively and then leave. For intimacy to develop participation and commitment to one another is essential.

### **A Further Step**

1. What scares you about becoming intimate with one person? A few people? Why?
2. Would you prefer to share something intimate or have someone share something intimate with you? Why?

## There are No Walls **Strategy**

Church exists where people are committed to one another and to Jesus' mission. In this context, he is present whether it is two or three or several more. It does not have to have a specific location or time to meet. It can be in the marketplace of life with no theologically trained leader. Coffee shops, store fronts, schools, homes, bars, tattoo parlors or wherever become the place to meet. Some churches have purchased apartment complexes and developed "church on the block." Church can be developed where people live and where they feel comfortable. There are hip hop churches, skate churches, artistic church groups and many other types. The message will challenge their life but at least they are going to hear it. It is simple rather than weighted down with rules. Life should dictate structure and not structure dictate life. So, structure can change. In essence, Jesus is the strategy. If we do not believe these things, we will have trouble with church outside the United States. Governments or geography have dictated the how and where of church in many countries.

Sometimes we have believed something so long that to accept a new idea that is radically different from what we have believed will seem unthinkable at best and heretical at the worst. (**Matthew 9:16-17**) Remember people used to think the world was flat. Some institutional churches are making a difference but more are becoming relics that are irrelevant in our culture. Having to have a meeting set up just right, sharp power point presentations, making sure the music is on target have often changed mission for maintenance. Jesus sat on hill sides and talked to people and they were never the same-simple strategy. It can become a burden to maintain the structure. We have also allowed people's busy schedule to dictate how long the church meets together. What if God wants to say something but everyone is looking at their watch?

Walls define perimeters and because church exists anywhere, we do not need the kinds of walls that have been culturally erected. As someone said "we need to lower the bar as to how church is done while raising the bar of what it means to follow Jesus."

We have a choice to be provincial and safe or dangerous and adventurous. A good question to ask in developing strategy is "where can God be accessed?" If he can be accessed anywhere (check out Jesus' discussion with the woman at the well in **John 4** and Phillip the eunuch in the desert-**Acts 8:26-40**), then the church is expanded to wherever people not yet Christians hang out. Everywhere becomes the spiritual zone.

### **A Further Step**

1. What challenges would you personally face in doing church on a different day, in a different location with no pastor type leader?
2. What are the implications of lowering the bar as to how church is done while raising the bar as to what it means to follow Jesus?

## This Map is Confusing    **Missional Thoughts**

A trip I made to Kyzyl, Siberia one time seemed incomprehensible as I thought about it in my living room in Laramie, Wyoming. But shortly later our plane touched down in Frankfurt, Germany then Moscow. Another plane to another Russian town and then a 5 hour drive on snow to Kyzyl and we were there. I was really unsure how to get from where I lived to a place I had never heard of only a few months before that. It can be like that in thinking about how to become involved with people in connecting not yet Christians to Jesus in the context of church. Here are a few suggestions.

1. Journal about what you think about and do and how it is connected to Jesus and how he lived his life. His lifestyle is not intended to cramp ours but to become ours. It cannot be part of what we do but is what we do, who we are and how we live. Get with some others who are on this page with you and track your progress. See **Philippians 1:21**.
2. Arrange your schedule and priorities so you can develop meaningful relationships with others in your community-especially those struggling with life, are lost in search of some kind of meaning, the poor or confused. Be willing to live for those God brings into your life rather than for yourself. (**Matthew 16:24**)
3. Think about how you can cooperate with God who is always working in other people's lives. Check **Ecclesiastes 3:11 and John 5:17**.
4. Be willing to go to the same types of places Jesus went. He hung out with people where they lived. For us that would be homes, social gathering points (bars, coffee shops, athletic centers, neighborhoods...). Become an insider rather than an outsider. We must be willing to take risks that get us out of where we feel secure and comfortable. Read through the gospels to see how most of Jesus' ministry took place away from the religious zones. Actually, wherever he was became the religious zone.

### **A Further Step**

1. If you were going to write a gospel for people in your culture consider this:
  - a. How would you start?
  - b. How would you explain sin?
  - c. How would you explain Jesus?
  - d. What would people in your culture resonate with the most about Jesus' life?
2. Where do you go and what are you involved with that is loaded with those not yet following Jesus?

# Small Groups      When Small is Large

## Exposed or Unobserved      **Value of Small Groups**

We don't usually like to think of things that are small. I spent a lot of time in Texas and most Texans like to think big. A favorite phrase in Texas is "Everything is big in Texas." However we know that the human body is made up of small cells and all kinds of other small things that result in who we are. We also like to think of how many show up at a large group of people and are often disappointed if it is a "small" group of people.

Small groups of people who meet to share life and impact their community are the fabric of small groups. What can happen in a small group cannot happen in a large church meeting. They have different purposes. Without small groups that are committed to living authentic lives in community, people will never understand the effect of their selfishness. When we are real with ourselves and others we see the strong commitment we have to ourselves as well as the commitment we should have to each other.

Small groups must be the primary focus of church. If they are an addition to the large group, they will be seen as optional. No one has to be real and depart from their self centered lifestyle by only going to the large group.

Small groups can be thought of as 3<sup>rd</sup> Places where people hang out to develop friendships, discuss issues and interact with others. It should be a place where you can relax and be yourself and a place where people are less guarded and more open to meaningful conversation. Small groups with a focus like this allow us to partner with God to create a new kind of culture.

Think about how God used 300 people in **Judges 7** to win a battle as compared to 3000 who became believers one day as recorded in Acts. Size does not indicate value or importance. Small can be large.

### **A Further Step**

1. How willing are you to having your life exposed to a group of people who are following Jesus?
2. To what extent do you have meaningful conversation and relationships with other Christians?

## Taking Apart the Engine    **Components of Small Groups**

The first Christian small group I went to was in college. It was in a home and people seemed to genuinely care for each other. One of the things I remember was when the leader asked everyone who wanted to, to share a sentence prayer. I said my sentence but some people talked for 5 minutes. I asked about it and the leader said they had a lot of commas in their sentence. It is funny what you remember.

It was not just a study group which are inadequate in terms of the mission of Jesus. Certain components are necessary to fulfill more effectively God's purposes for our lives. Some of these include:

1. Community-This is developing deep roots with people. This is necessary for significant friendships. It is coming together where we "talk and not just speak." It is being a part of a group where people do not pretend, are not hiding with defensive strategies and are authentic.
2. Accountability-Who loves you enough to ask you hard questions?
3. Confidentiality-What is shared in the group stays in the group.
4. Flexibility or Sensitivity-As the Holy Spirit leads and we follow his leadership, what is done in the group may vary from week to week.
5. Direction-People want to give their life to something that makes a difference.
6. Leadership-All members of the body and leadership that is done by everyone helps to better equip all members.
7. Variety-Small groups should study, pray, play, work, go on mission, battle, worship and eat together.
8. Ministry-Have a community component. Non-Christians get to see Jesus in several people rather than in just one when a group has a work project or something like it in their community.
9. Real-Peeling off layers is critical to knowing another person. Suspending our point of view in order to enter another person's experience is exciting. With connection we have something most groups never achieve.
10. Application-**James 1:22-24** talks about applying God's Word to my life as it really is. Effective small groups think about transformation more than gathering information.

### **A Further Step**

1. Why is a small group that only study's inadequate? How about one that only visits with one another?
2. How does the root system look like in your small group? What can you do to deepen it?

## There is Always Something Else You Think About **Random Thoughts**

God does not categorize life like we do which is a lot of comfort at times. So with that in mind a few final thoughts that are important to our understanding of how God wants us to live today. These first two will have a significant impact on our lives.

## It Just Doesn't Make Sense **Living Without Understanding**

When we live without understanding what God is up to in our lives there can be a gradual diminishing of our passion for life and especially for pursuing people who do not know Jesus. This is not to say that we have to understand everything. When God told Abraham to head west and he would tell him when to stop or to kill his son, these did not make Abe jump up and yell "sweet" I can't wait to tell my wife! Look through **Genesis chapter 12 and 22** for these stories.

However, understanding what God wants us to experience comes as we do what he talks to us about. If we go for lengthy periods of time without living like God wants us to, we lose focus and can easily become like people who either do not know God or like those who are caught up in the religious machine. We really do need to understand our purpose with razor sharp clarity. And we can understand regardless of some other things that we don't. Look at **1 Corinthians 14:8**.

Oswald Chambers said "We have no conception of what God is aiming at and as we go on, it gets more vague." Have you entered into the understanding of this?

### **A Further Step**

1. What are those experiences, disappointments, miscalculations, detours or dead ends that have diminished or stolen your passion of following Jesus?
2. If we have to clearly understand our purpose what do you do when it seems that purpose is getting vague?

## I Can't Keep Doing This    **When Our Experience is not Matching our Longing**

I can't tell you how many times I have said or thought that I would love to see God unite Christians into faith communities in which there is real commitment to Jesus and each other. The idea is a no nonsense approach to life and each other in which we are a band of brothers who are committed to joining God in his activity with those not yet following Jesus.

It would be a spiritual gathering of friends in a real world setting. Some of us are embarrassed by what we have seen in Christianity, and have such a thirst for God while wanting to do something more than what we are experiencing. We might see small pieces of it in an organized church group but it is almost invisible and is only occasionally mentioned but not practiced. This has the effect of causing us to become critical of church and Christians. It erodes our spirit and makes it easy to show up somewhere else on Sunday or when the church meets. Eventually, we believe there is no point to getting together with Christians who are not going to join the battle. We sense we have lost something or it has been stolen by religious people who have no intention of living like Jesus did.

All of this being said however, we do not always know what God is up to. Hey, I wonder if I ever do. Our interpretation of how things are playing out may be wrong. Some people in the Old Testament made a comment once that could be true today. "Surely the Lord was in this place and I was not aware of it." See **Genesis 28:16**.

We must not lose heart. We must always keep learning and following Jesus. The alternatives are not worth buying into. Winston Churchill said to his people during world war 2 "Never, never, never give up."

### **A Further Step**

1. How are you doing dealing with those longings of your heart that continue to not be realized?
2. Who do you know who is serious about following Jesus that you could meet with weekly to discuss life issues?

## What We Can't See is More Important than What We Do See **Invisible?**

Often, what seems to be true is not and what seems to make sense doesn't. Why is that? Christianity is at its best when it is seen as irrelevant and strange. It is at its worse when it is popular. When Jesus walked around and talked with the religious people they thought this guy was completely out of touch with the tradition. He was not normal when compared to them. He hung out with a few men and some women (who were not necessarily of the highest character) and usually did most of his ministry away from the religious institutions. Of course he was suspect in what he was up to.

Reality is far more than what is visible to our physical eye. Just try jumping off of a 5 story building. You can't see gravity but you will shortly know it is real. If God pulled back the veil and showed us what was going on in one of our typical days, we would hardly be able to handle it. I know some people with vivid imaginations but they would have a hard time with what is really out there. Or do you think there is anything really out there we can't see? What we can't see is more real than what we do see. Spiritual warfare is real whether we see or participate in it.

To look at something as though we have never seen it requires great courage. To begin to think differently and learn something new, while exciting is challenging because we have to alter something in our belief system. Here is an example-To move ahead, we must decide what we will leave behind.

Or how about this one "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (**Matthew 10:39**) Does this one make sense to you? Are you going to buy into it? How different is it than what is believed by our culture?

### **A Further Step**

1. Why would Christianity be at its worse when it is popular? Is it popular in the United States?
2. Why does most of ministry in the United States take place within some kind of religious facility when most of Jesus' didn't?

## How Do We Learn and What Do We Need to Learn? **Teachers and Teaching**

I took 98 hours of class in a religious institution in order to learn something. I believe it was to help me learn how to follow Jesus better and how to make a difference wherever I live once I finished the curriculum. I remember that the Greek was fascinating to learn, the church history connected some things and the contemporary evangelism lit a fire in my heart. I was however, really thankful I had been discipled by a man before I ever showed up there and that I had spent 6 years working in a secular job prior to taking the first class. What I learned connected mostly with my mind but did not help me with people who were dealing with very real issues in life. The discipling before the school did help me with people dealing with life.

Telling isn't teaching any more than listening is learning. I heard much during those 2 ½ years in school but I am not sure about the learning. I was given many answers but that in some ways short circuited the process of learning. I did learn that it is more important to teach a "process" of learning rather than giving answers. If I learn how to study the scriptures myself, what I learn is mine rather than someone else's.

Some things that help with the process of learning include: Mission trips or events, prayer, Bible study (discovering for myself), learning how to think, reading the Bible, exploring the unfamiliar, frustration, pain, work, play, small groups, leading, assignments, cultural differences, change, faith...You get the picture here.

Unity but not necessarily uniformity is critical in ministry. We must agree on truth but how we communicate it can look different. A business man or woman in a suit or fine clothing will probably learn differently than a guy on a skate board.

Learning must be the focus and it cannot be divorced from real life; therefore much of our learning and training must be done in real life. See **1 Thessalonians 2:9 & 2 Timothy 3:10,11**.

**Ephesians 4:10-11** says leaders are to get the team ready to play-impact people in the work place, neighborhood, etc. Modeling this is not only huge, it is essential or people will have great desires to make a difference but not have a clue how to go about it. Here are some things people need help with:

- How to develop meaningful friendships with people who are not yet Christians.
- How to share who Jesus is and how a person can know him.
- How to begin a spiritual conversation with a non-Christian.
- What is absolute truth and why it is important to be committed to it.
- What ministry is.
- How to help a new Christian follow Jesus.
- How to get into the Bible for themselves and make applications to their life.
- Wanting things to change but not being willing to change.

**Matthew 22:36 and 37 along with 28:18-20 and 2 Timothy 2:2** are critical verses to learn some "how to's."

**A Further Step**

1. How would you explain that helping someone learn how to get an answer is more important than being given an answer?
2. How does “control” enter into teaching people? How does it limit learning?

## What is The Bottom Line? **Discipleship and Disciple Making**

In the United States, we are driven to be successful. It really is on almost everyone's mind. It drives people to become stressed out because of a wrong definition. So, how we define success is again like the rudder that directs the ship-it is critical to get it right.

Was Jesus successful? Crazy question, right? Of course, we would say. But on what basis? I mean look at what happened-one of his men betrayed him, the rest fled in absolute fear during a critical moment and even Peter said he didn't know him and cursed as he said it. But John 17:4 and 6 indicate that before he died, he had been successful because he completed the work the Father gave him to do. That had to be giving these men and women the tools to live in a way that glorified God and knowing how to pass it on to others.

So, what fuels your success? **Philippians 3:12-14** says "not **many** things but this **one** thing I do..." Do you have the right focus about what really matters? Sometimes persecution or opposition are better indicators of success. The execution of the vision Jesus gave us is what really matters. We can talk about it all we want and develop fancy notebooks about it but we must implement the vision.

Our maturity is achieved not by getting more information or understanding of the Bible but by serving and application. It is achieved not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.

Who are you becoming? It is not whether you will be a doctor or teacher but what kind of doctor or teacher you are becoming that matters.

In **1 Chronicles 12:32** is a story of men who distinguished themselves from those around them by their understanding and perception of reality. Knowing what to do seems to be related with understanding the times. We are called to follow Jesus and show others how to do the same. We have different challenges in our culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century compared with the 1<sup>st</sup> one but it can be done. As Peter so accurately said when asked by Jesus if he was leaving "...to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life..." or as it says in The Word on the Street "Where? You've got limitless life to dole out! You're God's sacred one-we know it." We know him and what he wants our purpose to be. Nothing else matters.

### **A Further Step**

1. What happens when you talk about something for a long time you should be or do but you don't do anything about it?
2. Elaborate on the thought that maturity as a follower of Jesus is achieved not when there is nothing more to add but when there is nothing more to take away.

## A Final Thought **Even One More**

**Ecclesiastes 12:13** sums up that book in the Bible. I have no other summary to sum up what you have read. It seems life is a learning lab and that it is important for us to continue to keep on pushing through all the junk that comes our way. There is no chronological age at which there is no more to learn. My purpose is compiling all of these thoughts was to get you to think. You probably did not agree with some of what I have written about but who cares if you thought about it and learned something from it. I have much to learn but I want to pursue Jesus stronger than yesterday. I have a restless contentment.

If you haven't had enough you can check out my updated thinking and what God is speaking to me about on my blog at: [masjava.blogspot.com](http://masjava.blogspot.com). I make an attempt to update it about 3 times a month.

## Appendix 1 Values in Jesus' Life Who is this masked man?

This is a section of material intended to help you focus on Jesus' lifestyle and to explore what each of these thoughts could mean for you today. There are several ways you could use this but I will only mention a few. Be creative as you think about how he lived and the implications for you now. The list is not exhaustive but it is representative.

1. Read one a day and write a sentence or two about what you think about it and how to apply it.
2. Write a paragraph about each one and share it with someone.
3. Get a group of people focusing on these aspects of Jesus' life and think through them together.

### Values, Descriptive Words, and Thoughts about Jesus

1. Poor and associated with the poor. Matthew 8:20
2. Itinerant-traveling from place to place (where God was at work). John 6:16-17
3. Agenda-set by the Father rather than what he wanted to do. John 5:30
4. Reckless and exciting adventure marked each day. Mark 2:1-4
5. Uncivil spirituality-it did not go down well with the religious establishment. Matthew 12:1-2
6. A threat to the religious establishment. Matthew 12:14
7. Wild background and lifestyle-born in a barn, baptized by a guy who ate locusts and honey and dressed weird, spent over a month alone in a wilderness, met demoniacs head on, disrupted religious meetings or events (whip incidence). Mark 1:34
8. Story teller. Matthew 13
9. Dangerous, subversive and mysterious. Matthew 26:61
10. Homeless. Matthew 8:20
11. No ownership of anything except what he was wearing. (implied if he was homeless)
12. Socially marginal. Luke 7:34
13. Friend of outcasts. Luke 7:34
14. No fear for his safety. Matthew 21:12
15. A thorn in the side of the establishment. Matthew 12:2 and 9:14
16. Scourge to the rich and powerful. Luke 12:33
17. Caused riots. Matthew 21:12
18. Focused on the kingdom of God rather than the elimination of things non-believers were involved with. (weeds) John 3:17
19. Passionate for what the Father was passionate about. Matthew 26:39
20. Radically merciful. Matthew 5:7 and John 8:3-11
21. Surprising. Mark 16:12 and Luke 24:31
22. Alternate vision of reality rather than global consumerism. Luke 12:15
23. Thrived on risk. Matthew 21:12

**Appendix 1 continued**

24. Disturbing. Matthew 9:11
25. Demanding. Mark 10:21-22
26. Frustrated with religious types. Matthew 12:34
27. Disappointed. Matthew 26:34
28. Annoyed. Matthew 17:17
29. Angered. Matthew 21:12-13
30. Uncluttered lifestyle. Matthew 8:20 and Luke 12:15
31. Non Religious. Invalidates the religious system we have invested in. Matthew 23:23,27
32. Perplexing. Matthew 13:14-17
33. Challenges. Matthew 4:19
34. Demands an active faith or trust in God. John 14:1
35. Heals and confronts the demoniac. Matthew 4:24
36. Looks for people who will follow him. Luke 9:23
37. Has a high standard for holiness. Matthew 5:48
38. Lays down his life for friends. John 10:15

## Appendix 2 Making it Real Projects to help you know you are serious

### CULTURE

#### Making a Difference

1. Write out how you have replaced simplicity with complexity with regard to your following Jesus.
2. Get a group of friends together and discuss what being a radical follower of Jesus should look like today.

#### New Glasses

1. Take a few Sunday mornings and go hang out at different coffee shops and either listen to people's conversation topics or ask a few some pointed questions that will help you understand what is important to them.
2. Do the same at a local bar but do it in the evening and maybe on a Friday or Saturday night.

#### Understanding Our World

1. List the issues people are most concerned about today and how you could build a bridge of discussion from the issue to eternal things.

#### Affluence

1. Give something away each month that you value for a few months.
2. Have a "Third World Month" once a year in which you will only spend money on what you need.

#### Consuming Less

1. Instead of having a garage sale, clean out your basement, attic and garage and give all of it to a non-profit organization or someone who could use the things.

#### The Poor

1. Check the web site [www.1-800-volunteer.org](http://www.1-800-volunteer.org) to locate an opportunity to be with those in your community who are poor. Volunteer!
2. Invite someone you meet in your volunteering or someone in need to your home to have a meal with you. Do it once a month.

## Appendix 2 Making it Real Projects to help you know you are serious (2)

### Rethinking Our Life

1. Take a day away (or at least 6 hours) and get alone, free from distractions and ask God to show you your heart and what needs to change. Share your conclusions with someone who can keep you accountable. Do this every other month.
2. Make at least one change that God shows you in your day away with God.

### The American Dream

1. Talk with your friends and perhaps a few you don't know and ask them to list a couple of things that would be included in the American Dream.
2. Begin to eliminate anything in your life that exemplifies the American Dream but is not God's dream for you.

### Breaking Free

1. Ask a few people to tell you what they see in your life that shows you are living a. like and b. contrary to the western culture. (The United States if you live there)
2. In addition, ask them the same with regard to the Christian culture in the western world or the United States.

### Contrast

1. What is one aspect of your lifestyle that you do not believe would a part of Jesus' lifestyle? Begin to work on it and ask someone to ask you some hard questions about the change.

### Bringing Change to Where We Live

1. Get together with several Christian friends who are serious about following Jesus and sharing him with people who are not yet Christians and discuss the questions those without Jesus would like to have answered.
2. Look at John 18:33-38 and think through how Jesus handled these questions.

### Questions of Our Culture

1. This week talk to someone who you see a few times a month and introduce something into the conversation about your relationship with Jesus.
2. Get with some Christian friends and discuss what must change in your lives in order to begin to make a difference in your sphere of influence.

## Appendix 2 Making it Real Projects to help you know you are serious (3)

### How the World Views Christians

1. Ask a few non-Christians to share their thoughts about Jesus. About Christians. (Tell them you are taking a survey) Write out their responses.
2. Have a few non-Christians finish these sentences: I wish Christians would... I wish Christians would never...

### Gospel Ignorant or Resistant

1. Think about a change you could make in your life that would give non-Christians more access to the truth of the gospel.
2. Write down some of the things that have caused some of the people you know to resist talking about spiritual things.

### Violence

1. Eliminate anything in your life that contributes to a culture of evil and is contrary to God's nature.
2. Seriously think about how you can live a life that is focused on love; on creating rather than destroying.
3. Talk about the value or lack of value of violent video and computer games in following Jesus. Discuss with someone why they are some of the best sellers in the United States.

## LIFESTYLE

### Running the Race-Right Living

1. What is the one thing you will begin, stop or change in your life in order to live as God made you to live?
2. Talk to a few people (some Christians and some not) and ask them what they believe is the point of life. Tell them it is an assignment.

### Brokenness

1. Take a day away with God (at least 6 hours) free from distractions, where you can focus on God and your relationship with him. Write down what he shows you. Think about pride and humility for sure.
2. Talk with someone who has faced an area of sin in your life that is like a stronghold and talk about how they dealt with it.

### Close Examination

1. Get a day away with God and take your Bible, notebook and record what God tells you about your lifestyle and what he thinks needs to happen.

2. Spend some time with anyone else who would look at their life in this way and talk about it together.

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## **Appendix 2 Making it Real** Projects to help you know you are serious (4)

### Focused Thinking

1. Think about the things you do each week. Are there some that do not really matter? Eliminate at least one this week.
2. Ask someone what are the distractions they face in following Jesus and how they are dealing with them. List yours also.

### Transitioning

1. Identify what is behind your fears of major lifestyle changes you would have to make to do what God speaks to you about.
2. Try to find some Christian person whose life is being lived out differently from yours. Learn from them, ask questions and think about the implications for your life.

### Real Caring

1. Volunteer 2-3 hours a week to work with some people in need in your city. Look at [www.1-800-volunteer.org](http://www.1-800-volunteer.org).

### Perspective

1. Ask a neighbor, co-worker or friend what perspective about life your life communicates to them.
2. Write a couple of paragraphs as to how your life would look like if you lived with the urgency and perspective of Jesus. Share it with someone.

### Repentance

1. If you do not have an accountability partner, get one this week to help you really mean it when you say you are going to follow Jesus.
2. Tell a friend that you want them to ask you any question about anything and that you will give them an honest answer.

### Different

1. Think about the “Cadet Maxim” and do one thing in each of the 4 areas mentioned.
2. Get with a Christian friend and compile thoughts on what Christians believe is normal and abnormal living in the Christian life.

## Appendix 2 Making it Real Projects to help you know you are serious (5)

### Involved

1. Tell someone something about yourself that they do not know. Go deep on this one.
2. Think through what really gives you life, stirs your heart, releases your passions, etc. What opportunities are there in your community that feed these desires? Get involved in one of them.

### Simplicity

1. Say no to one thing each week (or challenge yourself to each day) for a month. Note if it was hard to do and why.
2. Look for some small thing you can do with great love each day. How can you be more consistent in this?

### Eliminating Clutter

1. List the reasons you have given for not being involved in helping others know Jesus and meaningfully following him.
2. If you were to have on your heart what God has on his, what do you think that would look like in your week?

### Responsibility

1. Get with someone and discuss what is causing your stress. Also talk about how to experience freedom and a pace of life that God intended us to live.
2. What specific adjustments is God asking you to make in order to join him in his work? Talk this over with someone.

### Enemies

1. Get with someone and discuss how some of your enemies have kept you from living like God wants you to live.
2. Do a Bible study on spiritual warfare or read a book that exposes how satan is out to wreck your life.

### Misplaced Fear

1. Think about what intentionally living among and becoming friends with non-Christians would look like and what it might cost you.

### Life Qualities

1. Meet with someone who has strengths in areas you have weaknesses with regard to relationships with both Christians and not yet Christians. Discuss this together.
2. Get with a couple of Christians on the same page as you and develop a few questions that will help those who do not yet know Jesus see their need for pursuing him.

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## **Appendix 2 Making it Real Projects to help you know you are serious (6)**

### Life Skills

1. Meet with some Christians who are seeking to help non believers overcome objections to following Jesus and develop several questions to ask that would help resolve their objections.
2. Think through how you have not succeeded in getting past superficial conversations with non believers and what have been the problems.

### **FOLLOWING JESUS**

#### Follow Me

1. Look through one of the gospels and write down what you see that should be included in an accurate understanding of Jesus' statement of "follow me."
2. Discuss with someone what it could mean to be on an adventure with Jesus.

#### The Wrong Neighborhood

1. List your beliefs and then your convictions (which are based on the last couple of months).
2. Do something bold that God has spoken to you about rather than wondering what it might look like.

#### No Return

1. Intentionally go a day or two without looking at a "to do" list.
2. If you know someone who has cut off all form of retreat in order to make a hard lifestyle change, ask them if they would do it again and why.

#### Danger

1. Think about whether you are more afraid of risking your reputation with Christians who don't think like you or with those outside of the faith community.
2. Read a couple of biographies of Christians who risked it big time and write down your thoughts.

#### Re examining Everything

1. Write down your thoughts as you consider whether you would want Jesus to show you exactly what he thinks about your seriousness in completely following him. Share them with one person.
2. Write down what convictions you know for certain are in your life. What is the evidence?

## Appendix 2 Making it Real Projects to help you know you are serious (7)

### Satan's Game

1. Talk with someone who knows what to do about a sin or habit you keep repeating and do whatever they say works for them. If it doesn't work, talk to someone else.
2. Paul talked about not being ignorant of how satan works (2 Corinthians 2:11). Write out the ways you have seen him work in your life and how you gained victory over him. Also write out how he is now working and talk with someone share your thoughts with someone.

### Change

1. Determine to make any change you know you must make and have a friend pray with and ask you about it.
2. Define change and get a group of people together to talk about what real change means.

### Now It Gets Exciting

1. Go to a sports bar and watch a football, basketball or baseball game with whoever is there. Extra risk for some: have a beer.
2. Crash a party at some non-Christian's house and meet a couple of people you don't know. Remember their names.

### Questions, Uncertainties, Yes!

1. Discuss with some others how God has engineered circumstances to teach something to you.
2. What is it in your life that is limiting your believing God could use you in the lives of other people ?

### Strategy

1. For a week (at first) don't do anything or go anywhere without seeing what God wants you to do or where he wants you to go.
2. Think through why having a growing relationship with Jesus is critical in having Jesus as your strategy.
3. Write down some aspects of the Christian sub-culture that have become absolutes but for which you can't find a Biblical basis.

### A Different View

1. List the dangers of letting Jesus define the parameters of how to live the Christian life or disciple a person.
2. Start a ministry from scratch with some others and let God give you the building plans.

## Hard

1. With 2 or 3 others discuss some hard things you face each week in following Jesus.
2. Start trusting someone you have had a hard time trusting.

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## Appendix 2 Making it Real Projects to help you know you are serious (8)

### Serious Stuff

1. Read through a gospel and write down what Jesus changed about what people valued or thought was right.
2. List the evidence you have seen that proves most Christians are just playing a game when it comes to following Jesus.

### Perspective

1. List the “you have heard it said, but I say to you” statements of Jesus and what it means for us today.
2. Begin to read through the gospels consistently. Maybe take one a month to read through.

### Identification

1. Read through John 6 and write down a few reasons why most of the people left when Jesus began to define what following him really meant.

### Opposition

1. Discuss with a few people whether you would prefer opposition to what you believe or apathy.
2. Stir something up with some Christians and see what happens. Introduce something you know is not the accepted opinion by the majority.

### Danger Ahead

1. Talk with some Christian friends about which has more potential danger for you: To give up a certain accepted way of living the Christian life or consistently involving yourself with the poor in your community and why.
2. List the self protective strategies you have used to avoid danger, rejection or whatever.

### Discipling Others

1. Think of someone you could ask to help you become more of a follower of Jesus. Ask them if they would be willing to get with you to disciple you.
2. Think of someone you would like to get with and help become more of a follower of Jesus. Ask them if they would like to commit to your discipling them.

### False Assumptions

1. Make a list of what you believe are some absolutes in being a Christian. Discuss them with a Christian who is further down the road than you are.

## **Appendix 2 Making it Real** Projects to help you know you are serious (9)

### Challenges

1. As you examine Jesus' life, write down not only what you see in his life but also what you do not see that challenges you.

### More Challenges

1. Get with some others and discuss what the right motivation would be in doing various disciplines like scripture memory, Bible study, etc and how you can know you have the right motivation.
2. Discuss "war" and "non-violence" with some people and see what happens.

### Implications of Following Jesus

1. Get with some Christians and talk about why discipleship can or can't be an option in following Jesus.
2. Get with a different group of people and discuss how each of you knows that Jesus has really captured your imagination rather than wealth, power, sex, reputation or whatever.

### The End or the Beginning

1. Change something in your Christian experience that has given you a warm, cozy or safe feeling.
2. Get into a small group where "safe" has been replaced with words of phrases like "gut check", "get real" or "are you telling us the truth?"

## **Unlikely Friendships**

### People Outside of the Faith

1. Ask a couple of people not yet Christians if they see Christianity as a "harmless delusion."
2. Think through what you could learn from spending a considerable amount of time with some people who are not following Jesus.

### Up Close with People

1. Think through and write out what your world view is. Compare it to the world view of a few other people who have any idea what a world view is.
2. Get with a few other Christians and write out the needs of people you know who are not Christians and what their world view is based on how they are living their life.

## Appendix 2 Making it Real Projects to help you know you are serious (10)

### Fear of Engaging

1. Talk through with some others, your thoughts about living responsibly where you live. Think about what that really looks like in a normal week.
2. Think through how you can “talk and not just speak” with some of your not yet Christian friends.

### Safety First

1. Maybe you might not want to do this but ...try hitchhiking for an hour on a busy highway and then talk with someone about your thoughts.
2. Ask several Christians how they are doing talking with people who are not followers of Jesus about spiritual things.

### Fences Between Us

1. Think through how the church with its bookstores, recreation facilities and other Christian athletic leagues, etc. have separated Christians from those not following Jesus.
2. What are some of the conclusions non-Christians have come to about Christianity and how you would respond to those conclusions.

### Looking Through a Fog

1. Get with someone who really believes you have to check your brain when you become a Christian and have a conversation with them about it.
2. Get with some others and discuss what living an “incomplete” or “inaccurate” version of Christianity would look like.

### Do I Know You?

1. Think through the kind of questions you could ask that would help you discover how some of your friends have arrived at their beliefs.
2. Meet as many as you can on your block or in your apartment complex. Write down their names. Then later, have a party and invite them.

### Get Out of Jail

1. Think about how you could disrupt the status quo of some Christians without having a critical spirit.

### Build the Road as You Travel

1. Begin to meet new people, develop friendships and pray regularly for God to draw them to Jesus.

2. Think through what a real friendship is. Describe it.

## **Appendix 2 Making it Real Projects to help you know you are serious (11)**

### Be Alert

1. Think through how you will make sure you will be accountable to not falling into the traps of the enemy rather than just talking about this stuff.
2. For men: Have an UFC (Ultimate Fight Championship) night but focus on the war with our enemy and how you can deal with his strategies to knock you out of the race.

### Cost

1. Think through why it would be easy to conclude that you can't really follow Jesus in this culture.
2. Eliminate something from your schedule that will free you up to be available to God and people.

## **CHURCH**

### Definition

1. Write a couple of paragraphs that describe your longings or desires in a church experience.

### Community

1. Write out what the word "community" means to you as you think about church.
2. Start a small group only with people who want to live as a community of believers.

### Artificial Environments

1. What scares the hell out of you in being real with people?
2. Tell someone in your small group (if you are in one) or some other Christian something you have never told anyone. What was their reaction?

### Communities of Faith

1. Make a list of some of the "hard questions" you wish people would ask you but also are glad they don't.
2. How does individualism, an emphasis on home ownership and freedom to do whatever you think is right clash with developing a community of faith?

## **Appendix 2 Making it Real** Projects to help you know you are serious (12)

### Connection

1. Invite some people to your home for a meal, dessert or to play some games. Be intentional about learning something about them.
2. How do you see a fellowship of connected believers being a protection for you?

### Intimacy

1. Think of the ways you have been a spectator rather than an active participant in doing church.
2. Discuss with some in your small group whether it is easier for women rather than men to be intimate with each other and why or why not.

### Strategy

1. Visit a church that meets in a home, or coffee shop or wherever. What were your observations? What made you comfortable? Uncomfortable? What is one thing you learned?
2. Look at the church in the book of Acts. How is your church similar and different? Why? Should it matter?

### Missional Thoughts

1. What Christian activities would you have to drop to be more significantly connected with people not yet following Jesus? Are you willing to do it?
2. Talk with someone about why you are or are not desperate to understand how the Christian faith and life intersect.

## **SMALL GROUPS**

### The Value of Small Groups

1. Think about the areas of your life you are in control of. Discuss with your small group why you are not letting God control them.
2. Take a week or so and list everything you thought and did that was selfish. Share this with your small group if you have the courage.

## **Appendix 2 Making it Real Projects to help you know you are serious (13)**

### Components of Small Groups

1. Ask someone to be an accountability partner with you and explain why this is critical.
2. Write out why you believe your faith must be developed in a small group rather than just in your personal walk with God.

### **RANDOM THOUGHTS-Learning Life Lessons**

#### Living Without Understanding

1. Think about why you or someone else believes everything in life needs to be able to be understood.
2. Find someone who has learned how to live without understanding what God has been up to in their lives and note the lessons they learned.

#### When Our Experience is not Matching Our Longing

1. How can you make sure you are always learning and not losing heart?
2. Talk with some people who have learned over a long time how to not get discouraged in their pursuit of following Jesus.

#### Invisible

1. What new thought, idea or ministry thinking is demanding courage from you to enter into it wholeheartedly?
2. Why is success more about what you don't have than what you do?

#### Teachers and Teaching

1. Think through how you have taught others anything of a spiritual nature. Did you enable them to know how to get answers or did you just tell them the answer? Check up on a few of them to see if it is working for them.
2. Talk with some others why we usually gravitate to giving answers rather than teaching "process."

#### Discipleship

1. How do you think you are doing with your understanding of the times in which you are living?
2. Ask God to give you a "Paul" to help you understand how to follow Jesus and how to pass it on; then ask him for a "Timothy"-someone you can help learn how to follow Jesus and repeat the process.

### Appendix 3 Books that Speak to these Issues

1. Blue Like Jazz Don Miller Nelson Books
2. Searching for God Knows What Don Miller Nelson Books
3. The Emerging Church Dan Kimball Zondervan
4. Organic Church Neil Cole Leadership Network Publication
5. Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches Robert Webber Zondervan
6. Don't Waste Your Life John Piper Crossway Books
7. Waking the Dead John Eldredge Nelson Books
8. The Church of the Irresistible Influence Robert Lewis Zondervan
9. Radical Reformation Mark Driscoll Zondervan
10. The Externally Focused Church Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson Group Publishing
11. UnChristian David Kinnaman Baker Books
12. The Kingdom of Couches Will Walker Cru Press
13. Mother Teresa In My Own Words Barnes and Noble
14. Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary Lee Strobel Zondervan
15. Exiles Michael Frost Henderson Publishers
16. The Forgotten Ways Alan Hirsch Brazos Press
17. The Shaping of Things to Come Frost and Hirsch Henderson Publishers
18. The Irresistible Revolution Shane Claiborne Zondervan
19. Jesus for President Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw Zondervan
20. Re Jesus Frost and Hirsch Henderson Publishers
21. Reimagining Church Frank Viola David Cook Publishers
22. The Relevant Church Various writers Relevant Books
23. Quo Vadis
24. The Curate;s Awakening George MacDonald Hurst and Blackett Publishers
25. Jesus in the Margins Rick Mckinley Multnomah Publishers
26. Real Church Larry Crabb Thomas Nelson Publishers
27. The Flower Man Mark Ludy Green Pastures Publishers
28. Crazy Love Francis Chan David C Cook Publishers
29. Brokenness, Surrender, Holiness Nancy Leigh DeMoss

